
UNIT 2 CURRICULAR ISSUES

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2.0 INTRODUCTION

In unit 1, we have presented the scene during the 1970s as far as the question of staff development for distance education is concerned, the overall picture that emerged was that of amorphous beginnings - different people and institutions took differing stands. Consequent upon the differing practices with differing approaches and foci were established. Some approaches considered only a part of the totality called distance education and others viewed it in altogether a different light. This divergence in approach and treatment of the issue is natural in the beginning which, however, got gradually changed in the 1980s.

As we come closer to the end of the 1970s and step into the 1980s, we observe efforts being made to bring an acceptable convergence in the approaches and thinking pertaining to staff development for distance education. International bodies like the UNESCO got interested in this educational concern, and appreciable degree of deliberate effort for consensus and the consequent convergence in thoughts and deeds is indicative of the fact that the period of amorphous beginning was over and that we had already entered the stage of consolidation and systematic organisation. The first five years of the 1980s may, therefore, be called the period of analysis and synthesis, i.e. what was on the scene was analysed objectively and then the findings synthesised to present a well organised view of the entire issue - staff development for distance education. We shall now describe and discuss this process of analysis and synthesis in order to show what the points of convergence are and what directions this process has given for further development.

We must begin with the fundamental curricular questions related to the need for the training, its aims, the personnel to be trained and the people who will train them, the resources, the content of the programme and the tasks of the personnel working at the distance education institutions, the mode of training, etc. In short, we shall discuss all the important aspects of the methodology of the training programme. Let us take these questions in that very order for discussion.

2.1 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we intend to acquaint you with the needs for professional training of distance teachers, and suggest answers to the basic curricular questions pertaining to teacher training in the area of distance education. In other words, we shall try to answer the questions: Why training is necessary in distance education? Who are to be trained? Who will train them? What should be the content of such training? What are the various criteria for using any training programme to train them?

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

- identify the various reasons for professional training for distance teachers;
- classify the various categories of trainees, and the trainers (distance educator/ resource persons) along with their functions; and
- identify the attributes of a distance teacher/ trainer/ educator, the contents of such a training, and the various activities meant to justify a training type/programme to impact such training.

2.2 WHY TRAIN DISTANCE TEACHERS?

We know that in the context of distance education the learner is separated from the teacher, multi-media strategies are followed, preparation and presentation of materials is systematic, student-support services are provided to make the system more effective, the design of the educational structure as a whole is much more advanced than the earlier correspondence or broadcasting education, and that the system is a deliberate effort to democratize education. In spite of these common characteristics, distance education systems differ widely in their organisation, practices and objectives, as their target clientele, their scales of operation and their structural complexities differ in essentials. However, these systems are now a major factor in educational development in many countries all over the world.

As has already been shown, though there is enthusiasm about these systems, there are reservations too, and to make the systems successful we need to be cautious. In this context the corner stone for the edifice of caution is 'trained personnel'. The implications of what we have said above are that distance education:

- i) has recognisable features,
- ii) has diverse structures and practices,
- iii) is a major factor in educational development, and
- iv) needs to be safeguarded as a system

2.2.1 Professional Training Needs

The above implications point to the need for 'training' which informs those concerned about what the recognisable features are, builds up the base for innovation and creativity among the practitioners, promotes the required degree of professionalism to answer the genuine reservations of some critics on the one hand and to create a long-term impact on the systems of education on the other. A body of distance educators is badly required to

start new distance education institutions, to expand the range and number of student populations, to see what the community needs for its social and economic purposes, to revitalise the older institutions, to identify, describe, and undertake new professional role within the system, to give new directions to the existing practices and establish the system permanently. Most people who take up key as well as subordinate positions in the distance education institutions come from other areas of education. They face two problems in new positions:

- i) they must adapt themselves to the new situation immediately; and
- ii) they must contribute to the culture and vitality of distance education in positive terms for a long-term impact on the society in general and on education in particular.

The first of these problems may be overcome with the help of 'workshops' etc., but the second problem calls for a more potent solution - nothing less than professional training of a very high standard.

