UNIT 2: LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES

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2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the basic concept of learner support services (LSS)
- derive the meaning and scope of LSS
- list the different mediums of LSS and evaluate their role
- state the role of study centres
- discuss the role of counselling and how the counsellors guide the distant learners
- discuss the changing circumstances of the 21st century learners and the changing scenario of LSS.

2.2 INTRODUCTION

We all know that the teaching-learning methodology in the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system is expected to be different from the conventional class room system. As a result, the learners in the ODL system need to be provided with various kinds of resources like: Self Learning Materials (SLMs), library services for consultation and additional resources, counselling sessions for guidance and clearing doubts and confusions of the learners, SMS services for updating them with the important recent/ upcoming activities or events with the help of postage services or email or advanced electronic tools like blogs, social networking, discussion forum etc., interaction with other members/co-learners, audio-visual aids to supplement the learning materials and many more such services. These services are termed as learner support services (LSS). It can be well said that well designed Self Learning Materials (SLMs) and Learner Support Services (LSS) are the cornerstones of a Distance and Open Learning System.

Again, it may be noted that in the last two decades of this century, due to rapid advancements in information technologies, the learners' learning circumstances as well as the learners' characteristics also have significantly changed. Thus, we shall also discuss the changing characteristics of the 21st century learners in this Units. Finally, some of the recent changes in LSS have been discussed.

2.3 LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES: BASIC CONCEPTS

Learner Support Services (LSS) play a very important role in distance education. The learning environment of a distant learner is much different from that of the traditional learner. Unlike the traditional learner, a distant learner has to learn on his/her own, without any regular guidance from teachers. This requires that such learners are helped through the use of a range of services/products that not only compensate the lack of

resources/facilities as is easily accessed by a traditional learner, but at the same time also supports the self-learning environment of the distant learners. Now-a-days, the advancement in information and communication technologies (ICT) has brought to us newer and newer tools that can be very effectively used for this purpose. These tools are comprehensively termed as Learner Support Services; basically because these support the learning environment of the distant learners.

2.3.1 Meaning and Scope of LSS

Learner Support Service is an umbrella term which encompasses many components under it. Almost all the services/products used in the ODL system to facilitate the learning experiment are included under the generic term Learner Support Services (LSS). Thus, in loose terms, the term LSS may be defined as any medium, service or product used to facilitate the learners in the ODL system.

It should be noted that the ODL institutes or Universities do not use all the available mediums or components of LSS that we have today. Often, they provide combinations of such media. We shall discuss the different mediums of LSS later in section 2.6.

2.3.2 Role of Learner Support Services in ODL

The role of Learner Support Services (LSS) in ODL can best be appreciated if we consider the environment of the distant learners. As a learner of an ODL system, you can yourself judge the learning environment faced by you and can easily appreciate the following points:

- **Lack of face to face interaction with teacher:** The lack of face to face interaction with teachers is one of the basic features of distance education. Most of you have had some amount of conventional education. As such, you would agree that any query you made to your teacher was immediately solved. But in distance education, this is not possible. So, in the absence of a

teacher, how to solve the queries? On account of such factors, learner support services become necessary. In distance education, we see counselling sessions being organized at least once a week. This helps the learners like you in getting the queries met. Apart from the counselling sessions, an ODL provider may offer additional resources like: Audio CDs, Audio-Visual CDs/DVDs, telecast of TV programmes, FM Radio programmes, Phone-in-programmes, Internet-based services etc. to help its learners in overcoming the problem of the absence of face to face interaction with the teacher.

- **Lack of interaction with fellow learners:** In the conventional system of education, you can easily form a group among your fellow learners. This helps in your academic matters. You get the opportunity to discuss among yourselves and solve many queries. In distance education, formation of a group is not very easy. In many cases, the learners of the same programme, even from the same study centre may not know one another. In such cases of absolute 'isolation', learning becomes very difficult. Learning theories suggest that learners can learn better when they are in a group, rather than when they are alone. As such, it becomes necessary to facilitate interaction among the fellow learners.
- **Learner's autonomy versus lack of motivation:** One of the virtues of distance education is that it offers its learners ample freedom. As a learner of conventional education, you may have to follow the strict routine in attending classes, completing home works, assignment etc. But a learner of ODL, you are free from such bindings and you get to learn at your own pace and time. However, this same virtue may turn out to be a disadvantage for the learners. This is because, in the absence of constant guidance and pursuance received from the face to face interaction with teacher or the pressure to complete the course in time, the learners in the ODL system may lack the motivation

to study regularly on his own. As such, the learners may get distracted from regular study and would try to complete the curriculum just at the eleventh hour at the time of term end examination.

