

## The Attitude of Prospective Teachers towards Guidance and Counseling Services in Distance Education of Pakistan

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### Abstract

*This study evaluated the attitude of prospective teachers towards “guidance and counseling services” in distance education. The survey method was used for data collection from 730 B.Ed. learners of the AIOU by using questionnaires on a five-point rating (Likert) scale. The results indicated that the majority of the prospective teachers (80.24%) appeared to be satisfied with information services and the channels of providing such services by AIOU. More than half of the respondents (57.81%, 57.59%, and 57.81%) appeared were unsatisfied with the provision of tutors’ information, guidance by their tutors on writing assignments, and tutorial meetings (respectively). Overall, more than half of the respondents’ appeared with their positive perception about “guidance and counseling services”. The study recommended tutors’ training on how to tutor in distance education; how-to guide and facilitate distance learners in writing good assignments.*

### Key Words:

Prospective Teachers, Guidance and Counseling Services, Tutor, Student Counselor, Distance Education r

### Introduction

Provision of “*guidance and counseling*” in distance education seems to be useful for learners in realizing their study needs, overcoming assignment issues, loneliness and finally getting through examinations. In teacher education programs guidance and counseling become more significant as future teachers are trained who need more care and more attention for equipping them with pedagogical skills, professional ethics, and moral values along with pro-social behaviors. However, it is a challenging task to provide “*guidance and counseling*” services to the prospective teachers at a distance rather it seems to be a passionate and skillful

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activity for the tutors and academicians at an Open University –AIOU. Proper provision of appropriate “*guidance and counseling services*” appears to be useful for distance learners in exploring the self, learning social values and professional ethics, getting better opportunities of employment, enhancing professional efficiency, developing and maintaining professional relationships, accepting diversity and challenges to become future leaders of the younger generation. Therefore, one may say that “*guidance and counseling services*” are catalyzing agents in distance education which facilitate learners to continue their studies till successful completion. Munchel (2015) acknowledged the need for “*guidance and counseling services*” in distance education to help them continue their studies.

According to Hussain (2013) distance, learners need “*guidance and counseling services*” at different stages and levels for their success. Initially, they need guidance before becoming distance learners formally i.e. they need information on and/ or about different programs and/ or courses of their interest or to which they can be enrolled. They need information about the advertisement, admission process, fee and fee structure, scholarships, and more importantly the process of study in distance education, examination, and certification. Similarly, after becoming distance learners formally, they need guidance on “*how to study the self-instructional materials*”, how to prepare assignments, how to get greater marks in the assignments, how and when to contact their tutors, how to participate in tutorials, how to prepare for the examinations, how to overcome study problems, how to overcome personal problems and maintain the sense of belongingness by eliminating the sense of loneliness, how to get feedback on the work and how to maintain the pace of study. Provision of the right type of “*guidance and counseling services*” at the right time to the right learners’ develops self-motivation and self-regulation among distance learners and leads them to secure higher grades in their studies. In other situations, they would become not or less motivated and feeling isolated to lead them to secure lower grades and in some cases quitting the program or courses unsuccessfully (Safdar, 2007; Rashid, 2001).

Even so, distance learners need “*guidance and counseling services*” when they successfully graduate at a certain level. At this stage they need guidance on how to get the cumulative transcript and degree, what are further academic opportunities, what is the scope of his/her credentials and where s/he can get employment etc. therefore, “*guidance and counseling services*” appear to be part and parcel of an academic journey of a distance learner. As distance learners are adults (Hussain, 2005) they need “*specialized guidance and counseling*” (Hussain, 2013) and therefore, they, “*placed the greatest importance on student support services related to getting started with their studies*” (Möwes, 2005, p. i) particularly guidance and counseling in distance education. Burns (2011) preferred learners’ centered instructional design in distance education along with proper “*guidance and counseling*” provision and suggested high quality professional online and/ or televised learners’ support services in the new era.

Bibi and Khan (2018) suggested the present “*guidance and counseling services*” model of the Allama Iqbal Open University be updated and strengthened according to the needs of the learners by redesigning it. They concluded that “*the areas where Pakistan is lacking when it comes to guidance systems are an absence of vital acknowledgment of direction and centralized approach, lack of matching skill gaps with learning opportunities, poor communication, lack of professional development, absence of knowledge of the newest trends and tools and lack of self-review and planning. It suggests that the goals and approaches catering towards student wellbeing need to be considered when revamping and upgrading guidance systems to improve the current quality of such services at the AIOU and throughout Pakistan*”.

