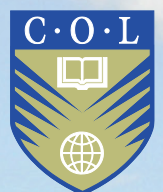


Manual for the Tutors of Learning Centres in Open Schools

COMMONWEALTH EDITION

Dr. Sushmita Mitra
Dr. Johan Hendrikz



COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to encourage the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources and technologies.



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About the Manual

Target group and Purpose

This is an entry level manual for practitioners, specifically managers and tutors in open schools, who would like to improve their understanding of open and distance learning (ODL) and open schools and want to improve their support to their learners in open schools.

An attempt has been made to make the manual self-instructional so that it is:

- Self paced (i.e., it allows you to work through it on your own);
- Easy to read;
- Easy to follow the instructions;
- Illustrated with examples to enhance understanding;
- Activity based to provide opportunities to reflect on and apply your knowledge while studying.

Development of the Manual

This manual was initially developed by Dr. Sushmita Mitra and was called the *Manual for the Tutors of Learning Centers in Open Schools*. The content of this training manual was selected by colleagues after they had attended a face-to-face training programme in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Following the dire need for learner support in open schools around the Commonwealth, in 2008 COL commissioned Dr. Johan Hendrikz to present a workshop on Learner Support in Open Schools and to use the discussions and contributions from the workshop to adapt the existing manual so that it could become a Commonwealth Guide on Learner Support for Open Schools. The name of the manual was adapted to reflect the new focus.

Structure and Content

The content of this Manual is structured to first guide the reader through theoretical aspects of open and distance learning and learner support and then focus on the more practical implementation of learner support in an open school.

Theoretical foundation	Introduction to open and distance learning (ODL)
	Introduction to learner support
Practical implementation with the focus on open schools.	Curriculum and learning materials
	Tutoring in open schools
	Process of tutoring
	Evaluation and monitoring
	ICTs in learner support

To the reader

The manual consist of nine units with a number of sections. Activities are provided at the end of each section so that you can reflect on what you have learned and achieve a better understanding. Completing the activities will help you apply what you have learned.

For ease of use, the manual uses the following components:

- **Section dividers:** Parallel lines at the end of each section clearly show where one topic ends and a new one begins. If you want to stop and continue later, the section divider provides an easy point to take a break.
- **Section numbers:** Each section is numbered for easy access to particular topics and quick cross-referencing.
- **Table of contents:** A detailed table of contents is given at the beginning of each unit, as well as a main table of contents, to help you easily find topics.
- **Activity icon:** Look for the icon shown on your right. This lets you know that there is an activity to do.



We believe that once you have worked through the Manual you will have the basic understanding and knowledge to deliver quality learner support to your learners.

This manual will also be helpful in the following ways:

- As a reference in planning and delivering learner support to your learners.
- As a training tool to train other staff in learner support.

We hope that this manual will empower those who engage with it by improving their knowledge, understanding and skills of learner support.

Our highest priority in ODL must always be to make our students successful in their studies. The tool to achieve this is through quality learner support.

Acknowledgements:

The following participants who attended the workshop on learners support in open schools in October 2008 in Johannesburg, South Africa are acknowledged for their contribution in the development of this Manual.

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Mozambique	Custodio Lurio Ualane	National Institute of Distance Education
Namibia	Paavo Pea	NAMCOL
Nigeria	Mrs Mairo Ismail Hajiya	Universal Basic Education Commission
Samoa	Fiau'u Faleto'ese	Matuaileo'o Environmental Trust Incorporated
Seychelles	Mrs Elva Gedeon	Ministry of Education
Sri Lanka	Dr. N. Wanniarachchi	National Institute of Education
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Unit 1

Introduction to open and distance learning (ODL) and open schools

**Written by Dr. Sushmita Mitra
Adapted by Dr. Johan Hendrikz**

Section 1.1: Open and distance learning (ODL), concept and meaning

Section 1.2: Growth and development of ODL

Section 1.3: Introduction to Open Schools

Section 1.4: Open Schools for vocational education

UNIT OBJECTIVES

After completing this unit you should be able to:

- Explain the concept of ODL.
- Understand the relationship between the scope and characteristics of ODL.
- Explain the concept of open schools.
- Understand the objectives and main features of open schools.
- Understand who are or who can be open school learners.
- Understand open schools in the context of vocational education.

Section 1.1: Open and distance learning (ODL): concept and meaning

What is ODL? It has three parts: open (O), distance (D), and learning (L). In Activity 1.1.1, you will consider what these terms mean to you in the context of education.



ACTIVITY 1.1.1: Mark a tick (•) beside the statements you agree with.

Learning means:

- Change in behaviour after having gone through a situation that causes the changed behaviour.
- Acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitude that causes a change in behaviour.

Distance means learning that occurs:

- away from an institution;
- with a separation between the teacher and learner;
- with the use of multi-media for educational communication.

Open means:

- removal of barriers to learning;
- flexible learning opportunity;
- freedom to learn.

You probably agreed with all the statements. Therefore, we can say that:

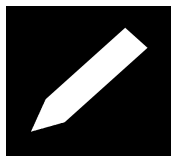
Open and distance learning (ODL) is the philosophy of a constraint free learning situation, adopting a methodology of organising learning experiences at a distance using multi-media and information technology.

To improve your understanding, consider the principles stated by Otto Peters, (an ODL educationist), which the ODL system follows. Read them carefully.

- **The equality principle** • The acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes are open to all; nobody is excluded.
- **The principle of equality of opportunity** • Traditional barriers to education are removed, including economic difficulties for low income groups, gender-specific educational practices, unfavourable socio-cultural milieus or members of minority groups.
- **The principle of lifelong and ubiquitous learning** • Learning is neither bound to define lifecycles nor to define locations and times. It is possible to learn at any time and anywhere.
- **The principle of open curricula** • Teaching programmes may not be completely developed and determined beforehand in an empirical, scientific manner, but are open and able to respond to unforeseen developments in the build-up of the individual's ability to act.
- **The principle of relatedness** • The course of learning is not stipulated rigidly and independently of the students, but starts from and is shaped by his/her individual values, perspectives, interests and experiences.

- **The principle of autonomous learning** • Learning and teaching institutions are created in which students can organise their learning themselves.
- **The principle of learning through communication and interaction** • The learning itself is not initiated and steered by means of ritualised presentation and reception processes, but by discussions and active management.
- **The principle of relatedness to everyday life** • The learning does not take place in relatively enclosed institutions that are defined by bureaucratic structures, but is opened up by keeping to the practices of everyday life.

In Activity 1.1.2, you reflect on what you have learned about the philosophy of ODL.



ACTIVITY 1.1.2: Mark a tick (•) beside the statements you agree with.

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) means

- Learning at a distance but with the flexibility to choose study time, pace and place.
- An effective and equitable (i.e. fair) means of providing learning opportunities for people in all situations and of all ages.
- A student-centred approach to education that removes all barriers to access while providing a high degree of learner autonomy and in which the majority of communication between teachers and students occurs at a distance.
- A flexible and open system that has shifted from institution-led learning to own-time self-learning at a distance.

From the principles of ODL, we can now list the characteristics of ODL.

- ODL is an alternative educational system;
- ODL is a flexible educational system;
- ODL provides educational opportunities to those who are denied access to a formal schooling system;
- ODL allows educational opportunities to those who choose to use it; ODL allows learners to study at home or in the workplace independently with a greater measure of flexibility;
- ODL provides an openness with respect to age, place and pace of learning;
- There is a separation between the teacher and the learner;
- ODL is a self-learning system;
- ODL is a learner-centred system where learners have optimum control over their learning;
- ODL provides the opportunity to acquire work-based skills along with academic knowledge simultaneously;
- ODL provides opportunities for lifelong learning to improve quality of life.

In Activity 1.1.3, you reflect on what the designers of an ODL programme might need to consider.



ACTIVITY 1.1.3: Considering the characteristics of ODL, answer the following questions about what an ODL programme can offer learners.

In an ODL programme system:

- Who can become a learner?
- What motivates learners to learn?
- What subjects do learners want to learn?
- How will learners learn the subject?
- Where will learners learn?
- When will learners learn?
- How can the learning be effective?
- Who will help the learners?

From these questions, Wylie (1996) summarises the following eight major characteristics of an ODL programme:

- flexible entry provision;
- responsive to learner needs;
- learner can negotiate content;
- resource-based, alternative strategies;
- home, workplace, study centre;
- flexible start, pace, completion times;
- learner participates in assessment; and
- variety of advice, support available.

With these characteristics, the scope of ODL in providing education is immense. ODL can reach out to anybody anywhere, at any time.

Section 1.2: Growth and development of ODL

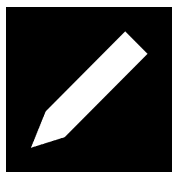
Until recently, all of us believed that effective teaching and learning could not occur without face-to-face contact between the teacher and the learner in a classroom. Probably you do it even now, but this is no longer the only way to help students learn. With rapid development in learning theories and advancement in technology, it has become possible to shift from institution-led learning to *own-time self-learning* at a *distance*, that is, from teaching to self-paced-learning, slowly moving towards flexibility and openness. This has led to the rise of an alternative delivery system known as open and distance learning (ODL).

Furthermore, you will agree that traditionally education and learning are closed by various rigid requirements such as entrance requirements, fixed time and space, fixed curriculum, etc. Such requirements pose geographical, social and cultural barriers, including those of gender, individual characteristics and abilities. ODL, as mentioned in Section 1.1, aspires to overcome these barriers by providing learning opportunities with freedom to learn at a distance.

ODL did not evolve one day; it made its beginning through correspondence programmes. These correspondence programmes, offered by institutions, opened up new opportunities for own-time education, where a student can learn on his/her own at a time convenient to him/her without going to an institution. However, most correspondence institutions at different levels offer the same scheme of studies, syllabus and examination as the formal system. The only difference is that correspondence students study at a distance through printed materials, whereas conventional students receive face-to-face instruction in the classroom. Often the correspondence mode meant uncertain achievement for students and a lowering of quality. The correspondence system was unable to cope with large numbers (quantity) and provide a high quality of education and diversity of courses. Thus, the use of correspondence as a sole means of delivering education could not entirely compensate or replace face-to-face instruction; the expectations of distance learners could not be satisfied this way. Something better was needed. Advancement in communication technology allowed educators to introduce flexibility and openness to educational opportunities thereby promoting the growth of ODL. Today ODL is in use in many developed and developing countries, providing many educational opportunities to meet the varied needs of learners.

Section 1.3: Introduction to open schools

Open schools are becoming more and more important because conventional schools can no longer cope with the demand for education. A growing number of children and adults demand a different type of education and the mainstream schools are not geared for these types of learners.



ACTIVITY 1.3.1: How would you describe the concept of open schools?

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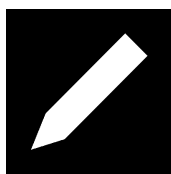
An open school can be described as extended education and training opportunities to out-of-school young people and adults by using open and distance learning methods with a mission to empower students with knowledge and skills through open access to innovative distance education programmes of high quality.

According to COL, open schooling involves "the physical separation of the school-level learner from the teacher, and the use of unconventional teaching methodologies, and information and communications technologies (ICTs) to bridge the separation and provide the education and training". COL also says that "Open schooling is not called open/distance schooling for a reason. Open schooling may follow different patterns, but the most common scenario is that the learners study specially designed open learning materials on their own – at home, in their workplace, wherever it is convenient for them – and then they meet together with a facilitator on a regular basis. The 'open' in open schooling refers to the openness of the system – seldom are there rules dictating student ages, prerequisites, content of courses to be taken or number of courses in which students must enrol."

COL's definition of open schooling is adequate as a technical description of the way in which an open school goes about the business of teaching and developing an environment within which learning can take place. There is, though, another way of looking at open schooling, and that is to try to define the role of an open school in relation to conventional schools.

Open schools can also operate in different models and be classified as follows:

- A **complementary open schooling system** offering the same curriculum for children and youths who have never been in a position to attend the formal classroom-based school system or who, having attended the formal education system, have had to drop-out because they had to start working or because their grades were too poor for them to progress through the grades and various examination hurdles.
- An **alternative open schooling system** offering a different, more adult-relevant curriculum for people who never had a chance to have or complete their formal education at school level (and perhaps some out-of-school youth, for whom an alternative curriculum – generally more vocationally-oriented – is seen as more appropriate).



ACTIVITY 1.3.2: What do you think are the objectives of open schools? Write down your top three objectives.

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The major objectives of open schools are to:

- provide educational opportunities to school-leavers, drop-outs, working adults, housewives, and learners from distant and remote areas;
- reach out to those who could not complete or continue their schooling due to socio/cultural and economic reasons;
- provide a parallel mode of non-formal education and add an alternative to formal schooling;
- lighten the burden on the formal schooling system; and
- promote an open distance learning system of education.

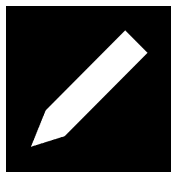
Namibia has, through the Namibia College for Open Learning (NAMCOL), established a comprehensive open school system. The purpose of NAMCOL is “to contribute towards the social and economic development of Namibia by upgrading the educational level of adults and out-of-school youths through programmes of open learning; by devising, developing and offering programmes to address the diverse needs of such adults and out-of-schools youths; and by providing opportunities for

adults and out-of-school youths to upgrade their professional and vocational skills, as well as their level of general education”.

It would do this by using technologies that would take “education to the people” and by broadening “access to education by establishing and maintaining tutorial centres in the various regions of Namibia for those Namibians who have been deprived of formal education or vocational training or who are too old or for other reasons are unable to engage in conventional school-based education”.

