

GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING AS A TOOL FOR TRANSFORMING DISTANCE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA FOR MEETING GLOBAL CHALLENGES

Chinedu Obioma Okoye
National Open University of Nigeria,
Enugu Study Centre,
Enugu - Nigeria

Abstract

This paper discusses guidance and counselling as a tool for transforming distance education in Nigeria for meeting global challenges. Highlights on the global challenges were noted. They include challenges in education with respect to Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in Nigeria, economy, politics, technology etc. It equally highlighted efforts of government in curbing these challenges, which has yielded little or no fruit. The paper highlighted the challenges faced by a distance learner and how effectively guidance and counselling services in open and distance education can be used to ameliorate these challenges. Some of the measures advocated are to assist distance learners in acquiring as early as possible positive image of self through self-understanding, self-direction and skills acquisition for problem-solving and decision making. It finally recommended that Guidance and Counselling should be given its proper place by the government by ensuring that more professional counsellors are employed in open and distance learning institutions to help distance learners in their academic pursuit.

Keywords: Guidance and Counselling, Distance Education, Global Challenges

Distance Education is derived from “correspondence education which arose from non formal education (Idowu, 2012). It is the mode of instruction by which the instructor and the students are separated in time and space. Interaction between the learner and the instructors is usually limited or not regular. The mode of instructional delivery may be synchronous or asynchronous. Distance education acts as remedy or relieve of hope to many qualified candidates who desired to gain admission into

conventional institutions but rather were denied as a result of the low carrying capacity of those institutions. This mode of instruction is increasingly becoming popular due to its flexibility and learner friendly approach, especially to those who could not get access to the formal education system due to the nature of their work.

In the Nigerian education sector, due to the place of education in the economy, the government has taken some measures to increase the literacy of its citizens by granting licences to individuals and private organisations like churches to run private schools, increase the number of government owned institutions and the introduction of National Open University of Nigeria to make up for the low-carrying capacity of the conventional universities and also to make higher education accessible to many Nigerians. The government also introduced other measures such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE), Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund), the Petroleum Development Trust Fund (PTDF), various scholarships, free education, meal subsidies and bursary awards etc to tackle education and learning challenges. Indeed, government has done a lot in trying to tackle these challenges in education and learning but, there are still much more to be done.

In Open and Distance Learning (ODL), some of the challenges include those associated with low societal recognition, Quality Assurance of Academic programmes, dearth of trained staff in distance education methods, instructional delivery methods, ICT and power supply, cost of personal computers, infrastructural, course material and negative mind set. (Ajadi 2010, Bolupe, 2016). Some of these challenges like societal recognition, quality assurance of academic programme and negative mindset in ODL cannot be tackled by government directly. These challenges could be tackled through the use of professionally trained guidance and counsellor. This is because it is only a professionally trained guidance counsellors that can take care of the psychological aspect of humans challenges. The use of internet facilities by the students can be improved on through the use of guidance and counselling. The life style, study habit/patterns and associations of the students can also be affected through guidance and counselling. This paper is an attempt to examine how guidance and counselling can serve as a tool for transforming distance education in Nigeria for meeting global challenges.

Concept of Guidance and Counselling

The term guidance and counselling have been variously defined by different writers. Each definition is influenced by the theoretical orientation of the individual defining it. While each of the various definitions may be unique, the central theme that runs through them is that it is made up of many services provided to those in need of help to harness the potentials for their optimum development educationally, personally, socially and vocationally. Ugwuegbulam in Omosule (2003), define the word guidance and counselling as two sides of the same coin. According to him,

guidance is to direct, pilot, manage, steer, aid, assist, lead and interact while counselling is the process by which a person with a problem is helped by a professional counsellor to voluntarily change his behaviour, clarify his attitude, ideal and goals so that his problem may be solved. Ipaye (1983) in his own view, defined guidance as all the means whereby an institution identifies and responds to the individual needs of pupils or students no matter the nature of the need and no matter its source, thereby helping the child or student to develop his/her potentials maximally. Obi (2013) opined that counselling is an element of guidance although it is a more personalized process. It is both private and confidential in nature. It deals with individual's personal, emotional and psychological problems. While Modo (2008), defined counselling as a helping relationship between the counsellor and the counsellee. Egbo (2013) and Obi (2013) agreed that counselling is a learning process in which a counsellor helps an individual or individuals learn, understand themselves and their environment and be in a position to choose the right type of behaviours that will help them develop, grow, progress, ascend, mature and step up, educationally, vocationally and socio personally. Counselling is one service under guidance which is a transformative process of helping people to learn all that are to be learnt both in and outside the school.

