



# **PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING (ODL) (CASE STUDY – NOUN)**

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## **PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT IN ODL (CASE STUDY – NOUN)**

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## PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING (CASE STUDY – NOUN)

### INTRODUCTION

Open and Distance Learning is fast becoming an acceptable and indispensable part of the main stream of education system in both developed and developing countries. Since the past 20 years, it is a force contributing to social, educational and economic development. (*Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and Asian Development Bank (ADB) 1999.*)

**Open learning** means that learners are given the opportunity to Study and reach their educational destination no matter their credentials. While **learning at a distance** means that you do not necessarily have to be at a designated place and at a specific time to learn, as is generally the case in a conventional Learning setting. In a conventional learning setting, the students are in a face-to-face learning situation with the lecturers while in a distance education setting, the learners do a large portion of their learning away from the institution and the tutors. In other words, they are virtually removed from the University and their tutors in time and location and have to Study on their own.

It is now obvious that Distance Learning appeals to people who want to work and learn at the same time and so in developed nations of the world distance learning is in fashion.

In National Open University of Nigeria, a young ODL Institution, established only five years ago has a more encompassing approach to distance learning. This includes personal contacts and a combination of resources such as;

- (i) Availability of course materials in prints,
- (ii) Course materials in CD-ROMS,
- (iii) Audio and Video Cassettes,
- (iv) Computer conferencing facilities,
- (v) Networking opportunities amongst learners,
- (vi) Websites for Courses,
- (vii) Instructions through the Television
- (viii) Instructions through the Radio broadcasts
- (ix) Regular feedback on Tutor Marked Assignments
- (x) Periodic face-to-face contact sessions during tutorials.



Therefore, at NOUN, distance education is offered with so much flexibility and without compromising the quality of education and training given. It also gives the learner a chance to study at the university level without giving up their jobs, pleasures, families or any other commitments.

## **2. The Management of Open and Distance Learning Programmes**

The Management of Open and distance learning programme poses a lot of challenges. It poses more challenges than the management of a conventional system in a face-to-face setting due to the following;

- It is aimed at providing education that is relevant to the period, locality and also of high quality; while in the face-to-face system the same curriculum is followed years ago is still followed in the present not considering its environment or locality.
- It needs large administrative Bodies that accommodate a greater diversity of function, unlike in the face-to-face conventional system where they just have administrative systems that simply enrolls student and registers them in their chosen courses.
- The programmes are often open, in the sense that they allow learners through the Access (Foundation) courses to make-up for deficiencies that could deter them from pursuing higher education, unlike the closed system run in the conventional face-to-face instructions.
- They deliver their courses using a mixed technologies and media, while the conventional face-to-face Institutions depend mainly on lectures and lecture notes.
- They frequently require collaboration with other programmes and agencies to provide learning materials, course development and delivery personnel



- and facilities; while the face-to-face Institutions are contented with books recommended by lecturers for students to read in addition to their lecture note.
- They must remain flexible and innovative at all times for learners can learn in any place and at any time convenience to them; while the face to face system simply follows the conventional one way of delivering of lectures to students at lecture halls.
  - National Open University of Nigeria uses the minimum academic standard approved by NUC same as for all universities and infact goes beyond this minimum of the conventional universities due to its philosophy.



### 3. Personnel Management

- The personnel requirement to implement an Open and Distance Learning programme depends on the organizational model that has been chosen. Basically there are three organizational models for Institutions that offer distance education. Which ever model adopted will depend on the Organization Mission, vision, resources and services provided.
- In the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) the model adopted is the Single Mode. This means that the Institution is founded mainly for the purpose of offering Open and distance education, just like it is done in the United Kingdom Open University (UKOU), Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), and University Terbuka, Sukhotahai Thamma Thirat Open University (STOU).
- ODL thrives on economy of scale. This means that a good balance between staff and student population spreads the overhead and reduces the overall cost of delivery.
- The number of courses offered by the university at a particular time usually determines the size of the academic staff.
- This also determines the information and communication technologies to be deployed in the delivery of instruction. Therefore, the student ratio is extremely cost effective.

