

Blended Learning Approach to Training School Counselors: A Case Study of COL-NCERT Collaborative Programme

Theme : Social Justice

Sub Theme :Scaling up quality education for all

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INTRODUCTION:

There has been a great demand for Guidance and Counselling services in schools to facilitate better academic performance, adjustment and career development among students so as to provide quality education to students. In this direction the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), an autonomous body under Govt.of India among other programmes/activities offered a nine months Post Graduate Diploma Course in Guidance through face-to-face mode for almost five decades for teachers and teacher educators drawn from different States of India. Later on this programme was extended by offering it through its four constituent units located at Mysore, Ajmer, Bhopal and Bhubaneswar to cater to the needs of the whole country.

In 2003, Teacher- Counsellor Model was designed and offered as a six month (face to face) International Diploma to teachers/teacher educators/administrators of India, and other South Asian and African countries. Participants from Maldives, Sri Lanka, Zambia, Kuwait, Bhutan and Fiji were the beneficiaries of this programme. Even this expansion was not enough to meet the growing demand for the trained guidance personnel in the region. In order to meet the training needs of the developing countries, NCERT in collaboration with COL, Vancouver, Canada designed and developed a one-year Distance Education Programme called International Diploma Course in Guidance and Counselling (IDGC) with special features like focus on needs of developing countries, opportunity for multicultural interactions and exposure to alternative strategies for assessment and counseling. The course inputs of earlier programmes were redesigned to be offered in a mixed mode with components of distance, online and face-to-face modes. This Blended learning approach adopted in IDGC to enable the in-service personnel avail of the opportunity without leaving their places of work and families for a long period of time. The main objective of the course is to train teachers, teacher-educators and untrained guidance personnel as counselors, teacher-counselors to guide and counsel students from schools and related settings. This paper studies the different aspects of the course and the extent to which the objectives of the course are met. A case study approach has been adopted for this purpose.

FOCUS OF THE STUDY:

The focus of the study is to document the programme objectives, structure, content, effectiveness and outcome.

METHODOLOGY:

The sources from where the information included the following:

- Documents including study materials, hand books, course guide
- Interviews (4 content writers, 6 tutors, 68 students, 6 coordinators, and one website administrator)
- Participant observation

- Students who have successfully passed out and students who are currently going through the course. (A questionnaire was developed and used to collect data from 68 students)

DESCRIPTION OF THE IDGC COURSE:

a. Course Structure:

The programme adopted a blended learning approach with components of distance/online as well as face-to-face modes. This one-year programme spread over to three phases.

Phase I – Distance/online of 6 months,

Phase II - face-to-face contact of 3 months with intensive school practicum and

Phase III - internship at their workplace with online support and local supervision.

Each of the phases has different weightage in terms of hours and credits as detailed below.

Table1: Distribution of hours and credits for different phases of the programme

Phases	Hours	Credits
Theory (Distance Learning Phase) (DLP) (six months - part time)	480	16
Practical (Contact Programme (CP) (three months - full time)	420	14
Internship (three months - part -time)	210	7
Total	1110	37

b. Course Inputs:

The course comprises of theoretical instruction, practical work and internship

- Theory:** The course consists of core components in guidance and counselling processes and procedures, major theories of human adjustment and career development and their application in counselling, psychological assessment and appraisal, and use of career information in guidance and counselling practices.
- Practical work:** The main purpose of the contact programme is to teach, demonstrate, and provide skill practice and consult, discuss, organize seminars, role play and try out in actual classroom/schools.

The practicum during contact programme involved various activities relating to Group Guidance, Counselling, Management and dissemination of Career Information, Career Development and Assessment which is later conducted and supervised in schools. Enrichment lectures, seminars, workshops, demonstrations, self-study and reflective sessions are also conducted.

- Internship:** Trainees undergo internship in actual work setting to try out and further refine the understanding and skills acquired from theory and practice. For this purpose trainees are to develop internship proposal during the contact programme, make presentation and finalise with the faculty support. During the internship period, the students are provided on-line support by the faculty and support by the qualified persons in their local place as supervisors.

c. Materials

For the effective implementation of the IDGC programme following materials were developed with support of internal faculty and external experts, which include subject experts, distance education experts and format and content editors.