To overcome such issues, learner support services become necessary. Assignments are provided to learners so that the learners study on their own and complete the assignments within the specific period of time. Similarly, broadcast of FM programmes helps the learners to be in touch with their study even when they are busy otherwise. Counselling sessions help them find answers to the queries as well to motivate them for self-study.

- **Lack of easy access to resources:** As a distant learner, you might lack an easy access to additional resources you might require when you go through a curriculum of study. In the conventional system of education, the learners get access to the departmental library, central library or other services like e-journals, journals etc. much more easily.

But in case of a distant learner, those facilities are not easily available. As such, in the ODL system, it becomes imperative to provide a range of LSS so that the learners can compensate the lack of easy access to additional resources.

- **Striking a balance between work and study:** Let us consider this hypothetical example: just after passing out the Matriculation Examination, Mr. Anil Borah joined Indian Railway as a Clerk in the year 1995. In the last 15 years, based on seniority, he has received a few promotions. However, he cannot move up the ladder further, as that requires a candidate to be a Graduate, even after having the stipulated years of in-service experience. Thanks to the ODL system! Mr. Borah can become a Graduate, even when he continues his current profession and ultimately got his/her promotion.

This fact highlights yet another virtue of distance education. It allows its learners to pursue study even when the learner is regularly

engaged in some other work. More importantly, the learner can enroll in a programme which will help him/her in getting a promotion even when he/she is busy in his profession.

Striking a proper balance between work and study however is not very easy. Learner support services can help a learner to utilize their free time and ultimately achieve the ultimate objective of attaining the qualification they were aiming at. In the conventional system of education, this may not be possible.

- **Locational impediments may be overcome:** Locational impediments may adversely affect the learning environment of a learner. Due to locational disadvantage, a learner may find it difficult to join a programme in the conventional system of education. The ODL system can reach the unreached and overcome all such barriers. Through LSS, an ODL Institute/ University can help a learner to enrol into a programme and complete it successfully. For example, as we have already mentioned, the services like FM Radio, TV programmes can reach a remote learner much effectively.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How does a working person benefit from the ODL system? (Answer in about 50 words)

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Q 2: How does LSS promote self learning in the ODL system?

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2.4 ROLE OF STUDY CENTRES IN ODL

A study centre plays a very important role in the system of open and distance learning (ODL). The study centre establishes the link between the ODL institute/University and its learner. As such, the learners may not have any direct contact with the University. A study centre offers the following services to a learner:

- **Getting admitted to a programme:** In general, a learner gets admitted to the programme of an Open University or an ODL institute through a study centre. The learner collects prospectus from the study centre and deposits the necessary fee to the university/institute through the study centre only. Now-a-days, most of the open universities or ODL institutes offer the learners to download the prospectus/application form from its website and then submit the filled-in application form to the study centre of one's choice. Again, for the payment of fee to the university, now-a-days, Demand Draft is the most preferred mode rather than Cash.
- **Acts as a Connecting point:** A study centre also acts as the connecting point between the University/Institute and the learner. Learners collect their study materials from the study centres. Again, on behalf of the learners, most of the administrative activities are undertaken by a study centre. From getting admitted into a programme to the receipt of the mark sheets/certificate of pass out, all the tasks involving he learners are undertaken by a study centre.
- **Conduct of counselling sessions:** A study centre also conducts counselling sessions. In general, these counselling sessions are conducted in weekends. The counselling sessions play an important role in the learning process. We shall discuss this aspect in some detail in the next section.
- **Continuous evaluation:** Apart from conducting the counselling sessions, a study centre also undertakes continuous evaluation. It should be noted here that continuous evaluation occupies an important place in distance education. As a part of the curriculum in distance education,

a learner is needed to submit a few assignments. Learners submit such assignments at the study centre. It is a general practice to evaluate the assignments at the study centre itself. After evaluation, the assignments are returned to the learners with comments on them. This helps the learners perform better in the term end (or semester/annual) examinations.

- **Library Services:** A study centre also offers the facility of library services to its learners. It should be noted here that most of the study centres of an open university/ODL institute are located in traditional colleges/ educational institutions. As such, the study centre may allow the learners of the OU/ODL institute to use its existing library facilities, or it may have other alternative arrangements with or without the assistance of OU/ODL institute.
- **Conduct of examinations:** Some of the study centres also act as the examination centres of the term-end examinations. However, it is not mandatory that a study centre will also be the examination centre. In general, depending on the number of learners, easy communication facilities, and other factors more than one study centres may have a common examination centre.
- **An activity centre of its learners:** A study centre may become an activity centre for its learners. A study centre helps a learner to interact with other fellow learners who can thus form a group among themselves. This helps them undertake group activities related to the curriculum of study or in other areas outside the curriculum.
- **Grooming of personalities:** We all know that a learner will find it difficult to get a job/service unless he/she is not equipped with certain soft skills like self-presentation, an effective communication skill (both verbal and non-verbal), writing a suitable bio-data as per the requirement of the job and the personal traits and skills possessed by the learner, computer skills etc. Even when a learner may have very good academic career, such soft skills are very much important. A study centre may help the learner to equip himself/herself with such personal traits/skills.

