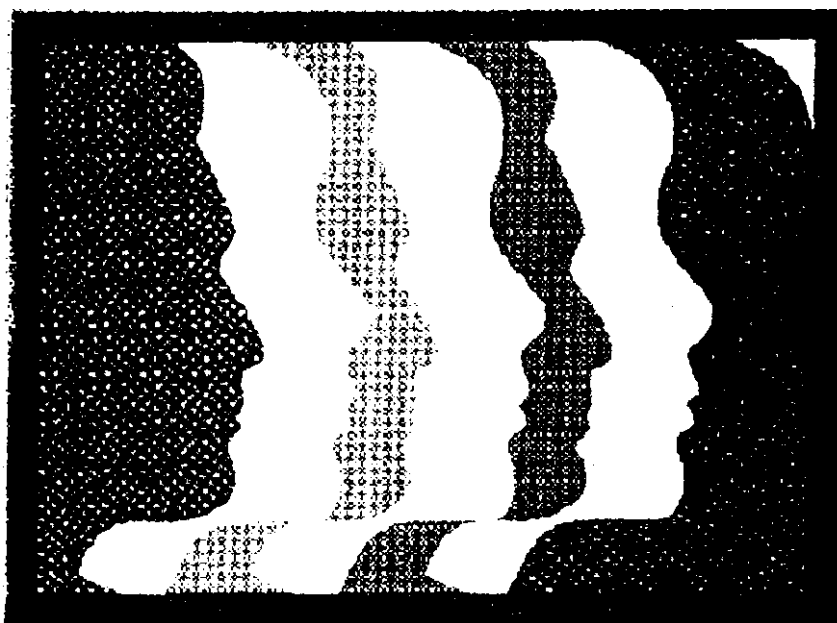


The Will Learn ... !

Counsellors' Perceptions of Academic Counselling



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CHAPTER - 1 : BACKGROUND AND DESIGN OF THE STUDY



1.1 Introduction

Teaching through open and distance learning is quite different from teaching in the conventional education system. In conventional education, face to face teaching is practiced in a classroom situation, where student motivation, classroom activities, feedback, teacher guidance, and proximity of the teacher and learner create an ideal environment for learning. The learners are full time and relatively homogenous in nature which facilitates contiguous learning. However, in the open and distance learning (ODL) system, the situation is completely reverse. The students are a heterogeneous group with irregular habits in studies and often with some of their entrance qualifications less than the others. Moreover, distance learners are also part-time learners. The students learn at their own place and pace. The self learning materials (SLMs) which are highly structured and self-contained are expected to carry out the role of a teacher. Hence, a number of learning activities are incorporated in the SLMs and the subject matter is presented in a simple conversational style. Wherever possible an appropriate pattern of media mix, using audio, video, broadcast, computer media along with printed SLMs is used. It is supported by distance tuition through tutor comments on the learners assignments. It is also supported occasionally (depending on the nature and requirements of the course concerned) by face to face tutorial/counselling sessions and if necessary practicals.

Hence, distance education is highly a specialized branch of education requiring a special set of skills and attitude on the part of teachers who take up distance teaching and function at any of the different levels in the system, such as course designing, course development, course production, tutoring, counseling, evaluation, etc.

In other words ODL revolves around a learner-centered system with teaching activity focused on facilitating learning. The

success of the system does not depend wholly on the highly structured study materials, which is the hallmark of ODL, but on the inter relationship of that package with the distance learner as an individual through the agency of academic counselling



1.2 Academic Counselling

Academic Counselling is one of the most important activities of an Open University / Distance Education Institution. It is important because of the particular characteristics of distance learners, of the institution and of the teaching learning process. An academic counsellor is the only human link between the learners, the institution and the resources of learning. It is through the medium of academic counselling that the real needs of distance learners can be clarified, their conflicting demands of home and work can be reconciled and they can come to terms with their isolation and with problems resulting from their previous experience. Academic counselling is also important in helping distance learners to develop their own individual strategy for studying at a distance. Also, whatever be the merits of the self-learning materials, to the extent they try to build the teacher in the text, try to simulate a classroom situation, they remain finite in their character. On the other hand the learners' needs are infinite in their variety, as all human beings are. To satisfy these variations, it becomes necessary to offer some academic counseling and it is precisely for this reason the role of an academic counsellor becomes important in distance education.

However the academic counsellor is only one type of resource that the learner can access and his/her role is that of a facilitator — linking learners to other resources such as library facilities, various media and software programmes etc., and providing adequate support to empower the learner to exercise control over the learning process. Hence the provision of study center (local resource center) has been made where help can be provided by the academic counsellor to distance learners to overcome barriers to learning which result from the loneliness 'isolation) of the learner working on his/her own

1.3 Role of an Academic Counsellor at IGNOU





Like other open universities, IGNOU appoints experienced teachers from established educational institutions and even competent professionals on a part-time basis for serving as Academic Counsellors at its study centers. The academic counsellor has the combined role of providing general counselling as well as tutoring to the IGNOU learners attached to him/her.

As a general counsellor he/she is supposed to orient learners learn at a distance, familiarise them with the system and try to help them to over come their non academic problems that are hindering their process of learning. As a tutor he/she assumes a role of a subject specialist where the emphasis is on dealing with problems related to the subject. The academic counsellor has another major responsibility of providing distance teaching/tuition by writing tutor comments on the learners assignment responses.

