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## UNIT 3 LEARNER SUPPORT SYSTEMS

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### 3.0 OBJECTIVES

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At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify the problems of distance learners;
- explain the role of learner support systems in solving the problems of distance learners;
- discuss the role of reading skills;
- relate the teaching/learning of reading and study skills to distance education;
- distinguish between the roles of tutoring and counselling in distance education;
- discuss the roles of regional and study centres and other institutional mechanisms that influence curriculum transactions.

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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The view that education is primarily a learning process on the part of the student rather than an instructional process on the part of the teacher has achieved almost universal acceptance in recent years (Sewart, 1995). Assigning a central role to the learning process, and as a corollary, to the learners has led to greater attention being paid to the learners' requirements. In this setup the teachers role is essentially to provide support for different activities including-

- Teaching (Example: Tuition, Feedback, Grading)
- Administration (Taking administrative action, Advocacy, Assessment)
- Counselling (Informing, Advising, Counselling)

Distance education programmes are generally accepted as being learner-centered and being rather than teacher centered programmes, organized on an

industrialised pattern, with large-scale production and consumption, they treat the learner as their clients/customers. The central concern of these programmes is customer satisfaction. A majority of learners find that the self-instructional material (which forms an integral part of distance education programmes) helps them in working through their chosen courses successfully. However, there are a number of learners who for one reason or another find it difficult to get the best out of such materials. These learners need additional help to achieve their objectives. The ways and means of providing this additional help are called learner support services.

Learner support services refer to any services other than the actual course material which an institution provides to its students to realise the instructional objectives of the course. (Croft, 1991). Distance learners, according to Gallo (1977), need help and assistance for developing better skills, knowledge and attitudes.

In this Unit we shall first discuss the need for learner support services and then examine the characteristics of distance learners, distance institutions, distance learning, and distance learning materials. We shall also discuss the role of reading and study skills in enhancing the teaching-learning process in distance education. In this context, we shall discuss the interventions of academic counsellors and other personnel engaged in learner support services. In particular we shall discuss the processes of counselling and tutoring in distance education and their role in curriculum transactions. In the end we shall discuss the structure, function and operation of institutional mechanisms in the form of study centres, regional centres and other centres and their role in enhancing the curriculum transactions.

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### **3.2 NEED FOR LEARNER SUPPORT SYSTEMS IN DISTANCE EDUCATION**

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The change from the industrial age to the information era has led to a greater emphasis on knowledge-based activities. The entire world is witnessing a burgeoning demand for information which has taken the form of “lifelong learning” and demand for formal or non formal courses in educational institutions. Rumble (1989) has suggested that distance education refers to varied forms of educational activity in which learners are physically apart from the teacher or the teaching institution for much of the teaching and learning process. But the relevance of the learner support system is found in its attractiveness to the multitude of learners as it has the ability to reach to the learners living in remote areas. The main aim of the learner support system in distance education is to promote self study/independent study, particularly in the absence of regular face to face contact. However, the learner support system is affected by social, economic and geographical conditions. Moreover, Sewart (1993) has focused on the need to integrate course production with the student support/learner support sub-system for the effective and efficient management of distance learning institutions.

However the process of distance learning requires the interaction of the learners, both with the material and with the teacher. The quality of the support system affects learning. Hence, it should go beyond providing material and tuition and should reflect a well-defined and integrated approach to learner services, based on clearly articulated guiding/counselling values about learners and how the learning process is best facilitated. As a matter of fact, in a good learning environment, each learner can interact with any of the existing elements of the institutional infrastructure to optimise the learning/performance.