Sometimes, these may be made a part of the curriculum, while in other cases a study centre may take up such training sessions on their own. Placement services: It is true that learning is a life-long process and has its own value. As such, getting engaged into a job after the successful passing out of a programme may not be the ultimate aim of a learner. However, keeping in view the burning problem of unemployment, it is desirable that the learners get into some job/service after the successful completion of a programme. The open university/ODL institute through the study centres may offer such placement services to its learners. However, sometimes, the OU/ODL institute may do this centrally, on its own. Again, the study centre may take such activities on their own, with or without the help of the OU/ODL institute.

- **Other activities:** A study centre may also undertake some activities not directly related to the curriculum of study. For example, a study centre may conduct workshops/lectures/seminars on issues relating to the ODL system or other general topic which attracts and benefits the learners.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: State whether the following statements are True or False.

a) In the system of distance education, it is customary to conduct examination in the study centres only. (T/F)

b) Placement service is an integral part of distance education. (T/F)

Q 4: What is meant by continuous evaluation? Why is it necessary? (Answer in about 50 words)

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2.5 COUNSELLING IN ODL

One of the basic features of distance education is the absence interaction with a regular, face-to-face teacher. This puts the learner at the centre point of learning. Unlike a regular student of the traditional system of education, a learner in the ODL system of learning does not get the guidance of a face-to-face teacher. The learner may not be able to clear his doubts/ queries as he/she undertakes the study of a topic. Thus, without any guidance from a teacher, a vacuum will be created. To overcome such vacuum, counselling sessions are being incorporated in the ODL system of learning. We shall now discuss the different aspects of the counselling sessions, and the role a counsellor plays in the ODL system of learning.

A counselling session may be defined as an activity undertaken by a trained/skilled professional that seeks to clarify the doubts/queries raised by the learners of an academic content. In addition to that, counselling also implies that the counsellor is an overall guide to the learners.

In the above definition, two aspects are inter-related, viz., the counselling sessions and the counsellors. While counselling sessions are the activities, counsellors are its real actors. Let us discuss the role played by each of these.

- **Role of counselling sessions in distance education:** It is a basic tenet of the system of distance education to provide its learners study resources in the form of Self Learning Materials (SLM). The basic philosophy behind the design of the SLMs is that it makes studies easier for the learners. It is expected that the learners can self-learn from such SLMs without much difficulty. But even then, there may come up a number of doubts in the minds of the learners. As such, counselling sessions or personal contact programmes are undertaken by the study centres or the University. These personal contact programmes help in resolving the issues learners may encounter in their course of study.

Another aspect of the counselling sessions is that the number of such counselling sessions is very limited. Generally, counselling sessions are undertaken one day or two days a week, in most cases in the weekend.

As such, as compared to the traditional mode of education, the number of counselling sessions allotted for a given curriculum of study is bound to be very limited.

Another important aspect of counselling sessions is that in most of the cases, attending the counselling sessions is not made compulsory. This is unlike the traditional mode of education, where attending a given number of classes is made compulsory. However, in the ODL system as well, attending practical/lab classes may be made compulsory, if the programme has certain practical /lab classes.

- **Role played by the counsellors:** The term 'counsellor' in distance education has a different connotation. We have already discussed the learning environment of a distance learner; and as you are yourself involved with the ODL system, we suppose, you will very much agree with that. The counsellor in a distance education system is much different from a conventional teacher. He/she needs to facilitate the learning process of the learners. Owing to the lack of regular guidance from a teacher or a regular study routine, a learner of the ODL system may turn out to be a passive learner. The counsellor should try to motivate the learners and encourage them to go through the curriculum of study on their own and raise their queries, if any.

Again, unlike traditional mode of education a counsellor should not aim at 'completing' a given curriculum of study. In fact, as the number of counselling sessions is very limited, a counsellor may find it an uphill task to 'complete' the curriculum. Thus, the basic aim of a counsellor should be to solve the queries of the learners and guide them to study on their own.

Another aspect of the personal contact programmes is that these help the learners to form a peer group among themselves. Such peer group can help the learners in solving many problems. Various studies have shown that a distance learner having his/her peer group can learn better than if he/she can learn alone. As such, the counsellor of the personal contact programmes should aim at forming 'peer group' among his/her learners who can be assigned some 'group activity' in this regard.