The major functions of an academic counsellor has been summarized in the box below :

MAJOR FUNCTIONS OF ACADEMIC COUNSELLORS

Counselling	Tutoring	Use of Multi-Media	Assessment & Evaluation
(Helping to overcome learning difficulties)	(Helping to achieve satisfactory academic standards)	(making appropriate interventions of non-print media)	(give feedback and establishing inter-personal links)
Specific Tasks of Tutoring and Counselling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiating the student into distance learning. • Guiding the self-learning in the desirable direction • Confirming the positive learning and reinforcing further learning • Identifying mis-learning and undoing the same • Providing non-print instructional interventions • Promoting non-print instructional interventions • Promoting and sustaining academic motivation through suitable techniques • Developing the skills of listening and viewing and following it up with interactions • Identifying person specific problems and help to overcome learning handicaps 		

How to do it ?	<p>Through two way communication :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct face-to-face Counselling sessions giving feedback, academic guidance, initiating interaction, utilizing audio-visual aids, etc • Tele-counselling and radio counselling • Indirect – written media communicating through assignment responses and communicating through letters or other media such as telephone, e-mail, etc 	 
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In order to make the counselling sessions more meaningful, the university organizes an Orientation Programme for the newly appointed academic counsellors, where they are given an exposure to the skills of tutoring, counselling and evaluation of assignments.

Counselling sessions are not lecture sessions. Since the printed material are self learning, the distance learners are supposed to have read the course materials before coming to the session. Ideally the learners should utilize the opportunity given to them i. e., to interact with SLMS more effectively through the agency of the academic counsellor during counselling sessions.

1.3 Counselling Distance Learners at IGNOU

At IGNOU most of the courses have fixed credit value. A credit means the study input required by the programme. One credit is equivalent to 30 study hours. These study hours may be distributed among different study activities required of a distance learner, namely:

- Reading the study materials.
- Viewing / listening to video / audio cassettes
- Working on assignments, self check exercises, etc
- Referring to books

Normally a 4 credit course is equal to 4 to 5 blocks and an 8 credit course is equal to 8 to 10 blocks. Generally a blocks is of 1 credit. Each programme is divided into courses Each course consists of a few printed booklets called Blocks, a few audio, a few videos and some assignments. The block appears in the

form of a booklet of around 60 -- 80 printed pages. Generally each block represents one unified theme. Each block is further divided into units. Each unit is an individual lesson. All units of a block are thematically linked to each other. Normally, the unit comprises of an introduction, explanation of the topics, summary, keywords, self-check exercises to help learners to learn the materials, and further readings and answers to the self check exercises. 10 % of the total study hours allotted to complete a course is set aside for counselling. Hence, a 4 credit course will have 5 sessions and an 8 credit course 10 sessions of 2 to 2 ½ hours'.



Various media are being used to counsel distance learners, viz.

- face to face sessions at Study Centers
- tele-counselling through Gayan Darshan and also teleconferencing at Study Centers / Regional Centers
- phone-in-radio counseling at home / workplace / Study Center
- e-mail at Tele-learning Centers / home / workplace
- chat mode on internet Tele-learning Centers / home / workplace
- practicals at laboratories
- hands on experience at Specialized institutes / industry etc.

All programmes except 2 information technology programmes have the component of face to face counseling sessions which are organized at IGNOU study centers, mostly on weekends and holidays and sometimes even on weekdays but mostly after office hours. Attendance at face-to-face Counselling sessions is not compulsory except for practical courses.

Presently there are more than 20,000 counsellors working at over 600 study centers spread throughout the length and breadth of the country (IGNOU, 2001). The counselling schedule is prepared by the Study Center in consultation with the

counsellors and in accordance with the guidelines provided by various Schools at the HQs



The Regional Centers periodically monitor the conduct of counselling sessions at their study centers. The study centers submit monthly counselling reports to the Regional Center.

In addition, to the face-to-face sessions telecounselling is also provided to IGNOU students through teleconferencing at over 160 receiving stations (which are at Regional centers and Study Centers). An exclusive Educational TV Channel, namely Gyan Darshan, is being used by IGNOU and other institutions / for 24 hours everyday. IGNOU is the coordinating agency for Gyan Darshan. Gradually the number of hours of telecast would be increased and also more effective utilization of this channel for counselling distance learners. Limited (one hour on every Sunday from 4 to 5 pm) phone-in radio counselling is being provided through nearly 190 radio stations including FM stations all over the country. (IGNOU, 2001)

E-support is being specifically provided to Bachelor in Information Technology and Advanced Diploma in Information Technology students. They have not only received their courses on-line but are being counselled through e-mail (asynchronous) and chat mode on Internet (synchronous). Since all distance learners do not have a computer at their homes / workplaces, IGNOU has setup Tele-learning centers which have the state of art infrastructure to facilitate effective delivery of programmes through e-support.

In the science and technology based programmes such as B.Sc., Computer Programmes, Library and Information Sciences, B.Sc (Nursing) etc., practicals are an essential and compulsory component. In all lab practical based courses 70 % to 80 % attendance is compulsory.

