

GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING FOR NTI DISTANCE LEARNERS - GUIDELINES

1.0 BACKGROUND

Guidance and Counselling (G&C) is an ancillary service to education, which aims at helping students understand themselves in relation to their intellectual potentials, aptitudes, talents, educational or occupational interests and other characteristics, which are necessary for educational or occupational decision. The main reason for Guidance and Counselling Services is to reassure students, promote their self-actualization and to make them aware that they are cared and catered for.

The nature of distance learning enables people to study at their own pace, place and time in order to either compensate for lost opportunities or acquire new skills and qualifications for the future. It is often characterized by the absence of personal or face-to-face contact that involves the separation of teacher and learner which distinguishes it from face-to-face lecturing. In a nutshell, distance learning involves the use of strategies that enable the learner and the teacher to be so physically separated from each other that they are beyond the unaided sight and hearing of each other, yet interacting reasonably enough for meaningful learning to occur.

Distance learning also describes a set of teaching and learning strategies used to deliver education to learners who are separated, mostly by time and space, from those who are teaching and training. It is also a method of education that is different from conventional education in that there is a distance between the learners on the one hand and the institution and teacher on the other. This distance or separation can of course be more than just physical distance, it can also be distance in time and space. Distance Learning therefore expands access to qualitative higher education and essentially meets the needs of many Nigerians desirous of non-residential higher education.

1.1 Purpose

The main purpose of these guidelines is to guide the implementation of G&C programme for National Teachers' Institute (NTI) distance learners and to also define the roles and functions of the personnel involved for effective service delivery.

For a programme in distance learning to succeed therefore, there must be a smooth administration of the learning and assessment process in place and also an adequate learner support system so that effective study habits can be developed. Since counselling has been identified as one of the support services which makes it possible for individuals to see and explore unlimited endowed options, its importance in distance learning cannot therefore be over-emphasized.

2.0 GENERAL NATURE OF DISTANCE LEARNERS

Learners, as we all know need professional advice about their problems from older or more experienced people. Many had chosen to study by distance learning because it suited domestic and work routines and also fitted conveniently into their life styles. Despite these conveniences, they still face the inconveniences that affect their studies, most often, for instance, studying alone for several months in a year which can be so uncomfortable and uninteresting. Hence, there is a distance to be reached and a gap to be filled.

In developing nations like Nigeria , distance learners are prone to experiencing physiological, psychological, economical, social and academic problems such as isolation/boredom/loneliness, emotional maladjustment, domestic/financial/marital/family responsibilities, anxieties/tension, combining studies with work routines. In advanced and developing countries, these problems are similar to varying degrees but are easily addressed because of their advancement in various technologies.

2.1 THE NTI EXPERIENCE

In NTI Distance System, these problems are not different with what obtains generally, but they are addressed by provision of face-to-face contact support, which provide learner-learner, tutor-learner and instructional-media learner interactions.

Apparently, this is not adequate to solve the problems of distance learners, hence, the provision of Guidance and Counselling Services for NTI Distance learners.

3.0 NEED FOR EFFECTIVE GUIDANCE PROGRAMME FOR NTI DISTANCE LEARNERS

Running distance learning in a society that is deeply rooted in conventional system of education poses a very serious challenge because the general notion is that this mode of learning is second rate. Rendering effective Guidance and Counselling services in distance learning therefore poses another greater challenge because of the peculiar system, which is not the usual face-to-face conventional system.

In times past and recent times, emphasis and the need to address this issue has not been taken into consideration. However, the current trend of events in the Nigerian Educational System is such that presently requires guidance and counselling services for distance learners.

Based on all these therefore, the following services are recommended so that the specific needs of distance learners would be effectively alleviated:

A. **General Educational Guidance.** This is aimed at:

- i) Orientation for distance learners, that is, provision of: All information regarding operations of distance learning (general awareness/enlightenment); Assistance to students in making their choices and adjusting to new learning environment (induction exercises especially before, during and after matriculation ceremony) and; any other general awareness/enlightenment they need to help them cope with distance learning.
- ii) Assisting distance learners to acquire effective learning skills through Learner-Learner, Tutor-Learner and Instructional Media Learner System.
- iii) Helping distance learners to meet their expectations through successful study vis-à-vis reduction of examination anxieties/tension, alleviating the fear of studying alone and omission of handbook with hints to develop effective study guides. This will help them cope with their studies, despite the inconveniences that impact on their studies most often).