The learners may also become interested in gaining some hints relating to higher studies or career. In such cases, the duty of the Counsellor is also to help the learners get their queries resolved. Therefore, a counsellor functions as a guide or a mentor to the learners, rather than a tutor/counsellor only.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: State whether the following statements are True or False.

a) In the system of distance education, it is the job a counsellor to cover the given curriculum of study at the earliest.

b) To attend the counselling sessions is not compulsory for the learners.

c) A programme in ODL never has any lab/practical classes as such courses cannot be taught through ODL.

Q 6: Define the term 'counselling session' (Answer in about 40 words)

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2.6 DIFFERENT MEDIA OF LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES (LSS)

We have already stated that Learner Support Services (LSS) is an umbrella term which encompasses a range of mediums. In this section, we shall discuss the major services/products that are generally used in the ODL system under three major heads, viz., audio-visual aids, electronic services and other mediums of LSS.

2.6.1 Audio-Visual Aids

- **Use of Audio-Visual Media:** The use of different audio-visual media is very common in distance education. These may include audio tapes, audio CDs, video tapes, Video CDs, DVDs, animation film, documentary, etc. These mediums are very interactive, informative and can be used with much ease as per the convenience of the learners.

An issue with audio-visual mediums is that in most of the cases, these are priced, and as such, they become a burden on the part of the learner. However, this may be overcome by using these in the study centres during the counselling sessions or as reference materials in the library.

- **Use of Radio:** Use of radio is also very effective. Radio services, especially the FM Radio Services, are very effective as through the use of these learners and others may be communicated easily.

IGNOU (Indira Gandhi National Open University) launched its FM Radio Station 'Gyan Vani' in 2001. At present, IGNOU has established 31 FM Stations throughout the country. In Assam, Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University had launched its FM Radio Station 90.4 Jnan Taranga in 2010. This was in fact the first education FM Station in the North East. The other educational FM Station launched in Assam is the 90.8 Luit, launched by the IDOL (Institute of Distance and Open Learning) of Gauhati University in 2010.

- **Use of TV:** Use of Television (TV) is another effective tool for the distance learners. Distance education provider may use TV for telecasting educational programmes and thereby reach a large population of its students and other members of the community. As an educational tool, a few programmes are through Gyan Darshan, an initiative jointly undertaken by IGNOU and UGC (University Grants Commissions), New Delhi.

2.6.2 Electronic Devices

- **Use of Web Technology:** The rapid advancement in information and communication technology (ICT) has immensely helped the distance education system a lot. This has in fact brought a paradigm shift in the field of Open and Distance Learning (ODL). Now a learner can opt for admission into an ODL programme without visiting a study centre or the University. He can get the SLMs by downloading those from the University Website, submit assignment online, get all the queries solved online, can interact with the members of the peer group and the counsellor in the discussion forum, even sit for examination on online and get his certificate delivered without visiting the University even for once. This concept is called 'Virtual University'.

However, this concept of Virtual University has seen its maximum growth in the advanced countries and has had very limited impact in the developing countries. In our country as well, the concept of Virtual University has not much flourished. However, this does not mean that the use of the internet services has been very limited in India. Most of college/institute/Universities in India have used the internet services at a varied degree. For example, to mention it in the context of ODL, IGNOU has made extensive use of internet services. Students of IGNOU can download most of the materials of most of its programmes from its website (e-Gyankosh). Students can use its website for all types of queries, including academic and non-academic matters.

In Assam, KKHSOU has designed the website www.kkhsou.in and launched the e-portal known as 'e-vidya' services for its learners. Another such internet learning portal from the state is 'e-bodhidroom' launched by IDOL, GU.

- **Use of Mobile Technology:** Use of mobile phones has become quite common among the people of all the age groups. As such, educational institutes, especially the ODL institutes/Universities

have used mobile as a tool of learning. For example, if you type SNKKHSOU and send them to 9870807070, you will be able to get all the important updates from Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University. Such updates include announcement of admission, examination, results etc. Similarly, IDOL, GU also has launched a similar service whereby a learner can get any information relating to admission, fee and results by sending a sms at 56070. For detail, you can log on to: www.idolgu.org/sms.pdf.

2.6.3 Other Media or Components of LSS

- **Self-Learning Materials (SLMs) in print form:** Even when there have emerged a number of components of LSS in the recent times, the basic component of LSS is however the Self-Learning Materials (SLM). The basic difference between any print book and a print book in SLM format is that the SLMs are designed as self-explanatory, and easy to follow study materials. The basic consideration in the design of a unit in SLM format is the environment of the distance learner. Emphasis is laid such that a learner can learn of his/her own. As such, a Unit is the SLM format is designed keeping in view the pedagogical issues of open and distance learning. Another aspect of SLMs is that they are designed in a particular and based on the house-style of the ODL institute/Open University. Thus, the units in a SLM are designed based on the house-style of the particular ODL institute/Open University. This helps them look similar as well as helps the learners follow with much convenience.
- **Advice or Counselling Sessions:** Learners may have to contact a study centre or the institute/university to get his query solved. For this, the learner may undertake personal visit to or may make phone calls to the study Centre/University. For example, to know the range of programmes or the time of

admission, nearby study centres offering the programmes of your choice, fees, dates of examination etc., you may have made calls to the University or the study centre.