It is the duty of coordinator / programme in charge to arrange for practical counselling and hands on work practice in the course during the academic session. Coordinator / Programme In charge has to prepare a schedule in the prescribed format and send it to the learners and counsellors well in advance. The

duration of each session is 2 to 3 hours depending upon the programme and the course. However, in library sciences the duration of the practicals is of 4 hours each.



In addition to face-to-face counselling, a number of academic programmes have been provided with project work as a compulsory component of the programme generally as a separate course. Basically this component is to provide an experience of ground realities in the field of the academic programme which a learner has chosen. Academic counsellors are to assist and supervise learners to pursue their project work. In some professional courses field visits, workshops and seminars are prescribed such as PGJMC, B.Ed., MLIS etc.

1.4 Counselling Support for PGDDE Programme

IGNOU's PGDDE learners are attached to one of the 45 study centers located throughout the length and breadth of the country. IGNOU has appointed 60 counsellors at these study centers for conducting face-to-face counselling sessions. The post graduate Diploma in Distance Education programme has 5 courses of 6 credits each. Normally 10 sessions of **2 1/2 hours** duration are held for each course (50 sessions in all) (STRIDE, 2001).

Those who have successfully completed DDE or PGDDE programme with good performance are appointed as PGDDE academic counsellors. Recently (in 2000) the criteria of selection was altered to attract professionals in the area of media and technology, instructional design, open and distance education, learner support etc. They could be appointed as counsellors, even if they have not completed DDE/PGDDE programmes of IGNOU.

From time to time the Regional Centers conduct interactive radio counselling sessions for the PGDDE learners. Tele-counselling is provided by the STRIDE faculty members on demand.

The academic counsellors also provide support to the PGDDE learners through letters over telephone and if required even spare their valuable time for them at their places of work / home.

1.6 Statement of the Problem



As we know the support provided by academic counsellors is crucial to learners in the ODL system. Presently 60 teachers from the conventional system who have successfully completed the PGDDE programme are performing the role of PGDDE academic counsellors at 45 IGNOU study centers (STRIDE, 2001). All of them have attended a 2 days orientation programme conducted by IGNOU in order to perform the tasks of counselling tutoring and assignment evaluation.

Therefore it is desirable to find out the impact of the two day orientation programme on the PGDDE academic counsellors. Hence the proposed study was planned in order to study whether these academic counsellors have been able to deal with the complexities of academic counselling (counselling & tutoring) and provide distance teaching to the PGDDE learners through comments on their assignment responses.

The rapid expansion of the ODL system in India has provided a vast and ever-growing field to introspect and explore and to find out the contribution of academic counsellors in the teaching — learning process. There is a need for research and empirical evidence to influence the policy makers in order to correct the weaknesses of ODL system with a view to improving the conduct and organization of academic counselling and assignment evaluation and thereby enhance the learning activeness of the learners. Till date no such review has been done of the PGDDE counsellors and their perspective of academic counselling in distance education. Though sporadic information is available but not sufficiently in detail to draw the attention to throw light upon these important questions. An in-depth study was therefore required to be done. Hence, the present study was undertaken.

1.7 Aims of the study

- To know the professional development programmes undergone by the PGDDE academic counsellors
- To critically examine their perspective of academic counselling and assignment evaluation

- To seek their opinion on IGNOU's multimedia instructional system
- To seek their opinion on support services offered by IGNOU
- To find out the benefits accrued to them as a consequence of being academic counsellors of IGNOU.



1.8 Objectives of the study

This study would enable us to :

- List out the types of professional development programmes undergone by the PGDDE academic counsellors
- Name the methods used by the PGDDE academic counsellors in conducting academic counselling sessions.
- Analyze their experience regarding writing of tutor comments.
- Assess the turn around time taken by the academic counsellors in providing feedback to the PGDDE learners
- Describe their views on IGNOU's multi-media instructional system
- List out their views on support services offered by IGNOU
- Specify the benefits accrued to them as a consequence of serving as academic counsellors of PGDDE programme.

1.9 Methodology

Descriptive and documentary method of research was used for this study. The design mainly used the survey technique. Schedules were canvassed to collect data. Interviews were conducted to supplement and corroborate the data. Appropriate tools were developed based on the objectives of the study. The tools were tested before actual use. Data collected was then subjected to descriptive analysis using appropriate techniques.

1.9.1 Universe of the study



The 60 PGDDE academic counsellors appointed and approved by IGNOU formed the universe of the study. These 60 academic counsellors were invited to attend a re-orientation programme conducted by STRIDE in March and August, 2000. Out of 60, 36 attended the re-orientation programmes who were selected for the study. Schedules were canvassed to the 36 academic counsellors to collect data. 30 % of them (12 academic counsellors) were interviewed personally to supplement and corroborate the database.

