COUNSELLING IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

By

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The couselling is defined as "Assisting individuals towards responsible independence, development of maximum potential or self actualization". (Arbuckle's,1967). While psychological purpose of counselling is "to facilitate development" It aims at maximizing human activeness. Effective human behaviour is the behaviour which give an individual the greatest possible long term control over the environment and effective responses within him which are evoked by any environment.

It is obvious that counselling is about how to choose to live within the constraints or personal limitations, society and physical environment. Hopson (1982) has suggested that there are four possible strategies for solving such problems. These are meant to

1. change the situation
2. change self to adopt the situation
3. get out of the situation
4. stay with the situation and develop way to live with it.

Sometimes, the combination of these may be employed. Counselling in distance education (as this deals usually with the adult) is mostly non-directive. It may be formal or informal. (Munro et al, 1983). Here following four stages have been identified:

- The first is that of helping a person to explore his/her problem.
- The second stage is of understanding of the problem.
- The third stage is helping in the decision-making.
- The fourth stage is putting decision in action.

These stages are not fixed to be followed rather generalized decisions. Problems faced by the distance students may be of

- Physical distance
- Time of schedule
- Limited number of places available
- Limited number of teachers available
- Cultural and religious and political considerations.

Blanchard (1974, P.50) defines counselling as "working with personal problems as opposed to firmly giving and receiving". Counselling actually takes place in the mind of the counsellor. In actual sense counselling and teaching are interrelated processes. Teaching is an activity, which focuses at the facilitating human development.

As student's spectrum is versatile, so different strategies and tactics are required, person come with anxiety in attempting an assignment may need a different approach from a person who comes with anxiety on examination. Therefore a counsellor needs to

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have a range of skills to the situation along with knowledge his/her own limits. This will help the counsellor while referring the students to an appropriate person or agency.

As indicated earlier, counsellor has to assist the students in understanding their situations and the problems so it is necessary to consider some of the basic helping skills. The most critical and creative is listening (Pinny, 1981) or active listening (Nilson-Jones, 1983). So the counsellor therefore, has to pay deep attention to the statements of the students as well as to his/her feeling.

There should be an act of empathy. Here volume, tone, stress on specific words clarify the description of the situation, pace to state of the statement even silence and body language (non-verbal behaviour) is important. Here listening and attending is not only desired but active listening and attending is required. This may be at communication level i.e. reflection of content, reflection of feeling. These should be facilitated by physical position.

Thus, many students facing personal problems may need counselling. Students look towards distance education institutions to help them so as to develop their potential. Following are the primary functions of education, which clearly need guidance and counselling services:

1. Development function.
2. Differential function.
3. Integrating function.

Now let us consider counselling in the theoretical perspective of education, which are briefly discussed below.

Theory of independent study

According to this theory, the learning occurs separate in time and place from the teaching while teacher has the influence at least equal to the teacher in determining goals, resources and evaluation decisions. So the learning is self-pacing, individualized and freedom in selection of goals and activities provided. Student may need counselling in the selection of goals hence here the degree of autonomy and dialogue may vary with the maturity of the learner and level of the academic work. The role of the educational institutions varies with respect to degree of control which largely depends upon the goals or aims of a specific programme. However Holmberg (1987) is of view that an adult educator who regards his work duty to provide support to the distance students whether asked or not. This supports is provided through educational design.

Theory of individualization

According to Peter (1981), distance education is product of industrial era where economic and industrial theory is applied to the distance education process. So usually distance education caters large enrollment and uses mass media technique (Robert, 1984). But individualization cannot be successful without student's support system. This is also necessary as this theory partially meets the essential requirement of the teaching. It pays comparatively little attention to the functional relationship, condition and outcome of the learning. According to Rashid (1992, p.41) Peter's theory is silent on the human aspect, which cannot be ignored as education aims at total development of the

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person. This by itself highlights significance of the guidance and counselling services in this theory.

Theories of interaction and communication

These theories view interaction and communication as central to distance education. So there is provision of effective or satisfactory learning experiences for the distance students after mailing of study materials. The tutor as an academician has to play the vital role of counsellor. He has to perform the role of correcting assignments. In didactic conversation Holmberg (1983, p.116) listed seven postulates, which are concerned with two-way communication by correspondence or telephone. Student's assignments are seen as facilitator rather than as instrument of assessment only. It can occur only if guidance is provided on studying the materials effectively and completely the assignments effectively.

Another theory of the group is concerned with the interaction between the distance learner and the teaching institution. Sewert (1981) advocated an interactive system of distance education with the study center manned by tutor counsellor whose function is mainly to provide human contact and facilitate learning. Here the tutor counsellor is seen as local and continuing support for distance students. This type of support helps to bring down the drop out rate.