Indira Gandhi National Open University (2009) found “*guidance and counseling services*” as important components of instructional process in distance education mode; whereas Baugh (2018) and Panja & De (2015) emphasized on the importance of these services generally in education system and teacher education programs for the nourishment of mental capacities of the younger generation.

Proper provision of “*guidance and counseling services*” to the students makes them capable of exhibiting acceptable behaviors in different life situations (Tuchili & Ndhlovu, 2017). These services as personal contacts between tutors and students appeared to be useful interventions for eliminating the dropout at IGNOU (Farhat, 2014; Duggal, 2016). Ojo & Olakulahin (2006) found affirmative perception and opinion about ODL in Nigeria including guidance and counseling services by asserting that “*The counseling needs of learners are better met in ODL than in the conventional higher education*” (p.7). Onyilofor (2013) suggested, “*repositioning guidance and counseling and curriculum innovation in higher education*” (p. 153) in Nigeria.

A study conducted by Mansha (2001) on “*guidance and counseling services*” provided by AIOU at M.Ed. level affirmed the significance of such services furthering their education and minimizing the dropout rate in distance education. However, an overwhelming majority of learners were of the view that tutors were not properly trained in providing “*guidance and counseling services*” and also these were provided during the tutorials. Similarly, Raza (2003) compared students' support services provided by AIOU and UKOU at M.A Education and M. Ed. level. The study revealed that the learners had less access to guidance services at AIOU; whereas the counselors at UKOU appeared to be caring and supportive to the learners with efficient management of “*guidance and counseling services*”. Even so, the study of Chaudhary, Gujjar, and Chaudhary (2009) compared learners' support services of the Open University of Sri-Lanka and Allama Iqbal Open University. The study found counseling services, tutorial services, media support services, and library services to be of the same level at both the universities. But the provision of general services, regional office services,

and overall services appeared to be better at the Open University of Sri-Lanka than its counterpart i.e. AIOU.

Akhter and Munshi (2016) analyzed tutorials support services in distance education for prospective teachers (B.Ed. learners) in Pakistan and found that the respondents appeared to be keen on attending tutorials but these were less effective in helping prospective teachers especially those who were living in rural areas. They suggested an online tutorial to supplement face-to-face tutorial meetings. Malik and Rashid (2015) examined the role of “*guidance and counseling services*” for prospective teachers (B.Ed. learners) at AIOU. The study affirmed that learners need guidance and counseling for admission. Students’ advisory cell and regional offices are responsible for providing such services to potential distance learners. They further asserted that “*Telephonic guidance and internet counseling are available in the university and special care is taken to resolve the students’ problems by Student Advisory Cell. Tutors bring relief from stress to students from poor concentration. In the selection of courses, during depression and anxiety but pre and post-admission guidance and counseling services are inappropriate and the ethical values are not maintained during guidance and counseling to students*” (p.276).

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study focused on (a) evaluating the “*attitude of prospective teachers towards guidance and counseling services*” in distance education; (b) examining the opinion of prospective teachers towards the role of tutors in providing guidance and counseling services; (c) Opinion of prospective teachers about their problems in getting benefits of the “*guidance and counseling services*” at AIOU.

### **Research Methodology**

It was a descriptive study and the survey method was used for data collection.

### **Population and Sampling**

This study was delimited to the Islamabad and Rawalpindi regions. The learners of B.Ed. program of the Allama Iqbal Open University comprised the population of this study. There were 14,950 prospective teachers enrolled in B. Ed. Program in spring and autumn semesters 2013 at Islamabad & Rawalpindi regions. A sample of five percent (5%) of the total population which consisted of 748 prospective teachers was taken through a random sampling technique.

## Research Tool Development and Data Collection

A questionnaire on a five-point rating (Likert) scale was developed after a literature review to elicit the opinion of the prospective teachers about “*guidance and counseling service*” at AIOU. To validate the questionnaire of the study, the experts’ opinion was taken. The questionnaire was improved by adding and correcting some statements according to experts’ suggestions. The improved questionnaire was piloted on thirty-five (35) prospective teachers. The tool was finalized in light of the results of the pilot testing. The reliability coefficient of the tool was measured to be 0.76.