2.2.2 Distance Education as a Career

At this stage we need to comment on a statement made in 1987 in a UNESCO publication. The statement considers pre-service training in distance education 'only as a future prospect and scarcely yet a present reality' and suggests that perhaps some time in the future when distance learning systems and structures are an inevitable part of every general education system, distance teacher education may become an option in ordinary teacher education but that is not yet the case in the Asia-Pacific region. We would like to ignore this view, and emphasise that the statement is no more valid today. However, we shall do so by reviewing the arguments which are basic to the statement.

In the first place, it is suggested that for some people involvement with distance education is a temporary phase in their career. Most people enter the system mid-career and those who continue move from one work role to other within the system, but there are hardly any who spend their entire working/ professional lives in the same system.

The suggestion is valid, though only superficially. Distance education institution cannot claim to be older than 40 years to date. Therefore, it is premature to suggest that the personnel who enter the system have not spent or are not going to spend their professional lives in the system. If what is indicated by the success of the courses given at Jordanhill College, the University of Surrey, etc., (see Unit 1) is taken into consideration, a more powerful and valid suggestion will be that people are looking for pre-service training in distance education, which of course is available presently in a few rare cases. Secondly, a serious question can be raised: "Has a career of distance educator yet emerged?" And the earlier answer was that it has not. It is feared that distance education is an 'emergency system' which may attract talented and imaginative academics and non-academics as it provides outlets for their talents but may fail to retain them for long. Success in such distance education experiences may invite them back to the professions they originally came from and look for, explore and implement innovations in those professions. Such possibilities are open in fields like education, broadcasting, educational television, publishing and printing, educational communication, etc. So the fear is not entirely unfounded.

Secondly, it should be noted that most social reforms, educational and others, do appear on the scene as 'emergency systems', but, if found useful, get established as parts of the overall social system. It should not be difficult to see that distance education systems, though introduced as 'emergency systems', have come to stay. Of course, the period of transition, in which the concerned population of academics and non-academics shuttle between their original professional interests and those offered by the systems of distance education, is still on or more correctly, has just begun. The transition will go on for a long time, but the fact that it has begun is evidence enough to emphasize that distance education is emerging as a career, it is time we saw that is made one.

Thirdly, if distance education is to be accepted as a 'career', it needs to display a 'career profile' i.e. the various possible, or existing stages of professional growth which follow one another successively, providing the careerist ample opportunities for developing the career-system (distance education) on the one hand, and on the other his/her own personal career within the domain of distance education. What we can say here is that any professional training in distance education worth its name should highlight those progressive stages towards greater professionalism which should enable it to be seen both as a career and a discipline. Needless to say that providing full-fledged professional training in distance education is a positive and necessary step in this direction.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Space is given below for your answer.

ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

Identify at least three important needs for which a special training Programme for distance teachers is necessary.

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2.3 WHO WILL TRAIN AND WHOM?

Many people are involved in the whole process of distance education. So far as the activities in a professional training programme for distance teachers are concerned, two major types of people viz., those who are to be trained and those who will train them, are engaged in the programme. The first two subsections of this section are devoted on the two categories of trainees – the professionals and the non-professionals and the next two sub-sections will talk about those who will train the distance teachers.

2.3.1 The Professional Trainees

Among the professionals, we may identify a few clearly definable categories of personnel, each category requiring a specific kind of training relevant to its needs and job requirements. These categories are:

- i) planners and administrators working at various levels of the system;
- ii) surveyors, course planners, curriculum developers, course writers, editors, reviewers, course coordinators, tutor counselors, evaluators, and graphic artists;
- iii) audio producers, script writers, evaluators, special effects personnel;
- iv) video producers, script writers, designers, special effects personnel, evaluators;
- v) educational technologists, technical staff of various types, specialists in integrating the media-inputs; and
- vi) facilitators of various services - libraries, laboratory staff, etc.

