
Module 4 Learners' Support Services

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Unit 1 Definition and Purposes of Learners' Support Services

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1.0 Introduction

You are welcomed to the last module of this course. In the last few weeks, you have studied various aspects of open and distance learning system of education from the history to communication modes and forms of assessment. All these are designed to make you familiar with the system of learning in open and distance learning and also to make you feel at home during your course of study in the National Open University of Nigeria. In this module, you would be examining one of the most important feature and concept of open and distance learning: learners' support services. In this unit, you would be looking at the definition and purpose of learners' support services.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- Define learners' support service
- Identify activities that can be designated as learner' support service
- Describe the various purposes of learners' support services
- Differentiate between the various purposes of learners' support services.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Definition of Learners' Support Services

Learners' support is one critical component of an effective open and distance learning environment. As a concept within the open and distance learning, learners' support has been variously defined, however, the concept does not have a widely accepted definition (Bowa, 2008). You would be presented here with some major definitions that would help you to understand the concept.

Garrison and Bayton (1987) define learners' support services as the resources that learners can access in order to carry out the learning process. Garrison (1989) observes that in distance education, "support is concerned with a range of human and non-human resources to guide and facilitate the educational transaction" (p. 29). Tait (1995) an open and distance learning practitioner of Open University of United Kingdom who has written extensively on learners' support service defines it as follow:

The term students' support means the range of activities which complement the mass-produced materials which make up the most well-known elements in open and distance learning (ODL). It is, of course, true that printed course units, television and radio programmes, computer programmes etc., which replace the lecture as a means of delivery, and after so much both in terms of social and geographical access, and in terms of cost-effectiveness, support student in central ways. But the elements of ODL which are commonly referred to as student support are made up of tutoring, whether face-to-face, by correspondence, telephone or electronically; counselling; the organization of study centres; interactive teaching thorough television and radio, and other activities. These activities have as key conceptual components the notion of supporting the individual learning of the student whether alone or in groups, which in contrast to the mass-produced elements are identified for all learners (p. 232).

You need to note that the above definition was constructed when the use of print materials were predominant in distance education.

SAIDE (1999) defines learners' support as the "entire range of methods and strategies employed in the presentation and delivery of courses aimed at assisting and enabling learners to comprehend fully, assimilate and master the skills and knowledge needed to achieve success in their studies" (p. 14).

Simpson (2002) offers another beautiful definition. He approached the definition of learners' support from a broader sense and he sees it as all measures beyond the production of study materials that support students in their learning process. However, he brought in another dimension by differentiating between academic and non-academic support. On academic support, he wrote:

Academic support consists of: defining the course territory; explaining concepts; explaining the course; feedback-both informal and formal assessment; developing learning skills such as numeracy and literacy; chasing progress, following up students' progress through the course; enrichment-extending the boundaries of the course and sharing the excitement of learning (p.9).

On non-academic support, he wrote:

Non-academic support consists of: advising: giving information, exploring problems and suggesting directions; assessment: giving feedback to the individual on non-academic aptitudes and skills; action: practical help to promote study; advocacy: making out a case for funding, writing a reference; agitation: promoting changes within the institution to benefit students; administration: organizing student support (p. 8).

Self-Assessment Activity

Having gone through the above definitions, try formulating your definition of learners' support services.

3.2 Function of Learners' Support Services

3.2.1 Cognitive Function

Cognitive support facilitates learning through the mediation of the standard and uniform elements of course materials and learning resources for individual settings (Tait, 2000).

3.2.2 Affective Function

Affective services provide an environment that supports students, creates communities and enhances self-esteem (Tait, 2000:28).

3.2.3 Systematic Function

Systemic support services establish administrative processes and information management systems that are effective, transparent and student-friendly.

3.3 Types of Learners' Support Services

Adewale (2014) identifies five types of learners' support services and they are listed as follows: *This section should go to the next unit under types. For this section, look at the importance of learners' support services to the university and the students. Also, present the role both need to play to have a successful learner support services. In NOUN, explain the Directorate and its function. The students should know where to find such services*

Forum Discussion

In the few weeks you have spent in the National Open University of Nigeria, list all the activities you have gone through that can be classified as support services and group them according to their types.