Some important features of distance education make learner support systems an inherent need of these programmes:

- i) Characteristics of distance learners
- ii) Characteristics of distance education institutions
- iii) Characteristics of distance learning
- iv) Characteristics of distance learning materials

### 3.2.1 Characteristics of Distance Learners

Barbara Hodgson (1993) described learner characteristics in distance education system as comprising the following four major factors:-

- 1) **Demographic factors:** These include the learners' age, sex and occupation.
- 2) **Motivational factors:** Such as why the students are learning and how a learning programme might relate to their work and aspirations about learning.
- 3) **Learning and subject background factors:** Such as educational history, existing knowledge, relevant experience and learning styles.
- 4) **Resource factors:** Such as when and how the learners will be studying, the time available, access to media or other facilities, and the financial support available.

The idea that distance learners have to rely on self learning is based on the universal perception that study material for distance learners is adequately clear and lucid i.e. they are written with enough explanatory details and built in content-student interaction through self assessment questions. It is, therefore, the need for external pedagogic support would be minimal for example. This presumption led the Open University of Hong Kong to follow the universal pattern of distance learner support, namely personalised tutor – student interaction which is learner centered and most focused on student identified content-related difficulties. This would obviously make the conventional lecturing method unwanted and rather inefficient.

Oliver and McLaughlin (1997) highlighted the role interactivity which provides a way to motivate and stimulate learning in the form of dialogue. It also provides the means for instructors to help learners to consider and reflect on the content and process of learning and to seek more complex levels of learning as well as understanding of the course content.

However, the basic characteristics of distance learners become clear when we compare them to conventional learners. The following table indicates the differences between the learners in the two systems:

**Table: Learners in conventional and open systems: A comparison (Koulet. A (1989)).**

Conventional System	Distance education system
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Learning is a full time and major activity.</li> <li>● The learner remains in one role and continues the membership of a learning institution.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Learning is a part time secondary activity</li> <li>● The learner generally returns to a role he/she had given up sometime ago.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The learner belongs to an institution.</li> <li>● The learner is usually young.</li> <li>● The learner is in easy contact with fellow learners.</li> <li>● The learner has easy access to institutional resources.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The learner is a member of many institutions, most of which (e.g. work, family) take precedence over the institution which gives the courses.</li> <li>● The learner is usually an adult.</li> <li>● Contact with fellow learners may not be easy</li> <li>● The learner’s contact with the institution is infrequent and often takes place across a distance.</li> </ul>
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The table highlights some important aspects of the distance learners such as their:

- 1) substantial time commitments to home and/or work leading to the limited availability of time and energy for educational/learning related tasks and activities,
- 2) previous educational experiences which may be positive or negative, which implies that emotional or affective influences may play a greater role in distance learning particularly since there is limited face to face contact and communication, leaving the distance learner to deal with his/her own feelings.
- 3) wide diversity of educational, economic, social and occupational backgrounds and contexts, which effect the learners’ allegiance and commitment to the educational institution.
- 4) generally high level of commitment and motivation since the choice of continuing education is based on personal decisions and commitments.
- 5) isolation from other students and the institution, which leads to a certain remoteness and to limited communication.
- 6) the remoteness from the central institution, which makes access to the institution and its resources limited.

These characteristics of distance learners serve to highlight the need for support services for overcoming the limitations and problems faced by them.

**Check your Progress 1**

*Notes :* a) Space is given below for your answer.  
 b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

What are the main differences between distance learners and conventional learners?

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### 3.2.2 Characteristics of Distance Education Institutions

Institutions imparting distance education tend to develop some common characteristics such as

- **Remoteness:** Even an institution that develops a regional network of services still tends to have its offices hundreds of kilometers away from its students. In countries where communications are difficult, the remoteness of the institution is compounded by delay and delivery problems.
- **Complexity:** An institution which is trying to produce a vast and diverse variety of course materials and deliver them to learners as well as to provide support services, is likely to develop a complex bureaucratic system of administration. Such systems can be very effective in dealing with large numbers of learners but that may be inflexible and damaging when dealing with individuals.
- **Functional diversity:** The greatest challenge for distance education institutions is the variety of functions they must perform, which calls for a variety of organisational styles. While running production system and operating course materials warehousing may best be done through the rigours of industrial process for ensuring availability of material for learners within time the functions such as the development of course material by course teams, as well as by individuals, requires the most modern forms of project and personnel management, skills in systematic instructional material design and the development of effective and efficient products. In the same manner, organising the information flows necessary to support effective tutoring and counselling for distance learners is also a complex task, which should be implemented systematically.

