

# Professional Development in Distance Education: A Case Study of Distance Education Programme of District Primary Education Programme

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**Abstract:** Professional development of distance education personnel undertaken by DEP-DPEP has been primarily with the aim of supplementing face-to-face training of teachers with multi-media support. This has the aim of minimising quality dilution and content loss in the cascade mode of the teacher training strategy. Professional development of DE personnel undertaken by DEP-DPEP has the dual purpose of generating media materials as well as building a trained body of media professionals in the DPEP states, Producing materials in consonance with the zeitgeist of the concerned state. Both synchronous and asynchronous modalities of media communication have been utilized for production and delivery of DL materials. Professional development exercises, as reported in this paper, have three stages: (i) pre-training preparation, (ii) during training activities, and (iii) post-training outcome.

For Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE), the *National Policy on Education*, 1986 emphasised three focal aspects;

- i) “universal access and enrolment
- ii) universal enrolment of children upto 14 years of age
- iii) a substantial improvement in quality of education to enable all children to achieve essential levels of learning” (MHRD, 1997).

For this, the District Primary Education Programme was launched by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt. of India, with support from the World Bank. It draws significant parallel to the Amartya Sen doctrine that “Given the extremely heterogeneous character of the Indian economy and society” (Dreze and sen, 1993), it is necessary that developmental interventions should “examine the experiences in sufficiently disaggregative form — and in adequate detail” (Dreze and sen, 1993:3) for optimal results. DPEP has provided special focus on contextuality in its interventions, drawing upon disaggregated targets and decentralised planning and management. Besides, a synergistic point of convergence for all interventions has been in the area of enhancing professional development and competencies of the teachers and primary education personnel. Face-to-face recurrent in-service training methodology has been

followed rigorously. However, a need has been felt to minimise the quality dilution and content loss that this cascade model of training methodology brings within itself. A significant component was added to DPEP — that was the Distance Education Programme (DEP), to provide “support to the ongoing effort for training teachers and other personnel in primary education” (MHRD, 1997) with the special purpose of “strengthening institutions at national, state, district, and sub-district levels in designing, development, producing and delivering distance learning inputs and materials” (MHRD, 1997).

For design development production and delivery of Distance Learning materials, professional development of state, district, and sub-district level personnel of DPEP has been one of the major tasks of the Project. This had a dual purpose (i) to generate media materials in the form of scripts for audio, video, and SIM production, (ii) to ensure sustainability of the programme through building a body of trained professionals in distance education in the states to ensure continued contribution in Distance Education (DE) even after the DPEP is withdrawn. Training in DE has usually been plagued with anarchic access resulting in paucity of trained professionals in this area. One major reason for this has been that “staff development for open and distance learning is largely seen by organisations as a cost not an investment” (Robinson, 1998) and efforts have to be taken up that are “directed at improving knowledge, skills, attitudes, and performance at the levels of the individual, the work group and the organisation” (Robinson, 1998:34). Bernadette Robinson further suggests that an effective training model for distance education should have three components; “(i) Pre-Training preparation, (ii) During training activities, (iii) Post training outcome and support” (Robinson, 1998:34).

The DEP has undertaken capacity building in the DPEP states in development and actual production of DL materials and multi-media packages and their effective integration with and use in ongoing training programmes of the state. The purpose has been to undertake capacity building of the actual target user in the DE modalities. The DL materials thus produced would ensure user ownership, local specificity and user friendliness within themselves. DEP has combined a two pronged strategy in the production and delivery of DE materials;

- i) DE materials that can be stored and accessed when the learner is ready i.e., “asynchronous” (Bates, 1995) materials as A.W. (Tony) Bates calls it; and
- ii) DL through interactive teleconferencing through one-way video and two-way audio conferencing, which may be taxonomised as a “synchronous” (Bates, 1995:9) communication pattern of Bates i.e., simultaneous or real time communication between teacher and the taught.

It is true that training teachers and teacher educators in remote state, district, and sub-district levels in sophisticated DE systems is a very difficult and ambitious proposition. However, in order to combat the problem of generativity crisis in ‘DE materials as well as producing DE material in consonance with the zeitgeist of its target audience, it was felt that training in DE at state level could produce a trained body of professionals having “grassroots base. The attempt at professional

development is still in its incipient stages. It draws strength from the fact that learning is a lifelong process and training even in highly technical areas like DE can be internalised by lay persons with effective results as, "Education is no longer to be regarded as imparting and assimilating set contents but a lifelong process that takes place within a person to aid personal development, to communicate with others, to question the world on the basis of personal experience and increasingly to bring self-realization" (Peters, 1998).

