

Distance Education and Human Resource Development: A Tracer Study of Vocational Educational Programme of IGNOU

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INTRODUCTION

Distance education can play a crucial role in the economic development of a developing country like India by meeting human resource requirements. It caters to the requirement not only those who are unemployed but also of those who are on the job. Their knowledge can be updated through continuing education programmes. Vocational education and training like other forms of education and training is an investment in human capital, which brings benefits in the form of enhanced labour productivity, and higher levels of output and training. One of the most important functions of the education sector is to provide skill and technical manpower to various sectors of the economy. It is widely argued that the structure and pattern of education, especially at the secondary stage, has to be purposefully re-oriented towards Vocational and Technical Education to join together with the projected future pattern of employment avenues and requirements. Of late, most of the countries of the world have given due importance to vocational education at senior secondary stage to provide diversification of educational opportunities so as to enhance individual employability, reduce the mismatch between demand and supply of skilled manpower and provide an alternative for those pursuing higher education.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN INDIA

A number of Committees and Commissions have been formed in India from time to time to evaluate the prevailing educational system and implement the Vocational Education System in the country. For example, Hunter Commission (1882), Hartog Committee (1929), Sapru Committee (1934), Kulandaiswamy Committee (1985) and the National Policy on Education (1986). On the basis of the reports of these Committees and Commissions, the centrally sponsored scheme of vocationalisation of secondary education at 10+2 level was implemented in 1988. The implementation of the scheme was scaled down in 1996-97 to transfer the scheme to states and Union Territories. The scheme was revised during 1999-2000.

Past Experience

The past experience particularly vocational educational scheme which was offered through formal system indicates that 'although vocationalisation of education was visualized as a major reform of the educational system in education policy adopted in 1968 but its progress remained dismal. The share of students in vocational education at secondary stage to general secondary education in India was the lowest in the world (5%) in comparison to developed countries like Russia (60%), China (55%), Chile (40%), Indonesia (33%), Korea (31%) and Malaysia (11%) (World Bank, 2008).

Evaluation studies conducted by Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) Planning Commission of Government of India (GOI, 1997) and review of research compiled by National Council of Educational Research & Training (NCERT, 1997) found that the management structure was either very weak or non-existent in most of the States in India. To conclude, the previous experience has revealed that the Central Government had spent several crores of rupees on implementation of the Programme but the outcome was not up to the expectations. Studies conducted by the present author which supported to earlier studies by the World Bank found that

- ❖ The students who graduated from this scheme were often unemployed, entered low-waged employment, often in occupations for which they were not trained, or enter higher education. The programmes were not directly serving the needs of the economy or society and were *externally* inefficient.
- ❖ The scheme was claimed to be characterized by poor staffing, often obsolete equipment, poorly motivated students, and poorly designed courses. These poor inputs into the programme resulted in poor quality provision and, because of their costs relative to academic education, high cost outputs. Thus, the programmes were *internally* inefficient.
- ❖ There were also adverse equity effects in the sense that the programmes tended to recruit low-income low-ability students and condemn them to further disadvantage in the labour market (Gaba, 2006).

Present Scenario

Despite these poor performances, Government of India keen to expand vocational education in the country. National Knowledge Commission and the Planning Commission of India have identified this lack of skill to be a major hurdle in overall economic development. Honourable Prime Minister of India Dr. Manmohan Singh stressed the need for skill development on a mass scale and create commensurate job opportunities at the higher education level during his last Independence Day address.

The need of vocational training is high for out-of-school youth, girls and destitute women, economically deprived sections of the society like Scheduled Castes (SC), Schedule Tribes (ST) and working children. On the other hand, Globalisation process will force new job opportunities, new skills and updating old skills. Of the total 30 million young population registered in various employment exchanges of India (GOI, 2008a), about 83% do not have any kind of skill. Over 90% of employment in India is in the so-called informal sector, with employees working in relatively low productivity jobs. Provision of appropriate skills may thus be an important intervention to increasing the productivity of this workforce. However, both demand side as well as supply-side constraints have inhibited skills development for this sector.

In spite of the existing infrastructure and facilities, skill development and training in the country is highly inadequate. Every year 5.5 million students pass out of class X of which 3.3 million go to Class XI, leaving 2.2 million out of the educational system. There are, besides those who drop out after Class VIII, about 19 million. These are another target group who look for vocational training and self-employment avenues. The focus has to be on this 21 million target group. As against this, available formal training capabilities of the country are only 2.3 million students, which leaves a gap of 18.7 million. Further, there is an urgent need to look into training of trainers as only 40% of the 55,000 instructors have undergone a full instructor-training course (GOI, 2008b).

It is not possible to provide '*skill for all*' through existing educational and training system in the country. There is an urgent need to look alternative system for providing skills to

this target group. Distance and Online Learning, which is not only the cost effective, but also reduces time span for training of these learners.

