14.3.1 Challenges faced by the Learners

The following are the challenges faced by the learners of ODE.

- Perhaps the most important problem faced by the learners of ODE is the feeling of isolation and marginalisation. As 'face-to-face' contact is not considered a part of ODE, most learners often feel the absence of the 'real' person to talk to, and communicate his/her understanding and confusions. This is one of the major problems faced by the ODE system in general, although the various processes of guidance and counselling have undergone different positive changes in the recent years. Besides the feeling isolation, the challenges of bridging the 'gap' between the teacher and the learners within a new and technologically advanced learning environment have invited serious attention and discussions. Hence, issues like tutorials, contact and counselling sessions, or guidance of any sort have to be re-considered as part of the 'real' interaction between the teachers and learners in relation to the changing educational processes, which offer both opportunities and problems.

- There is no denying the fact that without the Learners Support Services (LSS), ODL cannot function. These services can very well address the academic and personal problems of the learners with the objectives of solving their problems and providing them regular feedback on their performance. As the obscene of regular and direct contact with the learners as they are placed at a distance, remains a common characteristic feature of the ODE in general, a strong Learners Support System needs to be ensured. Although Support Services are numerous, in matters relating to Counselling and Feedback, Up-to-date study Material, Media Support Services etc., the learners are facing different types of problems because of the 'distance'. These problems have added more to the isolation in

turn following several institutions conducting the teaching learning transactions in the Open and Distance mode. Moreover, in the most recent years, we have also seen the emergence of new mechanisms and tools to support open and distance learning following which many changes have occurred in the field of ODE. For example, the previous practice of distributing printed learning materials by post to the distance learners has become obsolete following the successful integration of ODE to new media, information and communication technologies. However, one should not forget about the fact that three parties are always involved in ODE, which are namely—distance learners or students, the teachers or faculty members, and the institutions or the universities offering distance learning. Although, ODE has experienced a revolutionary development in the 21st century in the entire globe, all the three parties mentioned have been facing lot of barriers and challenges hindering the effectiveness of ODE which has otherwise the potential for an explosive growth and acceptance. An attempt has been made in this unit to discuss the barriers and challenges faced by ODE in general especially in the context of a country like India.

14.3 CHALLENGES IN OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION

Open and Distance Education (ODE) has been an increasingly important aspect of higher education in today's world. It has succeeded in meeting the needs of an expanding range of learners who find education necessary for certain arenas of their life. Although ODE provides a convenient, flexible, and manageable alternative for the deprived learners in our society, it has never been free from barriers and challenges. Hence, every ODE institute must try to first understand and identify these challenges, and then devise solvable measures to these problems. For example, one of the most common problems in ODE is the 'absence' of the teacher, an issue having a deep pedagogic significance. However, in the following subsections, we shall try to discuss in some length, some of the most common barriers and challenges faced by ODE in general.

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