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Study to Explore the Strategies to Increase Student Participation in Academic Counseling in the Programme Offered Through Open and Distance Learning Mode

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ABSTRACT

When a learner joins a programme in open and distance learning university, he/she is assigned a Programme Study Centre (PSC) which is an approved and recognized Centre for the offered programme. Subject-wise counseling is provided at the PSC by experienced academic counselors. The motivated learner of Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) is expected to go through the study material and clear his or her doubts regarding the material during the counseling session. In a majority of the programmes of IGNOU, a minimum 10% of total study hours are provided for counseling session, but in professional skill based programmes it varies and attendance is compulsory. For example, in the Post Basic BSc Nursing programme of IGNOU, for which target population is in service nurses, the highly motivated learner joins the programme after entrance test and all in-service nurses take No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the organization as it is compulsory to attend theory and Practical counseling every year for which they are expected to take leave for 50-54 days each year. It is a novelty of the programme that students do attend the counseling session and complete their attendance requirement i.e., 75% attendance in theory and 90% attendance in practical, failing which they are not allowed to sit in the examination. Since the year 2008, the author is an academic counselor for one of the course of Post Basic BSc Nursing programme and has provided counseling for 12 hours for the batch of 30 students of the 1st year. Initially the author followed the traditional way of counseling i.e., doubt clarification and tutoring, but it was found that with this method, the student attendance in the class was always 12 to 15 students only, and a majority of them used to leave the class early. This irregularity was brought up in a focus group discussion and the following strategies, which were supported by other research studies also, were explored for enhancing student participation in the counselling sessions: (i) Counsellors should be student-friendly, (ii) Counselling sessions could be made more interactive and friendly, (iii) The counsellor should facilitate group reading during counseling sessions, (iv) A topic can be given to the students for presentation, and (v) The counsellor should get in touch with the learner more often so that the communication gap is bridged.

This study was carried out to explore the different strategies to increase student participation during academic counseling session the courses of Post Basic BSc Nursing programme of the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system using a questionnaire. The semi structured questionnaire consisted of 20-25 items related to academic

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counseling, some suggested strategies, and the additional strategies. The respondents 30 learners of the ODL system. The list of strategies with role of academic counselor and learner will be made available for future use. It is expected that the results of this study will enable the other academic counselors to use suitable strategies to increase student participation in the counseling sessions.

Keywords: *Academic Counseling, Distance Education, Professional Programme.*

Introduction

Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), functioning at the national level for almost three decades, made considerable progress and gives equity and access to those who could not join the formal mode of higher education. IGNOU is an apex institution for coordinating and maintaining standards of ODL in the country. IGNOU has given importance to multimedia technologies like VCD, Gyan Vani radio broadcast, Gyan Darshan TV Channel, Teleconferencing and two-way video-conferencing facilities as supplement media besides the print material (self-learning material). However, the target learners of IGNOU are adult learners having different social, economic, educational backgrounds. Therefore, it is not surprising that the heterogeneous distance learners of IGNOU prefer to attend the face-to-face academic counseling at the study centres and the academic counselors' at the study centres are considered as the link between IGNOU and the distance learners. As a result it is not a far reaching idea to arrive at the fact that the academic counselors' at the study centres of IGNOU have a very important role in the management of academic counseling sessions as well as in maintaining the quality of ODL. On other hand, the learners of IGNOU also see a human face at the study centre in the form of academic counselors'.

Academic Counselling in Ignou

When a learner joins a programme in IGNOU h/ she is assigned a Programme Study Centre (PSC) which is an approved and recognized Centre for the offered programme. Subject-wise counseling is provided at the PSC by experienced academic counselors. The motivated learner of IGNOU is expected to go through the study material and clear his or her doubts regarding the material during the counseling session and it acts as a platform where the learners come into direct contact with the academic counselor and their peer groups. For any distance learner, the academic counseling sessions are very important. The sessions are meant for Informing,

Advising and Counseling (Koul and Bhatt, 1989). In academic counseling, the emphasis is to be given more to the non-academic communication and tutoring should be restricted to minimum possible level. The reason is that the SLM in IGNOU provides the entire content and course requirement in a structured and programmed format. In a nutshell, academic counseling is to cover the components like Helping, Guiding, Motivating, Supporting, Enabling Learning, Creating dialogue with learners. In a majority of the programmes of IGNOU, a minimum 10% of total study hours are provided for counseling session and remaining 90% of the study hours is to be undertaken by learners through self-study with the help of Self-Learning Materials (SLM), writing assignments, getting multimedia support etc., But in professional skill based programmes it varies and attendance is compulsory. **For example, in the Post Basic BSc Nursing programme of IGNOU,**