4.0 Conclusion

In this unit you have learnt that learners support services can be defined as the range of activities that complements the course materials designed to assist the students in the mastery of their course. These include tutorials, counselling, study centre organization and interactive teaching among others. Learners' support services can also be divided into two categories: academic (including tutorials, feedback through assessment, following students' progress etc.) and non-academic (including information access, advocacy, writing reference letters etc.). Learners' support services have three functions: cognitive, affective and systematic. Learners' support services also include administrative, technical, library and counselling support.

5.0 Summary

To recap what you have learned in this unit, click on the video below or copy the link and paste on a web browser. The video is a summary of what you have read in this unit. You could also click on the audio version and listen. You can also download them and play offline.

Video

Audio

6.0 Reference/Further Reading

Student Handbook, NOUN.

Unit 2 Types of Learners' Support Services

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1.0 Introduction

In the previous unit you have examined the definition as well as the various purposes of the learners' support services. You would have known that learners' support services comprises of wide range of activities that may even vary from one institution to the other. In this unit, you are going to examine the various classifications that make up learners' support services and the various activities included in them.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- List the various classes of learners' support
- Classify given list of activities to their respective class
- Identify various activities under each class of support services.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Types of Learners' Support Services

Though a lot of activities are involved in what is broadly known as learners' support services, they are usually classified into three. Rumajogee (2002) and Nonyongo (2002) divided the classes as follows: teaching and learning, social and personal and access and information.

3.1.1 Teaching and Learning Services

According to Bowa (2008), teaching and learning services consists of the following activities:

- a. Teaching and learning contacts,
- b. Network and learner support centres
- c. Compulsory residential schools
- d. Practical sessions for professional training (for example, teachers and nurses needs special sessions such as teaching practice and practicum)

- e. Access to facilities (for example, artisans would need workshops and natural sciences students would need laboratories).
- f. Academic advising
- g. Tutorial and counselling in person or by letter, telephone and e-mail.
- h. Tutorial marking and feedback
- i. Quick turnaround on assignments
- j. Orientation and on-going training of tutors to ensure quality support.
- k. Supply of high quality learning materials
- l. Pre-examination counselling
- m. Pre-course registration and counselling services
- n. Pre-course study-skills training
- o. Administration of examinations
- p. Provision of audio and or video tapes
- q. Telematics
- r. Supply of newspaper (internal and mass media).

3.1.1.1 Academic/Tutorial Support

Academic support has to do with support geared toward the academic life of the student. At the beginning of distance education, academic and tutorial support is done mainly through the tutors at the local study centres. As of today, there is a mixture of the face-to-face tutorial at the study centre and the web-based tutorials. As Lee (2003) says, “the focus of academic support gears towards facilitating collaborative learning and increasing interactivity between distance students and instructors or among distance students” (p. 183). Like every other open university, NOUN operates on the mixture of face-to-face tutorials at the study centre and the web based in selected course as of now but which would be expanded to cover all the courses as soon as possible.

3.1.2 Social and Personal Support Services

Social and personal needs services includes the following activities:

- a. Pre-course registration and counselling
- b. Internet and e-mail support
- c. Peer support/study groups
- d. Career guidance
- e. Disabilities support
- f. Minorities support
- g. Adult learners’ support
- h. Multicultural education coordination
- i. Social events

3.1.3 Information Support Services

Chattopadhyay (2014) opines that learners should be provided all necessary information prior to admission of their course so that they can make appropriate decisions about their studies and also have access to all

resources and support services. Information support services include the following:

- a. Information on fees and financial support
- b. Information on administrative procedure and regulations
- c. Information on registration and admission
- d. Access to information technologies
- e. Record management
- f. Book services
- g. Provision of personal timetables
- h. Career guidance

If you examined these activities closely, you would notice that some of them overlap, that is, they are found in more than one classification.