IGNOU'S INITIATIVE

In order to meet this target group, IGNOU has set up recently School of Vocational Education and Training (SVET). SVET, which will offer vocational education programme through adopting new technology in the form of 'Virtual Classroom' or 'e-Learning mode'. In addition to this, different schools of IGNOU are also offering some vocational programmes in different trades like School of Engineering and Technology (SOET) School of Agriculture (SOA).

CERTIFICATE IN CRAFT AND DESIGN (POTTERY) PROGRAMME

IGNOU and Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) collaboratively offering 'Certificate in Craft and Design (Pottery)' (CCDP) programme since January, 2005 onwards through School of Engineering and Technology as a project basis. The major advantage of this programme is that it has been designed and developed with the help of various experts, organisation, employer groups and professional bodies. CCDP is 18 credits programme which includes 6 credits theory, 8 credits practical and 4 credits project. The detail programme structure has been presented below:

Table 1: Programme structure of CCDP programme of IGNOU

Course Code	Title of the Course	Credit	Theory/Practical
1. OET-01	World of Clay	6	Theory
2. OETL-001	Dynamic Clay Forms	4	Practical
3. OETL-002	Static Clay Forms	4	Practical
4. OETL-003	Understanding Design and Marketing	4	Project

Counselling Sessions (Theory): Six counselling sessions are being conducted either at study centres or through radio and teleconferencing to clarify students' doubts. *Practical Sessions* (Practical): There are three types of Practical Sessions. First is Lab Practical which is being conducted at Study Centre. Second is Home Practical, which students can do at their respective home, and third is Field Practical which requires outdoor activities and surveys. Lab Practical Sessions of four hours each were conducted by the learners at their assigned programme study centres (SOET, 2007).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study investigates the learners' benefits, which they received after completion of the CCDP from IGNOU. The objectives of the paper are to study

- (a) Learners goals to register with CCDP programme;
- (b) Learners' perception of the valued of CCDP programme study through distance mode'
- (c) To find out the reasons, if any, for non-completion of the programme.

RESEARCH METHODS

Based on the above objectives of the study, two of research methods were employed in this study. *Document and Database Analysis*: the CCDP programmes had been launched since January 2005 onwards. The programme is being offered twice in a year, which starts from January and July months of every year. With reference to analysis of institutional data for six-month (in respect of gender, residential status, marital status, employment status, and social status) of students enrolled from January 2005 to July

2007 were obtained from the Programme Coordinator and Student's Registration and Evaluation Division of IGNOU. Students contact addresses (Telephones/Emails) were collected from registration data. In addition to this, published and unpublished documents were used for the present study.

Telephone/Email Survey Method: To further follow up the variables and trends obtained through the analysis of institutional data. Of the total 356 students, 302 students who mentioned their telephone numbers (256) and email address (46) in their registration form were contacted through telephones. Only 99 students were agreed to provide information. On their confirmation, the researchers contacted them for interview as per their convenience, and recorded their responses to structured interview items (conducted in an open-ended and informal manner). An interview schedule comprising of 16 questions was tested and which covered, besides background data for student. It took minimum of 8 minutes to a maximum of 17 minutes. The respondents' profiles were compiled, and their responses towards the objectives of the study are presented below.

FINDINGS

Institutional Data Analysis

Institutional data analysis of all the six-admission cycle shows the students' profile in respect of age, social, marital, gender, and employability status. It has been found that:

- Of the total 356 students, most of them were in the age-group of between 21-30 years (54%) followed by 31-40 years (29%); 41-50 years (12%) and above 50 years (5%). The oldest students was 60 years old.
- With regard to social status of the students (i.e. SC, ST, General Category, and physically challenged indicate that, the percentage of general population (71%) was higher than other categories i.e. SC (8%); ST (11%); Backward class (6%) and physically challenged (4%);
- The percentage of unmarried students (52%) was higher than that of married students (48%);
- Most of them (68%) were female; however, for January and July 2007 batch, the male percentage was more than 50%.
- Of the total 356 students, most of the students (71%) were from rural area and rest of them were from urban background.
- The large majority of the students were unemployed (75%).

Interview Data Analysis

As mentioned earlier, the findings are based on 99 students who were finally contacted through telephone (89%) and Emails (11%). Their profile are presented below:

- ⇒ Of the total respondents (99), most of them (89)% were females, belongs to urban area (91%), unmarried (62%), in the age group of 31 to 40 years (83%) and were employed (78%).
- ⇒ Of the total 99 respondents, 49 % of them completed the programme and rest of them are still on roll in the programme.
- ⇒ Most of the respondents (92%) informed that they joined IGNOU because of its flexible schedule of teaching/learning system;
- ⇒ Most of the respondents (76%) goal was to get skills in Pottery and rest of them said to get certificate.