Programme is offered only for In-service Nurses that is Registered Nurses and Registered Midwives (RNRM) with two years of experience after RNRM (Prospectus for 2016 session). The highly motivated Nurse joins the programme after entrance test and all in-service nurses take No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the organization as it is compulsory to attend theory and Practical counseling every year for which they are expected to take leave for 50-54 days each year. It is a novelty of the programme that students do attend the counseling session and complete their attendance requirement i.e., 75% attendance in theory and 90% attendance in practical, failing which they are not allowed to sit in the examination. The programme is implemented through a network of Programme Study Centres (PSCs) located in recognized colleges of nursing by INC and State Nursing Council. Face-to-face Academic Counselling is conducted at PSC by Academic Counsellors and Practicals are supervised by Academic Counsellors attached to the PSC in the clinical area and community field (Academic Counsellors and Clinical Supervisors are teachers who teach in Colleges of Nursing.. A maximum of 30 students are attached to a programme study centre. The students are required to undergo compulsory contact sessions.

Since the year 2008, the author was an academic counselors for one of the courses of Post Basic BSc Nursing programme and has provided counseling for 12 hours for the batch of 30 students in the 1st year. Initially the author followed the traditional way of counseling i.e., doubt clarification and tutoring, but it was found that with this method, the student attendance in the class was always 12 to 15 students only, and a majority of them used to leave the class early. This irregularity was brought up in a focus group discussion and the following strategies, which were supported by other research studies also, were explored for enhancing student participation in the counselling sessions: (i) Counsellors should be student-friendly, (ii) Counselling sessions could be made more interactive and friendly, (iii) The counsellor should facilitate group reading during counseling sessions, (iv) A topic can be given to the students for presentation, and (v) The counsellor should get in touch with the learner more often so that the communication gap is bridged.

Need of the Study

Action research conducted by author with the objectives to increase student participation in academic counseling sessions and to improve regularity and maintain punctuality among learners by using participatory strategies during academic counseling sessions since 2008, the findings were supported by the study highlighted the information sub-domains under the management in handling of academic counseling sessions conducted to prepare an information system for academic counselors in ODL by Dr. S. Kishore, in the year 2013-14 as majority of the mentioned domains were covered in the action research. The impact of the Adopted Strategies increased attendance from 12-15 to 25-28, with regularity and punctuality was maintained by the Student and they were happy to take presentation for peer group as teacher. Majority of the students used to contact through telephone for confirmation of class and some of the student contacted through e-mail also. This action research gave an idea to researcher to further explore the strategies to increase student participation during Academic counseling sessions in ODL.

This study was carried out to assess the existing practices and to explore the different strategies to increase student participation during academic counseling session of theory courses of Post Basic BSc Nursing programme of the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system using a semi structured questionnaire.

Objective of the Study

- To assess the existing practices followed for academic counseling sessions at Programme study Centre
- To explore the strategies to increase student participation in theory counseling sessions from learners of post basic B. Sc Nursing Programme .

This study is expected to aid in formulating participatory and innovative counseling strategies for the learners in future.

Research Methodology

Looking in to the nature of the research topic and the objectives formulated, the method for the research was decided. For the present research, a descriptive survey method was adopted, as the respondents were scattered all over Delhi. The method of collecting the responses of the respondents through semi -structured questionnaire consists of 30 items developed by the researcher .Out o 30 items first 10 items were related the student support activities before Academic counseling session, next 12 items were related to existing practices followed during the session and 8 items were to explore the strategies to increase student participation in Academic counseling session from the learners .

This study was carried out on the 30 enrolled learners of IGNOU Post Basic B.Sc Nursing Programme from January 2014 session at the study centres of Delhi .

The semi structured questionnaire with a few objective type questions and open ended questions for suggestions was used for the study .The questionnaires were given to learners to filled in and for some of the sample it was filled through telephonic conversation .

The prior permission of PIC was taken to collect the data from learners. It took 20 minutes by learners to respond.