Conduct of helping

This is a learning point from where the process of exploration may start and this may be encouraged by the open questions and use of minimal encourages. There are different model of counselling as helping process. Most model divide process into stages. Peterson and Nisenholz (1995, p.93) Egan (1982) Ivey and Sinek-Morgan (1993) Hansen, Stevic and Warner (1986) and Brammer (1993) work is examples.
Source: J. Vincent Peterson and Bernard Niseholz (1995). Orientation to Counselling Third Edition Bosdten: Ally and Bacon. P.94

Counselling at a distance exist even in situations where there is face-to-face contact between students and the teacher or tutor. Woolfe et al (1987, pp. 111-112) have listed seven categories where this relationship is developed.
1. One way written material i.e. instructional design
2. Two way written material i.e. letters, assignments
3. Contact on telephone
4. On via mass media
5. Two way contact via radio, tape and audio
6. Two way contact via audiotape. In this lapse sent back and forwarded between students and tutors.
7. Computer based contact.

While thinking about categories listed earlier empathy, acceptance, genuineness and skills such as active attending and listing are necessary.

Letters and Telephones

Letters and telephone are important means to help the students if careful consideration is not given to a student he/she may drop out. Tutor/course coordinator

should be respective to the idea of exploring the types and level of expectations and feelings of the students. If done properly, one can acknowledge the potential of the situation for facilitating students progress and can apply counselling skills. First important point is that some kind of contact is made. Letters should be responded without delays, as delay may cause drop out. Telephone is more immediate and spontaneous. Students usually write and talk not about the contents but also about their fears and anxieties. Both of these establish the basis of working relationship, which helps the person in clarifying his/her own objectives. Telephone calls or letters may be a starting point, after which students may visit or may write or telephone further. Counsellor may apply skills of empathy, acceptance and honesty.

One way written material (bibliography)

One way written material (bibliography) in loose sense can refer to the use of any form of literacy material, including fiction, in the field of physical and psychological problems. But now according to Woolfe (1987, p.115) it is used to describe "self help learning treatment or action programmes those attempt to engage readers in discussion about personal change". This type of material offers a large amount of self-assessment and diagnostic material. This helps to generate a self-profile leading through an examination of behaviour and feeling to plan for action. Students at a distance are engaged at a variety of levels including thinking, feelings, and behaviour which means that whole person in important. In general this approach is called eclectic approach. This eclectic approach of bibliography focuses on rational emotive therapy, instructional analyses, and gestalt behaviorist perspectives. Bibliography involves the employment of written material to produce change in the reader in such a way that facilitates the change as directed by the person.

Counseling through Radio and TV.

Broadcasting as a number of advantages over other sources of help.

Peterson and Blaslko (1994) as quoted by the Woolfe et al (1987, pp. 128-129)suggested seventeen guidelines for advice and counselling through broadcast media. Five of which are:

1. A clear understanding of whether the aim of a programme to provide advice, referred as counselling.
2. Awareness of such problems and how to avoid them as sensationalism, unwarranted invasion of privacy, false identification with another person's problems, time constraints and need to generalize from specific enquires to the determinant of the individual enquirer.
3. Need for an off-air back **up** services and communication of its nature to listeners e.g. leaflet personal advice.
4. Adequate back up resources like telephone and leaflet's
5. Callers not dealt with on a programme should **be** dealt with either by referral or directly off-air".

Group counseling

Group is an existing, diversified and effective way to help the students. Group may be of many forms "these to seem be a group experience tailored to suit the interest and need of any one who seeks psychotherapy, personal growth **or** simple support and companionship for other" (Lynn and Fraunan, 1985, p.423). The group may be Guidance/ psycho educational group counselling interpersonal problems-solving group, psychotherapy /personality reconstruction group, Task/Work group traditional and historical group. Theoretical approach to counselling in group is varied one. i.e. the work with group may base on psychoanalytic, Gastalt, person oriented, retional-emotive, transitional analysis and behavioural theories. The implementation of any theoretical approach will differ according to the group dynamics. While applying the specific theory, according to *Ward* (1982),counsellor or tutor has to pay attention to the individual, and group level processes.

According to Gladding (!996, p.338), counsellor/tutor must be aware of the stage of interactive work. These stages are terminating. Other model of group counselling also exist but most comprise three to five stages. Peterson and Nisenholz (1995, PP.260-263) has established five stage model on behaviour. Stage 1- Orientation /Forming, stage 2- Transition/Stroming, stage 3- Cohisiveness/Norming, stage 4- Working/ Performing, stage 5- Adjouring/Terminating but overall development of the stages cannot be specifically differentiated Hasan et al (1980, P.476) view that "group may not necessarily move step by step through five stages, but may more backward and forward as a part of its general development" but for the group a beginning, a iddle and a closing is a must. On group processing, functions of counsellor/tutor as identified labour man Yalom and Miles (1973) as follows are 1) emotional situation 2) Caring 3) Meaning attribution, execution. For this counsellor/tutor has to apply individual as well as group techniques as this has interpersonal dimension as well as group dimension.

