UNIT 14 QUALITY ASSURANCE IN ODE

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14.0 INTRODUCTION

Assuring the quality of education has been a fundamental aspect of gaining, maintaining and enhancing credibility for programmes, institutions and systems of higher education including the ODE system. Quality assurance (QA) is not just one time affair and has a strategic value with continuous relevance and concern. The standards of practice and criteria of measurement keep varying from system to system, from institution to institution, from model to model, from time to time, and so on. Quality of a higher education programme basically includes its norms and policy, quality of learning inputs it provides for its students and quality of graduates it produces. Hence, in higher education through ODL, it is important to clearly formulate the quality standards related to various inputs, processes and products.

In Unit-13, we have discussed management of ODE systems, models, organizational structures including different sub-systems and their significance in effective functioning of DTIs. Since, ODE system has established a successful track record of being a parallel system besides complementing and supplementing the conventional system, it needs to ensure that quality of its student's learning is no less than that of the latter. In ODL, different aspects such as its policies, programmes, teaching-learning materials, student support services, and students' learning or achievement, among others, become matters of concern for quality assurance. Quality Assurance (QA) policies, systems, approaches and measures become inevitable for achieving, maintaining and promoting credibility of ODL provision. Therefore, accomplishment of such tasks requires comprehensive quality assurance system designed to improve the quality of an ODL institution's inputs, methods/processes and products or outcomes.

We will discuss all these aspects and issues in this Unit.

14.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you should be able to:

- explain the concept of quality in open and distance education;
- identify the issues, parameters and modes of quality assurance in open and distance education;
- analyse quality concerns in programme evaluation in open distance education; and
- discuss different perspectives of evaluation in open and distance education.

14.2 ISSUES AND PARAMETERS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

Several broad trends have fostered interest in quality assurance policies in higher education; including the trend toward mass higher education, growing diversity of educational offerings, the internationalisation of higher education and the expansion of private higher education institutions and of distance learning (ElKhawas et al., 1998, cited in Viktoria Kis, 2005).

In the context of higher education in general and ODE Institutions in particular, quality means different things to different people, i.e. teachers, students, managers, policy makers, stakeholders, assessors, employers, and so on, and at different times. A broad range of factors such as institutional vision and goals, the talent and expertise of the teaching staff, the quality of students, the teaching and learning environment including library, laboratory and other facilities, assessment standards, the employability of its graduates (relevance to the labor market), the quality of the management effectiveness, governance and leadership, among others, affect overall quality of an educational institution. Thus, quality is a complex and dynamic concept and very difficult to define it, albeit many attempts have been made.

Since Open Distance Education (ODE) is increasingly accepted as an effective alternative means of access to higher education at national and international levels, all stakeholders including the governments, public, private groups, the society and the individuals concerned will look for quality provision. Fact is that it is difficult to have universally or commonly acceptable quality assurance strategy, given the diversity in the background of the students/clientele and other stakeholders, the range and the levels of programmes within an institution and across the institutions. It is thus essential that Quality Assurance (QA) systems, processes and guidelines are developed and maintained by the ODEIs as well as the concerned regulatory bodies.

In order to continue our discourse on quality assurance, let us first attempt to understand the imperatives in the context of ODL system.

14.2.1 Imperatives

The need to enhance the quality of higher education is strongly felt when the students are seen struggling in the global workforce / market, professions and technical fields operating with compromised professionalism and excellence resulting in creating

obstacles to national growth and prosperity. Quality is thus a key concern of academia across the globe and several efforts in multiple directions are made by the administrators and academicians to induce this component into the teaching learning situation.

Quality in education is achieved when education output conforms to the planned goals, specifications and requirements (Crosby, 1979). Quality in education is a very conscious and planned effort of all those involved in every stage and component in this activity. In developed countries, following massive research and scholarly output (Bonser, 1992; Crosby, 1979; Feigenbaum, 1983; Juran and Gryna, 1988; Peters and Waterman, 1982; cited in Zaki and Rashidi, 2013), quality assurance remains the basic component in the policies and practices of the institutions that are teaching or training individuals for assuming various roles in the society. They are fully conscious of the fact that if quality in education is ignored, then, profound adverse affects are created on the society which reduces the concept of viewing "education as means to harmonize and develop societies" to a mere fantasy (Holt, 2000; UNESCO, 1996; cited in Zaki and Rashidi, 2013). In the developing countries also, presently, there is a shift in the value system pertaining to education and those involved in education have begun discussions regarding the missing quality factor in their respective education system which has rendered all efforts surrounding the training and grooming of masses completely ineffective (Zaki and Rashidi, 2013).

As we know, a special feature of ODE is the application of well-tried principles of division of labour and specialization. ODE institution having complex system has to put very conscious and planned efforts in all its sub-systems for maintenance of quality at all levels. Quality assurance in ODE is an imperative in the new educational environment that encompasses a growing international trade in educational services, the expansion of the number and types of institutions offering degrees and other programs, the increased mobility of students and graduates, and the needs of students, parents, governments, educational institutions, and international partner institutions. Hence, the principal responsibility for quality assurance rests with the ODEIs themselves, rather than the regulatory bodies. In other words, it is in the interest of the institutions concerned to carry out periodic audits of their programmes in which they identify their strengths and weaknesses. The purpose is to institutionalize self-regulation and ensure continuous improvement and innovation.

It may be almost impossible to recommend a specific quality assurance strategy that can universally be adopted because the distance education programme, the background of the clientele it serves, the extent and levels of programmes offered, the modus operandi, and the purpose and scope of the distance education outfit may vary widely from institution to institution and from one country to another. It must, however, be noted that the focus of any quality system must be to satisfy the needs and aspirations of the learners vis-à-vis the appropriate delivery of services. There are many factors that may be considered for the improvement of the management strategy of distance education programmes in order to achieve higher quality. (https://wikieducator.org/images/3/35/PID_628.pdf). We can thus notice a wide range of factors linked to quality in ODL and greater responsibility rests with the ODEIs concerned to conduct regular monitoring and periodic evaluation activities in order to ensure the desired quality at the institutional level, programmes level and finally at the level of learning outcomes or performance / achievement of the learners. Thus, quality assurance (QA) is very essential in ODL if its credibility, particularly among the learners, is to be established, maintained and enhanced.

14.2.2 Issues

Quality assurance is essentially aimed at ensuring the desired quality in all the programmes as well as the ODE Institutions with a view to enhancing learning outcomes and performance of distance learners. The issue of quality provision concerns all stakeholders – learners, teachers, institutions, governments, private groups, individuals, the society, and national and international labour market forces operating in the higher education environment. But the onus of quality assurance falls mainly on the provider institutions, government and the regulatory bodies.