- **Peer Group Support:** While the formation of a peer group is very important to enhance the learning skills of the learners, such peer groups should be given adequate support as well. The distance education provider should provide a platform that medium sets a communication between the tutor/ counsellor and the learners.

While the learners may communicate themselves through the use of mobile phones, but such communication in the absence of a counsellor/ tutor may have very limited effect. As such, the distance education provider should offer a common platform. Such common platform can be very easily provided through the use of internet technologies. Tools like social networking, blogs, and discussion forum can offer such advance technologies. Then peer group support become easier. Personal contact programmes may also be an effective medium of peer-group interaction in certain cases, but it has many limitations. This is because the learners have to be physically present during the counselling sessions.

- **Feedback concerning assessment and progress:** In the system of distance education, it is very important to provide feedback with respect to the assessment and progress of study of the learners. For this, various types of assessment are used. The SLMs provided to the learners include Check Your Progress or Self Check Your Progress type of questions. These are based on the immediumste matter of discussion. In this case, certain short questions or objective-type questions are included. In most of cases, answers to such questions are included at the end of the Unit. Alternatively, hints to answer the questions may also be provided.

Another mechanism of assessment is the home assignments. These home assignments are provided so that the

learners go through the SLMs and answer the questions of their own after thoroughly going through them. The usefulness of home assignments lies in the fact that the learners get the Tutor's Comment. As such, they get to know the various ways of improving upon their efforts. These help them in improving their performance in the final assessment, i.e., the annual or the term end examinations.

- **Library Services:** Another important component of the LSS is the library sevices. In the system of distance education, attempts are made to provide the SLMs which are self learning and self contained. In this sense, SLMs are designed in such a way that they contain all the necessary information the learners may need to know in a topic. Even then, to facilitate better performance on the part of the learners, especially to meet the demand of references in the programmes of post-graduate, professional and research studies, adequate library service is a must. Library sevices may be offered in the study centres itself. In most of the cases, the study centres happen to be an existing college or other such institution. In such cases, the distance education provider may have formal arrangement with the study centres so that they can provide its distance learners an easy access to the existing college/institution libraries. Otherwise, a library cell specific to the distance learners may also be established at the centres.

  Another mechanism adopted by the distance education providers is the 'library bag' services. In this type of service, a bundle of selected reference books are sent to the learners. Learners need to return the same at the end of the course. Thus, the same set of books can be repeatedly sent to the subsequent learners a number of items. A refundable caution deposit is collected from the learners to ensure a safe return of the books.

- **Acquiring of Skills:** We all know that education is a life-long process and one of the objectives of education is to impart skills. Distance education is not an exception. Skill enhancement is

an important objective of distance education. Even when the learners may reside at a distance place, they also need to acquire certain skills. Counselling sessions or Personal Contact Programmes may help the learners to acquire new skills. For example, learning the presentation skills or effective communication skills may become very essential for a distance learner to get suitable job in the market.

An ODL institute/ University may also take the help of Audio-Visual Materials to impart skills to its learners. Still, other tools may be Project work, Activities, etc.

- **Career Guidance:** Career guidance is another very important component of the ODL system. To get a job, the learners may require certain soft skills like writing a Resume, facing an Interview, presentation Skills etc. The study centres may also conduct campus interviews to attract the prospective employers which ultimately helps the learners get good openings.

Many ODL institutes/ Universities have opened a Career Counselling Cell at the University Level to help its learners in matter relating to career and future prospects.

- **Administrative Problem Solving:** In the course of study, beginning from the pre-admission stage to the post-pass out stage, a student may face various issues. The ODL institute/ University must solve the problems of its learners.

In certain cases, the institute/ University may offer its learners or the community at large a Toll Free Number, where they can make calls and get their quires solved without paying any money for that. Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS) has also been used. As a learner of Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University, if you face any problem, you call at the Toll Free Number of the University: 1800-345-3613.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: State whether the following statements are True or False.

a) Gyan Darshan has been jointly undertaken by IGNOU and UGC. (T/F)

b) IGNOU has established more than 100 FM Stations throughout the country.

Q 8: Match the following Set B with Set A.