Open schools in India are playing a major role in the educational landscape. The formal schools are the main vehicles for delivery of distance education at the local level. While maintaining its academic autonomy and unique characteristics, their National Open School (NOS) has developed an effective partnership with formal education, and most particularly with the school system. This interface of NOS with the traditional schools has helped in reaching out to a large clientele across the country.

The delivery approach in India by NOS imparts education by adopting a mixed approach of combining self-study and study centre support, complementing these with electronic media in a very limited way. The courses are carried out through multimedia learning packages prepared exclusively for the distance education students. The learning package consists of a curriculum outline, printed self-learning instructional materials, personal contact programmes for face-to-face interaction, audio-video cassettes and use of electronic media (television transmission and teleconferences).



ACTIVITY 1.3.3: What do think are the three most unique features of open schools?

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Each country has their very own approach to open schools and that approach will have an impact on the features of their open schools. The following features are those that are typically part of open schools:

- An open entry system for all learners irrespective of their level of education;
- Students from all parts of the country are accepted;
- Multi-level registration, i.e. Bridge course and Core course;
- Flexible regarding the languages of instruction;
- Expansions in phases, with the establishment of regional Resource-cum-Study Centres;
- Periodic personal contact programmes;
- Relevant curriculum and separate schemes of studies in tune with the needs of learners;
- A flexible examination scheme;
- Easy-to-learn materials.

You will find that any one or more of the following could be reasons for someone to become an ODL learner:

- economic conditions;
- social and cultural barriers;
- geographical barriers and non-availability of a school in the locality;
- natural disaster such as a cyclone, tsunami, etc.;
- political disturbances;
- disabilities;
- by choice.

An understanding of who the learners are and what their needs are, are prerequisites for quality learner support. The learners in open schools are not the conventional learner, they come from various backgrounds and their needs are in many cases very specific to learners from open schools.

The categories of open school learners could be any of the following:

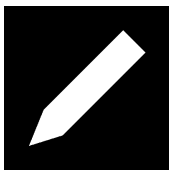
- Girls and women;
- Rural and urban people;
- Differently able persons;
- Employed/unemployed;
- Disadvantaged groups such as refugees, nomads, tribal children;
- Out-of-school children and youths.

The next section will briefly focus on the relationship between open schools and vocational training.

Section 1.4: Open schools for vocational education

Today we live in a fast-changing, knowledge-based society on which our economy depends. Because of this, it is essential that we prepare learners to be ready for work and future employment. Preparing learners for work means preparing them for work that they are really interested in, challenged by, feel capable of performing, and thereby feel they are really contributing something. Every learner has the right to expect that kind of work. To achieve this, there needs to be a responsive training system. The conventional system has been criticised for being too academic and not responsive to the economic demands and it is believed that vocational education can play an important role. Vocational education can develop skilled workers through diversified courses to meet the requirements of the unorganised sector and also instil self-employment skills in people through a large number of self-employment oriented courses. If this is provided alongside academic courses then, at the end of a course, the learner is enabled with both specific skills and academic knowledge. Recognising this aspect and, with the advancement in technology today, it is widely advocated that vocational education can be successfully introduced through open schooling.

In Activity 1.4.1, you reflect on what you have learned about ODL and vocational education.



ACTIVITY 1.4.1: Think of three objectives that vocational education through open schools can contribute in your country and list them here.

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A properly planned and effectively implemented vocational education through open schools can help achieve these social and economic goals:

- Upgrading skills and thereby contributing to the learning needs of young people and adults;
- Helping workers gain theoretical knowledge along with practical work skills;
- Reducing unemployment and creating opportunities for self-employment and entrepreneurship
- Developing a pool of productive human resources leading to economic growth and development of the country.

In the next Unit we will focus on learner support in open schools.

Unit 2

Introduction to learner support in open schools

Dr. Johan Hendrikz

Section 2.1: Learner support: concept and meaning

Section 2.2: Key elements of learner support

Section 2.3: Quality criteria and guidelines for learner support

Section 2.4: Development of a learner support system

UNIT OBJECTIVES

After completing this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain “learner support” in the context of ODL and open schools.
- Identify and understand the key elements of learners support.
- Know and understand quality criteria for learner support.
- Explain and apply the guidelines for learner support.
- Develop a learner support system.

Section 2.1: Learner support: concept and meaning

Before we proceed consider the following:



ACTIVITY 2.1.1: How would you explain the concept *learner support* to a colleague? Write your own explanation before you proceed.

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Your answer will most probably be correct because there is more than one correct answer to this question. There are different views and perspectives of what constitutes learner support.

Let us have a look at what the experts say. The University of South Africa (UNISA), one of the mega distance education universities in the world, on one hand describes “learner support as the range of activities, which complement mass-produced materials. These may include tutoring, counseling, telephone or electronic correspondence, access to academic information, interaction with course facilitators and with colleagues, preparation in study skills, time management skills, online learning skills; among others. All these are aimed at promotion of effective learning and enhancement of retention and through-put of learners”.

Kehrwald, on the other hand, defines learner support as, “the process by which learner’s needs are recognized, responded to and met in a learning environment.”

Simpson sees learner support as “all activities beyond the production and delivery of course materials that assist in the progress of learners in their studies”. (Simpson, 2000)

If you consider each of the above mentioned descriptions of learner support you will see that each one has a different perspective on learner support. Each one of these perspectives however has one basic concept in common.



ACTIVITY 2.1.2: Write down this core element that is reflected in all the perspectives and see whether your own view in Activity 2.1.1 also reflect this element.

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Learner support is about making our learners successful in their studies. It is in this sense about an approach or philosophy where the institution and/or lecturer consciously structure the learning experience in such a way that if the learner studies responsibly he/she will have a fair chance to be successful.

The “face” of learner support in open schools is different from the contact mode of delivery in the traditional school. In Unit 1 you read about the unique features of ODL and open schools. What must be clear is that given the unique features, the need for learner support in open schools is so much higher. Just think of the profile of the learners and the circumstances in which they must study. We have a moral obligation to go out of our way to deliver excellent support to our learners especially in open schools.

Although it is possible and also helpful to list all the activities that support the learners as you have seen in UNISA’s view above, we must remember that learner support is much more than a list of activities (interventions). It is, in a way, how an institution demonstrates that is on the side of the student. (Mills 2004)

A holistic view of learner support entails that we carefully evaluate each element of our involvement with the student to ensure that the student not only “feels” that he/she is supported but has a tangible experience of the support.

There are different approaches to learner support:

- Centralised and
- Decentralised

If, for example, you consider learner support activities such as enrolment, material distribution, face-to-face sessions, radio programmes and assignment marking, it must be evident that some services might be better suited to be delivered centrally while others might be better suited to be delivered in a decentralised way.



ACTIVITY 2.1.3: Consider each of the listed learners support services and decide which ones are better suited to be delivered centrally and those which are better suited to be delivered decentralised and motivate your choice in each case.

In doing Activity 2.1.3 you will experience that there are no clear cut answers. Variables like financial resources, human resources, present infrastructure and your specific context will play a major role in your decision to centralise or decentralise.

In addition to the concepts of centralised and decentralised approaches to learner support we must also take note of another distinction that is made when it comes to learner support. The one is academic or tutorial support and non academic or organisational support.

In the case of open schools in India they refer to the domains of learner support.

Support in the cognitive domain is provided through self-learning study materials, media materials and contact programmes (30-35 sessions per subject) arranged at their open schools. Support in the psycho-motor domain is also provided at open schools through facilities for lab work and practicals. The major problem faced by the National Institute of Open School's students in the affective domain is their lack of self-esteem, commitment and confidence. Contact with peers and tutors, listening to and watching audio and video programmes (specifically designed for the purpose), working through *Open Learning* (a bimonthly supportive magazine), study guides and assignments go a long way in mitigating such problems. As for the systemic domain, learner friendly and transparent administrative processes and information management systems provide all the support needed by students – registration service; responses to enquires; credit transfer from various boards; participation at study centres and in examinations; and collection of result-cards and certificates.

All too often, there is pressure to make open schools look like traditional schools. The purpose of learner support is not to mimic the traditional schools but to develop learner support within the unique features of open schools:

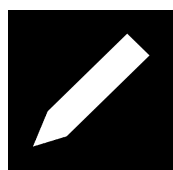
- There are new ways of providing limited interaction at a much lower cost than a fully individual system. Information and communication technologies have helped in this respect.
- It is undoubtedly the case that in those countries where students have relatively easy access to ICTs, these have supported greater interactivity between students, their tutors and the institution. This will be discussed in Unit 7.

Now that you have a better understanding of the concept and the meaning of learner support let us find out more about the key elements of learner support.



Section 2.2: Key elements of learner support

In this section we will spend some time on the key elements of learner support.



ACTIVITY 2.2.1: Complete the following sentence:

I think the key elements of learner support are.....

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It is clear from the literature that there are different understandings of this term. Some writers use this term to refer to specific actions of learner support. For example, contact sessions; tutorial letters; counselling; etc. Others refer to elements of learner support as those aspects that make the action of learner support possible. To use a very simple example, to conduct a face-to-face session with learners in an ODL programme can be described as part of the learner support that is offered to the learners, but to deliver that service you need to plan for it, have financial and human resources available and ensure the physical infrastructure requirements are in place.

The approach that we suggest is that key elements include both of the above mentioned perspectives. For Robinson (*ibid*) the learner support elements are:

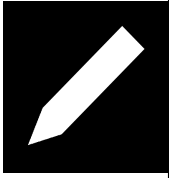
- personal contact between learners and support agents (people in variety of roles with variety of titles);
- individual or group face-to-face or via other means;
- peer contact;
- feedback to students on their learning;
- additional material such as handbooks, advice notes or guides;
- study groups and centers – actual or virtual (electronic);
- access to libraries, laboratories and equipment; and
- communication networks.

For Tait the student support elements are:

- tutoring (all modes);
- counseling;
- organisation of study centres; and
- interactive teaching through TV and radio.

Let us look at the following key elements and a brief explanation of each.

- Pre-enrolment and enrolment support – this element refers to the support to the learners before the learners enrol and during the enrolment process.
- Academic support – this element refers to support that is directly focussed on the learner, the learning material and teaching and learning.
- Counselling support – this element refers to support services that inform, direct and or comfort learners throughout their studies.
- Administrative support – this element refers to support services that administratively empower learners to be academically successful.
- Learning centres as part of learner support – this element refers to facilities that are established to enhance and support face to face contact with learners but also to provide for a learning environment for their studies.
- Monitoring/quality assurance – this element refers to all those actions by the institution to ensure that the progress of the learners is satisfactory and that the support that is given is consistently of high quality.



ACTIVITY 2.2.2: Why do you think it is important for you to know what the elements of learner support are?

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To know the definition of learner support and to understand the concept of learner support is not enough if you want to develop a quality learner support system for your open school. To know what the elements of learner support are will empower you to develop a comprehensive learner support system. However it is not of great help if you introduce all the elements or even some of them if they do not adhere to the necessary quality criteria. In the next section we will look at the quality criteria for learner support.



Section 2.3: Quality criteria and guidelines for learner support

We need to measure what we do in learner support against a benchmark, otherwise how will we know that what we do and how we do it is really of high quality? Quality criteria are this benchmark. Quality criteria are tools to ensure quality. Guidelines, on the other hand, are directing us to adhere to the quality criteria.



ACTIVITY 2.3.1: List five guidelines and five criteria for learner support. Think of your own context and try to list the guidelines and criteria that you use.

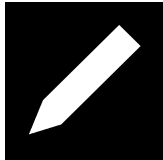
Guidelines:.....
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Criteria:.....
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Quality assurance is a process of ensuring that we meet specified quality requirements or standards. These standards or requirements are embodied in the quality criteria. It is therefore not possible to do quality assurance without guidelines directing us toward quality and the criteria to measure us against. There are five foundations for quality distance education programmes. These foundations are also very applicable for open schools:

- Quality of institutional leadership and its ability to articulate a vision that will ensure survival.
- Sound financial management.
- Quality of the programmes, courses and learning materials both in respect of their academic content and relevance, and the quality of the pedagogy underpinning their design.
- Quality of the logistical system underpinning the student support system and the materials distribution system. For example, timely despatch of materials to students so that they have them when required, timely feedback on student queries, rapid turnaround between receipt of an assignment and the return of the corrected assignment to the student.
- Quality of the student support services including the quality of the advice given to students, quality of teaching, and quality of the assessment process (both formative and summative).

It will be very difficult to run a quality open school if the above mentioned foundations are not properly in place.

Guidelines for learner support will not just focus on learner support specifically but also on other related aspects.



ACTIVITY 2.3.2: Think back what we said about learner support in Section 2.1 Do you understand why the guidelines should be comprehensive?

The reason why the guidelines need to be comprehensive is because learner support encompasses all aspects that might have an influence on the quality of the support to our learners. It is possible to extract guidelines from the foundations of ODL to ensure a quality learner support system. These guidelines for example can be:

- Institutional leadership.
- Financial management.
- Quality programmes.
- Quality administrative/logistical systems.

Guidelines can be divided into categories each with its specific guidelines.

Management and Administration

- Institutional leadership
- Financial management
- Administrative/logistical systems
- Quality assurance
- Facilities

Academic

- Learner centred approach
- Well designed programmes

Human resources

- Well qualified staff and tutors
- In service training
- Conditions of service

Learners

- Learner profile
- Student information

Learner support

- Consistent in quality across all of its aspects
- Timely
- Specialist and generic
- Impartial/Fair
- Accessible and appropriate
- Recorded and monitored
- Available in forms and at times convenient for the learner

Now that we have addressed the guidelines let us focus on the quality criteria. You remember that we discussed the key elements in the previous section. Table one below links each key element to a set of criteria.