The act of teaching is the deliberate and intentional initiation of learners into the world of human achievement, and learning as the result of communication from the teacher. In this sense, teaching is viewed as a reciprocal act which is impossible in the absence of learners. In conventional educational systems, this reciprocity is obviously possible because if students are not present in the classroom, then teaching cannot occur. However in distance education institutions, this facility for interface between student and teacher does not occur naturally since the teaching acts are separated in time and place from the learning acts. (The learning material used by the student could have been developed several years ago.) Moreover, the developers of the study materials and those who may be using it to teach are not necessarily, or even usually, the same persons. The study materials that are developed belong to the institutions and teaching becomes institutionalised. Therefore learning is the responsibility of learner although part time counsellors and coordinators are usually available as part of the Institutional system to support the learners in their learning process.

### 3.2.3 Characteristics of Distance Learning

The characteristics both of the learners and of the institutions, suggest that the nature of a learner's learning process is different in distance education.

The limited face-to-face contact with teachers and other learners makes learning the responsibility of the learners to a greater extent as compared to the case of conventional learners. The identification of difficulties and problems areas in the content have to be taken up by the learners and remedial help sought from tutors and/or counsellors.

To deal effectively with the required outcomes learners, must also develop appropriate strategies and/or study skills. While some learners may already possess the requisite skills, others would need help to acquire cognitive or affective skills (the latter is particularly true in the case of learners with a

previous history of educational failure) since fear, phobia, frustration, anger, or some other emotional reaction to the act of learning is often a resultant outcome). Recognising the fact that the onuses of learning lies with the distance learner, certain forms of learner support services play a vital role in distance education programmes.

### 3.2.4 Characteristics of Distance Learning Materials

Self-learning materials play a vital role in distance education. They are in the form of printed packages or in the form of teaching learning systems operating through a network of devices like audio tapes, video tapes, workbooks, assignments and computers. Whatever their form or mode of presentation, they have certain common features. First, they require the student to focus his/her attention on limited amount of material at one time. Secondly they require him/her to respond in some way to each segment of material. Thirdly, they give him/her immediate knowledge of results. These three features constitute the learning cycle. Every student is thus kept engaged in the learning cycle and goes through a series of learning experiences as he/she completes one cycle after another. Activities in which the learner is required to engage at each step are selected and ordered on the basis of empirical tests. The steps in self instructional packages are tested on samples of intended learners and are revised if necessary, so that they contribute to the students' learning. The strength of the self-learning materials thus resides not in the learning packages but in the rigorous process of their development, tryout and validation.

Most of the distance learning institutions send printed course materials in a self-learning format to their students. These materials present the subject matter in the form of interactive instructional steps. Each step contains some information followed by Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs). The student is required to read the information given in a step and then answer the SAQs, after which he/she is required to check the answer given in the answer key, and if his/her answer is right move on to the next step. If not, he/she is required to read the subject matter to clarify his/her thinking and then do the question again. In fact all the self-learning materials are supposed to teach all the intended capabilities to the target group of learners. But still some students are not able to fully learn all the subject matter. After responding to the SAQs and checking his/her responses, a student knows what points he/she has mastered and on what points he/she needs further clarification is needed. One important task of the distance learner is to identify all the difficult concepts which he/she has not been able to master from the self-learning materials. He/she are required to make a list of these difficult concepts and should raise them for clarifying these points from the tutors in tutorial sessions. It will thus be seen that despite attempts to simulate classroom situations and build the teacher into the self learning text, the materials remain finite in their character and they cannot go beyond a point. On the other hand learner needs are infinite in their variety and therefore self instructional materials become inadequate in catering to these needs. In order to deal with these variations, the role of additional support should not be underscored.