	Set A	**Set B**
a)	Jnan Taranga	i) E-learning portal of IDOL, GU
b)	Radio Luit	ii) FM Station of KKHSOU
c)	e-Gyankosh	iii) FM Station of IDOL, GU
d)	e-vidya	iv) E-learning portal of IGNOU
e)	e-bodhidroom	v) E-learning portal of KKHSOU

Q 9: What do you mean by library bag service? (Answer in about 50 words)

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Q 10: What is meant by career guidance? (Answer in about 50 words)

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2.7 THE CHANGING CHARACTERISTICS OF THE 21ST CENTURY LEARNERS

The learners of the Twenty first century basically belong to two generations: viz., Generation Z (born between 1995 and 2009) and Generation Alpha (born since 2010). The Generation Z was characterised as: most do not remember life without the internet, and have had technology like smartphones, iPads, smartboards and other devices available throughout most of their schooling. On the other hand, Generation Alpha is characterised as: younger than smartphones, the iPad, 3D television, Instagram, and music streaming apps like Spotify. This is the first generation (Generation Alpha) likely to see the next century.

Such a level of technology as a daily necessity also put them in a situation where they have a completely unprecedented amount of information at their fingertips. Today's tech-savvy learners are never having to wait more than a few seconds to get the answers to their questions; with everything only just a quick search away. Today, they are able to teach themselves about any topic they are interested in without even leaving their bedroom.

2.7.1 The Essential Skills for a 21st Century Learner

Applied Educational Systems listed 12 educational skills for a 21st century learner. These skills have been categorised into three major heads, viz., Learning Skills, Literacy Skills and Life Skills. The learning skills teaches students about the mental processes required to adapt and improve upon in a modern work environment. The literacy skills focuses on how students can discern facts, publishing outlets, and the technology behind them. There's a strong focus on determining trustworthy sources and factual information to separate it from the misinformation that floods the Internet. Finally, the life skills take a look at intangible elements of a student's everyday life. These intangibles focus on both personal and professional qualities.

Built around the digital environment of the 21st century learners, these 12 skills are particularly important for a 21st century learner. Let us discuss these three broad categories of skills in brief.

- **Learning Skills:** Learning Skills are consisting of 4 Cs, viz., Critical thinking, Creativity, Collaboration and Communication.
  - **Critical thinking:** Finding solutions to problems. It's what helps students figure out different alternative solutions for themselves when they don't have a teacher at their disposal.
  - **Creativity:** Thinking outside the box. This skill empowers students to see concepts in a different light, which leads to innovation. In any field, innovation is key to the adaptability and overall success.
  - **Collaboration:** Working with others. This also means getting students to work together, achieve compromises, and get the best possible results from solving a problem.
  - Communication: Talking to others. It's crucial for students to learn how to effectively convey ideas among different personality types. Without understanding proper communication, students in the 21st Century will lack a pivotal skill to progress their careers.
- **Literacy Skills:** Literacy skills are also referred to as called IMT skills, and they're each concerned with a different element in digital comprehension. IMT stands for Information literacy, Media literacy and Technology literacy.
  - **Information literacy:** Information literacy is the foundational skill. It helps students understand facts, especially data points that they'll encounter online. More importantly, it teaches them how to separate fact from fiction. In an age of chronic misinformation, finding truth online has become a job all on its own. It's crucial that students can identify honesty on their own. Otherwise, they can fall prey to myths, misconceptions, and outright lies.

- **Media literacy:** Media literacy is the practice of identifying publishing methods, outlets, and sources while distinguishing between the ones that are credible and the ones that aren't. Just like the previous skill, media literacy is helpful for finding truth in a world that's saturated with information. This is how students find trustworthy sources of information in their lives. Without it, anything that looks credible becomes credible.
- **Technology literacy:** Technology literacy goes another step further to teach students about the machines involved in the Information Age. Technology literacy gives students the basic information they need to understand what gadgets perform what tasks and why.

➢ **Life Skills:** Life skills are also referred to as FLIPS, these skills all pertain to someone's personal life, but they also bleed into professional settings. FLIPS stands for Flexibility, Leadership, Initiative, Productivity and Social skills.

- **Flexibility:** Flexibility means someone's ability to adapt to the changing situations. This is one of the most challenging qualities to inherit for students because it's based on two uncomfortable realities. First, the student has to accept that the way he/she is dealing with in a given situation isn't always the best way. There is in fact, room for improvement everywhere. Second, one has to admit when he/she is wrong. For many students, acceptance of one's own mistakes is a real struggle, particularly in today's given age when one can know any bit of information at the drop of a hat.
- **Leadership:** Leadership means motivating a team to accomplish a goal. Leadership is also someone's penchant for setting goals, walking a team through the steps required, and achieving those goals in a collaborative manner.
- **Initiative:** It means coming up with one's own idea to start projects, strategies, and plans. Only a handful of people can think of taking an initiative. As a result, students need to learn

it to fully succeed in every sphere of their lives.