Tutor as counsellor

Distance educational institutions may develop self instructional material, efficient distribution network but there may be many points where students might need help. This is only possible when the system overcomes the barrier of the distance. In most of the distance education institutions tutors are a part of the organization. Tutoring may be carried out through face to face contact or by correspondence. This function of the tutor according to Rashid (1980, P.38) is carried out by the following.

- Local or field tutor where they are employed.
- College staff who will do some tutoring at study centers but may also visit the students.
- Head teacher, if it is possible to involve them particularly in teachers training courses.
- Correspondance tutors.
- Radio tutoring.
- A student advisor, where one is employed on the staff of distance teaching institution.

Students of the distance education system may have isolation from the institution, or students. They might have hetrogenous educational background so planned counselling is required by the tutor. He may be sourse of dissimination of knowledge, problem solving (emotional, educational and financial). In some cases counselling may be seen as a pertaining tutoring. Some distance learning institutions see counselling as an unnessary service, others offer a little and very few have organised it into system.

When decision is made that counselling services should be provided, institutions has to consider questions like these;

1. Do counselling services need to be locally centrally located?
2. What kind of services need to be provided?
3. What kind of people are needed to staff in?
4. Should counselling role be separate from tutors? (Robinson, 1981, p.157)

So the role of counsellor which he might play in distance education system is of:

- Advicing applicant according to their potential and context (programme level)
- Explanning the distance learning in which they are applicant.
- Advising students on course choice.
- Providing guidance on adminstrative problems.
- Leasing with tutors.
- Assessing students to develop their skills.
- Helping students to maintain their motivation.
- Facilitating study group activities organized.

In short, counselling has emerged as an important ingredient in the distance education system. Most of the distance educational institutions have some type of students counselling services for the purpose of providing personal, educational and vocational counselling to the students, faculty and staff.

Counselling in Pakistan

Allama Iqbal Open University is the only university of Pakistan practicing the distance education mode. This university was formally established in 1974 is entrusted with the task of serving the whole country and all categories of people. Its students are provided with support services. Counselling is one of the students' support services The Counselling services at Allama Iqbal Open University may be categorized as:

Counselling at the main campus
Counselling at the regional centers
Counselling at the tutorial/workshops

Counselling at the main campus.

Counseling related to academic matters is carried out by the academic departments by providing information and advice in course/programme related matters. Admissions and examinations departments are there to solve academic problems, Along these, there is Students Affairs Cell to advise the students and potential students to take appropriate possible decision for admissions, examinations etc. In addition, students are advised and helped on the academic difficulties caused by the personal problems.

Regional centres assist the potential students in choosing the programmes in their perspective of qualification. Besides this, main function of regional centers is organizing the tutorial supports for various courses. Regional personnel are representative of the university in the different field. Their responsibilities are beyond local administration and organizing of tutorial support services. With the emergence of AIOU as a maga university, workload of the regional centers has increased. In order to improve the students counselling in the region, student's counsellor has been appointed at the regional Campus to begin work. The responsibilities assigned Students Counselors by the Director Regional Services are as follows:

1. Guidance and Counselling of students regarding AIOU programmes admissions and examinations schedule.
2. Pre-admission and post admission guidance and inquiry redressal.
3. Dealing students affairs as could ensure redress of their grievances.
4. Prompt response to the student's general queries/complaints.
5. To assist regional heads in the arrangement of student's activities.
6. Sales of admission forms will not be assigned to the student's counsellor.
7. Any other task assigned by the Regional Head.

Students Affairs Cell

It was established as Students Advisory and Counselling Cell. Now it has been strengthened and upgraded as the Directorate of Students Affairs. Main objectives of this are: to provide academic assistance to the students enabling them to continue their course of studies smoothly. In addition it actively processes student's complaints and problems regarding to admission, on mailing, issuance of results and degrees, certificates diplomas and other matters refereed to it by the students,

The detail objectives of this directorate are given below:

1. To provide guidance and counselling to the distance learners   through media, telephone and letters;
2. To carry out individual as well as group (face to face) counselling session at the main campus as well as at regional centers.
3. To act as a liaison between the students and the University.
4. To promote healthy interaction amongst the students through curricular/co-curricular activities so as to motivate them to become active learners throughout the course of studies.
5. To attract new learners and to explain them features of distance education.
6. To write and weekly compare radio programme JAMIA NAMA to provide current information regarding University programmes for students and general public and to highlight the pressing issues of the students and suggest remedial measures.
7. To respond to the queries of general nature.
8. To resolve the problems of the students by making liaison with relevant and academic and servicing department.

The directorate adopts the following modes to counsel and assist general public.

1. Standard answer sheets
2. Personal/specific letters.
3. Telephone counselling.
4. Face to face guidance.
5. Regular commission through media.

It is evident from the objectives that the directorate carries out the following functions.

1. Informing.
2. Advising.
3. Counselling.
4. Coaching.
5. Advocacy.
6. Problems.
7. Co-ordination.
8. Feedback to system.
9. Students extra co-curricular activities.
10. Financial assistance.

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