**Check Your Progress 2**

*Notes: a) Space is given below for your answer.  
b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit*

What are the main features of distance education which are primarily responsible for the need of learner support services in distance education?

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### **3.3 ENHANCING CURRICULAR TRANSACTIONS**

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There is growing acceptance of the perspective which states that the essential transaction in distance education is learning, not teaching. The learner support services and the designing and development of self instructional materials would be ineffective if this was not accepted. Learner support services should try to fulfill the needs which are unique to distance learners, and to promote the culture of learning against that of teaching.

Unlike the student in the formal set up, the distance learner's access to teacher(s) is limited. Consequently he/she has to depend more heavily on the course materials – print and other media. To compensate for the lack of interaction between the teacher and the student, the materials developed have a conversational style and help the learners feel that they are interacting with the writer and carrying on a dialogue with the text. The material helps in improving the reading, skills of the student.; This is important since the lack of effective reading and study skills is one of the major reasons for learners' dropping out of distance education courses. Students, as active consumers of information, must have strategies to process, assimilate, and accommodate information. They should be able to relate new experiences to what they already know. Although this has to be done by the learner, teachers can help facilitate reading, and studying activities.

#### **3.3.1 Reading Skills**

Reading can be defined loosely as the ability to make sense of written or printed words. The reader uses the symbols to activate information from his/her memory and subsequently uses this information to arrive at a plausible interpretation of the writer's message. He/she is called upon to be involved in drawing inferences, recalling relevant experiences, constructing images of scenes and appreciating of meaning. A broad definition of reading states that is a process through which a reader brings meaning to, and gets meaning from, print and other media.

This implies that readers bring their backgrounds, their experiences, as well as their emotions into play in order to derive meaning from a text. In the face-to-face situation (e.g. a conversation), the speaker can be stopped and questioned/asked to provide explanations whenever required. On the other hand, difficulties experienced while reading have to be resolved by interrogating the text. Since the writer is generally not available for consultation, the text is the only reference and reading can therefore be described as an active interrogation of or interaction with a text. It has to be realised that the message that the writer wants to convey does not merely lie embedded in the text, waiting to be passively absorbed by the reader. Instead the reader with his/her background, knowledge and experience breathes meaning into the text so as to divide it into comprehensive chunks to suit his purpose. Thus the reader is actively involved

in getting meaning out of a given text. Reading is thus an interactive process in which the reader establishes a meaningful communication with the writer/author. The role and importance of the requisite reading skills for distance learners must not be underestimated. Reading can also be viewed as a total integrative process that includes the following three domains of learning:

- 1) The perceptual
- 2) The cognitive
- 3) The affective.

#### 1) **The perceptual domain**

Perception can be defined as the meaning given to sensations or to the ability to organise stimuli on a particular area. A learner's background, his/her experiences and sensory perceptions, organise the stimuli confronted by the sense:-

Some of the factors which influence the process of decoding the written words and intersection with the text include:

- a) Motivation – often dependent on the attitudinal factor, this is the need to identify the unknown part or parts of a particular text board,
- b) Attention – the part/portion selected or attended to is more readily comprehended.
- c) Grouping of stimuli – recognisable syllables and other patterns for making optimal use of a limited attention span.
- d) Contrast – letter patterns that represent contrastive sound patterns are dealt with more readily,
- e) Feedback – a cyclic process which involves the application of the skills of word perception to the written word during silent reading.

#### 2) **The cognitive domain**

Reading involves the interaction of the reader with the text, with the aim of understanding the message of the writer. This implies that reading is an act of thinking and requires a reader to spend at least as much time thinking about what has been read, as the time spent in reading it. When a reader does not follow this pattern, he/she is unable to optimize the benefits from reading.