1.9.2 Response Rate

Table 1.1 Response Rate

Total Number of PGDDE academic counsellors appointed by IGNOU	Number of PGDDE academic counsellors who attended Re-orientation programme		Number of PGDDE academic counsellors who responded	
60	Regions		Regions	
	Bhubaneswar	3	Bhubaneswar	3
	Calcutta	2	Calcutta	2
	Guwahati	3	Guwahati	3
	Patna	3	Patna	2
	Lucknow	1	Lucknow	1
	Ranchi	1	Ranchi	1
	Delhi – 1	-	Shimla	2
	Deli – 2	-	Karnal	2
	Bhopal	-	Jammu	2
	Dehradun	-	Ahmedabad	2
	Srinagar	-	Jaipur	1
	Shimla	3	Hyderabad	2
	Karnal	2	Chennai	2
	Jammu	2	Bangalore	2
	Ahmedabad	2	Kochi	1
	Jaipur	1	Pune	2
	Hyderabad	3		
	Chennai	3		
	Bangalore	2		
	Kochi	2		
	Pune	3		
		36		30

30 (83 %) of the PGDDE academic counsellors who attended the re-orientation programme conducted by STRIDE responded by completing the schedule. They account for 50 % of the total PGDDE academic counsellors appointed throughout the country for providing academic counselling support to IGNOU's PGDDE learners.



1.9.3 Tools of Research

Three steps were followed in developing the tools to be used for the study :

- (i) identification of type of tool to be used
- (ii) item development (identification of variables) and
- (iii) development of the draft of the tool.

The proof of the tool developed was circulated among the STRIDE faculty members to find out the communicability of the language, the adequacy of the response alternatives wherever structured items were used. Based on their comments the items were modified.

Analysis of Data and Chapterisation

The data collected from the schedules were computerized and subjected to descriptive analysis using simple percentage, graphics and diagrams. The data has been presented in the chapter two in the following sections.

- Professional development of PGDDE Academic Counsellors
- Conducting Academic counselling
- Two-way communication through Assignments
- Feedback on support services
- Benefits accrued

1.10 Limitations of the study

- Data was collected from the PGDDE academic counsellors who attended the re-orientation programme conducted by STRIDE in 2000.

- The study is limited to the academic counsellors of PGDDE programme.



1.11 Expected Outcomes

It is expected that the outcome of this study would throw light on the performance of academic counsellors in the ODL system. The study is expected to bring out the deficiencies / gaps in the system and suggest appropriate measures to improve the functioning of the system in general and academic counsellors in particular.

CHAPTER — 2 : IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL **DEVELOPMENT** ON ACADEMIC COUNSELLORS



2.1 The **professional development**

The professional development undergone by the PGDDE academic counsellors is generally of 2 types, namely through professional programmes such as DDE, PGDDE, MADE and; by attending a two day orientation programme organized by IGNOU for its newly appointed academic counsellors.

2.1.1 Professional Programmes Completed

It was essential for any teacher desirous of being selected as a PGDDE academic counsellor to have successfully completed the DDE/PGDDE programme of IGNOU. It is only last year (in the year 2000) that the criteria of selection was altered so that professionals with in-depth knowledge of media and technology, learner support, instructional design, open and distance education etc., could be attracted by IGNOU to serve as its academic counsellors. It is not necessary for the experienced professionals to have completed IGNOU's PGDDE programme. If we look at the data provided by the 30 PGDDE academic counsellors, 17 % (5) of them have done PGDDE and majority of them (83%) have successfully completed the Diploma in Distance Education (DDE) programme of IGNOU. The DDE programme is one of the first programmes introduced by IGNOU, way back in 1987. Majority of the academic counsellors belong to the first batch of DDE (successful) students.

Interestingly 12 of them have also completed the Master's of Arts in Distance Education (MADE) programme which STRIDE had introduced in 1992 as the next higher module after completing the DDE programme. Even today on completion of PGDDE in the first year, the learner goes on to do MADE. On completion of the second module i.e., the MADE programme, the learner becomes eligible to procure the Master's of Arts degree in Distance Education. This reveals that 40 % of them have

successfully completed the MADE programme to gain more foothold in the sphere of open and distance education.



Table 2.1.1 Professional Development of PGDDE Academic Counsellors

Successfully completed	DDE	PGDDE	MADE	Attended 2 days Orientation Programme
	25 (83 %)	5 (17 %)	12 (40 %)	20 (67 %)

2.1.2 Orientation Programmes Attended

Only 20 out of 30 respondents have been oriented at a two days orientation programme conducted by IGNOU. 4 of them had been appointed as PGDDE academic counsellors and therefore they have not been oriented before.

6 academic counsellors were appointed a few years ago and 4 had been appointed very recently; had never been provided an orientation in the system or the PGDDE courses. Since STRIDE conducted the last orientation programme nearly 10 years ago, the academic counsellors appointed thereafter had never attended any such programme. The components of the 2 day orientation programme have been described in the box below :

The components of a typical two-day , approximated five hours a day, counsellor-training orientation programme are (Murugan. 1996) :

- *the concepts of open/distance education* :the implication/relevance of these concepts in the higher educational scenario of India; the feature of open/distance education, etc.
- *the role of assignments and importance of tutor comments on assignment responses* : assignments as a teaching tool (and not merely a tool for evaluation); how to comment on assignment responses, etc.
- *the notion of academic counselling* : the difference between what is called 'counselling' and teaching . the differing role domains of teachers, etc
- *specific content subject areas* how materials have been prepared. the role of self-instructional materials. etc

Usually, the first two items are considered on the first day and the last two on the second day. Evidently, the assumption of such a programme is that conventional teachers with some exposure to distance education can assume the role of a counsellor. In other words, the notion underlying the training is that the teachers, if given theoretical orientation, will be able to transfer it to real situations.