- **Productivity:** It means maintaining efficiency in an age of distractions. It signifies the ability to complete a given work on time.
- **Social skills:** The most rewarding feature of the current advancement in ICT is meeting and networking with others for mutual benefit. On account of the advancements in ITC, today's students possess a wide range of social skills. Studies have shown that some are more socially adapt than others. Some are far behind their peers. And some lucky few may be far ahead, as socialising comes naturally to them. But most students need a crash course in social skills at least. Etiquette, manners, politeness, and small talk still play major roles in today's world. That means some students need to learn them in an educational setting instead of a social setting.

In the next section 2.8, we shall discuss how the recent use of different ICT tools has helped in addressing the needs of the 21st century learners with a primary focus on open and distance learning.

2.8 RECENT ADVANCEMENTS IN LSS

Some of the recent practices in LSS as has occupied prominent place in the last two decades include the following:

- **Learning Management System (LMS):** A learning management system (LMS) is a software application or web-based technology used to plan, implement and assess a specific learning process. Ideally, a learning management system provides an instructor with a way to create and deliver content, monitor student participation and assess student performance.

  Though initially developed in the 1990s, LMS have been utilised prominently both by big corporate houses as well as by many open and distance learning institutions to store, organize, and distribute courses

to employees/learners as needed. Employees/learners take courses and submit feedback using the LMS interface. A good LMS lets admins monitor employee/learners' progress, view analytics, and recalibrate their learning programs for maximum impact.

The KKHSOU is also developed its LMS which facilitates would facilitate its students to learn in a more pro-active way.

- **Open Educational Resources:** Open Educational Resources (OER) are teaching, learning and research materials in any medium - digital or otherwise - that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions. The major types of OER include (but are not limited to) syllabi, lesson plans, learning modules, lab experiments, simulations, course videos, discussion prompts, assignments, assessments, library guides, and course design templates.

  The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) OpenCourseWare is one of the prominent initiatives in OER. The USESCO also is also playing a leading role in the promotion of OER. In India, IIT Madras came up with an initiative called NPTEL (National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning) in the year 1999. The basic aim of this initiative was to improve the quality of higher education in India. As per this initiative, all the IITs, along with the IISc Bangalore would come up with a series of video lecture-based courses across all the streams of engineering. This initiative has gained wide popularity in India and the lectures are being used by several engineering students from across India.

- **Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs):** Another similar initiative in the advancement of making knowledge free and accessible to all in the line of OER is the MOOCs. The Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are free online courses available for anyone to enroll. MOOCs provide an affordable and flexible way to learn new skills, advance your career and deliver quality educational experiences at scale.

  Millions of people around the world use MOOCs to learn for a variety of reasons, including: career development, changing careers, college

preparations, supplemental learning, lifelong learning, corporate eLearning & training, and more. In India, the Government of India has recently launched SWAYAM (SWAYAM: Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds) platform that facilitates hosting of all the courses, taught in classrooms from Class 9 till post-graduation to be accessed by anyone, anywhere at any time. All the courses are interactive, prepared by the best teachers in the country and are available, free of cost to any learner. More than 1,000 specially chosen faculty and teachers from across the country have participated in preparing these courses.

The courses hosted on SWAYAM are in 4 quadrants - (1) video lecture, (2) specially prepared reading material that can be downloaded/ printed (3) self-assessment tests through tests and quizzes and (4) an online discussion forum for clearing the doubts. Steps have been taken to enrich the learning experience by using audio-video and multi-media and state of the art pedagogy / technology.

Courses delivered through SWAYAM are available free of cost to the learners, however learners wanting a SWAYAM certificate should register for the final proctored exams that come at a fee and attend in-person at designated centres on specified dates.

2.8.1 Covid-19 and LSS

In the recent phase of Covid-19, it has been seen that most of the Universities, colleges and even schools had to offer online classes as well as other counselling services through the use of social networking platforms, viz., Facebook, Whatsapp etc. In such pandemic situations, the open universities, including KKHSOU, Assam used a number of ICT based services to reach its learners. These include:

- **e-Mentoring:** Discipline and semester wise mentoring groups were formed to keep constant communications with the learners. Both WhatsApp and Telegram were used to reach the learners.

Communication regarding clearing of doubts, counselling session schedules, examination schedules and all other relevant important official matters were communicated through these groups. Learners also receive real-time support through such groups at the time of online MCQ Tests, Open Book Examinations etc. The faculty members of the University serve as the mentor in these mentoring groups.