2.3.2 The Non-professional Trainees

Among the non-professionals, we list a host of people who may seemingly have nothing to do with distance education, but in reality may play a vital role in the success or failure of the system. We may categorise such people as follows:

- i) Politicians, policy/decision-makers who motivate the creation of distance education institutions, popularise the political statements in favour of such establishments and mobilise resources for them.
- ii) The target learner populations of several types - school children, university students, professionals, housewives, drop-outs from the formal system of education, etc. These are the people whom the institutions serve directly, and these people need to know how they may be served maximally.
- iii) Liaison agents of several types - social reformers, local community leaders helpers and at places, religious agents, parents, other professionals who can be used in local community situations etc. The suggestion here is that for example, uninformed parents can do a lot of harm to their distance learning children, as it is the parents, the seniors who are expected to create a learning environment (proper place, appropriate time, etc.) for their children for which they need to be educated, if they are not.

Table 2.1: Task and Training Needs for the Trainees for Distance Education

Role	Tasks	Training Needs
Policy maker	Makes decision about establishing the distance education system; persuades policy making colleagues aware about its advantage; monitors the progress of the system; controls the financial allocation, etc.	'Sensitisation' to advantages of distance education. Knowledge of outline of systems and structures; knowledge of cost benefit account of distance education.
Learners	Obtain study resources, place, equipment, time, fees. Manage learning tasks. Choose courses. Contribute to peer activities, whenever possible.	Study skills, knowledge of local resources (persons material information sources). Knowledge of curriculum information about other distance learners.

Role	Tasks	Training Needs
Parents and family	Provide physically requirements (place of study and for keeping study material safe) writing material, light, heat, radio, TV, Computer. Supervise learners schedule of study, assignment etc. Adopt encouraging attitude. Provide information/ideas from own education, if possible and from other sources. Monitor cultural/ethical /social appropriateness of material. Provide co-curricular needs. Contact organization, resource persons on learners behalf.	Awareness of distance education. Knowledge of relevant local resources and support system. Knowledge of outline curriculum requirement.
Other Community resource persons (teacher at other level's health worker) etc.	Provide alternative study location. Provide study resources information and material. Provide experience of practical situations. Adopt encouraging attitude. Contact logistic communication support systems.	Sensitivity/awareness of distance education. Awareness of relevant local resources. Knowledge of curriculum material, knowledge of delivery systems.
Local community leaders	Encouraging distance education as a part of education system. Marshal local resources/ personnel to assist learners. Check and improve logistic/community systems. Provide study resources information and material and experiments/ practical situations.	

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Space is given below for your answer.

ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

List at least three categories of professional trainees and two categories of non-professional trainees for whom we need to have distance teacher training/ education programmes.

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2.3.3 Staff Development: Sources

Having identified the groups that need training of one or the other kind, we now turn to the question “who will train them?”

At the outset, we should admit that not many pre-service training programmes in distance education are available today, as such we should not look for many qualified resource persons, i.e., distance teacher trainers in the traditional sense and they are not easily available, In other words, like other teacher trainers, we do not have many full time trainers in the field of distance education. This fact needs to be noted carefully. Obviously, today it is the ‘distance educators’ themselves who train others for distance

education, and not the 'trainers' in the conventional sense of the expression. These 'distance educators' have learnt their new skills and acquired the relevant knowledge about distance education mostly on the 'job'. It is also possible that many of them are fresh from their job experiences and in that sense they are themselves in the process of learning. However, this fact need not prejudice us against them, for in most cases training in the various areas of distance education pertains to the early stages of its development, and the experts fresh from their job experiences have proved successful in such situations. There is another factor too which helps this situation - mostly those who join distance education institutions are trained and/or experienced teachers, administrators, technicians, and broadcasters. In many cases, they have some relevant information or even operational skills. However vague or disorganised these skills, etc., might be, they should help in the process of interaction between the trainer/distance educator and the trainee. Thus, the present responsibilities in the field of staff development for distance education are three fold:-

- i) to maintain the existing arrangements to meet the 'emergency type' needs,
- ii) to build a system that will produce full time trainers, and
- iii) to achieve national or local self-sufficiency or training resources at the fastest possible rate.