The finalized questionnaire was administered on 748 prospective teachers (B.Ed. learners) during their workshops after getting permission from the respective Regional Directors and workshop coordinators. The respondents have explained the objectives of the study and the process of filling in the questionnaire. The researcher observed all research ethics of “*social science research*”. A total of 730 (out of 748) respondents completed the questionnaire in all respects. When the process of data collection was over, the researcher entered the data into MS Excel program according to scale values of the tool i.e. SA 5; A 4; UNC 3; DA 2 and SDA 1. The information collected through questionnaire were tabulated and analyze, by using descriptive statistics i.e. percentage because of the nature of the study. The results of the data analysis are given in the following section in tabular form.

## Results of the Study

The results of the study are given below in tabular form for the understanding of the situation.

**Table 1. The opinion of Prospective Teachers about the Information Services**

Statement	Level of agreement									
	SA		A		UNC		DA		SDA	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
<b>Information Services</b>										
Regional Office	372	51.96	292	40	10	1.32	32	3.38	24	3.29
Information about the program	364	49.86	292	40	11	1.51	52	7.12	11	1.51
Advertisement	136	18.63	472	64.66	38	5.21	52	7.12	32	4.38
Prospectus	265	36.30	301	41.23	72	9.86	87	11.92	5	0.68

Web-information	134	18.36	317	43.42	46	6.30	214	29.32	19	2.60
Payment of fee	73	10	369	50.55	57	7.81	187	25.62	44	6.02
guidance on admission process	345	47.26	361	49.45	2	0.27	16	2.19	6	0.82
Overall Average	241.29	33.20	343.43	47.04	33.71	4.61	91.43	12.38	20.14	2.76

$N^*=730$

The table indicates opinion of the prospective teachers (B.Ed. learners) about information services of the AIOU provided to the potential learners. The data demonstrated that 91.96% of the respondents' i.e. prospective teachers were of the view that they obtained their required information about admission process from the regional office; 89.86% affirmed that they were provided proper information about their program of study by the regional office of AIOU. Similarly, 83.29% of the prospective teachers acknowledged that advertisement of the AIOU provided them required information; whereas, 77.53% received this information from the prospectus. Even so, in the age of information technology, 61.78% of the respondents used AIOU website and social media for getting their required information about admission and programs of studies. However, 60.55% of the respondents thought that they needed information regarding fee, the process of fee payment process which they were provided by the AIOU regional office, and prospectus. Likewise, an overwhelming majority of the respondents asserted that they needed guidance on how to get admission in AIOU which is different from the traditional intuitions of teacher education. Overall, 80.24% of the prospective teachers were of the view that information services are properly provided to the potential learners through different means listed above.

**Table 2. Perception of Prospective Teachers about General Guidance and Counseling Services**

Statement	Level of agreement									
	SA		A		UNC		DA		SDA	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
<b>General "guidance and counseling services"</b>										
Receiving study material	196	26.85	367	50.27	33	4.52	79	10.82	55	7.53
Tutors' information	95	13.01	172	23.56	41	5.62	266	36.44	156	21.37

Help by the Students' Advisory Cell	482	66.3	204	27.95	21	2.88	16	2.19	7	0.96
Guidance on assignments	76	10.41	234	32.05	58	7.95	240	32.88	122	16.71
Guidance by academicians	294	40.27	316	43.29	28	3.84	56	7.67	36	4.93
Tutorial meetings	95	13.01	172	23.56	41	5.62	266	36.44	156	21.37
Overall Average	176.86	24.26	209.29	28.67	31.71	4.35	131.86	18.06	76.00	10.41

N\*=730

Table 2 demonstrates the perception of prospective teachers about general “guidance and counseling services” at AIOU. According to the table 77.32% of the respondents i.e. B.Ed. learners thought that university dispatched study materials timely and they received the same within the due time of assignments’ submission. They (94.25% of the prospective teachers) appreciated the role of students’ advisory cells in facilitating them by addressing their queries properly. Similarly, 83.56% of the respondents appeared to have their positive perception about the AIOU academicians in providing them proper help and facilitation in academic/ study matters for which they contacted them. However, more than half of the respondents i.e. 57.81%, 57.59%, and 57.81% appeared to be unsatisfied with the provision of tutors’ information, guidance by their tutors on how to write assignments, and tutorials meetings respectively. These areas need special attention of the university administration to address properly. Tutors should be provided training on how to tutor in distance education, how-to guide, and facilitate distance learners in writing good assignments. Overall, more than half (52.93%) of the respondents’ i.e. prospective teachers appeared with their positive perception of prospective teachers about general “guidance and counseling services”.