From the above definitions, it means that guidance and counselling is a combination of services which include the ability to help students in need to manage their potentials and capabilities for educational, personal, social and vocational development. This is achieved through rendering of such services like orientation, counselling, information, planning, placement-up and follow-up, appraisal and referral. One can safely assert that guidance and counselling is a helping programme carried out mainly by interpersonal communication where by a counsellor helps the client in using adjustment strategies and skills in gaining insight about himself/herself to purposely maximize his or her natural potentialities. The above assertion is in line with Sherter and Stone (1981) who stated that guidance and counselling is the process of helping individuals to understand themselves and their world,

Role of Guidance and Counselling

Due to the global instability and uncertainty, the role of Guidance and Counselling in the transformation of education in Nigeria for meeting global challenges is inevitable. Wrenn in Idowu (1989) stated that the role of counsellors regardless of setting, include:

- *to provide a relationship between counsellor and counsellee, the most prominent quality of which is that of mutual trust of each in the other.*
- *to provide alternatives in self-understanding and in the courses of action open to the counsellee;*
- *to provide leadership in developing a healthy psychological environment for clients; and*

- *finally, to provide for the improvement of the, counseling process through constant individual self-criticism and (for some counsellors) extensive attention to improvement of process through research.*

From the Survey conducted by Nwoye, (1983), it was observed that school counsellors were responsible to the principals, teachers, students, parents, and the community in certain ways. Some counsellors roles he listed include:

- (i) *organise orientation to help new students from primary to secondary school adjust to the new environment;*
- (ii) *define and interpret the objectives of the guidance programme to the principal, teachers, students, parents and members of the community;*
- (iii) *identify guidance needs of students and keep teachers informed of developments which may have bearing on classroom situations;*
- (iv) *assist teachers in providing group guidance experiences to students through talks, club and classroom activities;*
- (v) *coordinate the accumulation, development and effective use of meaningful data through interviews etc. for the effective implementation of the continuous assessment procedures;*
- (vi) *help principal to provide information to parents about school policies etc;*
- (vii) *assist parents to have a realistic perception of their children's attitudes, aptitude, interests among others;*
- (viii) *collect and disseminate to parents information concerning careers and opportunities for further education, training and curricular offerings.*

From the foregoing, the counselling role in transformation of education in Nigeria brings about self realization and self reliance. It helps the individual to gain a better understanding about himself. It equally enables the counsellee to be well-suited in the job he was trained for that not only gives him financial strength but also gives him maximum satisfaction. Call it job satisfaction the importance of which cannot be over emphasized.

Education

Early philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato pointed out that education was central to the moral fulfilment of individuals and the well-being of the society in which they live. In the past few decades, research has supported this conventional

wisdom, revealing that education not only enables individuals to perform better in the labour market, but also helps to improve their overall health, promote active citizenship and curtail violence. (Sandy, 2013). The benefits that accrue from education is more than a personal obligation. For there to be a smooth and developed society, there is need to have qualified and well educated citizens. This is imperative because educated individuals help the society to solve life problems and global challenges. This is in line with Harri, (2011) who believed that education is a prerequisite as society needs able thinkers who can solve life challenges when they arise. For this reason, education has become more important than just for personal fulfilment; it is indispensable especially now that times are changing. Education is not just about getting good grades but rather, it is to bring change as well as the ability to discover new things which will bring about an overall development in man's condition and his society. Mohamed (2015) opined that, "If one is educated, you are well aware of your rights, the law and your responsibilities towards the society". Hence, education is an important factor which contributes in social harmony and peace in the society.