Table One

KEY ELEMENTS	CRITERIA
Pre-Enrolment counselling	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Appropriate marketing strategies- Mechanism for information sharing- Appropriate promotional material- Opportunities for prospective learners to visit the institution (open days)
Enrolment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Provide guidance on services available- Provide enrolment package e.g. enrolment booklet, prospectus, handbooks, forms- Timely delivery of study materials- Orientation/induction programme
Academic Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Academic support is built into the design of the course materials.- Learners are carefully oriented to the teaching and learning methods on the programme, particularly if electronic learning methods are used.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tutor marking system, which provides quick and effective feedback - Regular, responsive and flexible tutor support - Regular tutor/learner and learner/ learner contact - Provision for learners in remote and rural areas - Design & provide appropriate delivery schedules - A focus on retention of learners in the programme - Well qualified and committed lecturing staff - Comprehensive assesment strategy
Administrative Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Administrative staff is trained to be helpful, clear and consultative in the way they relate to and make arrangements for learners - Learners have access to facilities (for example, libraries) and equipment that are necessary for their successful learning. - Up-to-date learner records and statistics - Suitable arrangements with relevant partner institutions in the delivery of learner support - Procedures for timely material dispatch - Proper guidelines for information dissemination - Schemes for financial support (scholarship, allowances, subsidy, loans) - Mechanisms for tutor recruitment and training
Guidance and Counselling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learners have access to counselling for personal difficulties/advice related to their study before and during their course or programme, as well as after its completion. - Dealing with learner enquiries in a caring, patient, helpful and compassionate manner - Guidance and counselling make provision for the following services available: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Career guidance ▪ Individual & group counseling ▪ Skills development ▪ Examination support ▪ Provision for learners with special needs
Learning Centres Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mechanism for the establishment of learning centres - Appropriate learning centres resources (physical, human, material) - Structures and procedures for the management of learning centres - Both academic and administrative functions of learning centres are taken care of in the way that learning centres are managed - Learning centres are accessible to the broader community, rather than merely to a provider offering a formal programme
Monitoring/Quality Assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mechanism for feedback of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Supervision of tutorials ▪ Visits to learning centres ▪ Observations of tutorials ▪ Evaluation of materials, programme, services

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mechanisms to ensure learners are well informed and encouraged to participate - Monitoring data is analyzed and acted upon - Guidelines for the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ examinations ▪ criteria for assessment ▪ criteria for selection of examiners ▪ assessment feedback ▪ support for special learners ▪ record keeping ▪ adherence to turn around time
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Roberts from UNISA highlighted the following expectations for quality learner support that the South African Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) provides. These expectations are:

- Learners are encouraged to create and participate in “communities of learning” in which the individual learner thinks and solves problems with others engaged in similar tasks. This is facilitated through a range of student support mechanisms – peer support sessions, tutorials/contact sessions, teaching on assignments, support in the workplace (mentoring), email and internet communications, etc.
- Academic support is built into the design of the course materials.
- Learners have access to counselling before, during and after completion of their course or programme.
- Learner access to the technology relevant for the programme/course is facilitated and learners are carefully oriented to how to use the technology for learning and communication.
- Learner performance is monitored and learners at risk are identified and timely educational intervention is provided for such learners.
- That systems are in place to organise and monitor decentralised support for remote learners – grouping of learners, allocation of tutors, location of suitable sites of learning close to where the learners live/work, and monitoring of attendance and performance of both tutors and learners.
- The tutor/learner ratio is sufficiently small to enable tutors to know their learners as individuals, be able to support them in their study and monitor their progress.
- There are sufficient contact sessions to ensure that the learners are able to achieve the outcomes of the course. These contact sessions are integrated into the course design rather than being an add-on extra.
- The teaching and learning activities at contact sessions acknowledge learners’ existing knowledge and experience, and provide opportunities for guided integration of the new knowledge and skills as contained in the course materials.
- Contact sessions are held at local venues or centres accessible to learners to reduce costs and time spent in travelling.
- Both the academic and the administrative functions of learning centres are taken care of in the way that learning centres are managed.
- Learning centres, to the extent that they become fixed structures, and particularly fixed structures with technological equipment, need to be accessible to the broader community, rather than merely an institution offering a formal programme.

- Tutors are selected and trained for their role of mediating learning from the course materials. The training places particular emphasis on equipping tutors to analyse and assist learners with language and learning difficulties.
- Staff engaged in online tutoring and the moderation of online discussions are qualified for the intensive engagement and direction, which is required.
- Tutors are trained to teach on assignments by giving constructive feedback.
- The turnaround time on assignments is kept to a minimum and specified to the learners so that they can use feedback to inform their learning on an ongoing basis.
- Adequate administrative and professional support is provided to tutors.
- Tutor performance is monitored regularly.
- Feedback is sought from tutors for the review of courses and programmes.
- Administrative staff is trained to be helpful, clear and consultative in the way they relate to and make arrangements for learners.
- The obligations and responsibilities of the learners and the educational provider are made clear at registration. It is clear what resources and equipment the provider will supply, and what the learner will have to supply himself.
- Satisfactory and cost-effective arrangements are made to meet learners' needs for physical facilities for study, tutorial, and resource space.
- Learners have access to the facilities (for example, libraries) and equipment that are necessary for their successful learning.
- Learners are provided with technical support for each educational technology hardware, software, and delivery system required in a programme.
- Learner structures such as student representative councils and faculty associations are established, recognised and empowered to represent learners on structures of institutional governance.

You will notice that there is an overlap of many of the criteria in the above mentioned list with those in Table One and that there are ones that do not correspond. This illustrates that there is not a full and comprehensive list of criteria for learner support. The information provided in this section at least empowers you to have a set of criteria to benchmark your learner support against. You however might identify more criteria that will make the criteria more appropriate for your context.

The next section will focus on how to develop a learner support system.

Section 2.4: Development of a learner support system

You now have a basic understanding of the following:

- The fundamentals of learner support;
- Key elements of learner support;
- Guidelines for learner support; and
- Quality criteria for learner support.

In this section we will focus on aspects of how to develop a learner support system for your open school.

We need to understand that the context of countries and communities differ and it will be very difficult to have a template for development that will be suitable for all. It will be necessary to extract from the framework provided what you think is appropriate and contextualise it.



ACTIVITY 2.4.1: What makes your context different from other communities or countries?

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Consider that India has a well developed open schooling system and is a densely populated country. Namibia and Botswana also have well established open school initiatives but they are countries with small populations widely dispersed throughout their countries. In Cameroon (2008) they have just started to plan for open schools. If you consider the above contexts you might agree that the circumstances in these countries differ vastly and that it will have an impact on the development of a learner support system.

There are three levels in the development process of a learner support system:

- Macro environment – within the macro environment social, political and economic contexts will play a role. Open schools cannot dictate, change or directly influence these elements and need to operate within these contexts.
- Macro environment – within the macro environment social, political and economic contexts will play a role. Open schools cannot dictate, change or directly influence these elements and need to operate within these contexts.
- Micro environment – the micro level refers to a specific open school or even class room and programme context. With in this context the school and or teacher do have control over this environment.

In developing an integrated approach to planning learner support the following questions need to be considered:

- Who are the students and what are their needs?
- What are the desired learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills?
- Do you have the necessary infrastructure available?
- Do you have the financial and human resources available?
- What media are most appropriate?
- Are there external factors that might have an impact?
- Is it possible to deliver the learner support on a sustainable basis?
- What are the mechanisms to ensure quality?

There is a link between the type of media that you select for the type of learner support needed. Although the fundamentals of learner support do not change, the media will have an impact on the

format, content and way of delivering learner support. Learner support will, for example, differ if you offer a predominately online programme as opposed to a paper based programme. The following questions can be asked when selecting the right media:

- Do any of the learning outcomes dictate certain media?
- Which media are physically available to the learners and convenient for them to use?
- Are any media likely to help motivate learners?
- Is the institution or sponsor pressing for certain media to be used?
- Do learners have the necessary skills to use the media?
- What are the costs to the institution of different media?
- What are the costs to the learner?

The following steps serve as a guideline for an open school to develop a comprehensive learner support system:

Step 1: Define learner support and open schooling

It is important that you understand what you mean by learner support and how you understand the concept of open schooling. This forms the foundation on which you will build your learner support system. It also serves as a mechanism to ensure that everybody involved understands the underpinning philosophy of your learner support system.

Step 2: Understanding your learners

Learner support is about the learners. You will be in a much better position to develop a learner support system if you really understand the needs of your learners. To know and understand your learners you must know the following:

- Academic profile.
- Social profile.
- Economic conditions.

Step 3: Identify the key elements to develop the learner support system

You need to decide whether you are going to focus on all the elements that were identified in Section 2.3 or only focus on one or two. You need to be able to motivate why you will focus on the elements you have identified.

Step 4: Develop the “Menu” for learner support

You now need to develop a “menu” or a list of learner support actions that you will establish to support the learners. For academic support you might decide to add more tutorial sessions, introduce structured feedback on assignments, and/or send a motivational letter to students before their examination, etc.

Step 5: Feasibility study

You can plan the most elaborate learner support system but if you cannot deliver the “menu” of services in a sustainable and consistent way then you need to rethink Step 4. You need to establish whether you have the financial resources, infrastructure and human resources available to deliver the planned learner support services.

Step 6: Develop the mechanism to ensure a quality learner support system

You need to understand how you are going to measure the quality of your learner support system. To do this you need to select the appropriate quality criteria that you will measure your learner support

system against. You also need to know how and when you will conduct the quality assurance of your learner support system.

Step 7: Implementation of the learner support system


Proper and comprehensive planning is a prerequisite for the successful implementation of the learner support system. Steps 1 to 6 serve as planning tools to ensure that once you implement your system you will add real value to the learning experience of your learners and that their academic performance will improve.

Again these challenges will not be the same for everybody. You can expect your own and sometimes unique challenges. Do not feel despondent as we are all faced with a variety of challenges. Botswana College of Open and Distance Learning (BOCODOL) and Namibia College for Open Learning (NAMCOL) listed the following challenges in their learner support environment:

- Record keeping and records;
- Safety for learners and tutors is a concern;
- Tracking down learners;
- Learners not adequately prepared for examination;
- Shared use of facilities;
- Distance to study centers;
- Part time staff turnover;
- Lack of resources.

What is important is that you understand your challenges and determine how you will overcome them or manage your challenges in such a way that it has the least impact on the academic performance of learners.

Do the activity before you proceed to the next unit.

	<p>ACTIVITY 2.4.2: What do you think are the biggest challenges to develop a learner support system?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
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The next 5 Units will address the following key elements of learner support:

- Curriculum and learning materials
- Tutoring and the process of tutoring
- Evaluation and monitoring
- ICT's in learner support

Unit 3

Curriculum and learning materials

**Written by Dr. Sushmita Mitra
Adapted by Dr. Johan Hendrikz**

Section 3.1: Curriculum in open schooling

Section 3.2: Difference between open school and formal school curriculum

Section 3.3: Open schools learning materials

Section 3.4: Characteristics of open schools learning materials

UNIT OBJECTIVES

After completing this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain “curriculum” in the context of open schooling.
- Differentiate between open school and formal curriculum.
- Explain how various learning materials are used for transaction of the curriculum in open schools.
- State the characteristics of open school learning materials.
- Explain the delivery of subject specific content through print materials for a specific target group and programme.

Section 3.1: Curriculum in Open Schooling

Since open schooling can reach out to anybody and almost anywhere, should developing a curriculum for the learners pose a challenge?

Yes, it will because open schooling learners:

- vary widely in age – from school-age children to senior citizens who differ in their experience and life skills;
- differ widely in their learning skills, and particularly in their reading skills;
- may not be able to afford the same time to study that full-time students can;
- are independent learners – many are self-propelled and self-motivated.

Therefore, in developing the curriculum for an open schooling system, we need to consider the following, while keeping openness and flexibility of learning in mind:

- Who are the learners?
- What will make the curriculum relevant and meaningful to the learners?
- What choice and flexibility can be offered in the curriculum?
- What methods should be considered for transacting the curriculum?
- What levels of learning should the curriculum attain?
- What methods are to be adopted to ascertain the achievement of the level of learning?

Pause for a moment to consider these questions. The curriculum in an open school system needs to be adaptive, dynamic, real-life based and attempt to cater to the needs of the varied learners. It is, therefore, a challenge to develop such a curriculum for open school learners.

In other words, to develop a curriculum, you begin by examining two sources for ideas about the possible objectives you should include in a curriculum: the students and society. You then "screen" the needs of each of these forces by evaluating them against a philosophy of education which, in this case, is open schooling. Once you understand the psychology of learning in open schooling you can specify precise instructional objectives which lead to the final steps of curriculum development:

- selection of learning experiences to accomplish the objectives;
- organisation of the experiences into a logical sequence; and
- evaluation of the experience to see if the objectives were accomplished.

A curriculum in an open school must consider:

- the scheme of studies, that is, the list of content areas or subjects to choose from and flexible requirements for a course;
- the objectives and content elements in each subject, or the syllabus;
- the scheme of evaluation, which should ensure a spirit of flexibility and freedom; and
- the methods of curriculum transaction.

When we adopt a learner-centred approach, our course design strategies endeavour to include a supportive element at all levels. The intention is to meet the learning needs of students by creating an environment that stimulates learning. Shelton and Saltsman (2004) explain that when learner support is integrated in course design it sets a "tone of excellence" by "sowing the seed" that will stimulate development of a learning community which will in turn support and nurture the student's progress to

maturity. In Heydenrych's (2004) view, the learning development process must be continuously innovative and inclusive of facilitation and support in order to encompass a holistic approach to the learning experience.