Therefore, these academic counsellors who had attended the above programme have outlined some benefits that they derived from it, which are listed below.

Benefits derived from the orientation programme :

- Understood the role of an Academic Counsellor
- Helped in identifying the needs of individual learners
- Understood the difference between teaching and counselling
- Developed the skills of tutoring and counselling
- Helped towards self development as well as professional development
- Learnt more objective and scientific evaluation methods
- **Upgraded** their knowledge about multimedia instruction
- Improved communication and teaching skills

10 of them who had not attended the orientation programme had therefore no practical knowledge/skills of academic counselling. They had been mainly exposed to the theoretical aspects of ODL which have been covered in the PGDDE courses. Even the 2 day orientation programme mainly covers the theoretical aspects of distance education namely the concept of ODL, the role of assignments and tutor comments and the notion of academic counselling. However, the package does not give any weight age to activities and practical training. The second part of the orientation programme is devoted to the content areas of the PGDDE programme : with which the counsellors are very familiar, having meticulously gone through them as PGDDE learners.



2.2 Conducting Academic Counselling

2.2.1 Counselling Sessions Conducted

63.3 % (19) of the respondents have conducted counselling sessions. 13.3 % (4) of the respondents have mentioned that they are newly appointed and hence have not yet been given the opportunity to conduct counselling sessions. 23.3 % (7) of them have not been invited to take counselling sessions due to less number of students enrolled for the PGDDE programme at those particular study centers. Hence no counselling sessions were organized for PGDDE programme and instead the PGDDE learners were attached to a Distance Learning Facilitator, appointed by the University for low enrolment programmes in the region. All of them have unanimously agreed to the need and necessity for conducting counselling sessions. They have listed many reasons which have been given below :

- Learners come from conventional system and get to know more about the distance education system at counselling sessions
- Counselling sessions help them in completing the programme on time
- It lessens the chances of dropouts
- It provides the learners opportunities to meet and interact with their peer group
- It provides them opportunities to clarify their doubts and resolve many of the problems coming in the way of their learning through human intervention of the counsellor.
- It also helps the learners in answering their assignments and ultimately appearing in the term-end examinations. They can make use of audio-visual aids during counselling sessions.
- Above all, it is a highly motivating experience for the learners.

Hence 50 % of them have suggested that attendance at counselling sessions should be made compulsory. The 50 % who are against making it compulsory are of the view that any kind of compulsory attendance is against the philosophy of ODL. However the other 50 % of the counsellors felt that at least 25 % of the counselling sessions should be made compulsory so that all distance learners would understand the importance and role of academic counselling in the teaching – learning process and take advantage of it.



Some of them have suggested that there should be an extended contact programme of 5 days duration which should be a compulsory component which could be utilized for imparting the practical skills of tutoring, counselling and writing tutor comments on assignment responses.

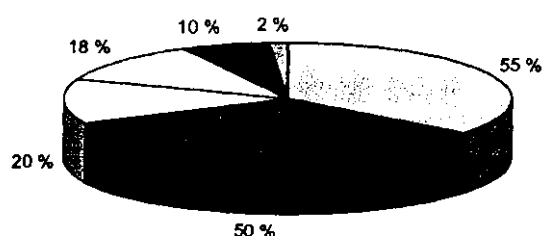
2.2.2 Attendance at Counselling sessions

Majority (70 %) of the academic counsellors have stated that the attendance at counselling sessions is below average. 30 % of them found it average. The major reasons given by the respondents for low attendance at counselling sessions are (i) lack of compulsory provision of attendance, (ii) pre-occupations of learners with household and office responsibilities, (iii) indifference/lack of interest of learners, (iv) learners do not feel the necessity of counselling sessions, v) study center is not centrally located and, (vi) information regarding counselling sessions reaches late (after the sessions have been held).

Table 2.2.1 Reasons for not attending counselling sessions



Reasons for not attending counselling sessions	Percentage of opinion
(i) Lack of compulsory provision of attendance	55 %
(ii) Pre-occupations of learners with household and office responsibilities	50 %
(iii) Learners do not feel the necessity of counselling sessions	20 %
(iv) Indifference / lack of interest of learners	18 %
(v) Study Center not centrally located	10 %
(vi) Information regarding counselling sessions reaches late	2 %



Except for 3 academic counsellors all of them made efforts to contact the absentee learners. The major medium used was writing of letters (80 %) followed by telephone (75 %), personal comments on assignment responses (72 %) and word of mouth, sending messages through friends (20 %).

Irregular distance learners also made attempts to contact the counsellors by visiting the counsellors at their place of work (70 %) and through letters (30 %).