Readers are required to work at different levels of cognition to comprehend what they are reading. They have to select, transform, organise and remember information. If the brain is an active consumer of information which interprets information and draws inferences from it as well as ignores some information and selectively attend to others, we are assigning an important and active role to learners, who have to take on the responsibility of learning from the instructional transaction.

#### 3) **The affective domain**

The “affect” includes the influence of feelings, emotions, beliefs and attitudes. The perceptual process is influenced by affective factors – e.g. anger could distort perception and make us read “food” as “fool”. Interpretation and assigning of meaning are also influenced by our feelings and often even what we decide to read has affective influences.

The integrative nature of the reading process should serve to make the planners and designers of curriculum more sensitive to the development and transaction of material which gives due weightage to all the aspects of the reading process once developed.



### Check Your Progress 3

- Notes :*
- a) *Space is given below for your answer.*
  - b) *Check your answer with the one given at the end of the unit.*

“Reading is an integrative process” – Substantiate this statement (in 10 lines).

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### 3.3.2 Study Skills

Studying is considered the primary means by which learning – irrespective of the level of learning and the modes of teaching – takes place outside the classroom. This makes it imperative that all learning programmes pay adequate attention to developing study skills in their learners. The isolated and remote position (with regard to the institution and teacher) of the distant learner, in particular, calls for concrete compensatory measures to ensure optimal benefits for these learners.

Study skills can be described as the skills or strategies employed by a student to independently and efficiently come to grips with the study materials. Study involves the learner setting up goals and choosing methods, solving problems, performing experiments, going through tests, collecting information, and segregating facts from opinions or suggestions. If we focus our attention on developing adequate study strategies that would help distance learners deal with their programme of studies, we have to acknowledge the role played by the design of the distance-teaching materials towards this end. Some key features of the material are :

- 1) Appropriate questions
- 2) Non verbal aids – Diagrams, charts, tables etc.
- 3) Conjunctive features and glossaries.
- 4) Advance organisers
- 5) Sum up
- 6) Narrative style

### 3.3.3 Counselling and Tutoring

Improving the outcomes of curricular transactions in distance education does need to be planned intensively. The materials developed and the learner support to be provided play an important role in the successful implementation of educational programmes. The limited focus on teaching in distance education programmes, makes the role of tutoring and counselling very important inputs for the benefit of the learners in such a situation.

Educational counselling is the advice and encouragement that people need, in addition to subject specific support, to help them to be successful learners. It may be effected through educational planning and course choice, the development

of study skills, vocational guidance, steering through administrative systems or support in coping with the combination of part-time study, working and family life. Counselling may be the responsibility of course providers or tutors or may be provided by a specialist educational counsellor on assigned days in the local study centres.

The role of the tutor in distance education is much more than that of a conventional teacher. It includes face-to-face contact, setting assignments (through correspondence), providing detailed, comprehensive feedback, and helping the learners become oriented to distance education and to developing reading and study skills that they need in order to achieve self reliance and the ability to study independently. His/her core function is of course tutoring. The focus of tutorial interactions is to help the students to learn all the difficult concepts which they have not been able to learn from the printed study materials and other materials like audio tapes and video tapes. The main task of the tutor is to identify difficult concepts which the students have not understood and to clarify and interpret these concepts for them. For this purpose the tutor should have a complete knowledge of the course content he/she takes up for tutoring and complete grasp of the difficult concepts which are not generally understood by students. He/she should also have the skill to diagnose the weaknesses of the students and to develop a tutoring plan for completing the requisite portion in allotted number of tutorial sessions. In each session he/she should use his/her skill to interpret and clarify the content which has already been presented in the study materials but has not been understood by the students. In fact, he/she should have the skill to act as a study guide to help the students to take future courses of action; to consult the library and to use audio/video tapes etc. The tutor should also keep a record of the progress and activities of the students and monitor their studies. For this purpose he/she should have the skill to diagnose the weaknesses of the students and to provide remedial instruction. In addition he/she is required to advise the students to study their materials in such a way that they become well equipped to respond to different types of assignments like tutor marked assignments and computer marked assignments.