3.1.3.1 Administrative Support

Administrative support involves functions such as “admissions, registrations, course scheduling, student records and financial transactions” (Lee, 2003:183) and in most universities today, including the conventional universities, these exercises are mostly web-based. Though administrative support may look menial and mundane, they can lead to frustration when not properly planned.

3.1.3.2 Technical Support

Technical support is defined as the monitoring of the efficient operation of delivery media and offering of technical assistance to learners (Abate, 1999). In some instances, this often involves all round presence of technical assistance at the institution’s web site.

3.1.3.3 Library Support

In the distance education programme, “adequate library services and resources is essential for the attainment of academic excellence” (Lee, 2003:183) so there is the need to extend the library services to the students because those at a distance from the traditional campus setting usually do not have access to the library services.

3.1.3.4 Counselling Support

Counselling support include guidance and advising. Lee (2003) states that the “focus of such services tends to be on how to deal with academic concerns and/or career advising” (p. 183). It also addresses ways to improve communication skills and increase interactivity. This type of support takes the bulk of the support services that takes place in the study centres. This is similar to what other scholars have termed “academic counselling”.

Academic counselling can be described as helping learners to understand all matters related to curriculum, course contents, academic administration and processes. Das and Ghosh (2011) also believe that academic counselling

includes the tasks of “informing, advising and counselling about the administrative aspects” (p. 193) of the programme. Academic counselling support represents the core learners’ support services that is usually provided at the study centres.

4.0 Conclusion

In this unit you have gone through the various activities that are classed together as learners’ support services and also the three major classes under which they are classified.

5.0 Summary

Despite the large number of activities lumped together as learners’ support services, they are classified into three, namely: teaching and learning, social and personal and access and information. Under teaching and learning are activities like tutorials, counselling, tutorial marking and feedback as well as examination administration. Under social and personal support services are activities like peer/study group, career counselling and internet and email support among others. Information support services include activities like access to information technologies, information on fees and financial support and information on administrative procedure.

Video

Audio

6.0 References/Further Reading

Usun, Salih (2004). Learner Support Services in Distance Education System. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, 5 (4), np.

Chatpakkarattana, T. & Jintawee Khlaisang. (2012). The Learner Support System for Distance Education. *Creative Education*, 3, p. 47-51.

Unit 3 Sources of Learners' Support Services

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1.0 Introduction

In the previous unit, you have gone through the types of learners' support services that exist. In this unit you would be studying the sources of learners' support services, in other words, the sections of the open and distance learning institutions where you are likely to receive activities that would be seen as learners' support services.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

By the end of this unit, you would have:

- Determined the role of study centres in providing learners' support services
- Listed the activities in the study centre that can be designated as support service
- Identified other units of the university that provides support for learners
- Discussed the activities of other units in the university that are support oriented

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Sources of Learners' Support Services

3.1.1 Study Centres

The study centres of open universities form part of the detached programme of the university framed to provide extensive modern and efficient student support services to the students. The university assigns an important role to contact sessions at the study centres and this is expected to help the students both academically and personally. The study centre is equipped to offer a

range of facilities to help the students overcome their problems through assistance, in addition to providing a common forum for students to interact (Kumar, Rao & Rao, 2000:18).

The study centre is equipped to with staff to fulfil these functions. In the National Open University of Nigeria, a study centre is under normal conditions, headed by senior academic staff (usually a professor and associate professors or senior lecturers). It has to be noted that there are some centres however that are under the leadership of senior non-academic staff like Chief Counsellors or Deputy Registrars. The Director of the study centre is supported by counsellors and Administrative Officers of various cadres. Usually, the number of the study centre staff is dictated by the population of the students in the centre. Other staff available in the centre are accountants, information communication technology staff, clerical officers and cleaners. However, the organization of the study centre is left in the hands of the director of the centre. The support services of the centre are entrusted in the hands of these staff. The learners' support activities that go on in the study centre can be divided into academic and non-academic activities. These shall be discussed briefly as follows:

3.1.1.1 Pre-Admission and Admission Process

It is expected that prospective candidates should visit the study centres for inquiries about the admission process. At this point, the job of directing the prospective student on what to do to secure admission for their desired course are handled by the counsellors and the administrative officers. Where necessary, the counsellors would guide the student to take the course he/she is most fitted for based on the basic qualifications of the prospective student. At this stage also, all necessary information about fees and the course demands are explained to the students. At the end of the admission process, the student proceeds to the registration stage.