2.2.3 Methods Used in Counselling Sessions

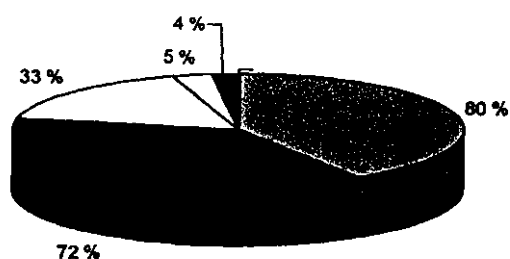
Interestingly 88 % of the counsellors used lecture and discussion method in counselling sessions. Around 60 % used group interaction and moderation method. Barely 34 % made use of audio visual aids during the sessions. The reasons quoted by them regarding the non-utilization of audio and video programmes were : (i) scarcity of equipment to play the tapes; (ii) non-availability of equipment at study centers; (iii) lack of

cooperation of study center staff; (iv) lack of training and; (v) power failure. Barely 15 % of them had pre-viewed the audio-video programmes before utilizing them in the sessions.



Table 2.2.2 Reasons for Non-Utilization of Audio-Visual Aids

Reasons	Percentage of Opinion of non-users
(i) Scarcity of equipment	80 %
(ii) Non-availability of equipment	72 %
(iii) lack of co-operation of study center staff	33 %
(iv) lack of training	5 %
(v) power failure	4 %



When asked to specify the group learning techniques utilized by them to make the sessions interactive, 12 % have mentioned that they did not utilize any such method as barely 1 or 2 students would turn up for the sessions. Some of them used role play and brainstorming. The devices used were blackboard charts and atlas.

2.3 Two way communication through Assignments 2.3.

1 Assignment Evaluation through Tutor Comments

26 % of the respondents have never evaluated any assignments. A few of them being newly appointed and many of them have not

been given any assignments for evaluation due to low enrolment of learners and low level of assignment response submission. 74

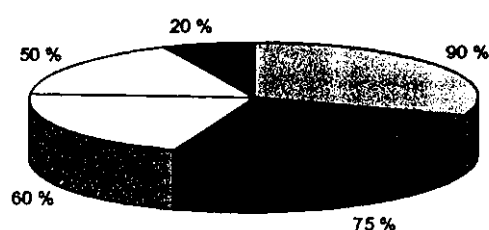


of them who have evaluated assignments have written tutor comments, both marginal and global comments and sometimes even personal comments.

While describing their experiences about writing tutor comments, majority of them mentioned that it was a meaningful exercise (90 %), very time consuming (40 %) and a few of them found it difficult and cumbersome (2 %). Their opinion regarding writing of tutor comments (Table 2.3.1) reveals that (9/10th of counsellors) they need training and re-training.

Table 2.3.1 Opinion of Counsellors regarding Writing of Tutor Comments

Opinion regarding writing of Tutor comments	Percentage of opinion
• Requires training and re-training	90 %
• One needs to cultivate these skills	75 %
• Increases the learners motivation and improves their performance	60 %
• Good method of communicating with distance learners	50 %
• Absence of monitoring has reduced the role of tutor comments into an ornamental one	20 %



2.3.2 Adherence to Turn Around Time

70 % of the respondents adhered to the prescribed (by the University) turn-around time, provided for assignment evaluation

and feedback to the learners. 30 % of them found the time provided insufficient. They mentioned that all assignments were handed over to them just a few days before the examination. Hence, they could not evaluate and return them to students in time.



On an average the academic counsellors required 30 to 45 minutes to evaluate a single assignment response. A few exceptions (5 %) said that they require 1 hour to 1 ½ hours to evaluate one assignment.

2.3.3 Preference for Grading

75 % of the respondents prefer grading system to the marking system. 25 % of them who gave more credence to marking felt that marking was more accurate than grading. However they (25 %) found grading suitable for examinations. The reasons given by 75 % of the respondents for preferring the grading system are :

- It is a fairly objective system
- It is more rational as it decreases foul competition
- It is more satisfying to the learner as its lessens the chance of variation
- It has less scope for wrong judgments
- It also prevents discrimination among learners.

2.4 Feedback on Multimedia Instruction

2.4.1 Self Learning Materials (SLMs)

It is interesting to note that majority of the academic counsellors (60 %) found the PGDDE printed course materials good, 37 % found them satisfactory and 3 % unsatisfactory. Their detailed opinion is given in Table 2.4.1.

Table 2.4.1 : Opinion about Printed Self Learning Materials (SLMs)

	Good	Satisfactory	Un-satisfactory
• The study materials are self instructional and have a teacher built in the text	25	5	–
• They are comprehensive and adequately cover the syllabus	24	6	–
• The language used is simple to understand	18	11	1
• Each new idea and term has been clearly explained	19	11	–
• Difficult concepts have been clearly explained	17	11	2
• The pictures and diagrams have been appropriately used	17	11	2
• The check your progress questions are adequate	21	7	2
• Case studies and examples given are adequate	17	11	2
• References suggested are adequate	22	8	–

Feedback reveals that 83 % found the printed materials really self instructional. 80 % of them found them very comprehensive. 60 % found the language simple and easy to understand and 40 % were just about satisfied. 37 % of them

- reduces their anxiety during examinations
- motivates distance learners



70 % of them opined that the type of questions asked in the assignments are appropriate and make the distance learners write original answers with some analysis. 30 % felt that the questions are framed in such a manner that they make the distance learners apply the knowledge that is given in the text in the form of case studies etc.