As far as the resource personnel are concerned, we may depend on two sources: national or local and foreign, either from resource countries or from international agencies such as UNESCO. Depending on whether local or national resources are advisable because the environmental factors pertaining to economic, social, industrial and educational development are shared and easily understood, common difficulties become tractable, and there is no scope for underhand exploitation. If such local or national resources are not available, one has to depend on what may come from abroad. There too, it is better to depend on neighbor countries, or the courtiers that belong to proximate region for similar reasons of shared environmental problems and understanding. Personnel from abroad can be of great help, but only in a limited way. Their roles at best can be advisory in nature. They help in setting up systems or subsystems but the task of building the actual infrastructure will always be that of the local personnel. Besides, the personnel from abroad cannot be of any real help at the school and community level education or training needs. The suggestion that is being made is that such personnel can be used as consultants who can present details about their systems, structures and the contexts wherein they were built and suggest ways and means by which the hosts can adopt and adapt to those systems and structures within the latter's contexts.

2.3.4 Distance Teacher Trainer Attributes

Another point to be considered is what the attributes of the trainers should be. By implication, those very skills should be expected from a finished product - the trained distance educator. A distance teacher-trainer should be

- i) **Skilled:** The teaching materials (print, audio, video etc.) in distance education are more visible to greater numbers of people of various walks and levels of life. They have to be of a very high standard for the credibility of the system and they have to be socially and pedagogically relevant for their social and pedagogic utility. Such materials can be produced if the personnel employed to produce them are **skilled people**. A very high standard of **academic and technical skill** is, therefore, expected of the trainers.

- ii) Cooperative:** There are hardly any tasks and roles in the systems of distance education which can be carried out in isolation from other tasks and roles. Most of these tasks and roles, however dissimilar they may be and seem to be, are inter-linked and inter-related for purposes of making the finished product a success. Cooperation, obviously, is the corner stone of this success, and cooperation is not possible unless those involved in the tasks are cooperative, or have learnt to be so. Trainers, therefore, have themselves to be cooperative, for, then alone can they promote this attribute among the prospective trainers (i.e. trainee trainers).
- iii) Flexible:** Rigidity of views and attitudes is a major hurdle in the way of making distance education acceptable and successful. Flexibility, on the other hand, not only helps the trainees to adapt themselves to the new situations and roles, but also in collaborating with others in effecting frequent readjustments of various kinds. It is only a flexible distance educator, who can take on such diverse roles as those of academics, Technicians, producers and administrators. The trainers should be able to display this attribute in good measure to show what its utility is.
- iv) Patience:** Some people believe that it is only at the early stages of the development of distance education institutions that the workers have to face anxieties, frustrations, delays and failures. The fact, however, is that so long as the institution keeps on being innovative in terms of offering new courses, extending its reach to diverse sections of the society, reducing the costs of its products, and becoming increasingly responsive to social needs, the distance educators will continue to face frustrations, anxieties, etc. Thus, instead of marking time for such difficulties to come to an end, they should develop a work- culture which accepts these difficulties as routine episodes, and thus build confidence and optimism in and around their work. Basic to this attitude is the attribute of patience which the trainers will do good to display in their own approach to work.
- v) Innovative:** Distance education is an innovation by itself and it survives on its ability to build one innovation on the other. These innovations range from course design to course offering, from cost efficiency to extended student services, etc. The personnel who can maintain this innovative character of distance education need to be innovative necessarily and so the trainers. Innovation has to be the dominant factor in the 'personal profile' of a distance educator, and through this attribute alone can they build a distinctive 'career profile' which will help ascertain the claim that distance education is an autonomous discipline by itself.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: i) Space is given below for your answers.

ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

- i) Write down the reasons for which we have to depend on the national or local resource personnel to develop staff for distance teaching.

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ii) List all the five skills/attributes to be developed in a distance teacher through professional training.

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iii) Justify the development of such a skill (any one of the five skills) in the distance teacher.