Distance Education

Distance Education is the mode of learning in which there is a separation in time or place between the learner and the instructor (facilitator). It is the offering of educational programmes designed to facilitate a learning strategy which does not depend on day-to-day contact teaching but makes best use of the potentials of students to study on their own. It provides interactive study materials and decentralised learning facilities where students can seek academic and other forms of educational assistance when they need it. (Harri, 2011) Distance learning, is sometimes called e-learning, that is, a formalized teaching and learning system specifically designed to be carried out remotely by using electronic communication. Distance learning is less expensive to support and is not constrained by geographic considerations. It offers opportunities in situations where traditional education has difficulty in operation. Students with scheduling or distance problems can benefit, as can employees, because distance education can be more flexible in terms of time and can be delivered virtually anywhere. Margaret in Florit, Montañó & Anes. (2012) described distance learning as any instructional arrangement in which the teacher and learner are geographically separated to an extent requiring communication through media. Distance learning is a flexible learning tool and it is a model of education that is done where the teachers and the students cannot see each other in face to face mode but they can interact with each other through some equipments.

Some of the benefits of distance learning according to Queensborough College (2006:1) are:

- *provides for an increase in access to education for those who otherwise have no other opportunities due to work, family or physical limitations.*

- *greater flexibility in location for study-students can engage course at home or work or on campus or at a library.*
- *distance education is learner centered -DE places responsibility for learning with the learner who must be more active and self directed.*
- *facilitates greater learner-instructor interaction.*
- *opportunity to develop technology competencies for instructors and learners.*
- *Access to global resources and experts via internet communication and Internet resources.*
- *has the potential to equalize access to education.*

However not minding the laudable benefits of distance learning, if not properly harnessed through orientation of learners by a professional guidance counsellor, the learner may not be able to tap sufficiently the laudable benefits inherent in the programme. This is because the mode of study in distance education is quite different from that the conventional universities. Learners should therefore are guided in their studies through the services of professionally trained counsellors.

Global Challenges

Global Challenge is any major trend, shock, or development that has the potential for serious global impacts and thus to create humanitarian needs and change the environments in which humanitarian actors will operate in coming years. (Kirsten, 2010). Some of the global challenges according to Kirsten include: climate change, food crisis, water scarcity, energy security, migration, extreme poverty and inequality, financial and economic crisis, health pandemics and infectious diseases. According to Kirsten, the major concern is that these challenges will also create massive volatility, insecurity and instability. Countries, regions, and even the global community as a whole may lack the capacity, knowledge, financial resources, institutional frameworks and governance systems required to respond to multiple and competing challenges. Indeed, these challenges do not occur in isolation and their effects on the ground cannot always be accurately attributed to one but to several of these challenges. It is the synergistic effect of several challenges which increases vulnerabilities to crises and requires a multi-dimensional and well-coordinated responses.

The Millennium Project, presented diagrammatically the 15 Global challenges facing humanity. It is shown in figure I below. Of all these challenges,

the focus of this paper is the global challenges to Distance Education in the Nigerian context and the role of professional guidance and counselling in tackling this challenges as they affect

Distance Education and the way forward.