2.4.4 Teleconferencing

40 % of the respondents have participated in teleconferencing but in hardly one or two sessions. They found teleconferencing very beneficial both from the learners as well as counsellors point of view, because of interaction with resource persons from HQs. However they expressed that teleconferencing cannot completely replace face-to-face counselling sessions as it does not fulfill the criteria of continuity of concern. **Moreover** teleconferencing facilities are available at very limited places.

The academic counsellors have suggested interactive radio counselling, cable TV networks and direct connectivity **between** the STRIDE faculty and the PGDDE learners through the internet, as other media that could be utilized for instructional purposes. They particularly stressed on radio because of its outreach and affordability and utility for these learners who do not attend counselling sessions at study centers. Direct contact could be maintained between the learners and STRIDE through e-mail. Frequently asked questions (FAQs) could be posted on the STRIDE website which would be beneficial to both learners and counsellors.

2.5 Feedback on Support Services

2.5.1 IGNOU Study Center

Barely 20 % of the academic counsellors are satisfied with the support services provided by the IGNOU study centers. They

have also given the reasons for their dissatisfaction which are :

(i) study center staff are not regularly in contact with the counsellors; (ii) they do not have list of students attached to them; (iii) they lack space; (iv) the staff is not active and prompt; (vi) they do not provide the latest information to counsellors, and lastly (vii) they lack sensitivity.



70 % of the respondents are not satisfied with the arrangements at the study center for conducting counselling sessions. 60 % of them mentioned that the study center, staff does not cooperate with them. Regarding their suggestions for improvement, the respondents felt that the selection of the study center coordinator is very crucial for the success of the system. The coordinator must have experience in distance education or should have at least completed the PGDDE programme.

Study center staff should be oriented and familiarized with open distance education methodologies time to time and sensitized to the problems of distance learners and counsellors. Only then they would understand the importance of timely receipt of course materials, adherence to turn around time for providing feedback to the learners on TMAs and the proper organization and conduct of counselling sessions.

2.5.2 Study Center Library

60 % of the respondents have mentioned that they have been using the library but not very regularly. 38 % have been regular users and only 2 % have not used it all. But unfortunately all the users of the library have expressed their dissatisfaction with the library facilities. Their reasons for dissatisfaction are given in Table 2.5.1 below.

Table 2.5.1 Dissatisfaction with Library facilities

Reasons for Dissatisfaction	Number of Respondents
(i) Reference books are not arranged properly	17
(ii) Catalogue is not available	20
(iii) No proper reading room facility	21
(iv) Reference books are not available	11

(v) Sufficient SLMs are not available	11
(vi) Required TMAs are not available	9
(vii) Term end exam papers are not available	9
(viii) Study Center Staff does not cooperate	9
(ix) Restricted library support (not allowed to borrow books)	14
(x) Library is closed during working hours	9



From the above Table 2.5.1 it may be inferred that the major reasons for dissatisfaction expressed by nearly 70 % of the respondents are the non – availability of catalogues and lack of proper reading room facility. Around 50 % have expressed that reference books are not properly arranged and there is lack of borrowing facility. Purpose for which library facility has been used by counsellors are given below :

60 % of them used for referring to books, 50 % for referring to the SLMs, TEE papers and borrowing the audio-video programmes.

In response to review the support services provided to the PGDDE learners and rating of support services them in the order of being beneficial to the learners, the respondents rated SLMs and counselling sessions at one to eight in the order of priority. (Refer to Table 2.5.2)

Table A Ratings of Support Services

Support Services	Ratings (Highest)
SLMs	1
Counselling Sessions	2
Regional Center	3
Letters	4
Telephone	5
Induction Programme	6
Teleconferencing	7
Library	8 (lowest)

opportunity to apply the knowledge gained from the DDE/PGDDE/MADE programmes. 53 % of them mentioned that this assignment gave them more confidence to carry out their permanently jobs (as conventional teachers) better.



50 % felt that it has helped them to improve their career prospects and 46 % felt that it generated a new interest to keep their mind active. 23 % said that it helped them get a job in an open university and thus get promotion and a pay rise. 20 % got an opportunity to re-enter the job market and improve their career prospects generally. Some (5 %) have also stated that their involvement in activities of IGNOU widened their area of acquaintance.

2.6.2 Overall Assessment

In overall terms nearly 50 % stated that they derived some benefit; 40 % derived enormous benefit and the remaining little or no benefit. All of them have stated that they really benefited from the PGDDE programme to function as academic counsellors. Hence they have suggested that this **programme** should be made compulsory for all academic counsellors of IGNOU. It should be offered to them either free of cost or **at very** concessional rates.

CHAPTER - 3 : SUMMARY



The support provided by academic counsellors is crucial to the learners in the ODL system.

3.1 Objective 1 : List out the types of professional development undergone

The 30 PGDDE academic counsellors have themselves completed DDE/PGDDE and some of them (40 %) have even done the MADE programme. 67 % of the respondents have also attended the 2 days orientation programme, which is a counsellor training programme conducted by IGNOU.

3.2 Objective 2 : Name the methods used by the PGDDE academic counsellors in conducting academic counselling sessions

88 % of them have used lecture and discussion method. 60 % used group interaction and moderation method. Only 34 % made use of audio visual aids during counselling sessions.