**Table 3. The attitude of Prospective Teachers about the role of Tutors in Providing Guidance and Counseling Services**

Statement	Level of agreement									
	SA		A		UNC		DA		SDA	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
<i>Tutors provide “guidance counseling” on</i>										



How to study	297	40.68	289	39.59	37	5.07	84	11.51	23	3.15
How to prepare the assignments	71	9.71	203	27.81	87	11.92	256	35.07	113	15.48
How to improve assignments	62	8.49	254	34.79	63	8.63	221	30.27	130	17.81
How to prepare for the examination	44	6.03	395	54.11	27	3.70	189	25.89	75	10.27
How to overcome study problems	19	2.66	214	29.32	46	6.30	134	18.36	317	43.42
Examination related problems	248	33.97	97	13.29	35	4.79	311	42.60	39	5.34
Loneliness problems	95	13.01	172	23.56	41	5.62	266	36.44	156	21.37
Overall Average	119.43	16.36	232.00	31.78	48.00	6.58	208.71	28.59	121.86	16.69

$N^*=730$

Table 3 reflects the attitude of prospective teachers about the role of tutors in providing “*guidance and counseling services*”. The table shows that 80.27% and 60.14% of the prospective teachers (B.Ed. learners) were of the view that their tutors guided them on “*how to study the instructional material*” provided by the AIOU and also they instructed them how to prepare for the examination respectively. However, they (5.55%, 48.08%, and 61.78%) needed proper guidance on how to prepare the assignments, how to improve assignments, and how to overcome study problems respectively. An equally distributed opinion was obtained by the respondents i.e. 47.26% and 47.94% on tutors’ guidance on solving examination related problems. Whereas, 57.81% of the prospective teachers were of the view that their tutors scarcely provided them guidance and counseling on their loneliness issues. Overall less than half i.e. 48.14% of the respondents appeared to be positive regarding the role of their tutors in providing “*guidance and counseling services*” properly.



**Table 4. The opinion of Prospective Teachers about Provision of Guidance and Counseling at AIOU**

Statement	Level of agreement									
	SA		A		UNC		DA		SDA	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
<i>The provision of "guidance and counseling" at AIOU</i>										
Helps the learners to enhance their academic performance	372	50.96	292	40.0	10	1.37	32	4.38	24	3.29
Provides solution to learners' problems	246	33.70	306	41.92	14	1.92	94	12.88	70	9.59
Helps in overcoming academic deficiencies	112	15.34	326	44.66	19	2.60	209	28.63	64	8.77
Promotes good working relations between tutors and learners	265	36.30	301	41.23	72	9.86	87	11.92	5	0.68
Helps in correct choice of courses	144	19.73	268	36.71	73	10.0	186	25.48	59	8.08
help students in becoming self-regulated	71	9.71	203	27.81	87	11.92	256	35.07	113	15.48
help students in becoming self-motivated	14	1.92	69	9.45	112	15.34	393	53.84	142	19.45
Is offered through trained staff	73	10.0	369	50.55	57	7.81	187	25.62	44	6.03
Overall Average	162.13	22.21	266.75	36.54	55.50	7.60	180.50	24.73	65.13	8.92

N\*=730

Table 4 demonstrates the Opinion of prospective teachers about the provision of guidance and counseling at AIOU. The data shows that 90.96% of the respondents i.e. B.Ed. learners believed that the provision of guidance and counseling at AIOU facilitates the learners to enhance their academic performance; 75.62% and 60%

regarded it necessary for providing solutions to their study problems and in overcoming their academic deficiencies respectively. Similarly, 77.53% and 56.44% were of the opinion that provision of guidance and counseling at AIOU promotes their good working relationships with their tutors and also helps them in their correct choice of courses respectively. Even so, 60.55% of the respondents acknowledged that guidance and counseling staff at the students' advisory cell is trained. However, 50.55% and 73.78% of the prospective teachers wished guidance and counseling to help them in becoming self-regulated and self-motivated respectively. Overall, 58.75% of the prospective teachers acknowledged the provision of guidance and counseling at AIOU.