Section 3.2: Difference between open school and formal school curriculum

- The open school curriculum is learner-centric and in many ways also directed towards self-learning, whereas the formal curriculum is teacher dependent.
- The open school curriculum is not age-dependent, whereas formal curriculum is class-based and age-dependent.
- The open school curriculum integrates workplace skills, whereas the formal one usually does not include them.
- For the transaction of an open school curriculum, usually no fixed time is required, whereas for the transaction of the formal curriculum, there is a fixed schedule, pace and location. Everybody is expected to be at the same pace of learning in the formal system, whereas in the open school system the pace is flexible and dependent on the learner.
- The open school curriculum is usually transacted through various media and materials, whereas the formal curriculum usually lacks these and is primarily delivered through a face-to-face classroom situation.

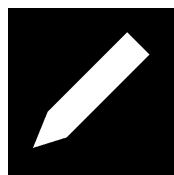


Section 3.3: Open school learning materials

In the context of open schooling, the learning materials are an elaboration of a set of learning opportunities, organised around a well-defined theme/topic in such a way that it is a **self-contained instruction unit** to be used in a **self-learning situation**.

Therefore, for learning material to be effective in a self-learning situation, the instructional design of the material should guarantee its **self-sufficiency**. It should be structured in such a way that it will help the learner to find his/her way into and through the text.

By and large, all open schools rely heavily on print-based instructional materials. In Activity 3.3.1, you will reflect on why the print medium is so widely used in open schools.



ACTIVITY 3.3.1: Why is print considered the primary medium of instruction in most open schools?

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A major advantage of printed materials over other technologies is that they are self-sufficient – no other equipment is needed to make them accessible to the learners.

Printed materials can be used at any place at anytime, wherever the learner happens to be – at work on the way to work, or at home.

Section 3.4: Characteristics of open schools learning materials

Open schools learning materials are primarily meant for self-learning. Such materials have the following characteristics:

Characteristic	Meaning
Intended for individual learning	No need to wait until there are enough learners to form a group.
Allows self-paced learning	Individuals can work at their own pace rather than at the pace of a group, which may be too fast or too slow.
Intended for private learning	No danger of loss of face, which might be a concern for student learners in certain kinds of group learning.
Available at any time	Learners can learn when they wish rather than according to an external timetable.
Available at any location	In students' homes or when travelling, unless fixed or special equipment is required.
Available to any number	There is no limit to the number of learners who can be studying a course at one time.
Standardised content given for all learners	All learners receive the same teaching materials. In a formal system, there can be variation because teachers determine content and may choose different textbooks.
Expert content provided	Materials can include contributions from national as well as international experts.
Updatable content	Packaged material can usually be updated more quickly and cheaply than teachers can be trained.
Structured teaching-learning strategy	The teaching strategy can reflect a consensus of the most effective and efficient way to teach the subject so that learning is overtly expressed.

Active learning is promoted	Individuals learn by using/applying ideas presented in the learning materials, rather than merely having the information told to them.
Frequent feedback is provided	Opportunity provided for the learners to get continuous feedback to help them monitor and improve their own progress through the learning package.
Explicit aims and objectives are provided	Clearly it is indicated what learners might be expected to do as a result of working through the package.

Although an open school expects learners to be self-learners undergoing their studies from a package of materials and mostly separated from their peers and instructors, teacher support is available. Learning packages are not enough and open learners studying at a distance need help and support from other people, not only to be successful in their endeavour to continue learning, but also in using the course materials effectively. Therefore, open schools provide planned teacher support in different ways in the open schools from the time a learner joins the system until the end of his/her successful completion. They provide tutorial services in face-to-face also known as contact programmes held on weekends and holidays, and in some cases during the week when the conventional classroom closes its doors (because some open schools use the facilities of conventional schools outside of conventional classroom time). Therefore, we can say that the delivery mechanism is a combination of distance and face-to-face learning situations.

Unit 4

Tutoring in Open Schools

**Written by Dr. Sushmita Mitra
Adapted by Dr. Johan Hendrikz**

Section 4.1: Characteristics and attributes of a tutor in open schools

Section 4.2: Difference between teaching and tutoring

Section 4.3: Roles and responsibilities of a tutor

Section 4.4: Knowledge and skills that tutors need

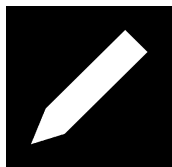
UNIT OBJECTIVES

After completing this unit you will be able to:

- Explain the characteristics and attributes of a Tutor in an in open school.
- Differentiate between teaching and tutoring.
- Describe the roles and responsibilities of a Tutor.
- Explain the knowledge and skills required to be an effective Tutor.

Section 4.1: Characteristics and attributes of a tutor in an open school

In Activity 4.1.1, you consider the question, “Who is a tutor in open schools?”



ACTIVITY 4.1.1: Place a tick (•) beside the statements you agree with.

A tutor is a subject expert who:

- teaches only;
- controls what students learn by lecturing and prescribing what to learn;
- does everything giving less opportunity for the learners to get involved in activities and discussions;
- pays no attention to individual learners' problems; and
- makes learners responsible for completing the programme;

If we consider a tutor in an open school as an intermediary facilitator between learners and their learning process who helps learners to become aware of how they can contribute to their own learning, then you will agree that none of the above statements are quite agreeable.

Tutors provide the most crucial form of learner support in open schools. Without tutorial support, the best materials in the world may prove disappointing for learners. On the other hand, quite basic materials can be effective if learners are supported by sensitive and diligent tutors. Tutors take up where the materials leave off and, in this context, tutoring is a role for someone who is an expert in the subject that learners are learning about. But the tutor's role is not to re-teach the content of the materials. Rather, it is to help learners make their own sense of what they are studying – and perhaps to critique the materials in terms of their own values and experience. Therefore the tutor also needs to be knowledgeable about learners and their images of learning as well as about the kind of difficulties they may encounter and the type of support they might find helpful. Tutors will run face-to-face/contact sessions – usually in groups – but with an emphasis on problems learners might face practical work or helping learners collaborate in a learning task and benefit from one another's insights and experience.

An open school tutor needs to have the following knowledge and capabilities:

- Well versed and preferably trained in open schooling to have an understanding of the system;
- Sincere, regular, punctual and a dedicated;
- Able to make learning engaging and meaningful to the learners;
- Able to assist learners in self-learning;
- Able to guide learners in resolving doubts and learning difficulties;
- Empathetic towards learners;
- Approachable to all learners and their parents; and
- Able to attend to all learners indiscriminately.

This is not an exhaustive list. Take a moment to reflect; what other qualities or abilities should an open school tutor have?

Section 4.2: Difference between teaching and tutoring

As you can see, there is a difference between tutoring and lecturing. The chart below lists some of the differences between teaching and tutoring in open schools.

Teaching	Tutoring in Open schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A teacher teaches or lectures to convey critical information, history, background, theories and equations.• An authoritative teacher will stand at the front of the room and recite information relevant to the lecture's content. A teacher dominates the teaching-learning process.• Teaching is mainly a one-way method of communication that does not involve significant learner participation.• The teacher usually provides all the feedback, both positive and negative.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A tutor facilitates learning. Tutors neither teach nor provide "answers," but rather assist in problem solving and in getting answers.• A tutor provides support by using a variety of learning resources, situations and activities and helps learners become confident and self-sufficient thinkers.• In the process of tutoring, learners are active participants in knowledge construction. Everyone knows something about the subject.• A tutor assists in self learning by providing expertise, experience and encouragement.• A tutor provides only positive feedback to sustain motivation.

You may wish to add other points to this list.

Section 4.3: Roles and responsibilities of a tutor

For quality contact-based tutoring in open schools, the following multi-roles are envisaged for an effective tutor:

- The **pedagogical** or **intellectual role** is the most important for the learning process, which involves expertise in content for academic advice and knowledge about learners and their images of learning, as well as the kinds of difficulties they may have and the kinds of support they might find helpful.
- The **social role** involves the creation of a friendly and comfortable social environment in which learners feel that learning is possible. This is considered to be one of the key success factors in an ODL system.

- The **managerial** or **organisational role** involves planning, implementing, monitoring and maintaining student records, as well as liaising with the institution so that the learning centre is effective and meaningful for the learners.
- The **technical role** involves utilising and maintaining ICT for learner support.

The tutor has many roles that cover three broad categories:

- academic
- supportive
- administrative

For each category, the tutor performs multiple functions:

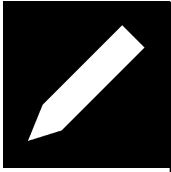
- tutor as facilitator
- tutor as counsellor/mentor
- tutor as assessor/evaluator
- tutor as manager

The chart below outlines the responsibilities associated with each of the tutor's roles.

Role	Responsibilities
Tutor as Facilitator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome learners to the programme. • Encourage and motivate learners. • Monitor learners' progress. • Ensure learners are working at the right pace. • Give information by expanding, clarifying and explaining. • Give feedback on learners' work. • Ensure learners are meeting the required standards. • Ensure the success of discussions • Facilitate a learning community. • Give technical advice and support. • Apply non-lecture oriented techniques for individual and collaborative learning.
Tutor as Counsellor/Mentor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to and assist learners as individuals. • Take care of learners' emotional and personal management. • Help learners keep the right learning pace and use the resources at his/her disposal to enrich learning. • Clarify course concepts and assignment requirements. • Help learners with revision. • Offer ways to overcome anxiety and fear of failure. • Remind learners about administrative procedures to be followed when they change or defer their studies.

<p>Tutor as Assessor/Evaluator</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify individual learners' areas of understanding. • Assess the learner's study skills (or academic skills), such as reading and comprehension, writing and analysis, or technical skills such as the ability to apply principles to practice. • Pinpoint areas of difficulty related to lack of background or a weak skill area, and develop strategies to help the learner deal with this difficulty. • Learn more about learners' individual interests and concerns. • Identify patterns of errors in the work of learner groups that may indicate problems with course materials or instructional strategies and provide appropriate remedial instruction.
<p>Tutor as Manager</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Represent the institution well by knowing all procedures related to the course and attendance of tutorials. • Understand the scope of responsibilities and activities tutors are contracted to perform. • Be well prepared for each contact session by being familiar with the student list, study material, assignments and related documents. • Plan course activities to enhance learning experiences with the tutorial, as well as manage the timing and sequence. • Show professional commitment by modelling the standards set for learners. • Become familiar, comfortable and competent with the available ICT systems and software available. • Maintain the available ICT systems. • Choose an appearance and communication style that shows respect for community and cultural expectations. • Give feedback to the institution, preferably through written reports, highlighting any problems encountered and suggesting possible adjustments. • Keep records of attendance, enquiries, assignment marking, contact details of fellow tutors, and all correspondence with learners and the institution.

In Activity 4.3.1, you apply what you have learned about the roles and responsibilities of an open school tutor.



ACTIVITY 4.3.1: The four roles of a tutor are:

- **tutor as facilitator (TF);**
- **tutor as counsellor (TC);**
- **tutor as evaluator (TE);and**
- **tutor as manager (TM).**

Indicate the role against each function given below (TF, TC, TE or TM):

- Attend the learning centre punctually and regularly.
- Ensure all resources are available at the centre.
- Ensure attendance of all learners in the centre.
- Assist learners in self-learning by encouraging them and helping solve difficulties.
- Provide a schedule for submission of assignments by all learners.
- Check assignments and provide timely feedback to all learners.
- Guide learners and counsel them.
- Contact parents/guardians in order to explain the learner's problems if needed.

Now that you have seen what the ideal tutor's roles and responsibilities are you must be wondering, how can I become an effective tutor? Well, you can be one, provided you have the knowledge and skills needed by an open school tutor.

Section 4.4: Knowledge and skills that tutors need

The tutor's main area of responsibility is academic. If the aim is to help learners understand content and its relationship to their learning goals, the tutor's specific responsibilities will determine the specific knowledge and skills required by the tutor.

Area of responsibility and aims	Specific responsibilities	Knowledge and skills
Academic – to help learners understand content and its relationship to their learning goals.	1) Help learners develop and apply appropriate learning processes effectively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of the subject matter; • Ability to communicate with learners in a clear, helpful and friendly manner.
	2) Provide fair, timely and helpful feedback to learners on their assignments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to assess and convey the strengths and weaknesses in learners' work and determine how best to respond to learners' needs; • Knowledge of the academic criteria for each grade level (Grades 6, 7, 8, etc.)