3.1.1.2 Registration

The payment of the fees marked the commencement of the student's formal registration. There are three types of fees:

- a. The compulsory fees which are made up of fees peculiar to new students such as orientation and matriculation fees, library fees and laboratory fees among others.
- b. Course Registration fees: course registration fees are determined by the course units and based on the open policy of the university, the student can register for the number of courses that he/she wants. It is not compulsory to register for all the courses, however, the minimum credit load a student can register for is 10.
- c. Examination fees: the students pay between 1000 (undergraduate) to 2000 (postgraduate) naira per course.

The student has the opportunity to pay these fees in instalments as long as all fees are completed by the end of the registration period that is usually

between six to eight weeks. You need to know that until a student pays the examination fees, tutor-marked assignments however would not be made available to the student.

In order to register, the student would go to the portal and click on the register courses button. As soon as this is done, all the courses available for that session would be opened up and the students would click add to pick the desired courses. At the end of this, the student can proceed to register for examination by clicking the register exams button. The two registrations would be printed out in triplicate. At the end of the registration process, the student is expected to return two copies of the admission form, letter of admission and proof of fee payment and the registration forms to the study centre. The third copy, endorsed by the counsellor, is returned to the student and it would serve as a proof to the store officer for the issuing of the available print course materials. Other course materials that are not available in print would be available to the student as electronic copies at the university courseware on its website.

3.1.1.3 Orientation and Matriculation

The next major activity after the registration process is the orientation and the matriculation program. The orientation is a programme designed to familiarize the new students to the study centre operations and the university by extension. Most new students, on this day for the first time come across the university anthem and are made to learn the anthem. During the programme, the students listen to talks from all the arms of the study centre: Director, Counsellors, Registration, DMI, ICT, Accounts, library and others. Available services are made open to the students and who as well as where they can turn to when they have issues are made known to them.

In NOUN the matriculation holds about a week after the orientation. The orientation holds simultaneously across all the study centres in the country. The new students take the matriculation oath after which they are accepted as students of NOUN.

3.1.1.4 Facilitation

In between the registration and orientation/matriculation facilitation sometimes would have commenced or when it is not possible, it commences after the matriculation exercise. Facilitation is the period when students are made to have some face-to-face interaction with university appointed facilitators to help them in the process of learning or content digestion. Usually, where the centre is large and well equipped, facilitation takes place on site but where this is not possible, facilitation takes place at other places chosen for the exercise.

There are some rules that are in place guiding face-to-face facilitation and the most important of them is that facilitation of any particular course would take place if there is a minimum of 50 students registered for the course in the study centre. The class can also be divided into two where there are more

than 200 students. It is the duty of the study centre to make a workable timetable to guide the facilitation exercise and also to appoint staff that would be on ground to monitor the smooth running of the exercise. The duration of the facilitation also has to do with the units of each course. A 2-unit course is allocated 8 hours facilitation; a 3-unit course is allocated 12 hours of facilitation and a 4-unit course gets 16 hours. You need to note that there is a difference between a lecture and facilitation and so you cannot expect your facilitator to lecture you.

3.1.1.5 Counselling

There is hardly any NOUN study centre that does not have at least 1 counsellor; there are some that have about 4 or 5 depending on the student population. The good thing is that all these counsellors are trained, as they are all graduates in Guidance and Counselling, and some of them have Doctor of Philosophy. They are thus equipped to counselling both academically and psychologically. If you have issues with your studies and other areas of life that may affect your output, you are advised to visit the counsellor's office for a session.