Results

Responses given by Learners to questionnaire:

Demographic profile of the learners: A total of 30 learners participated in this study, out of which (24) 80 % were females and(6) 20 % were males .And (16)53.3% in First year of the programme and rest(14) 46.6% were from the 2nd year of the programme in the year 2015.

Table 1. Frequency and percentage responses given by Learner about activities related to student support at Programme Study Centre N-30

| S.No. | Content | Yes | Percentage | No | Percentage | Remark |
|-------|--|------|------------|------|------------|--|
| 1. | Programme in-charge (PIC) of PSC contacted to you for Induction meeting | 16 | 53.3% | 14 | 46.6% | In first year only |
| 2. | PIC informed you about the counseling session schedule with date | 20 | 66.6% | 10 | 33.3% | Only dates schedule is prepared on the first day of counseling |
| 3. | PIC informed class representative about the counseling session schedule with date | 10 | 33.3% | 20 | 66.6% | Only dated and courses or it is informed that bring all the books |
| 4. | Class representative informed you about the schedule always | 30 | 100% | ---- | ----- | Fist time by PIC rest of the time by CR only |
| 5. | Any change in schedule is also informed by CR only | 30 | 100% | | | |
| 6. | Academic counselors are in touch with all the learners | ---- | ----- | 30 | 100% | Give Phone number but hesitate to contact |
| 7. | Academic counselors (AC) are in touch with CR only | 30 | 100% | ---- | ----- | For session related information |
| 8. | AC followed the schedule time for session | 22 | 73.3% | 8 | 26.6% | Date is followed topic and Time is not followed by many of the ACs |
| 9. | Any change in time was informed by AC | 22 | 73.3% | 8 | 26.6% | To PIC then to CR |
| 10. | You always attended the session after reading content which will be covered. | 7 | 23.3% | 23 | 76.6% | Same will be taught in the session |
| 11. | AC clarifies all the doubts asked by the learners in the session | 30 | 100% | ---- | ----- | Front sitter get more be chance to interact |
| 12. | ACs do tutoring for all the theory content and follow lecture method only | 21 | 70% | 9 | 30% | |
| 13. | Academic counseling sessions are always interactive | 9 | 30% | 21 | 70% | Front sitter get more be chance to interact |
| 14. | All the students attends counseling session just to complete the 75% attendance | 7 | 23.3% | 23 | 76.6% | We really wants to have interactive sessions by ACs and among group also |
| 15. | ACs teach from the SLM only which you can read at home also | 21 | 70% | 9 | 30% | |
| 16. | Topics for individual presentation for peer group were given to all the learners by ACs | ---- | ----- | 30 | 100% | Only 1-2 ACs only in first year |
| 17. | Topics for group discussions and then presentation were given to all by ACs | ---- | ----- | 30 | 100% | Only 1-2 ACs only in first year |
| 18. | ACs acted as facilitator for motivating the learner to read the content and clarify the doubts | 12 | 40% | 18 | 60% | |
| 19. | All ACs provides supplementary material to update learners knowledge | | | 30 | 100% | |
| 20. | Can we make academic counseling more student participatory as you all are in service nurses and some of the theory content are known to you. | 30 | 100% | ---- | ----- | |

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage of responses of the Learners for the participatory strategies for agreement / Disagreement to practice in future.

| S.No | Strategy | Agreement | Disagreement | Remarks |
|------|---|-----------|--------------|---|
| 1 | Connectivity through e-mail between AC and Learners to plan and follow the regularity in the counseling session | (30)100% | - | Possible as we all use smart phone and it will help us to come prepare in the session |
| 2 | Use of DVDs on topics followed by discussion | (30)100% | - | Students are ready to buy or want to have with books |
| 3 | Panel discussion among the learners for the topics learnt in previous qualification | (30)100% | - | Students should be given guidelines in the programme guide |
| 4 | Individual presentation may be given to make them thorough with the content and present gist of it | (30)100% | - | Students should be given guidelines in the programme guide. |
| 5 | Quiz can be organized by ac | (30)100% | - | Students should be given guidelines in the programme guide |
| 6 | Quiz can be organized by learners and AC can act as facilitators | (30)100% | - | Students should be given guidelines in the programme guide. |
| 7 | Case Study Presentation | (30)100% | - | Students should be given guidelines in the programme guide. |

Discussion and Suggestions

On responses given by study sample 1 about activities related to student support at Programme Study Centre

- 1. Information regarding Induction meeting:** A majority of the learners (100%) responded that PIC informed them about Induction meeting in first year only.
- 2. Information regarding counseling session schedule with date to Learners:** The learners were asked about source of information regarding counseling session schedule with date a majority of the learners (100%) responded that PIC informed them always regarding counseling session date for first time as schedule with topic and time is prepared by ACs on first day of session (46.6%) and for rest of time Class representative used to inform regarding any change and planning.
- 3. Information to class representative about the counseling session schedule with date:** In first year for induction meet PIC informs all the learners then CR is being informed as It is practiced in one of the PSC at Delhi that PIC selects the Class representative during induction Meeting and do further communication with CR only and h/She used to inform rest of the learners .