- ⇒ Of the 78% respondents who were on the job, most of them (83%) working as a arts and crafts teacher in a school. They informed that to get CCDP certificate from IGNOU was necessary to get job and promotion in their respective institutions and it was one of the prerequisite for the job.
- ⇒ Half of the respondents informed that certificate helped a great deal to facilitate job performance; however, a few respondents informed that it helped partially.
- ⇒ Most of the respondents (71%) informed that they perceived that the present certificate would help them in achieving higher education, to get new job and promotion in their present job.
- ⇒ Of the 99 respondents, 73% informed that the course exactly met their personal needs, which motivated them to complete the programme. Rest of the students informed that other factors like professional compulsion was responsible to complete the programme.

Learner's views

- ◆ One of the respondents informed that the curriculum of CCDP programmes was relevant and enabled him to acquire skills in their concerned fields.
- ◆ Another respondents informed that the study materials of IGNOU were high standards in terms of quality. This course having positive impact on skill development because the contents of the study materials were relevant to their jobs.
- ◆ One of the respondents informed that he had already aware about the skill but not having the certificate. Therefore, he registered with this programme and got certificate. Now he got job in the school.
- ◆ One of the students informed that he was an Architect before joining this programme. He registered with this programme because he wants to get new skills in poetry. He is self-employed at present and also working as a free lancer.
- ◆ Some of the students were having graduate and post graduate degree in Arts and Crafts. They registered with this programme for learning skills in pottery. One of the students informed that the programme was very useful and there was good environment to learn skill during practical sessions. He came to know about this programme from his friend. At the age of 37 years, he is still interested to learn more skills, because it is not possible from conventional teaching.
- ◆ One of the respondents informed that she could not appear in examination due to not receiving the material in time. She further stated that she got practical training from regional centre. She was perusing art and craft degree as well from University of Delhi at the time of registration with IGNOU.
- ◆ Another respondents informed that he couldn't start this programme because of his health problem.
- ◆ Few respondents suggested that more practical classes should be organised.

DISCUSSION

It has been observed from the above findings that distance education helped almost all. It brings changes economically in their personal life. Most of the respondents joined DE system because of its flexible characteristic and their goal was enhanced their existing skills as well as learn new skills. They perceived that the CCDP programme will help

them to perform better in their present job i.e. working as a school teacher. The study also found that few students were dissatisfied with the receiving the material in time that affected them in their successful completion of their respective programme. Gibson (1988, 10) indicates that distance learners do share broad demographic and situational similarities that have often provided the basis for profiles of the 'typical distance learner in higher education. Therefore, their views can be varied.

Skill development through distance education required more caution. It is because of requirement of more face-to-face interaction during the course of study. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Distance Education System will help to update the existing skills of learners and generate new skills among them. Vocational education and training can raise the job opportunities in many ways, as it helps to develop the necessary skills, attitude and motivation to match demand for manpower of the economy as well as self-employment. Training through distance mode is cost-effective as comparison to traditional classroom training. Research shows that total cost of Remote Access Distance Training (RADL) is higher than the total cost of classroom-based training (CBT). But, the profits from RADL are higher than the profits from CBT (Osiakwan and David 2001).

There is a need for curriculum design in all the need-based programmes of vocational education. If we think to train all employees for their daily knowledge upgradation and the process of skill development, the existing class room training methodology do not have the capacity to train all of them. E-learning has emerged as a successful tool to impart education and training in a need based manner using various forms of media.

There is a need for strategic planning for providing '*Skill for All*'. There should be planning board/committee. The members should be represented from public and private sector. There is a need to conduct an organizational analysis: (a) to find out opportunity for training and education; (b) database of participants; (c) to find out the basic infrastructure; and (d) provide accountability for the use of training resources. There is a need of the hour to have effective networking between all the existing online resources. IGNOU has already initiated some positive steps towards this direction.

SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

- ◆ The vocational training curriculum should be designed as per needs. The ICT should be used to make optimum use of distance training programmes.
- ◆ Possibilities for in-service skill training through distance mode should be explored for employees who are working in different occupation.
- ◆ Web-based training system can be developed which will provide interactivity among different students of the programme from different locations in the country.

CONCLUSION

The study found some interesting results. For instance, those respondents who said they were having skills before joining this programme; all of them informed that they perceived certificate will help them in getting job in government sector. On the other hand, those respondents who said that their goal was to develop skill, they perceived that certificate would help them in performing better in their professions. Although this is a small and primarily limited study, the results show some positive results. There should be some provisions in support of the principles of lifelong education, training and updating skills (both in-service and pre-service) and it should be a part of the continuing education

programmes of Distance teaching institutions (DTIs) in the country. It should be considered as regular activities of a distance teaching institution.

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