#### A. ACADEMIC SERVICES STAFF

Various categories of personnel are involved in the provision of academic services in an open and distance learner institution like NOUN which is non-existence in the face-to-face conventional institution. These are:-



- (I) **Study Centre Managers:-** Managers in an ODL programme are the first contact a learner or the public experiences.
- They provide management support and leadership for the day to day administration of the Study Centre and Liaison Office. They maintain regular Liaison with the Headquarters through the Directorate of Learner Support Services and other partners of the University.
  - Each Study Centre is headed by the Study Centre Manager. Often than not, he/she is a seasoned Professor in his/her discipline or is an individual who had risen to an administrative position which qualifies him/her to head a tertiary Institution/ or head of a Government Ministry e.g a Former Commissioner or permanent secretary. Others were former Provost of Colleges of Education or former Rectors of Polytechnics.
  - The Centre Managers monitor the distribution of instructional materials to distance learners and instructional facilitators and turn around time of Tutor-Marked Assignments.
  - They also liaise with course developers, examiners, assessors and advisory peer groups within the locality of the Study Centres.
  - The Managers co-ordinate the use, by distance learners and members of the local community, of the multimedia information and communications technology available at the study centre.
  - In NOUN, **the Liaison Manager** apart from providing management support and leadership for the day to day administration of the Liaison Office which is based in Abuja, also has the responsibility of maintaining regular Liaison between the Headquarters and the Federal Ministry of Education, Foreign partners of NOUN, non



Governmental Organisations (NGOs), National University Commission, other Federal Government Organisations, other Open Universities in the world and also the Presidency. The Liaison Manager is also responsible to market the University to the General Public.

- (II) **Academic Staff:-** These can be described as subject specialists and can be grouped under two headings. These two groups of academic staff are the types you will normally not meet by those names in the conventional university. They are described as **Programme leaders** and **Course Coordinators**. They are located at the Headquarters of NOUN in Lagos as full time Academic Staff. They are responsible for the planning, development and delivery of all the courses being offered at the University. They are required to provide programme and leadership in their special areas of studies.

All academic staff are also expected to undertake research activities and participate in university / professional and community service. These groups of staff are responsible to the Deans of their respective schools.

- (III) **Instructional And Tutorial Facilitator:-** These categories of staff are part-time academic staff. The nomenclature used in NOUN for these are usually not found in the conventional university.

The main function of the Instructional and tutorial facilitators is in the conduct of regular tutorial meetings and the facilitation of instruction at the various study centres. They assist with



professional workshops, course development and design. They are responsible for tutor marked assignment (TMA) and also invigilate examinations.

- (IV) **Learner Support Services**:- The Learner Support Services is not well known or used at all in conventional universities. In ODL especially in National Open University of Nigeria, Learner Support focuses on meeting the needs of all learners, these needs could be as diverse as the student body itself. Learner support services play a support role and provide supportive people.

**Student Counselors**, They serve as intermediary between the learner and the institution.

- The student counselors are specialists on tutoring and counseling.
- They provide regular counseling servicing to learners at a distance with respect to the various aspects of their studies. This include enrolment, choice of programmes and courses, when and how to study, and when to seek for special academic guidance.
- They also provide an early warning signal for a prompt remedial action. Therefore, Learner Support Staff spends quality time with learners thus helping to make learners re-discover themselves.

- (V) **The Call Centre (VICC)**:- Staff of the Visitors Information and Call Centre (VICC) must operate as Confidential Secretaries, Receptionist and must have computer knowledge.
- They must be sociable and accommodating to successfully run the centre.



- The VICC is centralized Office of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) where Students and the general public can phone in and seek information on any issues of interest to the caller.
- The Centre can respond to letters, faxes, e-mails and written correspondences.
- It is the first point of contact between the Public and the university.
- The VICC is a phenomenon that is unknown to conventional university system. This feature characterizes only an open university due to the OPENNESS with which it conducts its academic activities and provides information relating to these activities.
- In an Open University, some peculiarities of students' profile exist which is foreign to conventional university systems in terms of age and socio-economic factors, the nature of the students and public. These students profile ensures that students' needs are not just varied but are multidimensional whilst being specific to the particular student set up to tackle these needs.