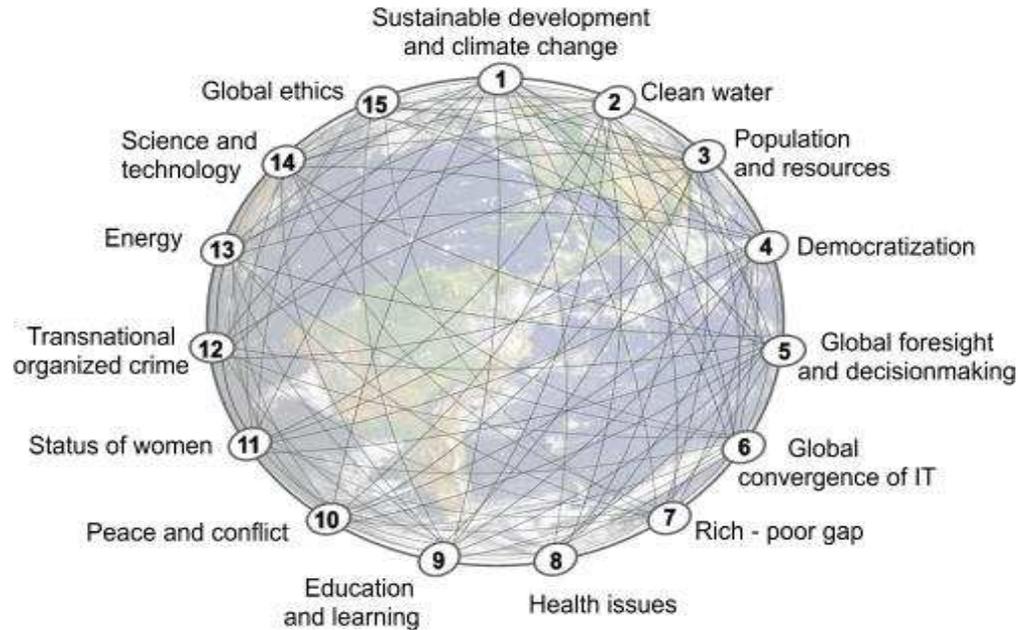


Fig 1: 15 Global challenges facing humanity
Adapted from: 2014 Millennium Project

What are Global Challenges in Distance Education

Many countries of the world that practice distance education are experiencing global challenges in their different levels and capacities. According to Bossu in Willem, Tynan and James (2013) in South America and Australia, some of the challenges faced by distance education providers include; lack of technological infrastructure: low internet connection, under developed technical skills in both staff and student, lack academia’s who are versatile in distance learning mode. The case is not different in Uganda, among their global challenges include: poor infrastructure, the high cost of education, an outdated curriculum, inadequate expertise in distance education, and poor attitudes towards distance learning (**Gudula, Natalie & Clayton, 2010**). The case is not different in Ghana, Brazil, Thailand and other developing countries such as Nigeria.

In the case of Nigeria, Distance Education is still at its infancy and it is grappling with so many challenges. Kim & Shih cited in Mohammed (2016) categorized the challenges of distance education into technological challenges and Sociological Challenges. Technological challenges include lack of computer facilities and network infrastructures, synchronous/asynchronous discussion, exam supervision system to curb cheating in online examinations. Procurement/deploying of virtual reality, wireless communication and games technology in distance education while the sociological challenges include motivation of students and facilitators to overcome sense of isolation, public/employer acceptance and attitude to products of distance education, ensuring team work in production of course materials between course instruction designers and art designers. While Israeli (2007) in his own view, saw the challenges facing distance education to be cost of technology, misuse and unfitted technology for different environments and populations, occasional technical hardware problems related to equipment, study materials, connectivity, unfavourable attitude of instructors and administrators and quality of instructional materials.

Bolupe (2016) listed some of the challenges of Distance Education in Nigeria to include:

- Societal recognition
- Quality assurance of academic programmes
- Management of Open and Distance Learning Institutions
- Instructional Delivery Method
- Distance Education Technologies

In the same vein, Ajadi (2010) observed the following challenges facing Distance Education with respect to National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) to include:

- Dearth of trained staff (in distance education methods)
- ICT and power supply challenges
- Bandwith (for internet)
- Cost of Personal Computers and internet facilities in Nigeria
- Infrastructural Challenges (buildings, furniture etc for study centres)
- Course materials
- Negative mindset

These challenges are numerous but the advantages inherent in distance education are enormous. According to NOUN Profile, (2014) some of the justification for Open and Distance learning include the provision of education for all and promotion of lifelong learning; filling the gap created by the closure of out reaches/satellite campuses; cost effectiveness, improved economy of scale; flexibility of delivery system; on the job teacher training; poverty eradication etc. The flexibility inherent in Open and Distance learning makes it easier for learners to study

at their own pace. It equally affords learners the opportunity to decide when and where to study. However, it is worthy to note that a project may be laudable or good but if it is not properly harnessed or managed, the aim, vision or the objectives cannot be achieved. This is where the duties of a guidance and counsellor comes into play. A guidance and counsellor's duties in a distance learning programme is to give the orientation and guidance to students on how to go about the successful completion of their academic program in a distance learning.

Guidance & Counselling as a Tool for Transform of Distance Education in Nigeria.