- **Online Counselling Sessions:** Online counselling session through Google Classroom, WebEx, Zoom were conducted to reach the learners. Here, learners could log in to their mobile/ Laptop/Personal computers through the link provided by the counsellor. Prior intimation about the counselling sessions are provided in the Mentoring groups.
- **Social Media Live:** Through the use of social media like Facebook Live, counselling sessions are also conducted to reach the learners. Prior intimation about the counselling sessions are provided in the Mentoring groups.
- **Walk-in-Counselling:** Walk-in-counselling provides the learners to walk-in directly to the University/study centre and clarify their doubts on academic and non-academic matters.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 11: Mention the 21st century learning skills. (Answer in about 20 words)

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Q 12: What is meant by Open Educational Resources? (Answer in about 50 words)

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2.7 LET US SUM UP

- Learner Support Services (LSS) play a very important role in distance education.
- Learner Support Services not only compensate the lack of resources/ facilities as is easily accessed by a traditional learner, but at the same time also supports the self-learning environment of the distant learners. The role of Learner Support Services (LSS) in ODL can best be appreciated if we consider the environment of the distant learners.
- A study centre plays a very important role in the system of open and distance learning (ODL). The study centre establishes the link between the ODL institute/University and its learner.
- One of the basic features of distance education is the lack of a regular, face-to-face teacher. Thus, in the absence of any guidance from a regular teacher, a vacuum is created. To overcome this vacuum, counselling sessions have been incorporated in the ODL system of learning.
- The 21st century learning kills have been categorised into three major heads, viz., Learning Skills, Literacy Skills and Life Skills.
- Some of the recent practices in LSS as has been experienced in the last two decades include the following: Learning Management System (LMS), Open Educational Resources and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).



2.8 FURTHER READING

1) V P Mathes Waran (2005): Distance Education: Student Support Services, Anmol Publication, New Delhi



2.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q N. 1: The ODL system allows its learners to pursue study even when the learner is regularly engaged in some other work. More importantly, the learner can enrol into a programme which will help him/

her in getting a promotion even when he/she is busy in his/her profession.

Ans to Q N. 2: LSS in the ODL system utilizes advanced information and communication tools like internet, mobile, phone, web, teleconferencing etc. Learners can learn of their own as well as they can form virtual groups among themselves. All these help in self-learning.

Ans to Q N. 3: a) False b) False

Ans to Q N. 4: As a part of the curriculum in distance education, a learner is needed to submit a few assignments. Learners submit such assignments at the study centre for evaluation. This is form of continuous evaluation.

After the evaluation of the assignments, they are returned to the learners with comments on them. This helps the learners to perform better in the term end (or semester/annual) examinations.

Ans to Q N. 5: a) False b) True c) False

Ans to Q N. 6: A counselling session may be defined as an activity undertaken by a trained/skilled professional that seeks to clarify the doubts/queries raised by the learners of an academic content, apart from being an overall guide to them.

Ans to Q N. 7: a) True b) False

Ans to Q N. 8:

Set A	**Set B**
a) Jnan Taranga	i) FM Station of KKHSOU
b) Radio Luit	ii) FM Station of IDOL, GU
c) e-Gyankosh	iii) E-learning portal of IGNOU
d) e-vidya	iv) E-learning portal of KKHSOU
e) e-bodhidroom	v) E-learning portal of IDOL, GU

Ans to Q N. 9: Library bag service is one of the learner support services. In this type of service, a bundle of selected reference books are sent to the learners. Learners need to return the same at the end of the course. However, a refundable caution deposit is collected from the learners for the safe return of the books.

Ans to Q N. 10: To get a job, the learners may require certain skills like writing a Resume, facing an Interview, presentation Skills etc. Again, to help the learners to get a job, campus interviews may be organized to

attract prospective employers which ultimately help the learners to get good openings into them. In an comprehensive term, all these may be termed as career guidance.

Ans to Q N. 11: The 21st century learning kills have been categorised into three major heads, viz., Learning Skills, Literacy Skills and Life Skills.

Ans to Q N. 12: Open Educational Resources (OER) are teaching, learning and research materials in any medium - digital or otherwise - that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions



2.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

A. Very Short Questions (Answer each question in about 50 words)

Q 1: What is counselling?

Q 2: What do you mean by learner support services?

Q 3: What is meant by library bag services?

Q 4: What is the basic purpose of SWAYAM?

B. Short Questions (Answer each question in around 150 words).

Q 1: Discuss the meaning and scope of Learner Support Services.

Q 2: Evaluate the role played by Learner Support Services in the ODL system.

Q 3: Discuss briefly the concept of OER.

C. Long Questions. (Answer each question in around 300-500 words)

Q 1: Discuss the environment of a distant learner. How do the different components of LSS help a learner to overcome the barriers faced by him/her?

Q 2: Evaluate the role played by the study centres in the ODL system.

Q 3: Briefly enumerate the learning environment of an ODL learner. What complementary role can a study centre undertake to help its learners get a suitable job?

Q 4: Briefly discuss the recent developments in LSS.

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