While tutorial interaction is subject-centered (centering around presentation, exposition, explanation, illustration, demonstration, and other pedagogical activities related to the course-content), counselling is learner-centered seeking to help learners identify their individual problems, the causes behind such problems and the ways means of overcoming or circumventing such problems so as to enhance the possibilities of effective learning.

The two activities of counselling and tutoring are essentially complementary, particularly in distance education. A good tutor has to be a good counsellor also since counselling is a part of the repertoire of activities of a good teacher. The role of the tutor is focused on academic interventions; while a counsellor has to deal with learners feelings and emotions. Cognitive and intellectual concerns are given due importance in most educational programmes, whereas the emotional and effective concerns are often neglected or are cursorily dealt with. In order to enhance the curricular transactions and the outcome the need to focus on both these aspects has to be recognised, in particular by distance education institutions.

#### Check Your Progress 4

- Notes :*
- Space is given below for your answer.*
  - Check your answer with the one given at the end of the unit.*

What is the role played by counselling and tutoring in improving curricular transactions in distance education programmes?

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### 3.4 INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS

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So far we have examined the problems faced by distance learners and identified some measures that provide support to the individual learners. Now let us move on to examining the institutional mechanisms which are in place to provide the help and support required by the learners. As mentioned in Unit 1 of this Block, a systems approach to instruction leads us to weigh the needs and objectives against the resources available. Similarly a cost-benefit analysis of the different centres will help in the identification of the requisite system.

Chander (1996) considers:

The main objective of learner support services is to motivate students towards continuous learning. These services shall provide such facilities as to enable the learners to feel important and equal to students of the conventional institutions. The other objectives are:

- i) to provide all the information that is sought by the student;
- ii) to encourage students to make full use of all facilities available in the University;
- iii) to stimulate students to assimilate what they learn;
- iv) to provide necessary counselling to motivate students; and
- v) to create a climate of friendliness among the students, the faculty and the administration.

A closer look at the structure and functioning of different institutional settings will serve to highlight the role played by each institution in improving the outcomes of learning.

#### 3.4.1 Study Centres

In distance education or open-learning institutions learner support services are established with the help of local centres. One kind of local centre is known as a study centre. A study centre is part of an overall system of support for learners. This system includes basic support contained alongside the subject matter within the self instructional materials. A study centre is a place which is regularly open for the attendance of learners, who may come for seminars, private study or individual meetings with a tutor or counsellor or to meet other students.

When a distance education institution sets up a network of study centres it has to decide the criteria it would follow for locating them. The proportion of learners who would attend is generally a major consideration. Another consideration

is the possible frequency of such meetings. To serve the requirements of the learners, a study centre needs some equipment and facilities such as:

- Books (course texts, reference books, background reading books).
- Laboratory equipment and supplies for science subjects and equipment and supplies for any other subjects with a practical component.
- Audio-visual or computing equipment (T.V. sets, video players, radio sets, audio cassette players, language lab. equipment, slide projectors, microcomputers etc).
- Information leaflets (on the distance teaching institution and its facilities, on career possibilities for grade etc).
- Basic office equipment – word processors.
- Classroom equipment – overhead projector, photocopier, check board etc.
- Stationary and office supplies.
- Cupboards and filing cabinets.

Study centres are generally equipped with only of few a these items. The requisite equipment, depending on the function of the study centre, can be placed in individual centers.

The staffing pattern at the study centre mainly comprises part time staff and includes the position of a coordinator who has administrative and supervisory responsibilities.

The main functions of most study centres include tutorial sessions, group and individual counselling, prouision of access to institutional resources (such as library, media), contact with other learners, and some administrative activities to complement or supplement the task of the central institution or the regional centre. These centres generally serve to provide the critical interface between the distance learner and the institution.

**Check Your Progress 5**

- Notes:* a) Space is given below for your answer.  
b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of the unit.