**Table 5. The opinion of Prospective Teachers about their Problems in Getting Benefits of the Guidance and Counseling services at AIOU**

Statement	Level of agreement									
	SA		A		UNC		DA		SDA	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
<b><i>Problems of prospective teachers in getting benefits of the "guidance and counseling services" at AIOU</i></b>										
Regional office is away	297	40.68	289	39.59	23	3.15	84	11.51	37	5.07
Students counselor at regional office is less-cooperative	44	6.03	395	54.11	27	3.70	189	25.89	95	10.27
Face problems in getting sufficient information about courses and programs	134	18.36	317	43.42	46	6.30	214	29.32	19	2.60
Problems in contacting tutors	364	49.86	292	40.0	11	1.51	52	7.12	11	1.51
Tutors don't provide comments on assignments	248	33.97	311	42.60	39	5.34	97	13.29	35	4.79
Guidance and counseling are NOT provided satisfactorily during tutorials	172	23.56	367	50.27	33	4.52	52	7.12	106	14.52
Face postal problems	197	26.99	349	47.81	35	4.79	76	10.41	73	10.0

<b>Overall Average</b>	<b>208</b> <b>.00</b>	<b>28.49</b>	<b>331.</b> <b>43</b>	<b>45.40</b>	<b>30</b> <b>.5</b> <b>7</b>	<b>4.19</b>	<b>109.</b> <b>14</b>	<b>14.95</b>	<b>53.</b> <b>71</b>	<b>6.97</b>
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N\*=730

Table 5 reflects the opinion of prospective teachers about their problems in getting benefits from the “*guidance and counseling services*” at AIOU. According to the table, 80.27% and 60.14% of the respondents that the regional office is away from where they live and the students’ counselor at the regional office is less-cooperative respectively. Similarly, 61.78% and 89.86% of the prospective teachers faced problems in getting sufficient information about courses and programs and also faced problems in contacting tutors respectively. Even so, 76.57% and 73.83% of the B.Ed. learners at AIOU affirmed that they face problems in improving their assignments as their tutors don’t provide comments on their assignments, and also they face problems in managing self-study issues as guidance and counseling are NOT provided satisfactorily during the tutorials respectively. Likewise, 74.80% of the prospective teachers recorded their postal problems. Overall, 73.89% of the prospective teachers recorded their problems in getting the proper benefits of the “*guidance and counseling services*” at AIOU.

### Findings and Conclusions

Keeping in view the results of the study, the following is concluded

1. The majority of the prospective teachers (80.24%) appeared to be satisfied with information services and the channels of providing such services by AIOU.
2. More than half of the respondents i.e. 57.81%, 57.59%, and 57.81% appeared to be unsatisfied with the provision of tutors’ information, guidance by their tutors on how to write assignments and tutorial meetings. These areas need special attention of the university administration to address properly. Tutors should be provided training on how to tutor in distance education, how-to guide and facilitate distance learners in writing good assignments. In overall, more than half of the respondents’ i.e. prospective teachers appeared with their positive perception of prospective teachers about general guidance and counseling services
3. The prospective teachers wished guidance and counseling to help them in becoming self-regulated and self-motivated respectively. Overall, they acknowledged the provision of guidance and counseling at AIOU.
4. The B.Ed. learners at AIOU affirmed that they face problems in improving their assignments as their tutors don’t provide comments on their assignments, and also they face problems in managing self-study issues as

“*guidance and counseling*” are NOT provided satisfactorily during the tutorials respectively. They also recorded their postal problems. In overall, the prospective teachers recorded their problems in getting proper benefits of the “*guidance and counseling services*” at AIOU

5. The prospective teachers (B.Ed. learners) were of the view that their tutors guided them on how to study the instructional material provided by the AIOU and also they instructed them how to prepare for the examination respectively. However, the majority of them needed proper guidance on how to prepare the assignments, how to improve assignments, and how to overcome study problems respectively. An equally distributed opinion was obtained by the respondents i.e. 47.26% and 47.94% on tutors’ guidance on solving examination related problems. Whereas, 57.81% of the prospective teachers were of the view that their tutors scarcely provided them “*guidance and counseling*” on their loneliness issues. Overall less than half i.e. 48.14% of the respondents appeared to be positive regarding the role of their tutors in providing “*guidance and counseling services*” properly.

## **Recommendations**

1. Tutors should be provided with proper training and retraining on how to prepare assignments. How to provide comments on the assignments and how to improve the quality of the assignments to get better marks.
2. AIOU should provide pre and post-admission guidance and counseling services to its learners.
3. AIOU should arrange proper tutorial meetings for solving the problems in study difficulties. Tutors should observe punctuality in the tutorial meeting so that learners can ask questions related to their problems.
4. The AIOU should arrange proper training of counselors regarding “*guidance and counseling*”.

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