3.1.1.6 Organization of Field Work

Another academically important activity that goes on in the study centre simultaneously with the facilitation exercise is the organization of all field related exercises for the semester. This includes teaching practice and practicum for the undergraduate and graduate Education students, field trips for the Tourism students, seminars for Tourism, Hotel and Catering, and the Business Administration students and Practicum for the Nursing students. Apart from this, there are some students who are also involved in SIWES and these are also planned and carried out during the semester. It is also important to know that students in the Sciences also go through their practical courses during this period. In study centres where there is no laboratory, the Director looks for a tertiary institution that they can collaborate with so that the students would partake in the laboratory classes.

3.1.1.7 Library

In some study centres, there are physical libraries while some centres have e-libraries and some centres have no library at all, either physical or electronic. Thus, the study centre is a place where the students of NOUN are expected to make use of the library. Due to the nature of the university, the e-library is emphasized more and so most of the study centres do have e-libraries and also a dedicated librarian to assist the student in accessing the libraries that the university is subscribed to.

Also available in the study centre library are the project copies of the past students of the study centre that the current students can use as a guide as they embark on their own projects.

3.1.1.8 Examinations

All examinations except the Tutor-Marked Assignments/Computer Marked Assignments holds at the study centres. To this end, most study centres are equipped with infrastructure to allow student write the examinations. It has to be stated that where there are more students than facilities, study centres rent venues to hold the examinations. Two types of examinations are held every semester: the e-examinations which is taken by the 100 and 200 levels students and all general studies (GST) at all levels, including the postgraduate level. Other papers from 300 to 800 levels are taken as pen-on-paper examinations. There are centres where students write e-examinations at rented venues and write pen-on-paper examinations at the centre or vice-versa or where all examinations are written at rented venues or at the centres. All the planning for the smooth running of the examinations is under the control of the Director and other staff of the centres.

3.1.1.9 Other Administrative Matters

There are other administrative matters that hold at the study centres. An example of such is disciplinary matters. For example, in the case of examination misconduct, immediately after examinations, students that were caught for one offence or the other are asked to face the examination misconduct panel at the study centre level. At the end of this exercise, recommendations and evidences on each case is forwarded to the University Examination Misconduct panel that reviews and or ratifies the decisions of the study centre panel and then forward their recommendations to the University Senate for approval.

In some other institutions, study centres offer only a selection of these services but unlike these other open and distance learning institutions whose study centres may not be able to fulfil all these functions, NOUN study centres are expected to fulfil all these functions.

3.1.2 Directorate of Information Communication Technology

The Directorate of Information Communication Technology (ICT) plays a vital role in meeting the digital requirements and expectations of students. The DICT provides a wide range of information technology and communication facilities to support students throughout their course of study.

All university staff, undergraduate and postgraduate students have access to the services that are available throughout the day. There is at least 1 DICT staff in all study centres around the country. Heavily populated centres have more than 1. For example, the Lagos Study Centre, that is most populated centre, currently has 9 DICT staff. The ICT officers are the central point of contact for staff and student seeking help, advice and support for all IT related services. The IT support staff can assist with the following:

- Online registration issues (password, accounts, etc.)
- Course and examination registration issues

- Computing advice and information
- E-examination administration and support
- Support services for personal computers
- Training for students and staff.

The DICT also ensures that computer laboratories are operational and accessible in all the study centres, so that students can have access to computing facilities and electronic examination. Furthermore, the directorate provides asynchronous and synchronous communication tools such as emails, e-mail groups, online forums, webinars and web conferencing. This is to make the learning process very flexible, where students can learn anytime, anywhere and at their own pace.

3.1.3 Faculties and Departments

The very first truth that often seems buried in the open and distance learning institutions is that no matter the location of the study centre, all students belong to the departments and faculties. The first support service of the departments and faculties is response to students' issues. For example, if any student feels his score in any course is unduly low, he can write to the Dean of the Faculty (definitely through the Director of the study centre) to ask for a reassessment of the paper. If it is a case of not having result for an examination taken, the student would also write to the Dean to complaint and the Department would respond at the end of their investigation.