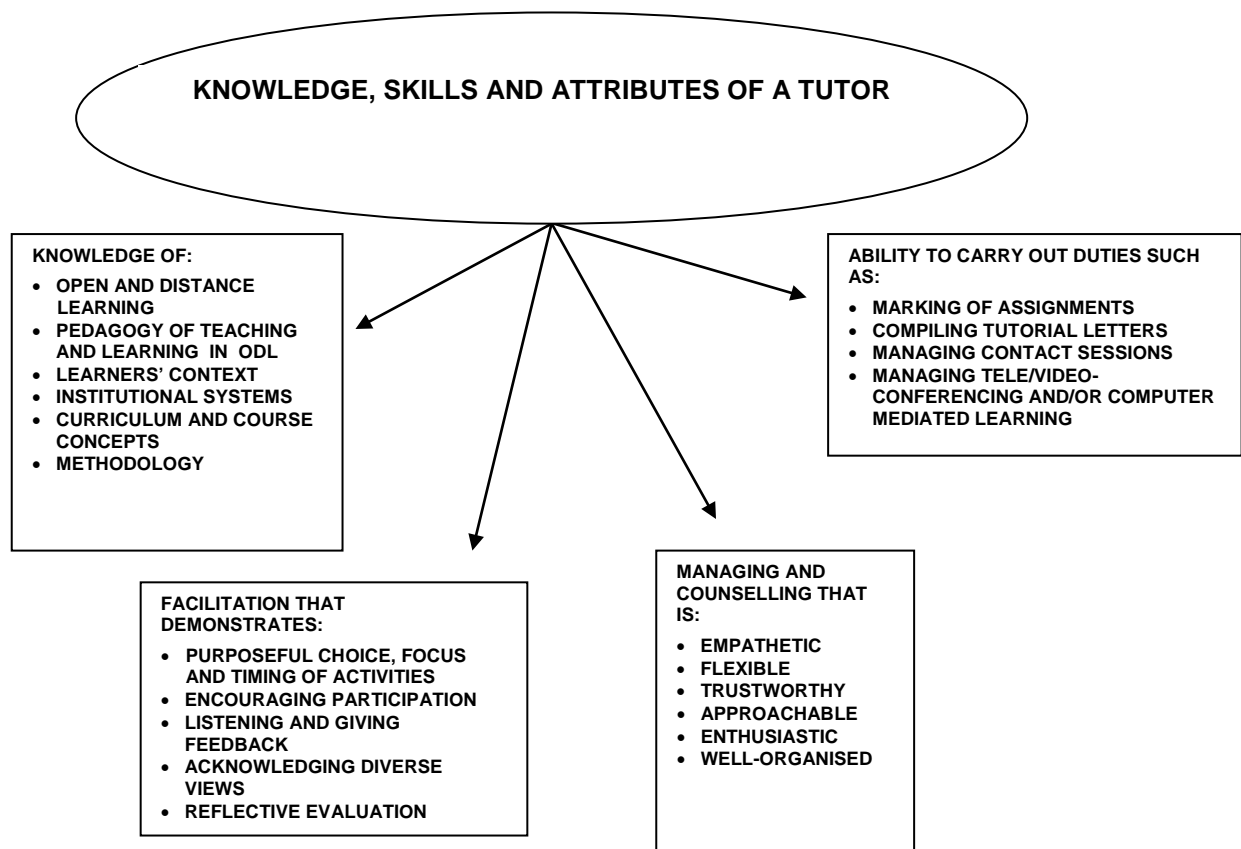
In Activity 4.4.1, you consider what specific knowledge and skills are required for a tutor's other two areas of responsibility.



ACTIVITY 4.4.1: For the following areas of responsibility and aims, identify the tutor's specific responsibilities and the corresponding knowledge and skills required.

Area of responsibility and aims	Specific responsibilities	Knowledge and skills
Support – to help the learner deal with personal, family or contextual issues that may affect learning.		
Administrative – to provide a link between learner and institution; ensure accountability between learner and institution.		

The diagram below details the knowledge and skills needed in order to perform the tutor's multiple roles and responsibilities.



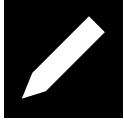
Take a moment now to identify the knowledge and skills that:

- you already have,
- you need to adapt for open schools, and
- new areas that you will need to add to your current knowledge and skills.

Are there areas where you need to expand your knowledge or improve your skills? Here's how one tutor responded when asked to assess her current skills and knowledge for performing the tutor's academic role.

Academic knowledge and skills needed	Already have	Need to adapt	Need to add	Strategies for learning
Knowledge of the subject matter	Yes, but not sure how to help distance learners connect with the subject matter	Consider how to encourage learners to apply first module to his/her own situation	Need more knowledge about learners' context, so can help them with the application side	Review learners' application forms, discuss learners' context with administrators or tutors who know them. Read about developing appropriate learner activities
Ability to communicate with learners in a clear, helpful and friendly manner	Yes, but find it easier to talk to learners than to write to them	Develop communication skills for more written rather than verbal communication	Skills in communicating in writing with learners for different purposes – providing information, assessment	Talk to experienced tutor about how to write to learners
Ability to assess and convey the strengths and weaknesses in learners' work and determine how best to respond to learners' needs	Yes, but find it easier to do this in person	Adapt assessment techniques to include more detail and suggestions for improvement		Practice marking sample assignments and discussing them with experienced tutors
Knowledge of the academic criteria for each grade level (Grades 6, 7, 8, etc.)	Yes, but not sure how to communicate this to learners	Learn how to convey academic criteria clearly to learners		

In Activity 4.4.2, you reflect on your own skills and knowledge as an ODL tutor.



**ACTIVITY 4.4.2: Knowledge and skills that you need as an ODL tutor:
(fill up the columns)**

Academic knowledge and skills needed	Already have	Need to adapt	Need to add	Strategies for learning
Support knowledge and skills Needed	Already have	Need to adapt	Need to add	Strategies for learning
Admin knowledge and skills Needed	Already have	Need to adapt	Need to add	Strategies for learning

Now that you have been introduced to the concept of tutoring, the next section will help you learn about the process.

Unit 5

The process of tutoring

**Written by Dr. Sushmita Mitra
Adapted by Dr. Johan Hendrikz**

Section 5.1: Basic principles of learning

Section 5.2: Application of learning principles in tutoring

Section 5.3: Techniques of tutoring

Section 5.4: Designing a contact/face-to-face (F2F) session

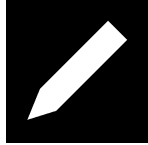
UNIT OBJECTIVES

After completing this unit you should be able to:

- Understand and explain the basic principles of learning.
- Apply learning principles in tutoring.
- Understand and explain the techniques of tutoring the target group.
- Apply the techniques with a group of learners.
- Design a contact/F2F session.

Section 5.1: Basic principles of learning

Everyday all of us learn something. Do you agree with this statement? Probably you will say yes. In Activity 5.1.1, you reflect on your own experiences with learning.



ACTIVITY 5.1.1: What does learning mean to you? Write it down.

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Some years ago, a simple but very useful piece of research was carried out by Säljö, (1979). He asked a number of adult students what they understood by learning. Their responses fell into five main categories:

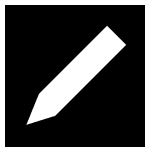
- Learning as a quantitative increase in knowledge. Learning is acquiring information or “knowing a lot”.
- Learning as memorising. Learning is storing information that can be reproduced.
- Learning as acquiring facts, skills and methods that can be retained and used as necessary.
- Learning as making sense or abstracting meaning. Learning involves relating parts of the subject matter to each other and to the real world.
- Learning as interpreting and understanding reality in a different way. Learning involves comprehending the world by reinterpreting knowledge.*

So we can say that learning is complex. In simplistic terms learning is often defined as a change in behaviour which is demonstrated by people implementing knowledge, skills, or practices derived from education.

Basically, from an educator’s perspective, learning involves helping people along the learning process, and learning includes all of the things that we do to make it happen. As an end result, we know that learning occurs when people take newfound information and incorporate it into their lives.

There are many learning theories and principles of learning based on the converging evidence from educational psychology, cognitive psychology, neuroscience and developmental research. However, in all situations learning is central to all educational practices. Such student learning is not accidental

- it is the direct result of learning experiences that have been designed intentionally or unintentionally for the learners. The designers may be the policy makers, curriculum developers, teachers, subject experts, institutions or even communities. Behind the design of such learning experiences lies a belief about learning. The belief or theory about learning followed by the designers directly influences the learning experiences that will be developed for learners, as well as the development of an effective instructional and learner support system.



ACTIVITY 5.1.2: What is, according to your view, the relationship between learning and learner support?

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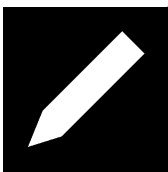
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At this point, it is worthwhile considering the different perspectives and orientations of different practitioners and educators towards learning in open and distance learning (ODL) systems. Read all the following views carefully as it will help you conceptualise how learning is presumed to take place in open and distance learning. Although this is focused on learning in ODL systems, this is also applicable in open schools.

The basic principle is *Everyone can learn* (Burns 1967). In an open and distance learning system:

- Learning occurs at a distance when the learner and the instructor/ institution are separated in time and place (Wedemeyar 1981; Holmberg 1977; Moore 1973b; Sewart 1981; Keegan, 1986)
- Considering learning to be an individual activity attained through a process of internalisation, learners undergo independent study, self-study or autonomous learning. (Dohman 1967; Wedemeyar 1974; Dellling 1975; Holmberg 1981; Wiilen 1981; Moore 1991)
- Learning is private. (Keegan 1986)
- Learning is mediated by a provider arranging for:
 - guided didactic conversation (Holmberg, 1983),
 - non contiguous communication,
 - two way interpersonal communication to recreate learning link,
 - educational transaction using technology and communication theory,
 - virtual contiguity by integrating systems that bring teacher and learner together, optimum dialogue between them and eliminate consequences of being separate in space. (Saba, 1990)
- Learning involves collaborated experience between a teacher and a learner, which is totally dependent on a two way communication facilitated by technology (Garrison, 1989)
- Learning considers requirements of both the learning task and learner i.e. principles of pedagogy/andragogy and structure of knowledge has an apparent influence on learning. (Verduin and Clark, 1991)
- Learner control is based on the inter-relationship between independence (as in self directed learner), proficiency (as in the ability to learn independently) and support (characterized by the resources available to guide and facilitate the educational transaction. (Garrison, 1989: Amundsen, 1993)

In reading this section, you must have come across many new words. In Activity 5.1.3, you reflect on any new terms and concepts you encountered.



ACTIVITY 5.1.3: List the words that were new to you and explain what they mean; you'll need to use a dictionary.

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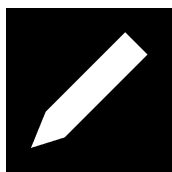
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Basically, since the learner in an open school is separated from the instructor and is undergoing self-directed self-study:

- the learning experience must have a clear purpose with focused outcomes and objectives based on the real world to foster meaningful learning and sustained motivation;
- the learner is actively engaged;
- the learning environment makes appropriate use of a variety of media;
- the learning environment must include problem-based as well as knowledge-based learning;
- learning experiences should support multiple interaction and the development of communities of interest through group collaboration and cooperative learning.

The practice of distance learning is believed to contribute to the larger social mission of education and training in a democratic society.



ACTIVITY 5.1.4: When an open school learner is undergoing self-study at home or in the workplace, where does a tutor play a role in his/her learning process?

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Section 5.2: Application of learning principles in tutoring

As mentioned earlier, tutors provide expertise, experience, and encouragement. They do not provide "answers," but rather assist in problem solving and in getting answers. So there is a need to make a major shift in attitude, for example, to move away from:

- deciding what must be taught to helping the learner decide what is to be learned;
- conveying information to helping the learner learn on his/her own;
- acting as the critical and impersonal expert to building relationships;
- using assessments to decide a grade to using assessment in order to help the learner learn (e.g., by written comments);
- putting on a performance to nurturing individuals.

Therefore, the process of tutoring can be said to be the process of facilitation in the contact session. This process would be comprised of the following:

- encouraging and facilitating learners to develop their basic learning skills, which are listening, speaking, reading and writing necessary for self-learning;
- helping and facilitating learners to make their learning meaningful; and
- enabling and helping learners to deal with and remove obstacles.

Consider each part of the process to understand what it means.

1. Encouraging and facilitating learners to develop their learning skills

Encouraging by:	Facilitating by:
enabling learners to make choices about their learning	becoming familiar with the resources relevant to the course topics and to learners' interests so that you can direct learners to appropriate resources
creating a supportive learning environment.	helping learners identify other learners with comparable interests and make connections with them
encouraging problem-based learning fostering the application of knowledge through learning activities and group work	helping learners develop skills in planning, task assignment, communication and problem solving for group work (where the course design and situation encourages cooperative learning)
encouraging reflection on the process and content of learning	encouraging learner independence and self-direction by offering guidance and providing signposts that enable learners to identify their own learning paths, rather than attempting to manage their learning.

providing for learner choices in assessment tasks designing assessment that engages problem solving rather than memorising	allowing learners to test his/her skills and abilities, rather than telling them that a particular topic or strategy is 'too advanced' for them
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2. Helping and facilitating learners to make their learning meaningful

Encouraging by:	Facilitating by:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> relating what the learners know to what they are learning from the course identifying relevant resources connecting learners with similar interests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> directing to appropriate resources highlighting examples from daily life helping by associating new knowledge with previous knowledge through question and answer sessions, quizzes, brainstorming and other techniques

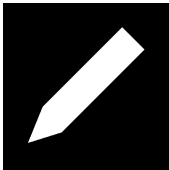
3. Enabling and helping learners to deal with and remove obstacles

Encouraging by:	Facilitating by:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> probing to find out the challenges/difficulties faced by students listening to students to identify his/her difficulties with course workload, assessment anxiety, and personal issues. discussing the difficulties with content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> questioning providing reassurance by referring to learner's earlier accomplishments guiding to tackle the workload in manageable chunks pointing to additional readings that help to further clarify technical areas. citing examples other than the ones in the material summarising concepts for students if needed getting student's perspectives about what to cover (cover a topic more or less fully based on students' feedback)

While tutoring or facilitating the learning process, you are providing support to help learners overcome obstacles that block their path to learning. Most learners do face obstacles; you will see this from the way they act and the kinds of questions they ask. A supportive response is needed from a tutor.

For example, frequent questions from a learner about course content or about procedures that are already answered in the course materials indicates that the learner possibly faces the obstacle of ineffective reading skills, poor concentration or a learning disability.