Initial audience research exercises have showed that the major target user segment for the multi-media packages (print, audio, and video materials) as well as for teleconferencing programmes in the DPEP states are:

- Primary Teachers
- Village Education Committee Members
- Cluster Resource Centre Coordinators
- District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) Personnel
- Key Resource Persons/Master Trainers
- District Project Office Personnel
- Non-formal Education/Alternative Schooling Personnel
- Early Childhood Education Personnel

The professional development and training exercises in DEP efforts has three stages;

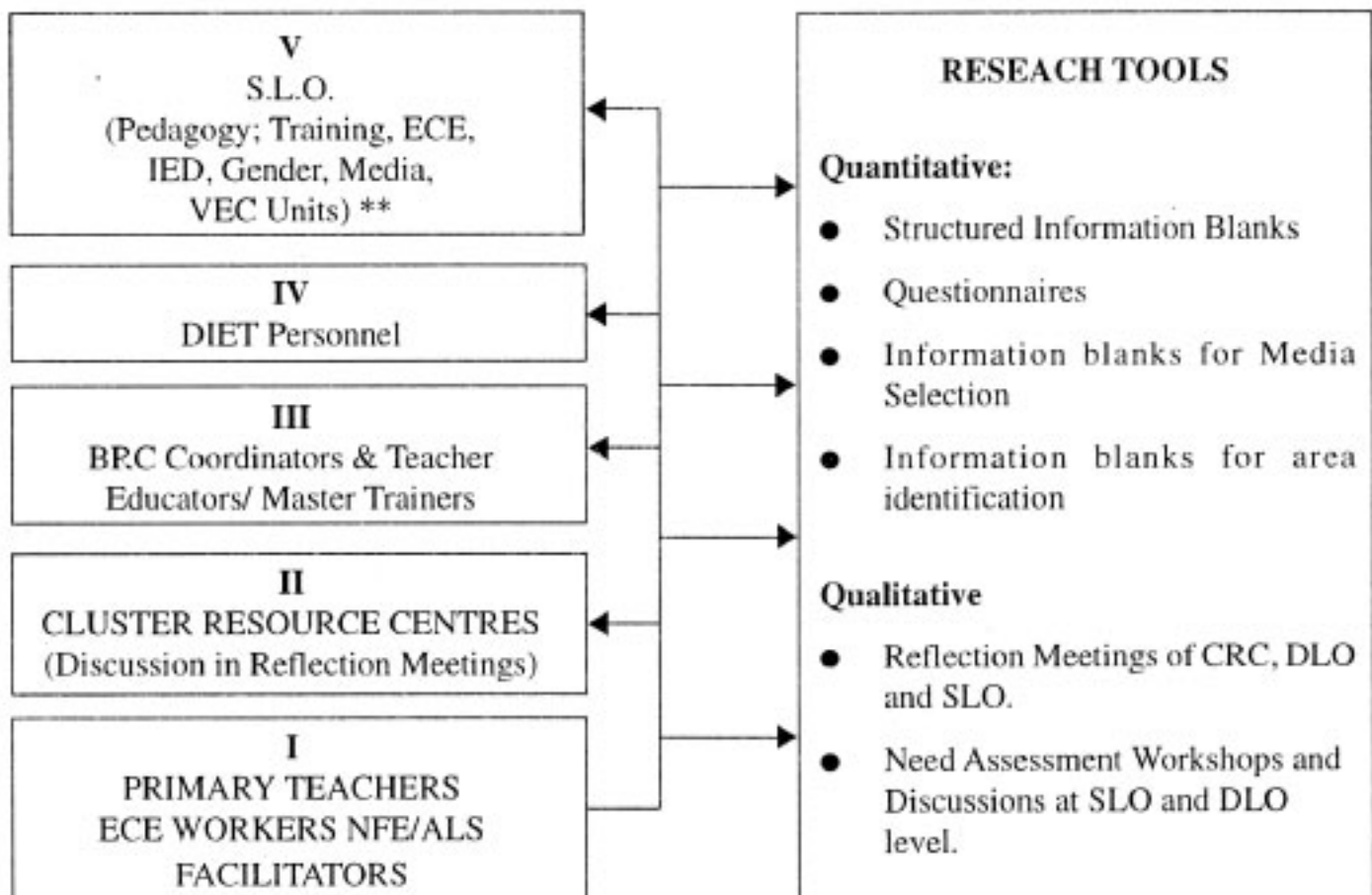
- Pre-training Preparation
- Actual Training
- Post Training Activities

### **Pre-Training Preparation**

In the first phase of pre-training preparation, assessment of training needs is undertaken. This leads to media selection and media integration processes with the training curriculum to make the programme production very target oriented.