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2.4 WHAT IS THE ‘CONTENT’ OF THIS TRAINING?

Like most complex systems, the system of distance education consists of networks and chains of diverse tasks. Obviously, first and foremost, training in this field should provide expertise and practice to the personnel to carry out their own specific tasks and duties. Secondly, the personnel should learn to function effectively along and within their role-chains and task-networks. So, the training should provide them with the understanding of and an appreciation for how their own work and tasks are related with those of others, and what the means and ways of making the cooperative effort successful are. Thirdly, this training should provide for the building blocks of ‘commitment’ on the part of trainees - they should get committed to distance education in their thoughts, words and deeds. These are the underlying principles the content of training should be based on. Put differently, what we have suggested is that training should provide adequate and appropriate content in all the three domains (namely, cognitive, psychomotor and affective) to build effective human resources for establishing, developing, maintaining and expanding the systems of distance education. Let us look into the sources to identify these training needs.

Identifying training needs: sources

The various means and ways of identifying training needs are:

- generalisation from the available literature on distance education in general, and on the roles of differing personnel categories in particular;
- analysis of the tasks, the problems therein, anticipated tasks and the problems expected therein;
- critical incident analysis i.e., an analysis of individual’s behaviour in various situations, its consequences in terms of the productivity of the tasks concerned; such exercises identify problems which suggest training needs;

- case studies of successful distance educators help in identifying those characteristics which contribute to their success; these characteristics may then be pointed to, and the trainees encouraged to develop them through training;
- pooling the views and opinions of experienced people (as to what they think and/or believe the training needs are) helps in preparing an inventory or possible needs, where from, after further analysis; dependable training needs can be identified.

Using these means, exercises have already been done and various training needs identified and listed. We shall present specimens of such lists in Unit 3 of this block.

2.5 HOW TO IMPART THE TRAINING?

In this fast changing world 'training once-in-a-life-time' is an obsolete concept. Now training is a life-time affair for serious professionalism. Besides, the variety of personnel to be trained is vast and they are at different stages of their careers, some in permanent positions in well established institutions, some in temporary positions, some working on projects, some on long-term assignments - and all of them at differing levels of concern.

The anticipated progressive career-profile suggests that those in permanent positions need revitalisation of their skills and practices so that they do not perpetuate such practices as have outlived their utility; those in temporary positions will move to permanent positions; those working on projects will go to long-term assignments; and those working on long-term assignments will step into permanent positions. Corresponding to this progressive upward mobility in the career prospects of a trainee, it is likely that the systems and sub-systems within a known system of distance education undergo changes: communication technology is changing rapidly, educational concepts and learning theories are breaking new grounds, etc. An effective training programme will have to take care of all the changes and the corresponding activities which have been exemplified above.

Selection of the training programme/type

Having, thus, very, briefly touched upon the scope of training, we need to list a few basic principles and specific activities that may be used to differentiate the various training types (see Unit 3 section 3.3.) and the corresponding activities according to the needs of the specific grounds of the personnel.

- i) **Scaling the scope of project:** First and foremost, the trainers or the training institution must judge the scope of the project for which training is to be arranged. The training programme should suit that scope adequately and appropriately. For a distance education project with a single specific objective, a training programme of two days may be enough to enable the personnel involved perform their tasks satisfactorily. An international agency may conduct a workshop of eight to ten days with the object of achieving multiplier effect (personnel trained at a workshop would train others and this process continues).
- ii) **Short and long term advantages of the programme :** The second consideration is the short-term and long-term advantages of a training

programme. It may be that the scale and scope of a training programme impose limited objectives and activities on it. Care should, however, be taken that a programme of limited scope builds reasonable motivation for further work beyond what the programme provides, and conversely a programme of vast scope should lay reasonable emphasis on immediate needs and applications.