In practice, there are a range of issues that pertain to quality assurance. These are:

1) What is the definition of quality considered in the context of quality assurance in education?
2) Whether all the stakeholders are identified and their perspectives and interests are included in such definiton?
3) Whether the stakeholders find a place in quality assurance processes, and if so what organisational implications this could have within quality assurance systems or mechanisms?
4) Whether the reviews should focus on academic programmes only or the institutions as a whole and should involve only quality assurance agencies and academics or other stakeholders as well?
5) What are the approaches to be followed for quality assurance?
6) On whom should the onus of quality assurance be — whether the provider institutions, the government and the regulatory bodies?
7) What is the scope of QA — whether it varies considerably between and within different national education systems?

All the issues mentioned above essentially depend upon how quality is defined in the context of quality assurance. It is therefore important here to provide you clarity on the concept of quality and quality assurance, as all the issues get embedded in it. This will offer you sound basis for your reflection on all other issues mentioned above.

Quality means different things to different people; and even the same person may adopt different conceptualisations at different moments about the same thing. Quality is thus always contextual in its nature and has reference point(s). It refers to the degree of excellence of particular aspect or the distinctive attributes or characteristics possessed by something, or the standard of something as measured against other things of a similar kind.

User-based definition of quality is given by International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO 8402: 1986, 3.1, cited in Katsoni and Stratigea, 2016) as "*the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bears its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs.*" Quality in education is seen as a positive and dynamic idea achievable by design with meaningful investment (Crawford and Shuttler, 1999) and the quest for quality should reflect customer-oriented approach with continuous improvement of the products and services, and of the processes brought about by the planning, implementing, evaluating, and decision-making methods (Navaratnam, 1997; cited in Zaki and Rashidi, 2013).

UNESCO definition, mentioned as edited and abridged by Vlãsceanu *et al* (2007, pp.70–73), states that quality in higher education is a multi-dimensional, multi-level, and dynamic concept that relates to the contextual settings of an educational model, to the institutional mission and objectives, and to specific standards within a given system, institution, programme, or discipline. Quality may thus take different meanings depending on:

i) the understanding of various interests (set requirements) of different constituencies or stakeholders (student / university discipline / labour market / society / government) in higher education;

ii) its references: missions, objectives, inputs, processes, outputs, etc.;

iii) the attributes or characteristics of the academic world which are worth evaluating; and

iv) the historical period in the development of higher education.

Concept of quality in higher education embraces all functions and activities of a university including teaching, academic programmes, research and scholarship, staffing, students, buildings, facilities, equipment, services to the community and the academic environment (Uvah, 2005, cited in Ogunleye, 2013). We can find a wide spectrum of definitions of academic quality particularly when it is linked to evaluation of higher education. While Harvey and Green (1993) argued that these definitions could be 'grouped into five discrete but interrelated ways of thinking about quality' and Harvey (1995) provides the brief overview of the same (http://www.qualityresearchinternational.com/ glossary/ quality.htm), which is further summed up here as follows:

- The *exceptional* view (of quality) sees quality as something special. In educational terms it is linked to notions of excellence, of 'high quality' unattainable by most.
- Quality as *perfection* sees quality as a consistent or flawless outcome that can be attained by all.
- Quality as *fitness for purpose* sees quality in terms of fulfilling a customer's requirements, needs or desires. It could be based on the ability of an institution to fulfill its mission or a programme of study.
- Quality as *value for money* sees quality in terms of return on investment. 'Customer' gets a quality product or service.
- Quality as *transformation* is a classic notion of quality that sees it in terms of change from one state to another. In educational terms, transformation refers to the enhancement and empowerment of students or the development of new knowledge.

The above approaches to conception of quality provide us as a fair idea of what quality means to different people in different contexts and times. Here we raise an important question: Are the terms ***quality assurance*** and ***quality control*** one and the same? Quality Control is "a part of quality management focused on fulfilling quality requirements" while Quality Assurance is also "a part of quality management focused on providing confidence that quality requirements will be fulfilled." (ISO 9000:2005). Quality control is the physical verification that the product conforms to these planned arrangements by inspection, measurement, etc. or it just measures and determines the quality level of products or services. It is a process itself. Quality Assurance on the other hand is fundamentally focused on planning and documenting those processes to assure quality including things such as quality plans, and inspection

and test plans. It is a complete system to assure the quality of products or services. It is not only a process, but a complete system for evaluating performance, service, or the quality of a product against set standards or specified requirements for customers (http://www.qualitygurus.com/courses/mod/forum/discuss .php?d =1557). What then is total quality management (TQM)? It refers to systems which are developed to monitor all processes that are part of the work of an organization. In higher education the assessment and accreditation agencies perform these tasks.

Quality assurance (QA) is the systematic review of educational programmes to ensure that acceptable standards of education, scholarship and infrastructure are being maintained. (http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/strengthening-education-systems/higher-education/quality-assurance/). It is the set of activities that an organisation undertakes to ensure that standards are specified and reached consistently for a product or service. It is thus a planned and systematic review process of an institution to ensure that the standards are set, met, maintained and enhanced.

Distance education which is technology-driven and industrial in nature requires constant revision of its operations for exploiting the advantages of technological advancements based on proper monitoring and evaluation. It becomes a great systemic or strategic challenge for distance education institutions / providers when they attempt to set standards of its different sub-systems and the stakeholders. Further, in ODE institutions which offer the same programmes in both on-campus and off-campus modes, quality assurance and quality improvement processes employ different quality frameworks to ensure comprehensive coverage of the factors affecting students' experiences of learning across these modes and systems with an institution and across the systems and institutions at broad level. These aspects assume significance in countries and institutions where such practices are followed.

Check Your Progress

Note: a) Write you answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under "Answers to 'Check Your Progress' Questions".

1) Explain the concept of quality with special reference to higher education.

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14.2.3 Parameters

Having understood the issues of quality and quality assurance, in this section we focus our discussion on parameters of quality assurance.

Egbokhare (2006) identifies the following as the basis of quality assurance: quality of staff; environment of instruction; content of instruction; student support services; culture of quality; management by processes and facts; continuous learning and improvement; and quality of instruction and feedback from clients and consumers of products. Zaki and Rashidi (2013, See http://ijsse.com/sites/default/files/issues/2013/v3i4/papers/

Paper-24.pdf) present a framework with eight key components or parameters that act as core factors which induce quality in higher education or contribute to the quality attribute of an academic institution. These factors are: i) higher education policies and practices; ii) resources; iii) curriculum; iv) institutional design and strategy; v) open-system thinking and change; vi) institutional leadership; vii) faculty KSA (knowledge, skills and abilities); and viii) learners' profile.