Having identified taxonomies and prioritised the target audience to be concentrated on, the next major step undertaken is a *Diagnostic Need Assessment* exercise. The attempt is to make the process as decentralised as possible, so that the needs emerging for media intervention do not only follow a top-down methodology, but evolve a bottom-up approach. The need assessment exercise begins from the primary teacher, who communicates his/her area of difficulty to the Cluster Resource Coordinator, which goes on thence to the Block Resource Centre Coordinator and then to the district i.e. DIET personnel, and finally, to the State Level Office (SLO). The following table shows the process at a glance:



**Table 1: Diagnostic need assessment (bottoms-up model)**

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- IED** : Integrated Education Development
  - VEC** : Village Education Committee
  - ECE** : Early Childhood Education
  - SLO** : State Level Office
  - DLO** : District Level Office

Media selection processes undertaken in the Preparatory Workshops usually throw up three areas; Print, Audio, and Video. A major finding has been that both the target users as well as the policy planners feel that video programmes are the quintessence of media materials. Print comes next. Professional development processes are undertaken in all the three areas. Another pre-training exercise that is undertaken, and which informs the training strategy is assessment of the Specific Entry Competencies of the prospective trainees. Hence, for production of print materials i.e., Self-Instructional Materials, such professionals are chosen who have previous experience in the area. Textbook Writers are usually short listed, assuming that training in SIM techniques would ensure emergence of a reasonably effective SIM writer. Even for audio and video script writing, an informal assessment is made to include teachers who are creative and felicitous in graphic representation of pedagogical concepts.

### **Actual Training**

For a presentation of the actual training procedures followed, the researcher would focus on case studies related to two states assigned to her i.e., Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Once the pre training preparation has been undertaken, the focus shifts on to what are termed as 'Capacity Building and Development Workshops'. As the name suggests, the purpose of the workshop is dual training as well as development of a sizeable body of scripts to meet the generativity crisis usually associated with media production.

## Uttar Pradesh

The Preparatory Workshop had highlighted one major area for media production and that was in the form of PRINT. This was a sequel to the production of textbooks in Mathematics for Classes III, IV, and V. Once the textbooks were published and disseminated, a need was felt for further supplementation of teacher training in the area of teaching of Mathematics at the mid primary and the penultimate primary mathematics teaching.

Besides face-to-face training, SIMs in the hard spots of Mathematics teaching was found to be a felt need.

The 'Capacity Building and Development Workshop' in SIMs was undertaken. The objective of the exercise was:

- 1) To train the participants in the development of SIMs.
- 2) To develop SIMs based on content briefs prepared.

The training inputs contained;

- a) SIM and its importance
- b) Different formats and its relative effectiveness
- c) Stages in the development of SIMs
- d) Field testing of SIMs.

A second stage edition workshop was also undertaken for finalisation and edition of the SIMs prepared in the initial training exercise.

The trainee/ participants' profile of both the workshops together was as given below:

Experts in DE	05
Experts in SIM writing	10
Teacher trainers (Maths)	10
Primary Teachers (with Maths background)	10
Graphic Artists and Illustrators	03

**Note:** About 50% of the participants had been those who had participated in the Preparatory Workshop.

## Bihar

The Need Assessment Exercises taken up for the state of Bihar in the Preparatory Workshop had revealed an urgency there for production of video

programmes for the supplementation of the teacher training package entitled UJALA. The areas identified were *curricular* (Language, Mathematics and Environmental

Studies) as well as *Contextual* (Teacher Motivation, Integrated Education, Multi-grade Teaching, Joyful Child Centered Teaching and Activity Based Teaching-learning).

The training purpose here was to build up a body of scriptwriters in video scriptwriting, who could be of utility as expert personnel ever after the project would come to a close. The participants chosen were those who had participated in the Preparatory Workshop, teacher educators, media persons and primary teachers.

The primary objectives of the workshop were:

- i) To undertake capacity building of teachers, teacher educators, pedagogy experts and media persons in educational television scriptwriting.
- ii) To develop draft scripts as a by product of the capacity building workshop. .
- iii) To provide practical training in the technical aspects of video scriptwriting, including story board making.

Working sessions were devised, focusing on developing in the participants' scriptwriting skills comprising of

→ Identifying the programme idea
→ Preparing a programme brief
→ Undertaking pre-programme research
→ Selecting media materials
→ Planning media message
→ Structuring of the programme
→ Planning the visual treatment
→ Preparing the story board.