- iii) *Catering both institutional and individual needs* : Both the needs of the individual participants and those of the institute should be catered to. Though a training programme always aims at achieving an objective for an institution to reinforce an existing distance education system or modify and improve such system, the building blocks of that reinforcement and/or change are the individuals who come forward for the training. For the programme to be successful, it should be satisfying for the individuals too, though the overall objective continues to be the needs of the institute and/or the country.
- iv) *Linking past activities events with future* : As stated above, training should not be 'once-in-a-life-time affair'. It should build links with the, training events that have gone before it, and create scope for other training events that may be linked to it in the future. To make this linking a possibility, each training programme must have built evaluation mechanisms which provide for follow-up changes, modifications and extensions. The ultimate result of such an approach is that the rewards of training turn to be cumulative.
- v) *Providing models of acceptable and desirable behaviour* : To cover the affective domain, training should modify the behaviour of the trainees by providing models of distance educators. This objective can be achieved by practising what is preached about its characteristic features: it should be systematic, well planned, efficiently managed, well proportioned with regard to its components and the trainer should conduct himself/herself admirably to set living examples for the trainees.

Check Your Progress 4

Note: i) Space is given below for your answers.

ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

i) How can training for distance educators be made continuous and lifelong?

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ii) How does the system of distance education adjust with the corresponding upward mobility of the trainee (of DE) within the framework of a life-long training programme?

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2.6 LET US SUM UP

We have discussed in some detail the thinking that took shape during the first half of the 1980s. It is obvious that this thinking is far ahead of what it was in the 1970s. This advance in thinking is indicated in the following facts:

- i) Unlike the earliest thinking of the OUUK, the main function of the personnel engaged in distance education is not just the production of instructional materials. It is realised and accepted that distance education systems consist of network of various sub-systems, each of which needs specially trained personnel.
- ii) Distance education is seen as an autonomous activity distinct from education (see Elton's views discussed in section 1.5 in Unit 1) and educational technology (see Jordanhill College Courses, section 1.3 in Unit 1)
- iii) Depending on the developmental stages of a particular distance education institution and the personnel, different types of training should be arranged to meet their needs, and the content, methodology, etc., of such training can be (in fact has been) specified in explicit terms (see Unit 3)

Besides, there is yet another point which this thinking has emphasised, namely, that pre-service training for distance education is only 'a future prospect and scarcely yet a present reality'. We have already expressed our reservation regarding this view though briefly. Unit 3 will take up this issue more elaborately to show that pre-service training for distance education is already a reality and that all the prerequisites that necessitate such training have already come into being.

2.7 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS : POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

A special training programme for distance teachers is necessary because they have to :

- i) plan and start new institutions of distance education and revitalise the older institutions
- ii) provide education and training to a large number of student populations and
- iii) develop courses suitable to the needs of the community and in relation to the socio-economic needs of the country.

Check Your Progress 2

The three categories of professional trainees are

- i) planners and administrators of distance education,
- ii) those engaged in curriculum development and teaching, and
- iii) educational technologists

The two categories of non-professional trainees.

- a) politicians and policy makers, and
- b) liaison agents.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) We have to collaborate with the national/local resource persons to share common difficulties in the system, to understand the various environmental factors involved in socio-economic and educational developments of the country, and to be conscious of any underhand exploitation in order to avoid them.
- ii) Attributes of a distance teacher: a) skills, b) cooperations c) flexibility, d) patience, and e) innovation
- iii) For example, a distance teacher must be innovative because he/she not only has to deal with various innovations within the systems, but also himself/herself develop new courses, new ways of offering the courses, new ways of tutoring and counselling, and to minimize cost on one hand, and increase System-efficiency on the other. Being innovative he/she can build up his/her personal profile and 'Career-profile' to add to the emergence of distance education as an independent discipline.

Check Your Progress 4

- i) In distance education training programmes, the past training events have close relationships with the present ones. The present training events scope for future training programmes. To maintain this continuity, evaluation mechanisms to be built in each programme and the distance educator has to know all the new developments in this area. Thus training in distance education becomes a life-long affair.
- ii) A distance educator may start with a temporary position, move on to a long-term one and then get absorbed in a permanent position.