- i. **Course Modules:** Each module consists of number of self-learning units. In all 60 units were developed under 14 modules. Each unit has been written in the format of Self instructional materials. Self-learning material in the modular form is the mainstay of this course. The material covers the theory topics and provides a foundation for acquiring knowledge, attitudes and skills during practical training. The table below provides the details of the modules.

Module No.	Title of the Modules	No. of Units
1 and 8	Introduction to Guidance and Guidance in Action	11
2 and 9	The Counselling Process and Strategies Special Concerns in Counselling	14
3 and 10	Guidance for Human Development and Adjustment Developing Mental Health and Coping Skills	7
4 and 11	Career Development-I Career Development-II	6
5 and 12	Career Information in Guidance and Counselling-I Career Information in Guidance and Counselling-II	9
6 and 13	Assessment and Appraisal in Guidance and Counselling-I Assessment and Appraisal in Guidance and Counselling-II	8
7 and 14	Basic Statistics in Guidance and Counselling-I Basic Statistics in Guidance and Counselling-II	5
Total Number of Units		60 Units

- ii. **Course Guide:** Provides objectives of each of the modules, scope, rules, syllabi as well as procedures for admission, transaction methods and evaluation strategies, for all the three phases of the course, brief information about contact programme activities, and faculty profile.
- iii. **Practical Handbook:** Provides areas and strategies for conducting and undergoing practicum with respect to group guidance, assessment, counseling, adjustment and career guidance, field experience and internship.
- iv. **Brochure:** Provides detail information about the course including admission criteria, structure of the course, fee structure etc. This is used to disseminate information about the course to various State agencies and individuals.
- v. **Tutor's Guide:** Lists guidelines for tutors, supervisors for course transaction and evaluation during all the three phases of the course.

d. In Take:

The total number of seats at each of the six centers (DEPFE, NIE, New Delhi and five RIEs) is maximum 50. At each centre, 30% seats are allocated for candidates from outside India. Fifty percent is reserved for those who are in service/working. Seats are reserved for disadvantaged groups (SC/ST/OBC) as per the Government of India norms.

e. Eligibility:

- In-service teachers - Graduates with teaching degree (any level).
- Presently not working - Graduates with teaching degree and at least two years of teaching or related experience.
- Postgraduates in psychology/education/social work/child development/special education/human resource development. Preference will be given to those with at least one year of teaching or related experience.
- Candidates from outside India who are not graduates but have teaching degree are required to have three years of work experience in the relevant area.
- However, admission committee set up for the course will see the academic equivalence of qualifications of these candidates.
- Minimum % of marks for all target groups is 50% (5% relaxation for SC/ST).

f. Course Fee:

Course fee to be paid by different categories of candidates before commencement of the course is:

Category	Course Fee
Government Deputed Candidates (Indian) (one time TA to attend the face-to-face contact programme for non-local Government deputed will be admissible as per Council's norms)	Rs.3,000/-
Private Candidates (Indian)	Rs.10,000/-
Candidates from Outside India	\$500 (USD)

g. Admission Procedures:

Candidates desirous of seeking admission into the course are required to fill-in the prescribed application form which can be downloaded from NCERT website (www.ncert.nic.in) or can be obtained in person from any of the six centers. Shortlisted candidates based on the eligibility and other criteria will be called at the study centre in their regions for selection test which includes essay writing and interview.