What is the role of a study centre in improving the outcomes of curricular transactions?

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### 3.4.2 Regional Centres

For the organization of operations in distance education, the role of regional centres is intermediate one, talking between that of the central institution and that of the local study centres. The regional centres are generally established for greater administrative efficiency and are meant to serve as a channel of communication between the central institution and the local study centres. They also serve as sub-offices of the central institution and act as resource centres in the respective regions.

The principal functions of the regional centre can be broadly classified under three heads:

- a) Academic Activities
- b) Administrative Activities
- c) Promotional Activities

#### a) **Academic Activities**

The academic activities of the regional centre encompass functions pertaining to admissions, evaluation, student records, selection and orientation of academic counsellors, launching of new programmes, research and development of academic programmes as per identified areas of special interest/concern to the region, organisation of academic seminars and workshops, monitoring of counselling and assignments, conduct of intensive contact programmes and maintenance of library services.

Distance educators all over the world are convinced of the view that regional centres should become academic centres rather than administrative units carrying out only semi-academic and coordinator functions. The academics in these centres are in a good position to provide feedback information to course teams on:

- i) the areas of difficulty faced by learners,
- ii) the points which need further explication/elaboration and
- iii) the problem areas.

Such feedback is an essential aspect of the process of helping course teams to produce courses which are better designed to deal with student requirements.

The regional centres have an important role in counselling. They can act as reference points (from study centres/sub study centres) for serious problems, sometimes resolving the problems themselves, sometimes sending them to the central institution. Organisation of summer/residential schools, field work, and laboratory work for the benefit of the students who are geographically widely dispersed or whose numbers are low.

#### b) **Administrative Activities**

The administrative activities of the regional centre include organising the operations of the study centres and the teaching that is conducted in them at the local level. The appointment of staff at the regional and study centres, maintenance of service records, purchase and maintenance of furniture and equipment, financial management of the regional centre, library records and the preparation of budgetary estimates etc.

#### c) **Promotional Activities**

Promotional activities at the regional centres include ensuring adequate publicity of the system, development of suitable publicity material, establishing contacts

and links with various institutions and voluntary organisations with the region, participation in book-fairs, radio, television and press interviews, organisation or public seminars, symposia etc, and in the open-learning/distance education system, these deficiencies include visits by regional director and assestart regional director to institutions and organisations and liaison with state government and voluntary agencies.

### 3.4.3 Other Centres

#### Sub-study Centers

Sub-study centres are established within the area covered by a regular study centre with a view to providing academic support to the learners who may not for various reasons, conveniently avail them selves of such facilities at the regular study centres. For administrative purposes, such centres remain attached to the regular study centre and function as a part of it.

A sub study centre can be established when there is:

- a) a concentration of learners in a particular area at a considerable distance from the regular study centre,
- b) an institute/organisation in the area willing to provide rooms for counselling and, if possible, audio-visual equipment for the use of the learners,
- c) qualified staff available in the area.

Some of the main functions such centres can take on include:

- Organising counselling sessions
- Holding assignments
- Conducting examinations.
- Disseminating information about the institution and its programmes to people in the area.

#### Work Centres

Work centres are established for conducting programmes with specific practical components which may require professional expertise. These work centres function under the administrative control of the study centre to which it is attached. Some of the functions of a work centre include:

- Conduct of practical/field sessions and examinations
- Organisation of counselling and audio-video sessions
- Assignment handling
- Feedback/quality control
- Infarcation to students
- Providing access to workshops/apparatus/computers/site equipment/ drawing board/technical library.

The responsibility of running a programme-specific work centre usually rests with an academic counsellor who is generally appointed on the recommendation of the Head of the host institution.

The establishment of work centres or sub-study centres allows for more personal contact programmes which generally serves to improve curricular transactions.

### Check Your Progress 6

- Notes:* a) Write your answer in the space given below.  
b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of the unit.

