

Modes for Development of Self-Learning Material

Self-learning materials: the concept

The success and effectiveness of the ODL system largely depends on self-learning materials (SLMs). Developing SLMs is a challenging task, and is quite different from that of face-to-face teaching or writing a textbook and/or journal article. It is pertinent for you to understand the concept of self-learning materials which are based on the principles of use of the means and ways of communication.

Concept of learning at a distance

As you have studied in the preceding block, the distance learners pursue their study on their own for they are away from their teachers, institution, and fellow learners. They learn independently with minimum external support from teachers and peers. Moreover, a majority of the distance learners is usually adults; and they need learning materials, which facilitate their independent learning. Normally they are motivated enough and also possess certain study skills which enable them to pursue their study independently and at their own pace.

As you know, in the ODL system the scope for personal contact with the learners is limited. Most learning takes place not through the mediation of a teacher but primarily through the mediation of the learning materials. Therefore, learning at a distance demands study skills on the part of the learners to enable them to gain optimally from the learning materials. Usually learning at a distance takes place and gets reinforced by:

- interacting with learning materials;
- receiving feedback on various academic activities, such as assignment responses, project work, term-end examinations, etc., .
- attending personal contact / communication during counseling sessions and tutorials;
- using multiple media and multimedia components (cassettes, broadcast, interactive CD-ROMs, teleconference, internet, etc.);

- participating in face-to-face academic activities (seminars, counseling sessions, tutorials, laboratory work, etc.).

Self-learning materials (SLMs) perform the functions of an effective classroom teacher by providing learning experiences similar to the classroom-based teaching-learning process. Thus, the invisible teacher built in the learning materials facilitates the learners in their studies in the same way as the classroom teacher does within the face-to-face classes:

Instructional design versus learning

Instructional design is a process comprising analysis of learning needs and goals and the development of a delivery system to meet these needs. It is concerned with research about instructional strategies and the processes for developing and implementing those strategies. It is the science of creating strategies for development, implementation, evaluation, and maintenance of environment¹ situations that can facilitate learning. Instructional design involves systematic development of instructional specifications using learning and instructional theory to ensure quality teaching and learning. SLMs are based on instructional design involving analysis of learning needs, development of learning materials, and placement of a delivery system and the mechanism of assessment to know whether the learners have achieved the course objectives. The quality of instructional design has a direct link with learning on the part of learners. The more innovative an instructional design is the more effective and learner-oriented the SLM shall be. This is so because there is a direct link between quality of instructional design and learning.

Let us now examine this relationship between instructional design and learning, and hence the implications of instructional design for developing effective self-learning materials. In the conventional system of education, the learners get most of their instruction through the face-to-face interaction with the teacher and the peer groups. But, the learners pursuing their study through the ODL system use the specially designed learning/training materials. Here, their learning depends on the effectiveness/quality of materials prepared or transformed for a particular target

group. In this case, the learners interact with the content presented in the forms of printed text, audio-video materials, computer-enabled instruction, etc. and the quality of these learning materials do enhance student learning provided they are developed on the principles of effective learning and the needs of learners. Therefore, learning materials must be based on effective instructional design and needs and characteristics of the targeted learners.

Characteristics of self-learning materials

Self-learning materials perform the functions of an effective teacher who guides, motivates, explains, discusses, asks questions, assesses progress, suggests appropriate remedial measures, and provides advice to learners. Self-learning materials emphasize pedagogical dialogues with the learner. While reading the course units, the learners interact with an invisible teacher (in a simulation situation since the teacher is simulated in the materials) and feel as if they are being taught by him/ her. The materials also provide questions for self-check and thus increase curiosity of the learners. The success of self-learning depends on the quality of the learning materials.

Self-learning materials follow learner-centered approaches. They are designed and developed as per the needs of the learners. The following are some of the characteristics of self-learning materials:

Self-contained

Efforts are made to make the text self-sufficient so that a learner does not hunt for the additional sources, or even a teacher. For this the scope of the content of the unit 'is visualized in detail. While avoiding what is redundant only the essential details are presented so that the unit can cover information required by the learners and keep away all that is superfluous or redundant.

Self-explanatory

The content is presented in a style so that a learner can learn from the material without much external support. The concepts are explained to the extent such that majority of the learners are able to comprehend them. Therefore the content is self-explanatory

and conceptually clear. To make concepts self-explanatory the content is analyzed and presented logically considering the mental and lingual background of the learners¹ target group. A few may not be able to comprehend the contents fully and may therefore need additional help and guidance by teachers through correspondence and at study centre tutorials.

Self-directed

The learning materials aim at providing necessary guidance, hints and suggestions to the learners at each stage of learning. The self-directed material is presented in the form of easy explanations, sequential development, illustrations, learning activities, etc., thus performing the role of a teacher who for instance guide, instruct, moderate and regulate the learning process in classroom situations.

Self-motivating

In distance education systems, the learners remain off the campus for most of their study time. The study materials, like a teacher in the classroom, should be highly encouraging for the learners. The materials should arouse curiosity, raise problems, relate knowledge to familiar situations and make the entire learning meaningful for them, providing reinforcement and feedback at every stage of learning.

Self-evaluating

As the learners remain separated from the distance learning institution as well as the teachers, the study materials should make provisions for feedback as well. To ensure optimum learning, the learners should know whether they are on the right track. Self-evaluation in the form of self check questions, exercises, activities, etc. provides the learners with the much needed feedback about their progress, reinforces learning, and motivates them for self-learning. The course writer should develop a built-in evaluation system by giving an appropriate number of self-check exercises, activities and questions in the course units.

Self-learning

Self-instructional materials are based on the principles of self-learning. So, a unit, besides information, provides the learners study guide - directions, hints, references, etc. to facilitate their independent learning. To make the content comprehensible, it is supported by simple explanations, examples, illustrations, activities and so on. In other words, the materials are designed and, developed in such a way that the learners can undertake learning by oneself with occasional help from others including the teachers.

Additional Features of self-learning materials

- Learning
- Individual Self-paced
- Private learning
- Any time
- Any number
- Standardized
- Expert content
- Updatable content
- Structured teaching
- Active Learning
- Frequent feedback

Comparison of textbooks with self-learning materials

Textbooks	Self-learning materials
Assume interest	Arouse interest
Written mainly for teacher use	Written primarily for Learner use
Do not indicate study time	Give estimates of study time
Designed for a wider market	Designed for a particular learner group
Rarely state aims and objectives	Always give aims and objectives
Structured for teachers and specialists	Structured according to the need of learners
Little or no self-assessment	Major emphasis on self-assessment

IGNOU SLM model

- P – Programme
- C – Course
- B – Block
- U – Unit
- S – Section
- SS- Sub-Section

Example for Developing a Unit in IGNOU SLM model

Unit 1 - (Title of the Unit)

Structure

1.0 Objectives

1.1 Introduction

1.2.....

1.2.1.....

1.2.2.....

Check your progress/Activities

1.3.....

1.3.1

1.3.2.....

1.3.3.....

Check your progress/Activities

1.4 Let Us Sum Up

1.5 Glossary

1.6 Suggested Readings

Possible answers

References

SMART model

- **S - Specific**
- **M - Measurable**
- **A - Accurate**
- **R - Realistic**
- **T - Time /Testable**