Different dimensions, components and factors discussed above are interdependent, influencing each other in ways that are sometimes unforeseeable. The quality assurance in the realm of ODL practice is thus unable to produce major improvements because of the inability to make satisfactory measurement of specific impact of inputs, processes and outcomes, together with the intrinsic difficulties associated with bringing in changes in the operating policies and procedures. Main and most fundamental issue is ascertaining the relative efficacy and effectiveness of the various sub-systems and in choosing appropriate measures for bringing in change in the practice of each of them.

The major aspects to which due attention should be paid in a distance education delivery mode include the following (https://wikieducator.org/images/3/35/PID_628.pdf):

- admission requirements and procedures;
- development and production of instructional materials;
- structure and management of the delivery system;
- quality of materials used for teaching and promotion of learning;
- student assessment procedures;
- availability of adequate human and material resources for the operation of the programme.
- problem of assessment of the effectiveness of an individual distance education facilitator since distance education has the element of quasi-bureaucratization (teamwork);
- student support services; and
- monitoring, evaluation and feedback systems.

Having known the major aspects, it is relevant here to touch upon some specific performance indicators. In the U. K. the Jarrat Committee Report (1985), based on the commissioned efficiency studies, has divided the performance indicators for universities into the following three categories (http://www.educationengland. org.uk/documents/jarratt1985/index.html).

a) *Internal performance indicators:* These include the following.

   - market share of undergraduate applications (by subject)
   - graduation rates and classes of degrees
   - attraction of master's and doctoral students
   - success rate of higher degrees (and time taken)
   - attraction of research funds
   - teaching quality

b) *External performance indicators:* These include the following.

- acceptability of graduates (postgraduates) in employment
- first destination of graduates (postgraduates)
- reputation judged by external reviews
- publications by staff and citations
- patents, inventions, consultancies
- membership, prizes, medals of learned societies
- papers at conferences

c) *Operating performance indicators*: These include the following.

- unit costs
- staff/student ratios
- class sizes
- course options available
- staff workloads
- library stock availability
- computing availability

The above indicators were identified with reference to conventional universities. Yet, these indicators are equally relevant to ODEIs as well.

14.2.4 Modes

In institutions of higher learning there exist three primary modes of quality assurance globally. These are assessment, audit and accreditation (Ogunleye, 2013). These modes are equally applicable to and are popularly followed in ODEIs as well.

Mode 1: Assessment

Assessment is an evaluation which results in a grade, whether numeric (e.g. a percentage or 1, 2, 3, 4 etc on a specified scale); literal (e.g. A, B, C, D, etc) or descriptive (excellent, very good. good, satisfactory, etc). A combination of these is followed by most of ODEIs. For example, IGNOU follows a grade system having A, B, C, D, E grades with respective descriptive levels of Excellent, Very Good, Good, Satisfactory and Unsatisfactory with grade points of 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively.

Mode 2: Audit

An audit is a process of review of an institution or program to determine if its curriculum, staff, and infrastructure meet its stated aims and objectives. It is an evaluation of an institution or its programmes in relation to its own mission, goals and stated standards. An audit is therefore a check on what an institution explicitly or implicitly claims about itself. Audit asks, "how well are you doing what you say you are doing?" An audit focuses on accountability of institutions and programmes and usually involves a self-study, peer review and a site visit. Such an evaluation can be self-managed (internal) or conducted by external body; most of the institutions follow both.

Mode 3: Accreditation

Accreditation can be defined as a process of self-study and external quality review used in higher education to scrutinize an institution and its programmes for quality standards and need for quality improvement. The process is designed to determine whether or not an institution has met the published standards (set by an external body such as a government, national quality assurance agency, or a professional association) for accreditation and to check whether the institution is achieving its mission and stated purpose. Accreditation asks such questions as "are you good enough to be approved (to confer degrees)? It has a dual purpose of quality assessment and quality improvement. The process usually includes a self-evaluation, peer reviews and site visits.

The results of an accreditation of a programme or an institution may have implications for the institution itself (e.g. permission to operate or eligibility for external funding) and also its students (e.g. eligibility for grants or a professional degree). An institution or programme which is denied accreditation can experience the cessation of public or private funding; its graduates being unqualified to enter the profession; a loss of status in the national higher education community.

There exist two types of accreditation, viz. institutional accreditation and programme accreditation.

Institutional Accreditation: It focuses on the institution as a whole, giving attention not only to the overall educational programs but also to such areas as:

- Mission
- Governance
- Effective Management
- Academic Program
- Teaching Staff
- Learning Resources (library, laboratories, and educational technology)
- Students and Student
- Physical Facilities
- Financial Resources

Programmes Accreditation: Academic program accreditation concerns the quality of each programme by the *standards of*:

- Education
- Curriculum
- Students
- Quality of faculties
- Quality of facilities
- Administration
- Finance

Adherence to the above modes will no doubt help in promoting quality assurance at both micro and macro levels. Yet, the practices need to gear up to meet the quality

demands or expectations of all the concerned within and outside the ODEIs or the ODL system at large.

Check Your Progress

Note: a) Write you answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under "Answers to 'Check Your Progress' Questions".

2) i) What are the modes of quality assurance in institutions of higher learning?

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ii) What are the focus areas of institutional accreditation and programme accreditation?

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14.2.5 CHALLENGES

If we look at the above sub-sections viz. 14.2.1, 14.2.2, 14.2.3 and 14.2.4 in a holistic manner we can identity certain major challenges of quality assurance in higher education institutions in general and in ODEIs in particular. Some of these are highlighted below.

1) It is important to note that the personnel being used for regular programmes of conventional universities/institutions are also used for the ODL activities at different levels. Therefore, for the success of ODL they are the factors to reckon with. At the same time, conventional universities/institutions as partners of ODL system are also using the ODEIs materials, equipments and technologies, and human resource capital for the benefit of their students and institutions. There is thus mutual contribution and symbiotic relationship to their quality assurance efforts.

2) Quality assurance exercises through internal audit and internal evaluation of performance of different programmes under different disciplines under different schools of studies cannot be undertaken fairly and uniformly given the deteriorating ethics and standards of faculty and other staff.

3) Frequent changes in processes, overstretching of academic reach, dropping of quality due to rapid start-up of programmes and revisions, undue stress on the inadequate faculty and other staff already under stress without appropriate resource support constitute a major challenge to quality assurance.

4) Functioning of high officials such as Visitors, Vice-chancellors and statutory bodies cannot be subjected to objective and fair quality assurance mechanisms/processes. Further, issues such as adverse impact of prolonged leadership succession on already poor or deteriorated quality culture and quality management pose serious challenges to the quality assurance efforts at the institutional level.

5) Leadership succession and transition sometimes results in conflicts of 'quality cultures' within the institution reflecting upon and setting in 'incompatible poor culture' imposed and sustained by dominant vested interests of the leadership. Such situations are very challenging to re-establish the quality culture for quality assurance in the institution/system.