It is also the departments and faculties that establishes the curriculum for each of the programme the students are registered for and the curriculum is made available for to each student at the registration point, clearly specifying the status of each course, that is, showing the courses that are core and those that are electives as well as the minimum number of units the students can register for each semester.

3.1.4 Registry

The role of the registry in support services is largely administrative and takes place even after the student has graduated from the university.

3.1.4.1 Issuance of Admission Letter

The Registrar of the university signs the provisional letter of admission issued to all the students at the point of their admission. Though the letter is automated, it comes directly from the Registry. Without this letter of admission, no one can proceed to the registration point.

3.1.4.2 Issuance of Introductory Letters (Visa/Research)

Another support service the students receive from the Registry has to do with introductory letters. Students sometimes, in the course of their research, may need to visit other institutions and libraries and may be requested to bring letters of introduction from their institution. When this is the case, the student

would write to the Registrar through the Director of the study centre to request for the letter of introduction. After the letter had been written and signed by the Deputy Registrar (Academics), it would be returned to the study centre for the student to collect. It is also important to know that sometimes, as part of their course of study or sometimes for leisure, students would want to travel abroad and embassies would request for letters of introduction from the university. The same procedure is followed for the issuance of such letters.

3.1.4.3 Issuance of Certificates

At the end of the student's course of study, the certificate signifying the successful completion of their programme, is signed by the Vice Chancellor and the Registrar and distributed by the staff of the Registry to the deserving students. The distribution of the certificates is usually done at the end of the convocation service at designated points.

3.1.4.4 Issuance of Transcripts

When students after graduation want to further their education in other universities, they would request for transcripts from the university and this would be sent again to the Registrar who would refer the request to the Deputy Registrar (Academics). After the payment of the required fees, the Academic office would prepare the transcript and the Deputy Registrar (Academics) would sign it and the letter would be mailed to the requesting institution.

3.1.5 Library

The library is another support unit for students' learning in the university. The support services of the library is captured in the following two excerpts:

"Most students used the library not to obtain resources but as a place of study. Generally, the students regarded the library as a quiet place to study" (Baloyi, 2014:1257). "Librarians go beyond information access and retrieval to helping students become information literate – to develop research questions, think critically, and navigate and evaluate the reliability, validity, and usefulness of the overwhelming amount of information available to them" (Brindley & Paul, 2004:5).

From the above quotations, the support functions of the library are: information access and retrieval, supporting students to become information literate and provision of a place of study.

3.1.5.1 Information Access and Retrieval

In fulfilling this function, the NOUN library is involved in the provision of a physical library both at the headquarters and at all the study centres all over the country. Where there is no space for good collection of books, the library ensures that electronic library is available for the students so that they can access and retrieve information. It is important to know that the library usually requests for list of relevant books to be purchased from the departments and

the faculties and use the list to acquire volumes for the library. Also included in the library volumes are copies of past research projects of students for guidance for students who are preparing for their own research projects.

3.1.5.2 Supporting Students to become Information Literate

In fulfilling this function, the library ensures that most study centres have at least 1 library staff to guide the students in the process of information access and retrieval as well as how to use the avalanche of information available to them. This allows for one-on-one interaction between the library and the students.

3.1.5.3 Provision of Study Space

Finally, the library both at the head office and the study centres offers the students a place where they can study. It is usually serene and calm and the librarian is always at hand to control the students in case some are going errant.

4.0 Conclusion

In this unit, you have studied that learners' support services takes place in the study centres, the Directorates of Information Communication and Technology, Information Management System, Examinations and Assessment and Media and Information, Faculties and Departments and the Library. The widest range of support services take place in the study centres and it includes pre- and admission processes, registration, orientation, matriculation, facilitation, counselling, organization of field work, library services, examination and other administrative matters. The Directorate of Information and Communication Technology supports registration and examination issues; Faculties and Departments determine courses to be offered across all levels as well as admission and graduation requirements. The Registry also has a wide range of services like the issuance of introductory letters, certificates and transcripts.