Specifically, the main function of the VICC is to provide information or advice on issues such as

- (i) Orientation
- (ii) Registration,
- (iii) Matriculations,
- (iv) Admission requirements,
- (v) Choice of academic programmes,
- (vi) Choice of remittable courses,
- (vii) Collection of study materials,
- (viii) Study fees, examination queries,
- (ix) Identity of fellow students in peer group formation and all such matters that are



peculiar to students need.

In summary, *Personnel Management in Open & Distance Learning ODL* is involved in the provision of academic services in an ODL system like NOUN include:-

- Study Centre / Liaison Managers
- Academic staff
  - ii. Programme Leaders
  - iii. Course coordinators
- Instructional and Tutorial Facilitators
- Learner Support Services
  - i. Student Counselors
- Visitors Information and Call Centre (VICC)

### **(B) KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT TECHNOLOGISTS**

These are experts in the electronic and computer Mediated Learning environment at NOUN.

- This group of Technologist is responsible for all computing, multimedia learning materials development, website development and maintenance, networking and programming activities of Open and Distance teaching and learning.
- The electronic library of the Open and distance learning programmes is also the responsibilities of this group.
- Finally the management of the National Technology Infrastructure framework falls under the schedule of the Knowledge Management Technologist.

### **(C) COURSE MATERIAL PRODUCTION STAFF**

These are a whole range of staff needed for a major feature within a sub-system of the National Open University of Nigeria which are completely unknown in the conventional University system.

- They produce comprehensive, well developed course materials and Resources which make up necessary component in all distance learning



system. These materials stimulate self-learning and influence the quality of the system as a whole.

- The development and production of learning materials is often considered as a sub-system in distance teaching organizations.
- Therefore, in the National Open University of Nigeria these have been developed based on the best Practices and tailored to National Need, hence a group of specialists are needed to run the different delivery channels of University Programmes. These are:-

- Course Writers
- Programme Leaders
- Course Coordinators
- Typesetters
- Editors
- Printers
- Instructional Designers
- E- learning / Media Specialist / Media Specialist
- Content / web master (Computer Programmers)
- Content developer
- Audio Visual Specialist
- Graphic Artists
- Video Cameramen
- Copy Editors

(i) **Course Writers:-** Course Materials are developed from the schools by the academic staff.

- The planning and writing of course materials are done by the Programme Leaders and Course Co-ordinators of the various schools.

(a) **Programme Leaders:-** are an equivalent of an Associate Professor in a conventional university. The same qualifications, experience and academic



scholarly publications are also expected of them as is expected of their contemporaries in the conventional universities.

- Full professors are also programme leaders whose function is to coordinate a group of programme leaders.
- External Specialists are invited to write courses in their special fields.
- Course developers are academic and content expert from face-to-face conventional universities. These are trained to write courses for the Open System. They usually perform these tasks with a hybrid of experts ranging from academics, to instructional designers, media specialists and copy editors to produce materials that meet instructional objectives.
- Sometimes the Open Learning sources are used when the university adopts courses from other open universities.

**(b) Course Co-ordinators:-** these are equivalent of Assistant Lecturers, Lecturer II and Lecturer I in the conventional university.

- They coordinate courses to be taught and ensure that the course materials etc are up to the required standard rather than do direct teaching all the time like in the conventional university.
- To do this, they must have relevant qualifications, experience and characteristics of the lectures in conventional universities.

**(ii) Typesetters:-** these are a group of staff whose main duties are to transform the manuscripts/textual matter prepared by Academic Programme writers into type by typesetting the



scripts and using the computer to process the materials.

- (iii) **Editor:-** At the National Open University of Nigeria, there are various kinds of Editors.
- The first group of Editors are found in house, the Course Material Development Unit of the University (CMDU). These edit written materials for publication but make sure that the materials are written to conform with NOUN STYLE/FORMATting.
  - The second group of Editors are found in the schools. When the queries are resolved, the materials are passed onto the Printing and Publishing unit (PPU).
  - There a third set of Editors take over to edit for language consistency. They are called language Editors.
  - When this is resolved, the material goes to the next group of staff known as PRINTERS.
- (iv) **Printers:-** are the group of staff who get all the edited materials printed and finally made into booklets or pamphlets to make it attractive to Learners.
- At the National Open University of Nigeria, the DOCUTECH unit takes charge of all the Printing to be done.
- (v) **The E-learning Unit:-** at NOUN e-learning unit is responsible of all non print delivery format. Here, the following category of staff are found,
- Content / web master
  - Content developer
  - Audio Visual Specialist – Write and Produce audio and video scripts.