6) Instilling quality culture is a continuing challenge. This is more so when there is influx of many new staff members and there is cultural conflict between the old and the new staff.

7) Problems of communication with the staff by the leadership and failures in building and maintenance of staff confidence in the decision-making processes of the university/institution create low morale among the staff, leading to lack of concern for quality assurance initiatives.

8) Increasing competition, demographics and poor quality students, large numbers and cohorts of students within and across the collaborating institutions in case of a consortium add to the complexity and nature of the existing challenges of quality assurance.

9) Public and private institutions are often or selectively subjected to different regimes of quality assurance or with deliberate statutory oversight by the regulatory agencies producing multiple quality institutions with multiple quality cultures within the system. It is much more serious challenge to quality assurance at accreditation level.

10) Among other challenges facing the ODL are the determinations by the changing leadership regimes of:

- the institution's notion of quality;
- the quality management goals, objectives and expected outcomes;
- a framework for the quality management, including resource generation; and
- a framework for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the strategic plan and the outcomes.

11) Various developments have been witnessed relating to quality assurance mainly through the intervention of information and communications technologies (ICT) in education, like networking of the open learning system with traditional Universities, interdisciplinary interactions at intra-institutional and inter-institutional levels, networking of institutions globally, data-based management of higher education, changing the orientation of institutions by incorporating self-financing in their financial management, assessment and accreditation of higher education institutions with frequently changing statutory set of regulatory bodies at the national level add new dimensions to the challenges.

12) There are many different stakeholders whose concerns and expectations of quality of education vary widely. Fulfilling quality demands of the diverse stakeholders

necessitate accommodation of a range of parameters and require various measures of addressing the quality concerns.

All these challenges together complicate the issues of quality assurance in open and distance education and thus add new concerns in programme evaluation, which require serious attention at all levels.

14.3 QUALITY CONCERNS IN PROGRAMME EVALUATION

Quality assurance and program evaluation are interlinked and form essential part continuous quality improvement efforts in ODL. Therefore in this section, we will focus on quality concerns in ODE programme evaluation.

We are aware that for evaluating any distance education programme, it is essential to know about the institution (its structure and functions) in which the programme is developed and implemented as also the actual field of operations of the programme. Once this is done, a plan is further needed to evaluate the objectives of programme evaluation. This is so because, programme evaluation in distance education takes into account various aspects of an academic programme, and also evaluation of the processes involved in designing and operating the evaluation model.

Programme evaluation in distance education refers to the continuous (formative) and term-end (summative) assessments of student achievement, based on assignments (tutor-marked, and computer-marked), projects, lab experiments, hands-on tests, presentations and demonstrations, term-end examination and the like. The scores or grades secured in these assessment situations are accumulated to give an overall score and/or grade for a students' performance, on the basis of which the certificate or degree is awarded. As you know, for example, at the Indira Gandhi National Open University the grades/marks secured on assignments at continuous intervals and the grades/marks secured in term-end examinations are combined to calculate the overall grade or marks. While continuous assessment (through assignment) carries 25-30% weight(age) term-end exam carriers 70-75% weight(age) to the different courses of the university. On a five-point scale with grades ranging from A (excellent) to E (unsatisfactory), a student has to secure a minimum D (satisfactory) grade in any assignment or term-end exam of a course, but at least a overall C (Good) grade in each course to successfully complete it. This type of 'evaluation' pertains to the assessment and the gradation of learner's performance only. Of course, the evaluation model or scheme may vary from institution to institution, and from programme to programme within an institution, depending upon the nature of different aspects of an academic programme as well as evaluation of the processes involved in designing and operating the evaluation model. We shall discuss these in the subsequent sections. Before that, let us discuss a little more of educational evaluation and evaluation of distance education programme in this section here.

Evaluation as a process includes the acts of testing and measurement, and goes beyond to make qualitative judgement about educational inputs, processes and products. Evaluation is a broader concept in comparison to testing and measurement, and involves diverse acts, purposes and processes. It may be intended to find out effects of learning (and improve it), effectiveness and efficiency of measures adopted, perspectives of other people, and so on. We shall note here a definition of evaluation given by Thorpe (1988) which better suits our purpose of programme evaluation in distance education:

Evaluation is the collection of, analysis and interpretation of information about any aspect of a programme of education or training as part of a recognised process of judging its effectiveness, its efficiency and any other outcomes it may have.

If you analyse this definition of evaluation, you may deduce the following characteristics.

i) Evaluation covers a wide range of activities than what is possible in testing or measurement. While evaluating a programme, besides examining the courses and their effectiveness, one might look into the monitoring aspects, the aspects of effectiveness of planning and management of programmes, learning and learner support, and the examination of the entire scheme of programme design, development and implementation. Evaluation is a one-time activity and is taken up at intervals, while monitoring is a continuous and practical activity taken up at various stages of a scheme.

ii) Evaluation is distinguished from assessment in the sense that the latter is concerned with assigning values to student achievement at various stages of learning (continuous and term-end). The assessment scores facilitate evaluation though additional information and explanations are needed to make considered judgement.

iii) Evaluation exercises, like any research exercise, are concerned with collection, analysis, and interpretation of data.

iv) Evaluation involves a deliberate and planned activity. Some of the routine activities concerning monitoring of programmes, discussions, decisions and steps taken could become part of an evaluation exercise, provided those are deliberately included in the plan of action of the exercise and, therefore, need to be recorded from time to time. This usually does not happen in many instances because of lack of planning. As would be seen in sub-section 14.3.2, evaluation exercises need to be collaborative and transparent so as to ensure the applicability of the findings of evaluation.

v) Evaluation can at the same time be focused as well as comprehensive. Some evaluation exercises focus on only a part of an activity as per the necessity of the time, while others may take into account all that is involved in a programme. Further, evaluation exercises may go beyond the stated or overt programme goals to include what is not obviously intended but is very much deep within the programme.

Programme evaluation in open and distance education refers to evaluation of any programme of study or programme of education and/or training, which may be credit-based or non-credit-based (degree-oriented or not aimed at any certificate/degree). There may be continuous 'monitoring' of a programme at regular intervals, but programme evaluation is essentially concerned with the outcome or effectiveness of a specific programme that has already been in place for a specified duration and the retrospective findings related to programme.

The programme evaluation exercise deals with academic (pedagogic), managerial, financial, quality and accountability aspects (which we shall examine in section 14.3.4). A programme comprises of a few or a set of courses and involves course design and development, production and distribution, student learning and support, assessment and evaluation, time and money. All these and other related aspects may be focused individually or collectively in a programme evaluation which is a planneed exercise. The plan must indicate as to why to evaluate, what aspects to evaluate, who would be

involved in the process of evaluation, who would utilise results of the evaluation, what perspectives should be considered and what are the models/principles that should guide the evaluation exercise. At this stage, you may like to keep a particular distance teaching institution in mind, for a clear conceptualisation of programme evaluation.