Activity 5.2.1 gives you a chance to reflect on obstacles learners may face. Remember the core purpose of learner support is to make your learners successful in their studies. To identify and address the obstacles that learners may face is part of learner support.



ACTIVITY 5.2.1: In a particular course, a learner’s questions indicate unfamiliarity with basic concepts. What are the possible obstacles that this learner faces?

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In this case, the learner may lack background knowledge, need to review skills and knowledge from earlier education, or have a learning disability. As a tutor, you need to respond in such a way that the learner is able to overcome the obstacles. The table below lists possible obstacles to learning, how they might show up and what kind of response is needed from the tutor. Read it carefully. Your responses need not be the same; you will have to act according to your situation and context.

4. Providing Support to Help Learners Overcome Obstacles

Obstacle	Indicator	Response
Inadequate background	Limitations in the student’s assigned work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advise the learner and notify administration as soon as the problem becomes evident.
Lack of study skills	Lack of focus, problems with allocating time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify the problem with the learner. • Recommend resources on study skills.
Difficulties with language of instruction	Lack of understanding in first communications with tutor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm that the problem is with language and recommend appropriate resources. • If language difficulty means that the learner cannot cope, suggest that the learner take a language course first.
Time management	Concerns about lack of time, delays in initial activities, assignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm the problem with the learner, and advise the learner on setting priorities and making a schedule. • Refer the learner to a time-management program. • Recommend postponing studies until the learner has more time.

Learning disabilities	Student or advocate may notify tutor may become evident in learner's work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If possible, request professional assessment to identify the nature of the problem, based on the student's work. • Advise the learner using strategies recommended by professionals.
Technology difficulties	Lack of contact, or intermittent contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact the learner by alternative means. • Request technical support for learner.
Emotional problems	Unreasonable reactions to staff, course materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not quite in the tutor's domain – consult a professional counsellor about best strategy.
Physical disabilities	Student or advocate may notify tutor, may become evident in learner's work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As soon as you realise learner has a disability, consult with staff about appropriate strategies to accommodate learner. • Contact learner to arrange modifications to meet learner's needs

Section 5.3: Techniques of tutoring

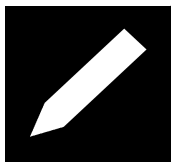
If tutors are not to teach but to facilitate learning in contact sessions, then what strategies and techniques can we use to implement the facilitation process? Here are some techniques that you may adopt in your own work as a tutor.

1. Techniques of Facilitation Process

Technique	Activity	Value
Work groups	A group is given a task to perform independently, to produce a specific output.	Demonstrates and applies learning and working in a team.
Buzz groups	A large group is divided into smaller groups to discuss a clearly defined problem or situation, then to report back to the larger group.	Stimulates thinking and opens up discussion.
Brain storming	Pairs or groups "think aloud" and generate ideas, which they share with the whole group later.	Generates novel/creative solutions to problems and stimulates participation.
Fishbowl	A small inner group surrounded by an outer circle of observers discusses a topic, followed by regrouping and role reversal.	Everyone gets a chance to participate as speaker, listener and observer.

Dyads and triads	Two or three participants work together, usually to find out personal information from each other or to share experiences.	Participants have an opportunity to get to know each other better.
Discussion	A topic is opened up for general presentation and clarification of views. A panel guides the discussion and responds to specific questions in which they have more knowledge /experience.	Openly shares knowledge about a topic in a structured forum.
Debate	A discussion which formally presents different sides of an argument.	Critically explores contentious issues; develops public speaking.
Role play	Participants act out specific roles in a given situation and then discuss various aspects of their role experiences.	Analyses a hypothetical problem or conflict and offers feasible solutions.
Game	A fun activity or competition, with clear rules for actions and reactions.	Changes the scene from one task to the next; sparks creativity and builds group rapport.

In Activity 5.3.1, you reflect on techniques you might use to facilitate student learning.



ACTIVITY 5.3.1: What techniques would you adopt to open up discussion among the learners in the contact sessions?

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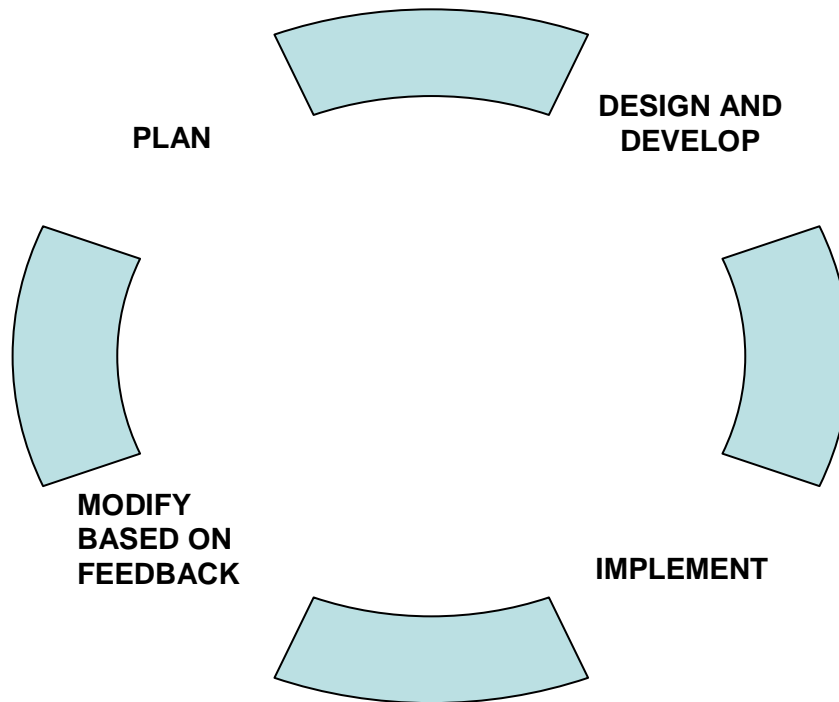
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Which technique(s) will help in developing the following in the learners?

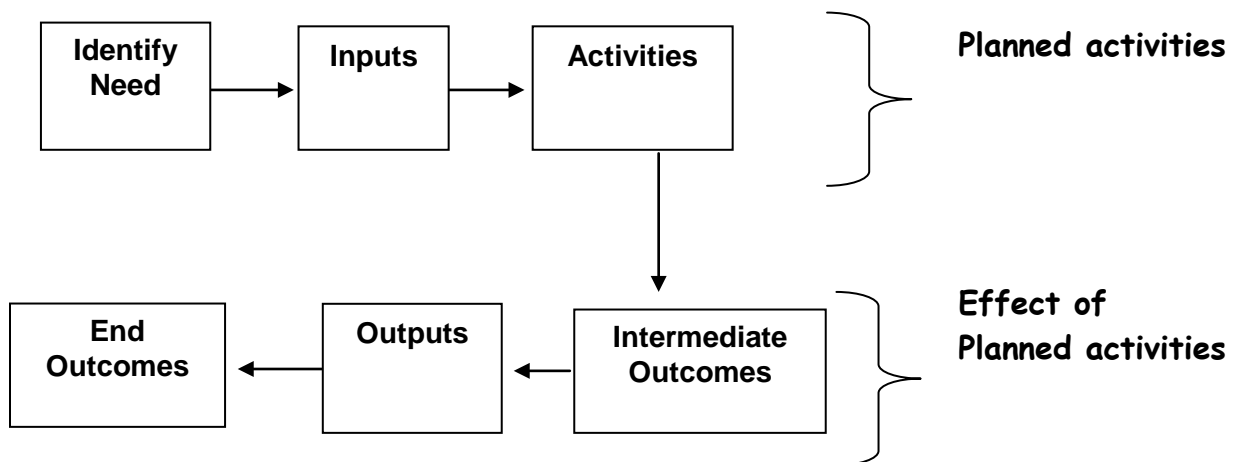
- Active participation
- Creating new ideas
- Team building
- Public speaking
- Sharing knowledge

Section 5.4: Designing a contact/face-to-face (F2F) session

For any activity to be carried out effectively and efficiently, we usually follow a four-stage cycle:



During the planning stage, you need to identify the results (or outcomes) your program intends to achieve. Your approach may consider the following six components.



Let us consider this approach and Plan an F2F programme.

<p>INPUTS are the resources used by your program to produce outputs and outcomes.</p> <p><i>To carry out my activities, I will use the following resources.</i></p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• study material• audio programmes• reading materials• activity sheets• fast track students.
<p>ACTIVITIES are the activities that will combine to achieve the outcomes for your program.</p> <p><i>To address needs effectively, I will carry out the following activities.</i></p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Peer tutoring to underachieving students during the school year (cooperative activity).• Discussion sessions with the group helping to overcome obstacles(developmental activity)• Clearing doubts related to the course (Academic activity)
<p>OUTPUTS are the number of recipients and amount of services provided.</p> <p><i>My activities will produce the following evidence of service delivery.</i></p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Peer tutoring to 45 underachieving students in grades 5-8 for one hour, three times weekly, for nine months (cooperative activity output).• Discussion sessions with students in grades 5-8 once a month over a period of 9 months helping them to overcome obstacles and be successful (development activity output).• Clearing doubts of the course covering 9 lessons and checking 3 assignments to provide remedial feedback (Academic activity output).
<p>INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES are the positive changes that occur in the lives of beneficiaries that contribute to lasting impacts (end outcomes) over the long term.</p> <p><i>My activities will lead to the following intermediate outcomes.</i></p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eighty percent of tutored students will demonstrate improvement in performance (cooperative activity intermediate outcome).• Eighty-five percent of students will be able to cope with his/her difficulties and problems (member development intermediate outcome).• Seventy-five percent of students will attend regularly and are successful (academic activity intermediate outcome).

END OUTCOMES are the positive changes that occur in the lives of beneficiaries that are significant and lasting.

My activities will lead to the following end results.

Examples:

- Eighty percent of tutored students achieved and advanced to the next stage of learning after being assessed by the Institution.
- Eighty-five percent of students demonstrated success after evaluation by the Institution.
- Eighty percent of the students continued with their studies, as evident by their enrollment in the next stage of the learning programme.

As you can see, such planning sets clear goals and outcomes and will ensure that your tutoring is likely to be effective. Lack of planning will mean that you are unprepared for tutoring, rendering you helpless and ineffective.

Following is an example of the design of a science lesson contact session by a tutor.

Sixth grade learners read a lesson about the parts of a flowering plant in their print material on science. However, to provide a concrete learning experience in the learning centre, the tutor, Shikha Rani Halsana, planned to hold a contact session as follows:

Session:

- Parts of a Flowering Plant

Input:

- Have an actual plant along with the print materials

Activities:

- Request a learner to list the parts of a flowering plant.
- If the learner is correct, then assuring that everybody accepts what has been presented, proceed further. If not, then let the learners provide peer tutoring.
- Use the real plant and reinforce the topic.
- Request each learner to draw a plant and label the parts.

Output:

- Number of learners who have done the activities correctly.
- Peer tutoring for underachievers.
- Discussion sessions.
- Eliminating doubts and misconceptions.

End Outcome

- All learners will be able to achieve what is expected and move on to the next lesson.

In Activity 5.4.1, you apply what you have learned about designing a contact session.



ACTIVITY 5.4.1: Design a contact session in your subject area. Use different techniques and indicate why you chose the content element for the contact session.

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To plan your contact sessions, you must:

- know your learners' characteristics;
- know about the course content and the learning materials;
- know about other resources available to support learning;
- be aware of the institutional plan of action in order to help learners follow the schedule;
- identify the needs and requirements of different learners;
- adopt strategies to meet the needs and requirements of different learners so that the contact sessions are meaningful to the learners; and
- monitor the progress of learning and provide input and feedback by adopting different techniques that follow the principles of learning.

If you increase the "holding power" of your learning centre through relevant, meaningful and joyful teaching and learning activities, open school learners will become motivated and develop the desire to attend the centre regularly. In other words, if the learner participates in your contact sessions regularly, actively, energetically and achieves the learning objectives to the specified standards, you know that you have planned effective contact /F2F sessions.

Remember, as a tutor your job is not to re-teach the content of the materials, but to provide the three E's: Expertise, Experience, and Encouragement.

Unit 6

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

**Written by Dr. Sushmita Mitra
Adapted by Dr. Johan Hendrikz**

Section 6.1: Defining monitoring and evaluation

Section 6.2: Types of evaluation

Section 6.3: Tutor marked assignments (TMAs)

Section 6.4: Developing a monitoring and evaluation tool

UNIT OBJECTIVES

After completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand and differentiate between the terms monitoring and evaluation.
- Explain types of evaluation and give examples.
- Understand the importance of tutor marked assignments and the marking process.
- Write comments to provide personalised feedback.
- Develop tools for monitoring and evaluating in learner support.

Section 6.1: Defining monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring is a continuing function that aims, primarily, to provide regular feedback and early indications of progress or lack thereof in the achievement of intended results. Monitoring tracks the actual performance or situation against what was planned or expected according to pre-determined standards. It generally involves the routine and systematic collection of data on activities or services, users, or outside factors that affect the organisation or project implementation processes.

Monitoring information is collected at specific times: daily, weekly, monthly or quarterly. At some point, this information needs to be brought together so that it can answer questions such as:

- How well are we doing?
- Are we doing the right things?
- Are we making a difference?

Evaluation, on the other hand, is the systematic determination of the merit, worth, and significance of something or someone. In other words, when we check if targets set earlier are met and if outputs are contributing to results intended in the programme, we are undergoing evaluation. When we try to find out if the intended learning outcomes at a particular level and point of time have been achieved by open school learners, we are doing evaluation.