- Photographers
  - Graphic Designers –are responsible for the clear drawings and detailed design of the production of study materials Booklets or Pamphlets.
  - Video Cameramen – captures all the image and activities with a Video Camera.
  - Broadcasting Technicians:- are staff who are skilled at keeping the Radio and Television equipment used for listening and viewing of academic programmes in good condition at all times of ODL.
- (vi) Instructional Designers:-** These are highly experienced multimedia/instructional design professional who provide media support by their expertise.
- They are experts who devise and executes designs as it related to the specific knowledge to be imparted.
  - They scripts, edit and commission non print delivery format.
  - They are found at the Directorate of instructional Resources Development of the National Open University of Nigeria. These categories of staff are completely Allen to the conventional university system.
- (i) They design audio and video instructional component of courses materials to complement other formats.
  - (ii) The edit all recorded audio and video programmes to assure quality production.
  - (iii) The engage in educational broadcasting: voice and video.
  - (iv) They train budding designers.



- (v) The conduct research on learners' needs in consultation with schools, study centres, students, media experts and other stakeholders in instructional resources development.

#### (D) ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

In the National Open University of Nigeria, the administrative arm charged with the responsibility for providing **administrative support services** for the academic function of the University is headed by the **Director of Administration and General Services**. This nomenclature is unknown in a conventional university, instead the title, Register is commonly used. In an ODL institution most nomenclature used are different from that used in a conventional face-to-face institutions.

Administrative Staff in an Open and Distance Learning Programme are categorized as follows:-

- Administrators
- Personnel Staff
- Financial Staff
- Record Clerks
- Secretaries
- Warehousing / Store Officers
- Transport Staff (Drivers)

(i) **Administrators:-** Administrators are needed in an ODL Programme to convert a variety of resources, such as manpower, fund, facilities and plans into an effective enterprises capable of achieving the systems' mission.

(ii) **Personnel Staff:-** These are the people responsible for the implementation of the plans developed by the ODL institutions. At NOUN, the



Director of Administrative services is supported by a crop of administrative Officers of different cadres and status in two different units of the department; **the Academic Registry and Human Resources Unit.**

- (a) **The Academic Registry:-** deals with all administrative matters relating to the academics of the University. At NOUN, the academic Registry provides the following types of administrative support services to student at different stages in their study career:-
- Sending out and responding to routine information.
  - Processing admissions and registering students
  - Keeping students records
  - Initiating delivery of course materials
  - Monitoring administrative support services at the Study Centres;
  - Issuing diplomas, certificates, student academic transcripts.
- (b) **The Director of Administration and General Services Office** looks at the administration of all other staff of the University.
- (6) **The Human Resource Unit:-** Human Resources are the life blood of the ODL programme. The general intent of personnel administration is to develop and maintain a highly motivated and effective staff.
- The Human Resource Unit in NOUN provides administrative supports mainly directed to the issues of staffing in the university. This unit provides the following services:-
  - Recruitment



- Training and Development
- Employee Relations
- Contractual issues
- Employee Rewards and Benefits and
- Transport.

(ii) **Financial Staff:-** This category of staff looks after the administration of finances and accounting.

- The Finance and Accounts is the custodian of all funds relating to NOUN; it receives and disburses all funds as appropriate.
- It encourages judicious management of funds, hence advise are given appropriately in NOUN, this, Department is headed by **the Director of Finance and Accounts** but in a conventional University he would be called a **Bursar**.
- He holds and manages the properties and investments of the university, advises the university on its financial policies.
- He is responsible for the preparation of the annual budget while keeping a constant watch on the cash and expenditure of the University.

(iii) **Record Clerks:-** These are members of staff whose job is to keep a written account of all that has happened at the Department in Files / Folders, which are kept so that these can be looked at and used in the future.

(iv) **Secretaries:-** Officials of the University who deals with writing letters, keeping records and making arrangements for the department they serve, they also type out letters and manuscript on Computers.