14.3.1 Why to Evaluate?

The decision to evaluate an academic programme is taken at a time when it is felt that something more should be known about how the programme is doing — how the students are learning from the programme; the difficulties they face; the kind and level of support services being provided to them; whether there is any need to change the pattern of continuous and term-end assessment; how much money has been spent; how to be more economical; and above all, whether the programme objectives have been met and the goals have been achieved. One can still go deeper to examine persistence and dropout rates of students, the quality and effectiveness of self-instructional course packages, nature of counselling and student interactivity, nature of teleconferencing and two-way interaction, evaluation of assignments, grading, turn-around time, and the like. In short, all the aspects of programme development and implementation can be studied, depending on the priorities of the institution.

Evaluation exercises are undertaken to get first-hand data and information (or feedback) so as to make decisions, alter the course of action, and improve upon any aspect of the process of distance teaching and learning. Many practitioners or functionaries of distance education are involved in this process. They include: members of planning and management bodies, programme advisers and expert members, course writers and editors, media producers, counsellors, evaluators, material producers and distributors, trainers, members of the accrediting agencies, the faculty and those responsible for administering the programme, and above all the students and other stake-holders (parents, employers, government, and public). They all would like to know how the programme is doing and what revisions are required so as to further ensure the effectiveness of the programme.

Sometimes, the revision of a progamme or course is taken up when a programme evaluation exercise in completed, as the results of the evaluation provide sufficient feedback to the programme or course coordinator for completely revising the programme. The feedback may lead to alternative course design and development models; new ways of presenting materials and media-mix; changes in structure and presentation of counselling sessions; alternative assessment and evaluation systems and procedures; new planning and management techniques; new training models and methodologies and so on. However, the evaluation exercise and implementation of findings are a collaborative exercise to be undertaken in a manner which ensures involvement / concern of all those associated with the programme, and implementation of suggestive measures as a cohesive team. In the process, individual accountability is also ensured.

14.3.2 How to Approach Evaluation?

One of the important ways of looking at evaluation is to focus on the purpose of evaluation. From this point of view, we may categorise any evaluation exercise into two approaches: **formative-summative** and **input-output** approaches.

Formative evaluation is undertaken from time to time with the objective of further improving the programme at the various stages of its development and implementation.

It may aim at the overall improvement and effectiveness of the programme, though largely the exercises are undertaken on various components of the programme, keeping in view the broad programme goals. Testing of instructional materials, modifying procedures of collating and reporting admission data and student records, improving the effectiveness of counselling sessions, etc are some examples of formative evaluation in distance education.

Summative evaluation is concerned with the overall effectiveness of the programme from a wider perspective, relative to the programme goals and objectives. For student learning the usual procedure has been the term-end examination, which along with the results of continuous evaluation lead to overall grading or scoring and award of certificates/degrees. This kind of evaluation also intends to judge the effectiveness of various kinds of approaches or means of achieving the same goal; and largely it is concerned with effectiveness and efficiency. For any kind of project or programme, the broad questions pertain to the cost, the products or achievements, time spent, precautions for the future, and any model or procedure emerging out of the project or programme.

Thorpe (1988) suggested that formative evaluation is undertaken during the programme to evaluate the progress and answer questions like 'how are we doing?' and 'what should we be doing next'? Summative evaluation is concerned with the effectiveness of the programme, and answers questions like, 'were the aims achieved'? 'was it worth doing'? and 'is it worth continuing'? Thorpe (1988) noted the following comparison between formative and summative evaluation:

Table 14.1: Comparison between formative and summative evaluation

Sl. No.	Formative Evaluation	Summative Evaluation
1.	Takes place during the programme.	Takes place towards the end of the programme.
2.	Conducted by the practitioners themselves; is a sort of self-evaluation.	Conducted by specialists from outside the programme or system.
3.	It is usually a low cost affair.	It is expensive; therefore, needs extra resources.
4.	Is usually a small scale affair. (though descriptive based on statistics often used)	Is usually a large scale affair; uses surveys, and statistically based methodologies for sampling and data analysis.
5.	Results are reported locally.	Results are reported nationally.
6.	The evaluation exercise is driven by decision-making and operational constraints of the organisation.	The evaluation exercise is driven by time-constraints of the chosen design and methodology.
7.	The sources of data are usually monitoring exercises on performance indicators.	The sources of data are varied which aim at gathering data to reveal effects of the long- term programme.

Much of the formative evaluation is developmental in nature, i.e. intending to further refine the process or product, Often we have the misconception that formative evaluation is undertaken at various stages of the development of the programme, and

summative evaluation is undertaken at the end. Contrary to this misconception, summative evaluation (like 'market testing') may be undertaken at development stage, which for formative evaluation would refer to 'developmental testing'.

While formative-summative approach is concerned with the purpose of evaluation, the input-output approach is based on the methods/models adopted to execute an evaluation exercise. Within the input-output approach, we may consider pre-test-post-test model and context-input-process-product model of evaluation.

For example, in an experimental method, a pre-testing is undertaken before the programme starts, and post-testing is done after at the end of the programme, and the difference is ascribed to the effectiveness of the programme. Usually a pre-test-post-test model is used to study the differences between the effects of various independent variables on the dependent variable(s). This is done after due control of the intervening variables (either by eliminating their effect at the stage of conducting the experiment or by partialing out their effect at the stage of data analysis. However, this method has its own limitations and therefore is less appealing to those intending to find out the wholeness of the variable under study and also how the context (of, for example, learning) is related to the variable (say, for example, student achievement). 'Illuminative evaluation' is another category (within input-output model) which focuses on the processes through which and contexts in which the learner goes through an academic exercise. To study the processes, problems, issues and effectiveness, a combination of methods comprising interview, observation, document analysis, questionnaires and the like are used by the evaluator to be illuminated and to draw meaningful conclusions accordingly.

The '*context-input-process-product'* (CIPP) approach takes into account the context in which the project or learning is taking place, which can be studied through methods of survey and illumination. The context includes such areas as the need for the project, its objectives, and pre-stipulated outcomes of the programme. Inputs may be the materials, time, money and human resources invested in the programme as also the programme strategy. For evaluating the process, one has to look into how the procedures and strategies were implemented; and evaluation of the product may be largely summative, focusing on the overall success of the programme. In such an evaluation exercise, all the aspects are taken into account within a comprehensive and composite framework so as to draw meaningful conclusions.