5.0 Summary

To recap what you have learned in this unit, click on the video below or copy the link and paste on a web browser. The video is a summary of what you have read in this unit. You could also click on the audio version and listen. You can also download them and play offline.

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Unit 4 Benefits of Learners' Support Services

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1.0 Introduction

You are welcomed to the last unit of the last module of this course. Over the last few weeks you have studied through the four modules that made up this course.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- List the benefits of learners' support services
- Write briefly on each of the benefits
- Evaluate if they have benefitted from this course on learners' support.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Benefits of Learners' Support Services

Learners' support is one critical component of an effective open and distance learning environment. As a concept within the open and distance learning, learners' support

3.1.1 Promotion of Academic Achievement

Scholars have been able to show that one of the causes of high rate of failure in the open and distance-learning system is the nature of the system, in which the students' study independently most of the time. Also, Tshivhase (2008) cite lack of contact between lecturers and learners and lack of self-help study groups as some of the major factors contributing to low performance and pass rates at UNISA. However, this can be mediated through an effective learners' support service. It has been asserted through research that the use of students' support aids the students learning and increases their academic achievement. For example, Farajollahi and Moenikia (2010) have been able to show that there is a "positive and significant relations between students' support services and academic achievement in distance education. In other words, students who benefit from services are more, their successes are higher" (p.454).

3.1.2 Mediation of Distance

One of the major perennial issues in open and distance learning institutions is the distance between the learners and the institutions and the resultant feelings of isolation by the students. Baloyi (2014) in discussing this says “ODL students often feel isolated, as they are studying on their own” (p. 1252). Boyle, Kwon, Ross and Simpson (2010) state there can be particularly acute issues in the distance learning environments where students often report feelings of isolation, little sense of connection and belonging. Responding to this issue vis-à-vis learners’ support services, Tait (2003) says “student support in ODL has as its primary aim that of assisting students to learn successfully, and in doing so it recognizes that in learning and teaching systems characterized by distance and part-time studying helping students with their feelings of confidence and self-esteem will energize them in ways that support persistence and success (p. 5).

3.1.3 Reduction of Drop-Out Rate

One of the major problems of open and distance learning institutions is the problem of attrition. Attrition is defined as the rate at which students drop out of their program. Research has indicated that ODL learners have a higher attrition rate than their counterparts in traditional campus-based institutions (Brindley 1985; Parker, 1995). Describing the rate of attrition among new students at the Open University of Malaysia, Raghavan, Mohayidin and Chun (2015) say, “nearly 30% of new learners enrolled in their first semester in OUM do not re-register for their second semester and nearly 10% do not re-register for their third semester” (p. 208-209). Describing the issue of attrition in the early years of NOUN, Adewale and Inegbedion (2008) discovered that between 2004 and 2008, out of the 439 students that enrolled for the MBA program, only 60 were left giving an attrition of 86.3%.

However, Bowa (2008) discovered that “learner support contributes to the reduction of drop-out rate through student guidance and counselling, tutor support, and affective information and administrative system” (p. 35). Tait (2003) affirms this as he states “these systems provide a range of activity that impacts not only in teaching but also affectively, thereby, reinforcing the student’s sense of confidence, self-esteem and progress” (p. 4).

4.0 Conclusion

In this unit you have examined the three major advantages of learners’ support. These are the promotion of academic achievement among students, which is usually attained as a result of the mediation of distance that takes place with the learners’ support activities. Finally, when learners’ support activities are properly taken, students who would have ordinarily dropped out of the system would be encouraged to pull through. As you can see, the effects of learners’ support seem to be spiral like.

5.0 Summary

To recap what you have learned in this unit, click on the video below or copy the link and paste on a web browser. The video is a summary of what you have read in this unit. You could also click on the audio version and listen. You can also download them and play offline.

Video

Audio

6.0 References/Further Reading

<https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/24076/Complete.pdf?>

https://empower.eadtu.eu/images/fields-of-expertise/StudentSupport/Student_Support_Services_for_Success_in_OED_SIMPSON.pdf