- (v) **Warehousing Staff / Store Officer:-** the warehousing staff are members of staff whose responsibility are to keep the warehouse records of all materials deposited and distributed to all Study Centres. These are usually sited at the NOUN Headquarters, and the Regional Centres while stores are sited at all the Study Centres in the Country. These are headed by a Chief Store Officer who is bases at the Headquarters while other store keepers take care of the store at the Study Centres.
- (vi) **Transport Staff (Drivers):-** are responsible to see that all officers get to their Primary Assignment as well as the Study Materials get to the learners at the thirty three (33) NOUN Study Centres in the country.

## (E) STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Staff Development is extremely important in Personnel Management of an Open and Distance Learning Institution. This is because of the peculiarities of the system and the fact that the ODL requires skills which are unknown to the conventional face-to-face system of education.

- In the National Open University of Nigeria, where the ODL system is in practice, staff development is a continuous exercise.
- Its methodologies and processes are very different from those of conventional education Institutions?
- In Conventional System, schools, colleges and universities can recruit teachers who have already been trained in standard classroom techniques. All the other support staff can be recruited already trained.

- This means that you may need to train the staff you recruit rather than rely on finding experienced personnel.
- The National Open University on a continuous bases sends groups of staff to be trained. NOUN spends a lot of resources training and re-training its staff especially in this situation where staff are recruited from the conventional system, private enterprises and government establishments. These categories of staff have come into the ODL with various mind-sets prejudices and ideas.
- These would need to be purged of their old conventional idea and fresh idea of the Open and Distance Learning implanted into them. Besides the members of staff freshly employed, other older staff also are sent to brush – up their knowledge in their special area of employment.
- The technologists in NOUN are always on this kind of training to upgrade their knowledge as technology improves or changes.
- Staff training / development in NOUN, cuts across board at the University.
- Round tables and conferences for Senior Management are organized to expose them to the methods and styles of distance education.
- Academic staff are sent to be trained as well as non-academic, and even the support staff. These are done in various ways, within and outside the country:-
  - On the job
  - Through short courses organized at NOUN
  - By sending learners on full-time or part time courses within the country. For example, several Senior Administrators were sent in batches to National Institute for Educational



Planning and Administration (NIEPA) in Ondo, Nigeria to be retrained.

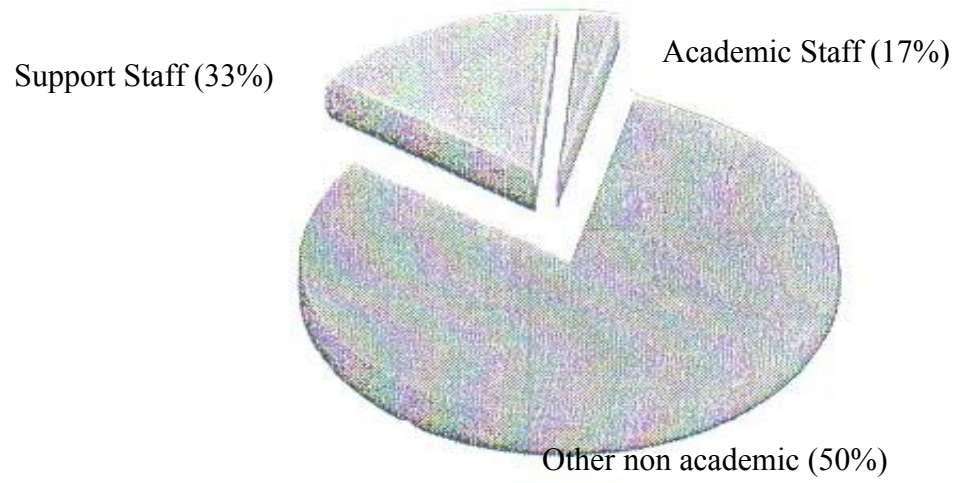
- By enrolling staff in an appropriate course or workshops taught at a distance, for example, NOUN had sent different groups of staff to;
  - (i) University of South Africa (UNISA);
  - (ii) Open University UK (OU-UK)
  - (iii) Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU)
  - (iv) Open University of Hong Kong
  - (v) Universities in Canada and United States of America where Distance Learning is practice.