14.3.3 For Whom to Evaluate?

Distance education involves industrial form of teaching and learning, with teams working for providing education to a large mass of people. Therefore, it is imperative that all those team members, in one way or the other, are associated with the programme evaluation exercise. Three broad categories of people are concerned with the evaluation exercise: ***managers, practitioners*** and ***learners.***

Those involved in planning and management (including the head of the institution, the government and any other funding agencies) are more interested in accountability of people, process and products (more in sub-section 14.3.4). This may include: how much time and money has been spent to develop/produce the programme? Whether materials have reached the students in time? Whether counselling and examination have taken place properly in time? What is the students' completion rate of the programme? How are the graduates doing in the job-market or self-employment? and the like. Evaluation of these aspects is relevant for managers and policy makers.

The practitioners are more concerned with and interested in the minute details of programme planning, design, development, implementation and evaluation. They are a varied group who occupy positions in the institution at various levels and in various capacities, with fixed work structure and responsibilities. Since evaluation also intends to have performance review and quality control, these are taken more seriously by the practitioners. Evaluation exercises provide feedback to a variety of practitioners involved directly or indirectly with the programme: members of school board / school council / planning board / academic council, programme and course coordinators, course writers, course editors, instructional designers / educational developers, language editors, translators, media producers, graphic artists, trainers, researchers, in-charges of student admission, persons responsible for material production and distribution, regional and study centre functionaries, counsellors and evaluators, mentors and project guides, examination personnel, and so on. Besides the overall effectiveness of the programme, they are more concerned with areas and tasks dealt by them, and would like to examine programme evaluation findings relating to their day-to-day tasks and improve upon further so as to ensure effective and qualitative process for quality student learning. This approach goes beyond the accountability perspective towards the managerial perspective where one is more concerned with self-evaluation and the process of the operation of the system and sub-systems with the intention of improving those from time to time. Therefore, this exercise is developmental in nature, and includes individual and team accountability. But, there is a danger that the evaluation results may simply become a tool at the hands of the management to ensure accountability, output and efficiency, rather than the process of teaching-learning. Therefore, as we shall see in sub-section 14.3.4, the exercise has necessarily to be democratic and collaborative.

Learners occupy the central place in DTI (or ODEI) because the establishment of institution is driven by student interests and the existence or continuation of institutions depends on them. Therefore, the primary focus of evaluation should be to protect and promote the interests of students or learners. The relevance of the academic programmes is determined by the interests of students, degree of acceptance of the programmes by employers and the public at large. The quality of the programmes, their delivery, accessibility, retention of students, performance and success rate of students, job prospects, etc should become essential components of evaluation. Only then it would be relevant to the students, the parents and the employers.

14.3.4 What to Evaluate? – Input, Process and product

There are many variables on which an evaluation exercise may focus. And, under each variable, a set of sub- or micro-variables also operate which need to be studied when a focused exercise is undertaken on a particular variable. At the time of the design of a programme evaluation exercise, it must be categorically noted as to what aspects one intends to evaluate so that the methodology (including evaluation instruments) gets set at the beginning. What to evaluate and what mechanisms to adopt to evaluate that/those depend on the evaluation perspective and approach that one adopts (see section 14.3.2). If we consider various sub-systems within the distance teaching system from a systems perspective, the following input-process-output outline emerges for distance teaching-learning (Fig. 14.2) (Panda, 1990):

Input	Process	Output
• Programme planning • Objectives as inputs • Staff development, (material development, assessment and evaluation, tutoring and counselling, administration and management, monitoring)* • Course (print, audio, video, etc.)* • Students • Infrastructure • Time • Financing and budgeting	• Two-way communication • Students' interaction with materials (learning style, strategy, pace, etc.) • Evaluation process • Student support service • Time management and decision-making	• Students' achievement (grades / scores) and other skills • Student satisfaction • Students' relevance with job market • Their employment and promotion • Staff development and use of acquired skills as further inputs • System efficiency as further input • SIMs as future input • Effectiveness and efficiency of subsystems**

Notes: * themselves as processes at input stage.
** also part of process.

Fig. 14.2: **Systems perspective to distance teaching-learning.**

If we look at each component in input/process/output more minutely, we may find them operating simultaneously with the entire system. Regarding inputs, Chacon (1987) and Feasley (1988) have noted that most of the evaluation activities in distance education have concentrated on 'course' as the unit of the analysis, in which specific variables include students (Chacon, 1987) and instructional process (Feasley, 1988). Chacon suggested two dimensions — structural (students, courses, etc.) and functional (curriculum development, instructional design, support services, staff development, etc.) — to be considered while evaluating higher education programmes at a distance.

While you will find out process framework, based on accountability and managerial perspectives in section 14.4.1, you will notice the perspective of process and output variables given below:

Process Variables

These may not be equated with the 'process' presented in Fig.14.2. These include the process, the input and part of the output put together (i.e. operation of the sub-systems) where the evaluator acts in a democratic-collaborative style at every stage of the evaluation exercise. The following are some of the important process variables of evaluation:

- Generation of knowledge (on teaching methods and learning processes in general).
- Curriculum development (models) and implementation.
- Instructional design and development; course design, and design and development of modular self-instructional material or multi-media materials.
- Assignments, commenting and grading.
- Support system, and perceptions of those involved in it.
- Student characteristics (age, gender, residence, caste, educational background, economic status, study skills, language proficiency, course needs, attitude to the system, occupational background, spare study time, level of motivation, etc.).

- Student drop-out / dropdown (background characteristics, social integration, academic integration, goal commitment, instructional commitment, academic and social problems, etc.).
- Sub-system(s) efficiency — costs, effectiveness.
- Student admission and related student affairs.
- Material production and distribution.
- Evaluation system (testing, grading/scoring, commenting on assignments, turn-around time, management of evaluation, etc.).
- Quality assessment and quality assurance.
- Quality control and decision-making sub-systems, evaluation of decision-making process and mechanisms.
- The logistical system (personnel, finance, establishment, administration, and their role at various stages of programme development and delivery).
- The coordination system, especially among the important instructional functionaries like course writers, media producers, educational technologists, academic counsellors, paper setter, moderators, evaluators, etc.
- The system of staff development — orientation and training.
- Employers' perception of the programme.

(It may be noted that the functionaries are equally concerned with the output, though their onus of emphasis would be more on processes).

Output Variables

Output is concerned largely with the overall evaluation of the system with an accountability perspective (accountable to the government, funding agency, and the like) where the evaluator acts as an advisor to the project and has control over the entire process of evaluation. Some of the variables for output evaluation include the following:

- Equality of educational opportunity — access and equity.
- Student pass out — grading/marking.
- Relevance to needs and expectations.
- Impact on other distance teaching institutions and the systems including conventional learning systems.
- Overall efficiency — cost-effectiveness, cost-efficiency.