TRANSACTION OF THE COURSE:

a. Distance Learning Phase:

The distance learning phase begins from January –June every year and continue up to a period of six months. Faculty attachment and provision of tutorials of one or two day duration during this phase facilitate learners in seeking clarifications and solving difficulties. During this period the students could interact on line or off line with tutors, as each student is provided with the services of tutor.

b. Face-to-Face Contact Programme:

The contact programme is organised at all study centers for a period of three months to give intensive training in practical Work related to theory components.

c. Internship:

Candidates will be attached to a school, agency or any other guidance Institution for internship for a period of three months in their home town/country under the supervision of an expert.

d. Website:

A website is created which provide platform for effective interaction between students, students and tutors, students and faculty members. The website has also provision chat (general, practicum, and internship), course forum (assignment, theory, practicum, internship and portfolios), general forum (site news, tutor forum, your comments general help, FAQ), question papers (examination and assignments).

ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES:

Assessment of each student is done in each of the phases. During distance learning phase, evaluation of trainee is done on the basis of his/her performance on assignments, portfolio maintenance. During the contact programme, evaluation of trainee is done on the basis of his/her written reports submitted for each practice. Evaluation of internship is done in terms of scope, relevance and implementation prospects of the project taken up by the trainee. Scheme of evaluation in the course is based upon grade points. The number of credits assigned to each course describes its weightage. Credits indicate the weightage given to a particular course content compared to the other contents covered in the course.

RESULTS:

The data/information collected from various sources has been consolidated and reported below.

a. Beneficiaries:

Number of students successfully completing the course is one of the indicators of the success of the programme. The data regarding the enrolment, attendance at the contact programme and successful completion of the course is given below.

Year	Number Applied	Admitted	Appeared for contact programme	No. passed the Course	Pass %
2009	736	260	160	140	85%
2010	728	207	129	The course will get completed by December, 2010	

From the table one could see a large number of students apply and take admission, and the number of persons attending the contact programme is about 60%. Some of the reasons mentioned by students for not attending the contact programme are

- a) non-completion of assignments (the students are to complete all assignments satisfactorily)
- b) failure on the part of the government agencies to depute the teacher in time for a period of 3 months
- c) personal reasons such as family commitments, ill health etc. d) distance to the centers from their workplace. From the above table one could also notice that among the participants attending the contact programme, the success rate completing the course is about 85%.

b. Materials:

The course material supplied to the students has been found to be informative, reader friendly and appropriate to the level. The students have found that the material having illustration, sufficient in text questions, variety of activities. Most of the students surveyed are of the view that modules on counseling are difficult to comprehend and modules on guidance are much easier. They are of the view that modules concerning Counseling, Statistics, Assessment and mental Health require support in tutorials.

c. Tutorials:

Though the tutorials are arranged in the centers, students wanted more number of tutorials and of at least two to three days in the State capitals so that they will be able attend the tutorials.

d. Website:

The information received from the site administrator indicates that only about 15% of students are active users of various forums of the site, though about 60% of students visited the site. Not having access to internet in their workplace is one of the reasons for less number of students accessing the website. The percentage of students visiting the site is significantly higher during 2010 in comparison the 2009 batch. Most of the students used the site for the purpose getting advice, suggestions for completing the assignments and preparing portfolios. The chat forum was used by the students, but was not used much between students and faculty/tutors.

e. Tutors:

One tutor is attached to 5 students. The feedback indicates that students approached tutors through email and telephone for getting advice completing the assignments and getting clarification of concepts. The frequency of interaction between students and tutors is not up to the expectation level. The quality of interaction requires attention.

CONCLUSION:

The course is offered in a blended learning approach through distance mode with 3 months intensive contact sessions and 3 months internship in the work place of the candidates. This facilitates acquiring of knowledge, skills attitudes required for a counselor in providing career and educational guidance and handling counseling cases. The teacher-counselor model is definitely cost effective (as subsidised by NCERT) in taking care of the needs of the schools in providing guidance services to their students. In comparison to other similar distance education programmes, the success rate in this programme has been very satisfactory. As the organisers proposed, there will be an expansion in the programme with respect to study centers to accommodate more number of students. There is a need to train and encourage students, faculty and tutors to interact more through online forum and other communication tools such as email, telephone. As suggested by the students there is need to conduct contact programme in two or three phases rather than the present practice. In the years to come one could think of expanding the scope of the programme by offering specialisations.