Whereas monitoring is routine and ongoing, evaluation is an in-depth study, taking place at specific points in the life of the project.

The management of monitoring and evaluation in an open school is ultimately the responsibility of the head of the institution. Monitoring however should be done at all levels in the organisation. It will therefore be the responsibility of the management team of the open school to monitor the performance of the open school in general and the responsibility of the educators to monitor the learning and teaching environment and for the administrators to monitor the administrative process.

Although monitoring and evaluation are not the same, these two concepts are closely linked. People sometimes confuse monitoring with evaluation and *vice versa*. You might experience a little bit of confusion yourself in answering the question in Activity 6.1.1.



ACTIVITY 6.1.1: What do you think is the link between monitoring and evaluation?

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The answer lies in an understanding of the essence of the two concepts as defined in the first two paragraphs of this Section. If you monitor properly the results of your evaluation should improve. In education, evaluation is almost by default, part of teaching and learning is in most cases institutionally structured. An open school for example will know when they will conduct their examinations.

Monitoring, unlike evaluation, is not usually formally structured within the operations of the institution. It is therefore so much easier not to do it and only rely on evaluation. It is therefore possible to only evaluate and seldom or never monitor. Open schools that are examples of excellence are those who do their monitoring and evaluation properly.

Monitoring, just like formal evaluation, needs to be planned and structured properly. We for example need to know: why we do it, when will we do it, and who will do it?

The essence of monitoring is to continuously determine whether things are going according to plan by asking the right questions. For example if you want to monitor the dispatch of your learning material to learners, you can ask the following questions:

- When is the target date for all the packages to be out?
- Do we have enough learning material to distribute?
- Do we have enough people to do the packaging for the time available?

If, for example, you want to monitor the attendance of contact sessions you could ask the following questions:

- How many learners usually attend the contact sessions?
- Is there a decline or an increase in the number of learners?
- Are the teachers and learners satisfied with the content and format of the contact session?

Remember, learner support is about mechanisms to make our learners more successful in their studies. It is therefore obvious that monitoring and evaluation be an integral part of learner support.

Section 6.2: Types of evaluation

Evaluation can be carried out during the operation or development of the process or after the activity has ended. In the first case the information is used to shape future activities and is called formative evaluation. The latter is used to make value judgements about success and is known as summative evaluation.

If you observe the activities undergone by learners in the contact session and find that most of them have inadequate knowledge about a particular area, such as the number system in mathematics, then you may decide to make these learners aware of this and provide extra support to help them. This process that you have done is formative evaluation. When you check home assignments and provide immediate feedback to the learners, you are also performing formative evaluation. But when learners face an annual examination conducted by the institution where they will be graded pass or fail, they undergo summative evaluation.

Reflecting on your own experiences, do the following activity. In Activity 6.2.1, you reflect on your own experiences with formative and summative evaluation.



ACTIVITY 6.2.1: List some tools for formative and summative evaluation that you have used.

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Like any other system, open school system evaluation has a major role in the teaching-learning process. In this case, evaluation is ongoing and carried out at different points of time to ensure that learners at a distance are monitored and that any deficiencies in their learning cycle are known and addressed by intermediary action. In an open school system, evaluation can be carried out:

- at the commencement of the course;
- during the course; and
- after the completion of the course at the end of the term.

In Activity 6.2.2, you reflect on what you can learn from learner evaluations conducted at different points of time.



ACTIVITY 6.2.2: Complete the sentences.

Evaluation at the commencement of the course will help to

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Evaluation during the course will help to

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Evaluation after the completion of the course at the end of the term will help to

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Section 6.3: Tutor marked assignments (TMAs)

We know that assignments are a tool for monitoring and evaluating any learning process. In open schools, Tutor marked assignments (TMAs) are typically:

- an integral part of learner support;
- a significant part of the learning process;
- of greater impact than in classroom situations;
- the centre piece of tutor/learner interaction; and
- an essential responsibility of tutors.

In fact, in open schools, TMAs are learning tools that help tutors get to know the learners and the quality of their learning in order to use this knowledge and understanding for the learner's benefit. TMAs are useful for tutors in the following ways.

- **Provide detailed and personalised feedback.** This is one way in which tutors provide learner support to learners who are at a distance. In an F2F situation, a learner will see the tutor and be able to have an exchange with her/him, including observing body language; the distance learner will only get feedback on the assignment. The tutor has to provide feedback in a detailed and personalised manner on the learner's work. The learner should not be left in any doubt of what the standard expectation was. This feedback is the critical form of dialogue between the learner and the tutor.
- **Identify the most important parts.** Usually the assignments that a tutor asks for and is required to mark will be on information regarded as critical to the course or learning process a learner is engaged in. Learners, therefore, will know that information being given in the form of assignments is important.
- **Supplement the course work.** Most of the time the marked assignment is a part of the continuous assessment required for the overall evaluation of the learner in the course. The importance of this work on both the part of the Tutor and the learner cannot be over emphasised.
- **Assess how a course can be improved.** TMAs provide opportunities to find out learner comfort with programme material, appropriateness of assignments, clarity of course content, effectiveness of learner support strategies, etc.

You will agree that giving personalised feedback on the TMAs is something that requires a different frame of mind and skills. Here are some guiding principles on providing good feedback on TMAs.

- **Constructive.** Your feedback should concentrate on providing information and suggestions to the learner which will enable him/her to improve his/her performance if followed.

- **Timely.** Your feedback should be received by the learner while he/she will still have time to do something about the issue raised.
- **Prompt.** The learner should get his/her feedback while he/she can remember what he/she did for the assignment.
- **Supporting improving learning.** Your feedback should clearly identify what is wrong and what can be done to by the learner to improve his/her performance as well as what he/she have done.
- **Prioritise.** Advise learners about what their priorities should be and what tasks should be completed first.
- **Realistic.** Make sure your suggestions can reasonably be taken up by the learner. For example, if you recommend a book, is it easily available?
- **Focussed.** Limit your feedback to the three most important things a learner can change.
- **Specific to the learning outcomes.** If a learner follows your feedback, will it make a difference to his/her marks? If not, be clear about why you value that attribute and share that information with the learner.
- **Consequential.** Good feedback engages the learner and means that he/she has to take notice of it in order to avoid repeating the mistake.
- **Foster independence.** You do not have to correct all mistakes; highlight one and tell the learner where he/she has gone wrong and how to correct it. Then suggest he/she look for other similar errors.
- **Efficient.** Get to the point clearly and concisely and avoid using jargon that may not be meaningful to the learner.
- **Critical.** Be critical in the sense of being analytical. Tell the learner what was done well and what was not done well. Be specific and diagnostic.
- **Directed at the work and not the learner.** Feedback is not about the learner as a person. You are assessing work submitted by the learner; your feedback should be related to that work.
- **Fair.** The feedback should be about the content of the work, not how it was produced.
- **Honest.** Learners pick up on discrepancies; if you are not consistent, you will undermine any trust in what you say, which is highly de-motivating. Always be honest.
- **Motivating.** The tone of the feedback can make or break your relationship with the learner. Learners need to be encouraged so that they will be motivated to go on and learn from the feedback.

- **Personal.** Where possible, use the learner's name and make him/her feel you actually care about him/her and how they have done.

From the perspective of learners, they need to:

- know how the right answer was reached;
- have information on their own performance, particularly where they may have gone wrong;
- get a clear picture of what they should do next and in what order; and
- have confidence in assessing their own performance thus becoming more self-directed in their learning.

Learners should be able to assess the adequacy of their responses to TMAs. The marking process must achieve the purpose of TMAs, which is to:

- provide a grade for assessment;
- generate comments in order to provide feedback.

For grading, there has to be a marking scheme for each assignment that gives detailed hints about the expected answer along with the distribution of marks for each item, as well as an overall scale for grading. As a tutor, you have to follow the marking scheme for each assignment.

Comments are your primary means of helping the learner and, like other interpersonal communications, should always begin on a positive note to encourage openness and dialogue. For example, compare the following two comments:

1. You've clearly thought about most of the factors that affect a distance learner's situation, but have you considered how isolation can affect a distance learner?
2. You've left out a key factor affecting open and distance learners: isolation. As a result, your analysis falls short.

The first approach invites the learner to think about this factor of isolation and respond to your question, while the second one closes the door to further discussion.

As a marker, it's easy to fall into the habit of just identifying the parts of an assignment needing correction, and assume that learners will know that everything else they did was fine. This is a poor strategy for a tutor in open schools because learners need explicit confirmation of the parts of their assignment that were correct, and to have the strong points acknowledged and reinforced for sustained motivation.

Also, positive feedback gives learners an accurate idea of their strengths, so that they know what they can build on. You also need to explain why the weak areas fall short of requirements and suggest some strategies the learner can use to improve this area of their knowledge and skills. For example:

- A very good introduction, because it presents...;
- This is a good point, because...; or
- Your findings are not quite complete, because....

FEEDBACK BY TUTOR 1:

1. This sentence encompasses a very broad concept of education, but it is a bit difficult to follow because you have packed so many ideas into it. It would be clearer if you broke it down into several smaller sentences, with each one addressing one main idea. You could then use these main ideas as themes you can develop throughout the essay

2. This phrase is a bit confusing how would you say this more simply?

3. You could expand on this concept of the school as a microcosm of society.

4. How would you do this while still covering the state curriculum?

ON EDUCATION

The introduction of active occupations, of nature-study, of elementary science, of art, of history; the relegation of the merely symbolic and formal to a secondary position; the change in the moral school atmosphere, in the relation of pupils and teachers – of discipline; the introduction of more active, expressive, and self-directing factors – all these are not mere accidents, they are necessities of the larger social evolution¹. It remains but to organize all these factors, to appreciate them in their fullness of meaning², and to put the ideas and ideals involved into complete, uncompromising possession of our school system.

To do this means to make each school an embryonic community life, active with types of occupations that reflect the life of the larger society and permeated throughout with the spirit of art, history, and science³.

When the school introduces and trains each child of society into membership within such a little community, saturating him with the spirit of service, and providing him with the instruments of effective self-direction⁴, we shall have the deepest and best guarantee of a larger society which is worthy, lovely, and harmonious.

Mizan, your essay shows a far-reaching concept of the relationship between education and society, and of the potential of recreating a healthy society within the school. You have made a very good start towards articulating your visions of the goals of education. However, you will need to develop these ideas further by demonstrating how they can be applied in practical terms. As well, I think your ideas will be more credible if you use less dramatic language to describe the potential outcome of your vision of education. I have made some detailed suggestions on the paper itself about how you can improve the structure. This is a good start, and I look forward to seeing how you develop these ideas further as you go through the course. Your Grade is a B minus. Please let me know if you have any questions about the comments on your assignment, or about your grade. Best regards, Nargis

FEEDBACK BY TUTOR 2:

1. This sentence is far too long and convoluted. You haven't made it clear what you really want to say. You must learn to be more succinct.

2. This is a very awkward construction.

3. What is this supposed to mean??

4. 'throughout' is redundant.

5. This is a very idealistic notion of schooling, and you have provided no evidence whatsoever that this is achievable in practice.

6. You must learn to use inclusive language.

ON EDUCATION

The introduction of active occupations, of nature-study, of elementary science, of art, of history; the relegation of the merely symbolic and formal to a secondary position; the change in the moral school atmosphere, in the relation of pupils and teachers – of discipline; the introduction of more active, expressive, and self-directing factors – all these are not mere accidents, they are necessities of the larger social evolution¹. It remains but to² organize all these factors, to appreciate them in their fullness of meaning³, and to put the ideas and ideals involved into complete, uncompromising possession of our school system.

To do this means to make each school an embryonic community life, active with types of occupations that reflect the life of the larger society and permeated throughout⁴ with the spirit of art, history, and science⁵.

When the school introduces and trains each child of society into membership within such a little community, saturating him⁶ with the spirit of service, and providing him with the instruments of effective self-direction, we shall have the deepest and best guarantee of a larger society which is worthy, lovely, and harmonious.

Mizan: It is simply not acceptable to present completely idealistic notions like this without any research evidence to support it and without any references to the current literature. If you expect to pass this course, (which is unlikely at this stage) you must at least develop adequate research skills and learn to present your evidence well supported by quantitative data.

P.S. You have until next Tuesday to resubmit.

The comments provided by the first tutor are:

- fair;
- accessible;
- relevant; and
- delivered in a positive manner.

The second tutor does not:

- establish a positive attitude toward the learner;
- recognise the strengths in the work;
- explain how to improve the sections of the work that need improvement; or
- respond thoughtfully to the central concepts in the work.

If you were the learner, don't you think you might feel very frustrated and undervalued by an assessment like that of tutor 2?

Section 6.4: Developing a monitoring tool

Section 6.1 introduced the concept of monitoring. In Activity 6.4.1, you reflect on what you learned about monitoring learners' performance.



ACTIVITY 6.4.1: What specific M&E tasks do Tutors at the learning centers have to carry out?

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Here are some of the tasks you may have listed:

- Compare achievements to see if targets set earlier are likely to be met.
- Check if outputs are contributing to results intended for the programme.
- If progress is not being made, find out why and design a strategy to address the issue.
- Find ways to improve performance and effectiveness if needed.
- Revise strategies; identify what new partnerships or assistance may be needed.

Some of the monitoring indicators are learner-based, while others are centre-based. To develop a monitoring tool, you need to consider indicators that will be:

- learner-based;
- organisation/centre-based.

Here is an example of a monitoring tool that records specific information about the learner's performance.