The participants' profile was as follows;

Teacher Trainers	10
Primary Teachers	10
Scriptwriters/ Media persons	10
Subject Experts	05

**Note:** 50% of these participants were those who had participated in the earlier Preparatory Stage-I activity.

The professional development exercises undertaken here resulted in the development of nineteen draft video scripts on the following areas of Primary Teaching;

Mathematics	05
Language Teaching	03
Environmental Studies	06
Psycho Pedagogy	03
School Readiness Programme (ECE)	01
Integrated Education Development (IED)	01

### Post Training Activity

The scripts produced in Capacity Building exercises in a workshop mode were then finalised after their final validation by its target users, subject experts and media specialists. The script validation group consisted of personnel from;

- a) State Council of Educational Research & Training (SCERT) — Subject Experts
- b) State Institute of Educational Technology (SIET)
- c) State Resource Group (Training)
- d) District Institutes of Education & Training (DIETs)
- e) Pedagogy Improvement Unit of DPEP-Bihar
- f) Block Resource Centre Resource Group

After validation and finalisation of these video scripts, they were field trialled with DPEP school teachers and teacher educators in the Cluster Resource Centre of the DPEP district Vaishali of Bihar.

In the case of SIMs produced in Uttar Pradesh, the field trialling of the final SIMs was undertaken with primary teachers in the DPEP district of Barielly. Barielly has been chosen as the district for intensive media interventions and impact studies in Uttar Pradesh.

DEP-DPEP has attempted capacity building in the area of audio media too in other states. The technical aspect of media in terms of the actual production of the programmes, however are taken care of by professional organisations like the SIETs or non-governmental professional production companies. These professional development exercises in DE in the areas of scriptwriting for multi-media packages or even stand-alone programmes has resulted in the building up of a sizeable body of professionals. They possess working professional knowledge about the intricacies of audio and video scriptwriting and Self-Instructional Material writing.

Though these capacity building exercises are a recurrent and ongoing programme of DEP, there is no doubt that it does suffer from certain inherent shortcomings. There are two basic factors in the programme design that lead to a lack of the pristine finish to the product that needs to be achieved;

- (i) The problem of numbers i.e., each state needs a large number of programmes. For this, the scripts have to be generated through personnel having indepth knowledge about the pedagogical and content areas to be incorporated. This necessitates a large number of lay persons in terms of media exposure being trained and utilized to produce scripts which often are somewhat short of the expected optimal technical finish required. However, they do possess authenticity in terms of the content area.
- (ii) The multi-lingual and heterogeneous contextual situation of the DPEP states necessitates the fact that programmes cannot be planned and produced centrally for all the states together. This would lead to the irrelevance of these programmes, as each state has its own requirements, its own linguistic identify and its own regional individuality. Hence in each state professional development in DE



endeavours are undertaken which may result in undertaking capacity building of persons who have absolutely no inclination towards or feel for scriptwriting or media in general.

However, this is a problem that would have to be taken in one's stride, considering the colossal dimension of the entire project, run in 14 states with more states to be taken in its fold, on the anvil. Besides, the inherent drawbacks have been attempted to be minimised by undertaking the final edition of the scripts/materials produced by these personnel through professionals in the area. Moreover, it has been found that the capacity building of teachers and teacher educators in educational media leads to a cross filtration and osmosis of creativity and pedagogy leading to productions that are both pedagogically sound and aesthetically creative.

It has been empirically proved that there are characteristic learning styles for different individuals. Each individual perceives, interacts with and responds emotionally to learning environments differently. Gardner mentions that "not all people have the same abilities: not all of us learn in the same way" (Gardner, 1993). In the professional development in Distance Education, perhaps one could achieve optimal results if out of the seven intelligences identified by Gardner, one could focus on the dominance of verbal/linguistic, visual/spatial and musical/rhythmic intelligences while selecting the prospective trainees. This should also be the informing spirit behind the planning of the instructional design of the multi media packages for training in distance education.

DEP-DPEP has made a small dent in the colossal need in the country for trained professionals in distance education. The fact is undeniable that some of the trained teachers may not be the kind of expert media specialists who have worked in the field of educational media for long periods of time. However, DEP has had the contribution of inculcating in the primary teachers and teacher educators, a meta-creative feel for writing for educational media. The symbiotic relationship between expertise in pedagogy and exposure to media processes has resulted in evolution of Janus-headed educational technologists, amphibians equally comfortable teaching in the classroom as in writing scripts for audio or video programme production.

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