Among the group learning techniques utilized by them are brainstorming and role play. The **devices** used were blackboard, charts and atlas. 50 % of them suggested that attendance at counselling sessions should be made compulsory. Some of them even suggested that there should be a compulsory extended contact programme of 5 days duration. 70 % of them found that attendance at sessions below average and 30 % of them found it average. The major reasons for low attendance according to them were lack of compulsory provision of attendance; pre-occupations of learners with household/office responsibilities; lack of interest of learners; learners do not understand the need for counselling; study center is not centrally located and information regarding counselling sessions reaches late.

Except for 1 % all of them made efforts to contact the absentee learners. The major medium used was through letters (80 %), telephone (75 %), through assignment responses (72 %) and Nord of mouth (20 %).

3.3 Objective 3 : Analyze their experience regarding writing tutor comments



74 To of the respondents have done assignment evaluation and have written tutor comments on the students' assignment respondents. Majority of them 90 To found it very meaningful exercise, 40 % found it very time consuming and 2 % difficult and cumbersome.

90 To of them felt that writing of tutor comments requires training and re-training; 75 To felt that one needs to cultivate these skills; 60 To said that it increased the learners' motivation and improved their performance; 50 % found it a good method of communication and 20 To felt that absence of monitoring has reduced the role of tutor comments into an ornamental one.

3.4 Objective 4 : Assess the turn around time taken by the academic counsellor

70 To of them adhered to the turn-around time prescribed by the university. 30 To could not do so as the assignments **were** handed over to them just a few days before the exams.

On an average it took them 30 to **45** minutes to evaluate a single assignment response. 5 % of them however required 1 to 1 % hours to evaluate one assignment.

3.5 Objective 5 : Describe their views on IGNOU's Multimedia Instruction System

60 % of them found the PGDDE print materials good, 37 found them satisfactory & 3 To unsatisfactory. 83 % found the printed materials really self instructional. 80 % then found it very comprehensive. 60 % found the language simple and easy to understand and 40 To were just about satisfied.

37 % of them are just satisfied with the explanation of difficult concepts, use of pictures and diagrams; and adequacy of case studies and examples. However 7 % were not at all satisfied with the explanation of terms, concepts and picture diagrams and case studies used. 70 To found the check your progress

exercises adequate and good and also the references suggested at the end of the units.



Regarding audio and video programmes, 50 % felt that they should supplement the print materials and 50 % felt that they should complement them. 50 % of the respondents found the video programmes very useful and 33 % found the audio programmes very useful.

23 % found the videos fairly useful and 50 % expressed the same opinion about the audios. 27 % did not find the videos useful at all and 17 % said this about the audios. All of them felt that submission of TMAs should be compulsory. 75 % also felt that the weight age of TMAs in the overall assessment should be increased from 25 % to 40 %.

40 % of the respondents have participated in teleconferencing but in hardly one or two sessions, which they found very beneficial. But they felt that teleconferencing can only partially replace face to face counselling sessions.

The counsellors have suggested that interactive radio counselling cable television networks and internet are the other media that could be used for interacting with the **PGDDE learners**.

3.6 Objective 6 : Describe their views on Support Services offered

Barely 20 % of them are satisfied with the support services provided by the IGNOU study centers. 60 % of them have specifically mentioned that the study center staff does not cooperate with them. 70 % of them were not satisfied with the arrangements made by the study center for conducting counselling sessions.

They suggested that study center staff need orientation and training. The coordinator should have completed PGDDE programme.

All of them were dissatisfied with the study center library. The major reasons for dissatisfaction are : absence of catalogues and reading-rooms, no proper arrangement of books and lack of

borrowing facility. They have rated the support services in the order of being beneficial to the learners. The order of priority is as follows :-

First SLMs, counselling sessions comes second, followed by regional center (third), letters (fourth), telephone (fifth), induction programme (sixth), teleconferencing (seventh) and library (eighth).

3.6.1 Objective 7 : Specify the benefits accrued to them as a consequence of being academic counsellors of PGDDE programme.

65 % of them have over 10 years experience as counsellors of IGNOU and 21.7 % have less than 5 years and 13.3 % have no experience as they were newly appointed.

77 % of the respondents mentioned that they learnt more about the open university system; 60 % stated that this gave them an opportunity to apply the knowledge gained from the PGDDE/DDE/MADE programmes; 53 % gained more confidence to carry out their permanent teaching jobs better, 50 % improved their career prospects; 23 % got them a job in an open university; 20 % got an opportunity to re-enter the job market and 5 % widened their areas of acquaintance.

In overall terms 50 % said that they derived some benefit. 40 % derived enormous benefit and the remaining 10 % little or no benefit.

However, all of them, have stated that they really benefited from the PGDDE programme to function as academic counsellors. Hence they have suggested that this programme should be made compulsory for all academic counsellors of IGNOU. It should be offered to them either free of cost or at very concessional rates.

3.8 Conclusion

Identification of the right academic counsellors will have a long term positive impact on the system. Renewal of counsellors should not be ritual but should be based on actual performance

of counsellors. The university should effectively monitor their performance.



In order to make counselling sessions more interactive, the academic counsellors should be given practical training in the conduct of counselling sessions and in the writing of tutor comments.

New training strategies need to be developed by STRIDE. Also refresher courses in distance education methods need to be arranged for academic counsellors periodically to update their knowledge and information and sharpen their skills.