Let us now examine some of the functional categories of components that one may like to evaluate in each category of the variables. The variables selectively described here are: programme and curriculum development, self-instructional materials, tutoring and counselling.

Programme and Curriculum Development

- The procedure and adequacy of learning/training needs assessment.
- Programme viability: target groups, appropriateness of content areas, financial viability, availability of experts to develop and present the programme, piloting and pump-priming.
- Structure of the courses/programmes.

Self-instructional Materials

- Appropriateness of aims/objectives, contents and strategy.
- Assessment strategy and difficulties faced by students.
- Requirement for updating, partial remake, revision.
- Most liked and least liked unit (what and why).
- Content density and difficulty — text consuming more time and why.
- Need for additional materials.
- Developmental testing and changes made thereof.
- Degree of use of text units, programme guide/handbook, set books, study guides, SIMs, activities, broadcast notes, audio-'video notes, TV broadcasts, audio and video programmes, radio broadcasts, home kits, computer practicals, lab practicals, tutor comments, and the like.
- Amount of work required in each block/unit, and time taken for each task.
- Best and worst aspects of a unit/block.
- Tutor's comments on the SIMs.
- Alternative content and presentation.
- Student performance on assignments.
- Relationship with other related courses in the area.
- Clarity and appropriateness of access devices.

Tutoring and Counselling

- Tutor's involvement in the preparation of learning materials.
- Tutor's involvement in arrangement of tutorials, setting of assignments, keeping records, evaluating/monitoring courses and students.
- Tutor's awareness of the mechanism of distance teaching-leaning, university database, etc.
- Tutor's skills of communication, guidance, teaching, counselling, adopting to learning styles, teaching study skills, telephone tutoring, evaluating assignments, dealing with personal problems of students.
- Effectiveness of counselling, guidance, tutor comments and grading/marking, organizing, and presenting practicals.
- Students' perception of counselling, TMA commenting and grading, personal support.
- Clarity of explanation, teacher enthusiasm, organisation of presentation, group discussion, and the like in each counselling session.

Each of the sub-themes under each category of variables can also be studied more minutely, and each one can be expanded to include micro level questions/items to be evaluated in a programme evaluation exercise.

Check Your Progress

Note: a) Write you answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under "Answers to 'Check Your Progress' Questions".

3) Distinguish between 'output' and 'process' variables of evaluation in distance education.

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14.3.5 What Perspectives to Adopt

In this section, we shall focus on some of the evaluation perspectives which provide mental framework, attitude or world view within which a programme evaluation exercise is carried out. Such framework helps in determining different issues and concerns we discussed in sub-sections 14.3.1 to 14.3.4 above, which you may revisit. This would provide you clarity to further discussion on evaluation perspectives.

Some of the issues raised by Thorpe (1988) (see subsection 14.3.2) are worth noting since these are of concern to the evaluator irrespective of the perspective of evaluation one has. The issues include: resolving conflicts associated with appropriate methodology versus facilitating decision-making; making value judgements in evaluation versus providing evidences; practitioners as evaluators versus outside agencies as evaluators; systematic and scientific data collection versus qualitative accounts of events and attitudes; monitoring versus evaluation; and evaluation versus research.

With this background, let's now examine a few perspectives that influence decisions on evaluation. It may, however, be noted that there is hardly any strict boundary between the perspectives discussed below; it is only the relative importance that can be attached to one or the other.

i) Accountability and Managerial Perspectives

Underlining the relationship between accountability and evaluation, Calder (1994) points out that while evaluating a programme one may be accountable to any of the following five levels of decision-making:

- external agencies responsible for funding or sponsoring the programme;
- decision-makers at managerial level in one's own institution where evaluation is taking place;
- decision-makers at faculty or programme level;
- decision-makers at course level; or
- students or other clients/customers.

A distinction has been made by Calder (1994) between ***quality control*** and ***quality assurance***, and between ***summative*** and ***formative evaluation***. While quality control

is concerned with rejection of products which do not confirm to the pre-stipulated standard (for which a range of summative evaluation approaches are followed), the concern of quality assurance is to achieve defined standards through application of agreed procedures (for which a range of formative evaluation approaches are followed).

Evaluation exercises with ***accountability*** and ***managerial perspectives*** have been noted by Panda (1990) that while the former examines especially the efficiency of a programme so as to report to the funding agency/authority, the latter intends to assess the effectiveness of the programme so as to provide feedback to the programme manager / coordinator / team regarding the effectiveness of programme delivery and management, and the programme itself. In the accountability perspective, the focus is on the ultimate objective(s) of the programme; the objectivity of evaluation methodology and the quantitative aspects of data gathered. The purpose behind such an exercise is to decide whether to retain the programme (and with what corrective measures) or reject it altogether. On the other hand, in the managerial perspective, the focus is on the immediate or intermediate objectives; the methodology followed (i.e. is it rigorous to the extent that sound decisions can be made?); and the data gathered — both qualitative and quantitative. The purpose of such evaluation is to improve the programme (its components and processes) along with its delivery.

ii) Democratic and Collaborative Evaluation

While outlining a case for democratic-collaborative evaluation, Tovar (1989) focused on roles and responsibilities of evaluation consultants in the process of selecting evaluation questions, and conducting programme evaluation based on those questions. In any distance teaching institution, the client-evaluator relationship determines the focus of the evaluation questions and the way the evaluation exercise is carried out (though, to a large extent, it depends on the institutional policies and purposes). The role of the evaluator is of special importance to examine such an evaluation exercise. According to political orientations, three evaluation roles based on institutional goals, client's needs, and evaluator's activities are discussed as follows:

a) ***Bureaucratic Evaluation:*** In this kind of evaluation, the evaluator works as a hired researcher who obeys and carries out the directives without any freedom of decision-making related to purposes, processes, products and utilisation of evaluation exercises. The role of the evaluator is limited to gather, process and feed information to the client who makes institutional decisions.

b) ***Autocratic Evaluation:*** The objective of this evaluation is to get advice from the evaluator on a programme or an aspect of it. The evaluator is free to formulate the questions, set procedures for data collection and data analysis, and recommend findings. The role of the evaluator is like an adviser to the client. The evaluator decides the objectives, methods and the scope of the evaluation.

c) ***Democratic Evaluation:*** This kind of evaluation accommodates and tries to meet the pluralism of values and interests. The political context under which the evaluation exercises are carried out is very important here. The client and the evaluator work hand in hand right from chalking out the focus of evaluation and formulating the evaluation questions to the analysis and application of the findings.

Collaboration is undertaken with a view to increasing the validity of the evaluation exercises, to carry out the findings to further improve upon the programme or the system, and to find out not only the overall effectiveness but also the effectiveness of the sub-systems.