The staffing distribution found in NOUN is very typical of an ODL system, despite the fact that it is a very young institution and has not grown to its full capacity yet. The peculiarities of the ODL System shapes the nature of the categories of staff in the University. The total staff strength at the Headquarters stands at Nine Hundred and Fifty One (951), amongst this figures there is a small cohort of full – time / part time academic staff of 152 or 17% of the total, a large number of Non Academic staff 482 about 50% of the total, and a large number of support staff 317 making 33% of the total.

This situation is completely different in a conventional university where the number of academic staff would be larger than the number of non-academic and very, very, little of support staff.

See the diagramme for illustration

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## (F) SUPPORT STAFF

The Support Staff at the National Open University of Nigeria, an ODL Institution, carry out a wide range of functions. This is due to the various courses offered, methodology and the technology used. It is quite obvious that ODL has a higher proportion of support staff than a conventional system (for example – NOUN has 30% of its total staff as support staff) thereby, the selection, training and support of these staff is an important issue. A study of staff development needs at NOUN has shown that:-

- Support staff generally do not need skill development in their specialist areas;
- Support staff do however, need development in their orientation towards ODL; while
- Some technical staff need updating because of changes in their specialist areas.
- Therefore, it is important to note that for staff development to be successful, support staff needs to be open to change and learning.

Within the few years of existence, experience at National Open University of Nigeria, has shown that the training needs of staff from conventional University background showed that support staff who were constantly be accustomed to the conventional system must retrained.

- Despite the fact that some of these members of staff with the conventional university background have been sent to workshops at different Foreign universities with ODL background, they still find it difficult to reason '**the ODL way.**' So, constant retraining is necessary to erase the old conventional ideas for the new.



## (G) MONITORING AND SUPPORTING STAFF AT A DISTANCE

The National Open University of Nigeria has Study Centres located in Thirty – Three State Capitals (33) in Nigeria out of a total of the existing thirty six. Therefore, it can be said that NOUN has study centres all over the Country.

- It has its Headquarters in Lagos, with an ODL Planning Office in Abuja and a large Campus in Kaduna.
- With this background, the university is faced with the task of monitoring and supporting its staff who are at a distance away from the Headquarter.
- These are the Managers, Councillors, Facilitators, Non Academic and Support Staff at the centres, Course Material Producers.
- It is an understatement to say that in an Open and Distance Learning programme, learners need continuing contact with the programmes and support from Programme personnel, as they undertake the work through their studies.

Personnel Management of ODL at a distance, as it is with NOUN, need the same kind of support and contact. This is so because they work under the following conditions;

- They are part-time and are mostly affiliated and committed to some other Institution,
- They are on short-term or annual contracts;
- They usually have no regular Face-to-Face contact with Colleagues; and
- Their roles are usually ill-defined and diffused.

The concept of **Effective Staff Relations** (ESR), a panacea in ODL for distance staff, is employed by the Management of NOUN which has made the practice of

ODL effective, easy and successful in Nigeria. This is achieved through the following;

- Clear role description through schedule of duties for staff;
- Frequent and effective two-way communication e.g. e-mails, telephone and even video conferencing; between the Headquarters and Study Centres, the Planning Office and sometimes between one Study Centre and another.
- A thorough induction programme on the Mission, Vision, and the policy of the university;
- Opportunities for face-to-face meetings;
- Monitoring and reviewing of performance on a frequent basis;
- Keeping of accurate and efficient record system;
- Opportunities to make input into decisions that affect staff work;
- The continuous updating on changes in policies and procedure, through memos writing and NOUN Newsletters.

(h) **Conclusion**

- (i) With the establishment of NOUN, it has become imperative that in order to operate successfully, Open and distance learning requires more systems than the conventional education. Such systems are also more integrated and necessitate additional planning and routine administration.
- (ii) The establishment of Open and Distance Learning system is capital intensive. The ODL system of NOUN makes use of a large number of part time staff called Facilitators. These give the students Learning Tutorials at the various study centres and other locations.



- (iii) Nonetheless, personnel needed to run an open and distance education system are often very skilled, and specialized in many areas.
  
- (iv) Finally, it is a truism that Staff Development is extremely important in Personnel Management of an ODL Institution. So, also is the monitoring and supporting of staff at a Distance. Both are peculiar to the ODL system alone.



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