- iv) Resolution of complaints/requests vis-à-vis helping distance learners to come to terms with themselves and to appreciate their strengths and weaknesses. This will also bridge the gap which affects studies and main decisions that will not mar their career and the steps to take when they need clarifications/advice/briefs regarding their programme of studies, for example, request for transfer of studies from one state or centre to another (inter/intra-state transfer), transfer from other institutions, correction of names, change of names, omission of names, deferment of admission (studies)/resumption, deferment of semester/resumption, withdrawal/re-admission, guide on change of course and other briefs, other complaints/requests as the need arises.
 - v) Periodic visitation to study centres and provision of group counselling as the case may be.
 - vi) Information dissemination via circulation of handbills, students' handbooks, information booklets, newsletters, circulars, etc as a medium of communication to students, field centres, tutors/facilitators and supervisors/managers.
- B. **Vocational Guidance:** That will assist in providing occupational information on the general nature of teacher-education, continuous professional development and career advancement opportunities.
 - C. **Socio-personal Guidance:** Geared towards solving emotional, social, health, interpersonal and family (domestic) problems militating against their studies.
 - D. **Pre-admission Guidance:** Field Officers to always ensure the provision of such information when the need arises. Additional information is also contained in the students' handbook. Prospective learners will be advised on suitable courses and time allocation to different courses to ensure that realistic study plans are secured. The students' handbooks will be the main sources of information at this stage.
 - E. **Therapeutic Approach (diagnosis):** That can be adopted / adapted for the treatment of adult/distance learners' problems.
 - F. **Referral Services:** As the need arises. Staffs are to be aware of the referral system and when it is appropriate to refer learners to the coordinating offices in the states and central Administration. Such instances include: clarifications/advice/briefs regarding their programme of studies, for example, request for transfer of course of study, correction/change/omission of names, deferment of admission (studies)/resumption, deferment of semester/resumption, withdrawal/re-admission, guide on change of course and other complaints/requests as the need arises, learners requiring specialist advice on emotional or personal problems they feel unable to deal with. It is also important that records of contacts with individual learners are kept confidential at all times.

4.0 METHODOLOGY (PLANNING)

Since distance learning provides an opportunity for life-long learning that assists in coping with the rapidly changing society where knowledge can become obsolete

within a short space of time, then the mode of rendering effective G&C services may therefore pose a lot of challenges.

Due to the peculiar nature of distance learning, a network of system between the Counsellor at the Central Administration or Headquarters and the field offices thus becomes imperative. This method can be achieved as follows:

4.1 Learner Support Services

Three levels of support services for learners are to be involved for effective G&C service delivery. These are:

4.1.1 Study/Learning Centres: These will represent the front line of G&C services provided directly to the learner. Part-time staffs, that is, centre supervisors/managers and course tutors/facilitators, whose main contacts with the learners are face-to-face, will be responsible. The learning centres provide the following services: Enrolment; Orientation for learners; Course Material distribution; Tutorials; Conduct of Examinations and Assignments handling; Examination advice, and; Guidance and counselling.

4.1.2 States/Zonal Offices: NTI staffs in these offices are to monitor and co-ordinate the study centres. Representatives of the Guidance Team in each state/zone are responsible for overall guidance and counselling service provided to learners. They will also monitor progress of learners; Deal with individual referrals; Coordinates enrolment; Conducts orientation/induction for learners together with the Guidance Team; Coordinates conduct of examinations and other administrative functions of the study/learning centres.

4.1.3 Headquarters/Central Administration: The Field Operations & Students' Services (FOSS)/Learner Support Department implements the guidance and counselling policy ensuring overall coordination and training. The department is also responsible for provision of overall guidance and counselling support including referral services for learners.

4.1.4 Other ways of supporting learners are: face-to-face tutorials, telephone, by letter, email and by radio. Due to the structure of distance learning, the main form of contact is face- to-face tutoring during contact sessions with the backup of course materials, that is, **Learner-Learner, Tutor-Learner and Instructional-Media Learner Interactions.**

6.0 CONCLUSION

An efficient and effective Guidance and Counselling services will be achieved if counselling is seriously involved in the running of **“Open and Distance Education without Walls”**.

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