- 4. Information regarding any change in schedule:** Majority of the ACs(100%) informed to PIC and via PIC informed to CR only
- 5. Connectivity of Academic counselors with all the learners:** Though all the ACs have given their contact number to all the learners but they feel hesitant to contact on phone accept one or two of AC who has given her email ID to learners for future use Majority of the learners 100 % replied that it is easy to contact through email with the use of smart phone Or communication in group at whats app.
- 6. Practices related to follows the planned schedule and Preparedness of the learners for the session**
 - Majority (77%) replied that AC follows the schedule for topic planned for the session but time management is not followed which is very disappointing for them as they take leave and come for attending the session. Any change in time was informed by AC to learners though PIC only and some time it becomes so late then they attend the session without reading the content .
 - They all have suggested that schedule once prepared should be followed strictly by the ACs once they become lenient then learners also become casual. Connectivity through email can be practiced if possible by teachers

7. Practices during the session

- Majority (100%) of the learners replied that ACs clarify all the doubts asked by the learners sitting in the first row, some strategy should be planned by AC that all the learners should get a chance to interact in the session
- Majority (70%) of the learners replied that AC do tutoring for all the theory content and follow lecture method
- Majority (70%) of the learners replied that Academic counseling sessions are not always interactive.
- Only 23.3% learners replied that they attend counseling session just to complete the 75% attendance rest Majority (76.6%) come for interaction with the ACs and peer. They all suggested to have a platform for discussion with Programme coordinators at head quarter IGNOU.
- Majority (70%) of the learners replied that ACs teach from the SLM only .
- Majority (100%) of the learners replied that Only 1-2 ACs give topics for individual presentation for peer group discussions followed by presentation .
- Only (40%) of the learners replied that ACs acted as facilitator for motivating the learner to read the content and clarify the doubts
- Majority (100%) of the learners replied no ACs provide supplementary material to update learners knowledge except one . .
- 100 % Consensus were given by the learners for possibility of making academic counseling more student participatory as all learners are in service nurses and some of the theory content are known to them.

Learners suggestion for overall Academic counseling for future implementation :

- It should be Flexible
- Prior information should be given with schedule so leaves can be arranged .
- In induction meeting AC should come and plan the session with time and date or connectivity through what Sapp or e-mail between the learners and AC
- NO cancellation of schedule, PIC should have panel of AC and another AC may be called if one can not come on planned day
- Student feed back plate form to give feed back to IGNOU HQ
- Student discussion forum can be developed in the mentorship of AC
- Links for additional and latest material can be provided
- Guidance for assignment writing and ans. Writing in TEE should be given
- Quizzes can be organized to make us understand the concepts
- Question bank can be developed and discuss during the session
- Connectivity with Ac through e mail for future also
- Guidelines for attending the session for learners
- I Card should be given by PIC to use library of PSC
- Topic which we have read in GNM can be given for case study and role plays can be organized for some of the condition to make it more clear
- Group discussion forum should be facilitated by AC
- Use of ICT for Theory counselling

Conclusion

The present study has attempted to assess the student support activities provided at PSC for theory counseling session in context of learners participation during planning and implementation for PostBasic B.Sc Nursing programme of IGNOU at Delhi based PSCs. Results of the study shows that students are highly motivated to be the part of participatory strategies as they have appreciated the efforts done by academic counselor. Participation from planning level is required as 75% attendance is compulsory. The schedule once prepared should not be changed and use suggested strategies can be planned for future use with proper guidelines for each for the students and the ACs. This research has given an idea to researcher to identify the role of PIC, Ac and Learners for implementing the suggested strategies to increase student participation during Academic counseling sessions in ODL which will be work out with experts for future use

Ethical Clearance: Taken

Conflict of Interest: Nil

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