Due to the relatively newness of Open and Distance Learning in Nigeria, many people are yet to come to term with the vision and mission of programme. According to Pityana, in Okoye (2015), the social acceptance of ODL products is a worrisome issue. There is abundant scepticism as to the quality of graduates produced through ODL mode of study. Many establishments ignorantly reject graduates of ODL because they feel that they do not possess the needed qualification for the job when compared with their counterparts from conventional universities. In order to correct this misconception so that the benefits enshrined in the distance learning can be harness for global transformation. The role of Guidance and Counsellor cannot be over looked. In CASSON, (2003), the Counselling Association of Nigeria highlighted the roles of Guidance and Counsellors to include: Orientation of new students; educational counselling; vocational counselling; personal/social counselling; referral services; follow-up services; liaison and follow-up services; keeping of students' records among others. Orientation service is conducted for new students in order to give them information regarding the operations of the distance education. This assistance which the counsellors give to students, enables them in making choices and adjusting to new learning environment. This is usually carried out during and after the matriculation ceremony. The essence is to help them cope with their distance learning. This is in line with the finding of Esere, (2010) that the counsellors welcome new students and inform them about the history, philosophy, programmes, rules and regulation of the institution. The essence is to get students' acquainted to their new environment, the mode of study and instructional delivery system and pattern. The counsellor equally counsels students with study problems, monitor students academic performance at regular intervals, handles disruptive or problematic students, groups or classes. The counsellor performs vocational guidance by guiding the distance learner on correct choice of course and programme. Occupational information such as professional development and career advancement opportunities are among the benefits a distance learner gains from the services of a professional guidance and counsellor. The information is important in the face of global challenges because they enable the recipient to ensure that his/her educational capabilities are channelled to the right choice of careers.

The counselling role in transforming distance education was summarised by Mallum (2005) in Agbajor, and Alordiah (2014) thus:

- *To assist all students in making appropriate and satisfying educational, vocational and personal-social choices.*
- *To assist all students in acquiring as early as possible positive image of self through self-understanding, self-direction and skills in problem-solving and decision making.*
- *To develop in students an awareness of opportunities in the personal social, educational and vocational areas by providing them with appropriate, useful and usable information.*
- *To help students acquire the skills of collecting, collating and using appropriate information.*
- *To help students develop positive attitudes to self, others, to appropriate national issues to work and to learn.*
- *To develop among them career awareness through understanding of career opportunities, lifestyles that are reflected in different types of work and job openings.*
- *To help students remove barriers that may inhibit learning.*
- *To help them participate meaningfully in the opportunities provided by the school in curricular and co-curricular activities.*

From the foregoing, one can observe that though the government have put other measures as outlined earlier to address the issue of education in Nigeria, but the desirable result are yet to be achieved. This situation has resulted in various societal vices. Therefore, adequate guidance and counselling services in educational institutions particularly those for distance education programme is a promising strategy worth employing. The benefits derivable from guidance and counselling is yet to be adequately tapped by distance learning students as it is the only avenue by which human beings can be transformed psychologically and this is done by giving the recipient positive self image about self through understanding, self direction and skill in problem solving approach.

Conclusion

Educational, vocational and socio-personal guidance of students is one of the key factors that will determine the success of a distance learning programme in any country including Nigeria. It is one of the avenues of meeting global challenges through Distance Education.

Recommendations

Therefore, this study recommends firstly, Guidance and Counselling service should be given its proper place by the government by ensuring that more professional guidance counsellors are employed in open and distance learning institutions to help distance learners identify their potentials and make proper and adequate use of it in their academic pursuit; therefore, Government at all levels should enact laws that will give annual allocation of fund that will be sufficient to manage counselling programmes.

Secondly, Counsellors in open and distance learning institutions should be trained in the use of psychological kits. Also their acquisition and utilization of adequate knowledge in use of information and communication technology should be encouraged. Thirdly, products of ODL institution should not be relegated to the background in the world or work. Employers of labour should not regard them as second class citizens because the guidance and counselling services they received from professional guidance counsellors can enable them to compete with the products of any other educational programme within and outside the country.

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