What are the different institutional mechanisms/systems which provide support to learners in a distance education

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## 3.5 LET US SUM UP

We began this unit with a definition of learner support services and examined the need for these services in a distance education programme. We also briefly examined the main characteristics of i) the distance learners, ii) the distance education institution, iii) the learning process in distance education and iv) the distance learning material, all of which further help in clarifying the need for learner support services. Having recognised the need for these services, we moved on to discussing the role of developing reading and study skills and tutoring and counselling in improving the curricular transactions.

Finally we identified the institutional mechanisms which have been established to provide support to learners. The different functions of regional centres, study centres, sub-study centres and work centres were presented.

## 3.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

### Check Your Progress 1

Conventional System	Distance education system
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Learning is a full time and major activity.</li> <li>● The learner remains in one role and continues to retain membership of a learning institution.</li> <li>● The learner belongs to an institution.</li> <li>● The learner is usually young.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Learning is a part time secondary activity</li> <li>● The learner generally returns to a role he/she had given up sometime ago.</li> <li>● The learner is a member of many institutions, most of which (e.g. work, family) take precedence over the institution which provides or offers the courses.</li> <li>● The learner is usually an adult.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● The learner is in easy contact with fellow learners.</li><li>● The learner has easy access to institutional resources.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Contact with fellow learners may not be easy</li><li>● The learners contact with the institution is infrequent and often takes place across a distance.</li></ul>
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### Check Your Progress 2

The main features of distance education programmes which necessitate the development of learner support services include:

- 1) Characteristics of distance learners – Limited time commitment, previous educational experiences which have long-tasting emotional influences, diverse backgrounds which influence allegiance to the current institution, isolation from other students and from the institution, limited access to institutional resources.
- 2) Characteristics of distance education institutions – Their remoteness, complexity, functional diversity, separation of both time and space functioning with regard to teaching acts and learning ones, etc.
- 3) Characteristics of distance learning-focus on self-study, strategies and skills developments.
- 4) Characteristics of distance learning material-self-instructional nature of materials, rigorous process of development, trialling and evaluation.

### Check Your Progress 3

When we read we integrate the three domains perceptual, cognitive and effective. In other words, we can say that when we read we select, transform, organise, remember and react to the information available in the reading material, in accordance with our attitudes and needs. Further, when we read our experiences and sensory receptors organise our responses. Eye movements, for example, influence and control what we perceive from the text. As all the three domains are activated during the process of reading, it is considered an integrative process.

### Check Your Progress 4

The role of tutoring and counselling is of vital importance in distance education programmes. The tutor has to focus on academic interventions while a counsellor has to deal with the emotional ramifications of a learner's problems. While tutorial interaction is subject-centered, counselling is essentially learner-centered, seeking to help learners identify their individual problems, the causes behind those problems and the means and ways of overcoming or circumventing such problems so as to enhance the possibilities of effective learning.

### Check Your Progress 5

A study centre is a part of an overall system of support for learners. It is a place which is regularly open for the benefit of learners. The main role of these centres is to organise tutorial and counselling sessions with groups and individual learners, provide access to institutional resources such as libraries, audio-video play facilities (if possible) and contact with other learners, all of which serve to enhance the outcomes of curricular transactions.

### Check Your Progress 6

The institutional mechanisms which have been established to provide support to learners in distance education programme include:



- 1) The central institution – which prepares and provides all the instructional material, organises summer schools and residential courses, organises and conducts examinations, appoints and monitors academic counsellor and tutors, handles special cases and individual requests for advice and providing variety of information and study advice.
- 2) The regional centre – teleconference sessions, organises seminars at the regional level, supports the local study centre and the counsellors and advisors at it etc.
- 3) The local study centre – provides group and/or individual sessions of tutoring and counselling, arranges regular contact between learner and tutor, has a reference centre for problems, use of library, media etc.
- 4) Other centres such as sub-study centres and work centres – for particularly looking after the practical component of courses and providing access to certain remote clusters of learners.