Record of Learner Performance

Centre name:

Centre Code:

Date:

Time:

Learner based information:

Sr. no	Name of the Student	Regular attendance		Self-learner		Understands content		Submission of Assignments		Active in the contact session		Attentiveness		Remarks
		Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	

Centre-based information:

Sr. no	Parameters	Yes	No	Remarks
1.	Is the room for the contact session suitable?			
2.	Are there appropriate seating arrangements for the learners?			
3.	Are the learner's subject specific tutors available?			
4.	Are all learners attending the centre? Are learners evaluated regularly?			
5.	Is the record for evaluation maintained properly?			
6.	Are the resources available in the centre?			
7.	Is the information regarding all learners maintained properly?			
8.	Is all the information given to the learners on time?			

To Sum Up

Tutors help students become aware of how they can contribute to their own learning.

The following quote from Ian McNay (1987) cogently sums up the potential impact of ODL but it is also applicable on open schools:

“ODL changes roles: it demands new skills and attitudes; it threatens vested interests; it clashes with developed norms for measuring workload or allocating finance, and with established administrative practices. In two words, it can be disruptive and revolutionary.”

THE CHOICE IS YOURS!!!!

Unit 7

Information and communications technologies (ICTs) in learner support

**Written by Dr. Sushmita Mitra
Adapted by Dr. Johan Hendrikz**

Section 7.1: The role of ICTs in learner support

Section 7.2: Appropriate technologies

Section 7.3: Challenges in using ICTs in learner support

Section 7.4: Mobile phones and learner support

UNIT OBJECTIVES

After completing this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the role of ICTs in learner support.
- Identify appropriate technologies.
- Know and understand the challenges in using ICTs in learner support.
- Understand the role of mobile phones in learner support.

Section 7.1: The role of ICTs in Learner support

Technology is having a huge impact on society in general and also on education specifically. This is especially evident in open and distance learning.

New words and terms like e-learning, online learning, flexible learning and mobile learning started to appear. Many saw technology as a wonderful tool that would only have benefits for teaching and learning. The drive to introduce ICTs into education originated within developed contexts in, Europe and America. It became clear over the years that ICTs for various reasons is not this magic tool that will solve all the ills in education.

The ubiquity of the internet and computers and other ICT infrastructure in developed contexts makes it possible to introduce wonderful and amazing ICT supported education. In particular, the face of ODL institutions were fundamentally transformed and learners have benefited tremendously over the past years.

It would be short sighted not to think and plan on how you will use ICTs in your open school. It would however be just as short sighted to introduce ICTs that might, at that moment, be very inappropriate in your contexts.

The challenges and priorities of developing nations differ fundamentally in many cases from those in developed nations. Open schooling is not a focus or even a feature in the education system of developed nations. In Africa and other developing contexts open schooling is imperative for the development of these countries.

In the developing context the ubiquity of the internet and computers and ICT infrastructure like bandwidth is limited. You must therefore be cautious not to be tempted to introduce ICTs within a context where it is almost doomed to fail. Millions of dollars have been wasted by well intended companies and foundations from the developed countries who established ICT initiatives in developing countries that failed miserably.



ACTIVITY 7.1.1: What is your view on the role of ICTs in learner support?

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What we need to understand is that it is not about ICTs, it is about the learners. Too many times educationist/teachers focus on what technology can do without asking the very basic question: “How will this technology support my learners within our context to be more successful in their studies?”.

ICTs in education are a “people thing”. And can only be as effective and creative as the people who implement them. Negative and positive outcomes of ICT use are intrinsically linked to how people use

them. ICTs may create opportunities for doing things in new and different ways, but only people can actually harness these possibilities.

Technology is a liberator of the learners in the sense that it makes the learning environment much more learner friendly, support the students better and give them control over their studies. The problem is that technology can also be a discriminator between the haves and the have nots. It might be that you can introduce a world class online programme for your learners but if only few have access to it, you might ask whether it was a wise decision.

Technology also has another face and that is in many instances you are totally dependant on an infrastructure that you have very little control over. An open school has for example no control over the bandwidth that is available in the specific country.

Section 7.2 Considerations before using ICTs

It must be clear to you that to introduce ICTs for learner support into an open school is a decision that must be considered carefully.

Printed materials are the primary media used in open schools because of their easy access and usability. However ICTs provide various means to support learning in ODL. Some of the ones used to support learning in open schools are:

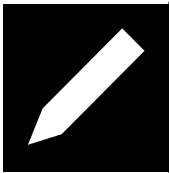
- Radio
- Television
- VCD/VCR
- Telephone
- Computer and Internet
- Mobile phones

India for example has through their National Open School system developed a comprehensive radio learner support system. Educational programmes can be broadcast by the radio on fixed days and times for the open school learners, who can listen to them from their homes or elsewhere to improve their understanding. This is a good way to reach out to many learners. However, because of the fixed schedule, there is a possibility that a learner may miss the programme. To overcome this disadvantage, the lesson materials are packaged in audio or video cassettes and provided to open school learners for their use. Audio and video materials can also be made available in CD format for easy access.

In the above example it is clear that the open schools themselves have very little control over the medium while in the case of computers in an open school the school at least have some control over the medium.

Many forms of ICT are in use, depending on the access and availability. Some of the common ones which are and can be utilised are as follows:

AVAILABLE ICT	USED FOR	BENEFITS
TELEPHONE AND CELL PHONE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual and one-to-one interaction: phone calls and brief SMS messages • Small group interaction: telephone conferencing when a number of telephones are connected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reasonable cost • Easy access • Needs-based
EMAIL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication may be to one student or to a whole group • Students can choose when to reply 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fast • Inexpensive • Can transmit material of all kinds through attached documents
BULLETIN BOARDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distributing tutorial notes • Exchange information for group projects • For briefing, asking questions or commenting on a topic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fast • Sharing information • Group interaction • Inexpensive
ONLINE DISCUSSION FORUMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synchronous computer conferencing that brings a group together to discuss a specific topic <p>Asynchronous discussions allow students to join in and express their views at any time</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Real-time event (synchronous) • any time interaction (asynchronous) • freedom from fixed location
VIDEOCONFERENCING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For interaction at multiple sites where there is an opportunity for ODL tutors and students to see and hear each other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • direct interaction in real time • can save huge travel costs



ACTIVITY 7.2.1: Consider your specific context and write down three to four aspects that you think will influence your decision on ICTs you would select for learner support?

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Your context is the starting point for any decision on the use of ICTs in learner support. There are however a few general guidelines that you can apply over and above those that you already have identified:

- The specific purpose of inclusion compared with the instructional benefits of technology-enabled education, as opposed to non-inclusion;
- The confidence in commitment, skills and knowledge of Tutors and learners with regards to ICT;
- Learner access and connectivity to computers and the internet;
- Learner readiness and attitude towards the use of ICT;
- The cost of implementing, maintaining and sustaining ICT-inclusive programmes of study.

There is a wide range of ICTs available, both low-end and high-end, so don't shy away from using them if they will benefit learners.

	<p>ACTIVITY 7.2.2: As a Tutor, would you like to use any form of ICT?</p> <p>If yes, why?</p> <p>If no, why?</p>
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Section 7.3: Challenges in using ICTs in learner support

In the previous sections it became clear that ICTs in learner support varied in their type and applicability. It also became clear that although learners can benefit a lot this is only possible if the ICTs are appropriate for the context of the learners. We also learned that the focus must be on the learners and not on the ICTs. ICTs are tools that teachers can introduce to enrich the learning experience. Open schools in developing countries will therefore directly be affected by the reality of this macro context.

ODL universities have introduced ICTs in all aspects of their operations including learner support. You can go to websites of ODL universities like the Open University in the United Kingdom or the University of South Africa and you will see to what extent they have introduced ICTs.

Open schools are not universities. In Unit 1 we discussed the unique features of open schools. The challenges for open schools to introduce ICTs will therefore also be very specific. Challenges can be divided between those on local level and those on a national level.

Challenges on a national level include:

- There is no national policy guiding the use of ICTs in open schools
- There are no macro ICT infrastructure available to make it possible for open schools to introduce the use of ICTs in the open schools
- Sustainability in the use of ICTs necessitates financial resources and expert human resources that are not available for open schools specifically.
- The use of ICTs in open schools is not a priority for decision makers on national and even provincial level.
- One of the challenges of developing nations is their lack of ICT infrastructure in the countries itself.

Challenges on a local level include:

- A lack of financial resources in the open school.
- A lack of expertise amongst staff in the open school that might lead to poor decisions in the use of ICTs in learner support.
- The school community are too poor to afford the additional costs.
- There might be a resistance amongst teachers, learners and parents because they see ICTs as a threat rather than an opportunity.



ACTIVITY 7.3.1: Think about the challenges that open schools are faced with when they want to introduce ICTs for learner support. Mention a few challenges that you are faced with in your open school.

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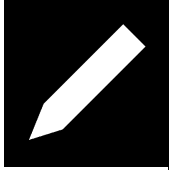
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Section 7.4: Mobile phones and learner support

The reason why we have decided to specifically include a section on mobile phones is because of the ubiquitous nature of mobile phones specifically in developing nations. This type of technology is in many cases at least accessible to learners as they either own or have access to a mobile phone.



ACTIVITY 7.4.1: Why do you think are educators reluctant to optimise the possibilities of mobile phones as a medium for learner support?

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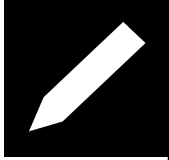
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7.4.1 Views on mobile phones that limit our creativity

There are views on mobile phones that inhibit educators to optimise the possibilities of this medium. The following are examples:

- The mobile phone is only a telephone. Although the mobile phone was initially developed as a telephone, developments made mobile phones much more than a phone and created opportunities in the learning environment that were not initially possible.
- Text messaging is predominantly used by youth and educators saw that as a gimmick for the youth. Nowadays even adults are using this very affordable feature of the mobile phone. The cost effectiveness and popularity of this feature creates opportunities for educators in open schools.
- Think that 160 characters for text messages are too limiting. It is difficult for many educators to see how a message of 160 characters can constructively support learning so they do not consider this medium for learner support.
- The mobile phone is not an instrument for learning. It is difficult to make a connection between a mobile phone and learning and therefore we tend not to even think about the possibilities.
- Educators themselves are “illiterate” in the use of text messaging. If you do not use text messaging yourself you will find it hard to see any possibilities to use it for learner support services.
- Always talk about the size of the screen. If the screen of the mobile phone is the only screen that you have, like the majority by far in developing countries, than the size of the screen is a non issue for the user.

The challenge for educators in open schools is to think innovatively on how they can optimise the possibilities on mobile phones as an instrument for learner support within their context.



ACTIVITY 7.4.1.1: Write down 3 reasons why you think text messages (SMSs) has the potential to be used as a medium for learner support in open schools.

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The power of text messaging (SMSs) lies in the following:

- It is immediate.
- It is received by a learner as a personal message.
- It carries an image of authority and importance.
- Learners tend to take the message seriously.
- If requested to do something, the experience is that the learners react almost immediately.
- It is by far the cheapest way of communication.
- It is for the youth one of the most popular ways to communicate.

The Unit for Distance Education at the University of Pretoria in South Africa did a study amongst 3121 students on their perceptions on the use of text messages by the Unit. Some of the more important findings were:

- 85% of the students indicated that they felt motivated when they received a text message from the university;
- 76% indicated that the text messages make them feel closer to the university; and
- 75% indicated that the text messages supported them in meeting their deadlines in their study programme.

Learner support is also about keeping your learners motivated and focused on their studies. The finding of the above mentioned research confirmed that the learners are responding very positively on support via this medium.

7.4.2 Managing text messages

If you want to introduce text messaging extensively in your open school you need to keep the following in mind:

- Budget. Although text messages are relatively cheap, you will need to budget for this expenditure if you have large numbers of students and you are going to use bulk text messaging extensively.

- Communication plan. If you want to constructively incorporate text messages as part of your learner support system, and not just use it on a limited and ad hoc basis, then you need to plan for it properly like all other learner support activities. Your text message support then needs to be part of your communication plan to your learners. This implies that you know when you want to communicate what to whom with what purpose and at what cost.
- Process of quality assurance. No learner support activity can take place without the proper mechanisms in place to ensure quality. This is also true for text messages. Not just must we quality assure the messages that goes out but also have mechanism in place to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of your text messages.
- Technology back bone. To run a comprehensive text message learner support system you need to ensure that you have the necessary technology infrastructure in place to do it properly. This infrastructure is usually fairly cheap to develop and to install.

7.4.3 Types of text messages for learner support

There are two types of support namely administrative and academic. Most ODL institutions and a growing number of open schools are introducing administrative text message support. These administrative” text messages have a variety of purposes that include the following:

- Reminders. To remind students to submit their assignments on the due date.
- Information. To inform learners about the change of a contact session venue.
- Instruction/Request. To request a student to pay his/her study fees or they will be deregistered from the programme.
- Research. To send a question to determine how many students do have computers.
- Motivation. To wish the students the very best for the examination.
- Confirmation. To inform the learners that you have posted their assignments back or that you have received their examination registration.

For those open schools that have a more sophisticated technology back bone, the options are also that students can register via text messages for examinations and also receive their examination results via mobile phones.

Very few institutions in the world have embarked on initiatives to use text messaging for academic support. The reason for that is that most people think in a conventional way about academic learner support and can't see any possibilities.

It is evident that you can't engage with complex themes and have in-depth and/or lengthy academic discussions or debates via text messages. There are however other and different types of academic support that can be done via text messaging. The prerequisite will be that the technology infrastructure will need to be in place.

The following are examples of the type of academic text messages that can be developed. It is important to plan very carefully for when you want to send the text message so that the learner will experience the maximum benefit.

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