One of the important democratic models of evaluation is the utilization-focused evaluation suggested by Patton (1986) in which collaboration exercises are undertaken in defining and focusing evaluation questions. The model takes into account the relevance of process and product to the system, and the utilisation of such exercises, i.e. what for to undertake it. Such evaluation proceeds through the following:

- identification of information needs of people in the system.
- formulation of the focus of evaluation.
- deciding upon the methods (sample, tools and techniques, procedures).
- doing analysis and interpretation of data.
- putting forward recommendations.

In this kind of evaluation, the group of users is identified beforehand, and in the entire process of evaluation the evaluator operates in collaboration with the users within a democratic perspective. The utilisation of recommendations increases with every increase in negotiation and collaboration between the clients/users and the evaluator in the identification and focusing of evaluation questions.

iii) Centralised and Decentralised Evaluation

The operations of any distance education institution are through its headquarters, regional centres and study centres (or may be variations of this model). The programme evaluation exercise, in which a variety of functionaries are involved (including the students as respondents), has to be decentralised with specified tasks to be undertaken by specified groups. Further, in the exercise is a build-in mechanism of the institutions which is continuous in nature and decentralised to facilitate the evaluation exercise. In a democratic-collaborative set-up, a decentralized evaluation involves those who actually undertake distance teaching-learning and also those who would eventually act on the findings (like the faculty members, academics in support divisions, administrators, etc.). If the evaluation is on a very small scale and has to be undertaken for once, a centralised exercise is more desirable because the evaluator has control over the entire exercise.

You may, at this stage, take a pause and formulate your views on the kind of perspective you may like your evaluation exercise to focus on. However, there is hardly a cemented wall between perspectives, and these may overlap depending on the formulation of evaluation questions and the focus/purpose of evaluation.

Check Your Progress

Note: a) Write you answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under "Answers to 'Check Your Progress' Questions".

4) Relate democratic-collaborative evaluation with centralised-decentralised evaluation.

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14.4 LET US SUM UP

Quality is a key concern of academia across the globe and several efforts in multiple directions are made by the administrators and academicians to induce this component into the teaching learning situation. Irrespective of any system or model the issue of quality in ODL remains a major concern, particularly because of its innovation in education. QA policies, systems and measures become inevitable for establishing and promoting credibility of ODL provision. Accomplishment of such task requires comprehensive quality assurance system designed to prove and improve the quality of an ODEI's inputs, processes and products or outcomes. In this Unit, we discussed different aspects related to maintaining and enriching the quality of ODEIs in general and their programmes in particular.

Assuring the quality of higher education through ODL has been a fundamental aspect of gaining, maintaining and enhancing credibility for their programmes and systems. We discussed in this unit how evaluation of distance education programmes will help in addressing the quality concerns in distance education and QA. The formative-summative dichotomy was discussed, with a caution that it may not be construed that formative is during the process and summative at the end. In fact, this is a continuous process in the programme evaluation and is an in-built exercise of any distance teaching institution. Based on why, how, for whom and what to evaluate, we focused on a few evaluation perspectives. It was pointed out that the potentiality of utilisation of evaluation findings will increase if it is undertaken within a democratic-collaborative framework, with a view to making the evaluation findings contribute to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the overall system and its sub-systems, and to make evaluation an in-built process for providing continuous feedback to the system at different stages for sustaining and improving quality of the ODL programmes in particular and of the ODEIs in general.

14.5 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS' QUESTIONS

1) Quality in higher education is a multi-dimensional, multi-level, and dynamic concept that relates to: the contextual settings of an educational model, the institutional mission and objectives, and the specific standards within a given system, institution, programme, or discipline. Concept of quality in higher education embraces all functions and activities of a university including teaching, academic programmes, research and scholarship, staffing, students, buildings, facilities, equipment, services to the community and the academic environment. In respect of quality in the context of evaluation of higher education, the main approaches to conception of quality are as follows:

   - The *exceptional* view in educational terms is linked to notions of excellence, i.e. of 'high quality' unattainable by most.
   - Quality as *perfection* sees quality as a consistent or flawless outcome that can be attained by all.
   - Quality as *fitness for purpose* sees quality in terms of fulfilling a customer's requirements, needs or desires.
   - Quality as *value for money* sees quality in terms of return on investment. 'Customer' gets a quality product or service.

- Quality as *transformation* in educational terms refers to the enhancement and empowerment of students or the development of new knowledge.

2) i) There exist three primary modes of quality assurance globally. These are: assessment, audit and accreditation.

   ii) *Institutional accreditation* focuses on the institution as a whole, giving attention not only to the overall educational programs but to such areas as: Mission, Governance, Effective Management, Academic Program, Teaching Staff, Learning Resources (library, laboratories, and educational technology), Students and Student, Physical Facilities and Financial Resources.

   Programme accreditation accreditation concerns the quality of each academic programme by the *standards of*: Education, Curriculum, Students, Quality of faculties, Quality of facilities, Administration, and Finance.

3) The output variables like total number of students passing out of courses, overall effectiveness and efficiency of the system, access and equity are more concerned with the overall system evaluation in which the system's accountability to funding agency or government are also examined. In case of process variables, which indicate the actual functioning of every unit and every activity, the stress is on achievement of quality and professionals in the process so as to increase the effectiveness of the activities and student learning.

4) The democratic-collaborative model of evaluation accommodates the views of all the categories of functionaries, and collaboratively evaluates mechanisms to carry out the exercise and implement the findings. This is largely facilitated if there is a decentralised evaluation with individual responsibilities fixed on those who are actually involved in the process of distance teaching-learning. The possibility of implementation of evaluation results increases once all those (from top-headquarters to bottom-study centres) are involved in the exercise.

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14.7 UNIT END EXERCISES

You may write brief notes or full-length answers to the questions given here in your own interest. Such notes or answers might help you during your preparation for term-end examination.

Unit End Questions

1) What are the imperatives for quality assurance in ODE? (500 words).
2) Discuss different issues of quality assurance in ODE. (1000 words).
3) What are the parameters of quality assurance in ODE? (250 words).
4) Highlight different modes of quality assurance in ODE. (250 words).
5) What are the challenges to quality assurance in ODE? (500 words).
6) Discuss the quality concerns in programme evaluation. (1000 words).

Questions for Critical Reflection

1) Do you think IGNOU has been successful in assuring quality support to you as the student of its BEd Programme? Justify your answer with reasons and/or practical instances.

Activity

Go through your BEd Programme guide and Student Handbook for Practical Work. Note down the important schedules, guidelines and standards mentioned therein. Compare them with the reality situation of your course of journey through the programme during its implementation till date. Prepare a brief report of evaluation of the same.