

COMMUNICATION

Study of Skill Development Through Distance Education

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Abstract : *Distance education facilitates the development of managerial skills. This study empirically examines the extent of attainment of skills through distance mode, the impact of multi-media on career of learners and the influence of acquired managerial skills on the managerial performance. It was found that IGNOU management programme was able to develop skills of the learners to a large extent. The multi-media helped greatly in the development of managerial skills, which facilitates the performance of various managerial functions such as planning, organising, coordinating and control.*

Distance Education and Human Resource Development

Distance education programmes provide equality of educational opportunity by creating access to all. This is especially relevant in India where the human resource development is characterised by imbalance of all kinds in terms of region, gender and levels of education. Another factor to be taken into account is that one important feature of distance education is its minimised opportunity cost. One can study through the distance mode while in employment in any field. This mode of education also helps in raising employment opportunities in many ways since it helps to develop skills and attitudes.

Distance education influences quality of humanpower in many ways. The open learning systems can impart awareness among people in the fields of health, nutrition and education. Disadvantaged group especially women will benefit from this. Besides, the programmes through distance education call for interaction among people belonging to different categories: teachers, technologists, learners, administrators, managers and other functionaries. This will have a positive effect and impact on social development.

The open schools established in India provide necessary education to the drop-outs from schools and they are presently doing remarkable work in this direction. The open universities and distance education centres provide higher education to all those who missed it and require at a later stage. Efforts were made in India since independence to initiate distance education. However, only after the establishment of IGNOU in 1985 that the idea of imparting education

at the door steps became a reality in India. The university has got a nationwide jurisdiction with its organisational network spreading throughout the nation. There are 19 regional centres and a large number of study centres spread over all states and union territories in India. The university imparts instruction in Humanities, social sciences, sciences and technology, and management sciences. Distance education programmes conducted by IGNOU in diverse fields such as management, computer application, water resource management, energy conservation and other relevant fields give a sort of on-the-job training. Through these programmes skilled manpower have been generated, the potentialities are much in a developing country like India.

This piece of research is an attempt to study the extent to which management programmes through distance education i.e. through IGNOU could help skill development among practicing managers.

Programme of Management

IGNOU imparts instruction in various areas of management leading to the award of Master of Business Administration. Besides, the University also has Diploma Programmes in various fields like Human Resource Management, Financial Management, Operations Management Marketing Management, etc.

Objectives

The main objectives of the study were:

- i) to examine the extent to which the learners have attained skills through the distance mode of education;
- ii) to study the impact of multi-media in distance education on the career and life of learners; and
- iii) to study the extent to which acquisition of managerial skills helped managerial performance.

Methodology

Survey research has been followed for conducting the study. No sample was taken.

Both secondary and primary data were collected. Secondary data have been collected from the following sources ;

1. Office of the Director. Statistical Bureau, Andaman & Nicobar Island, Port Blair.
2. Study Centre of Indira Gandhi National open University, (IGNOU) located at Port Blair.

For generating primary data, a questionnaire was administered on the census population. The universe of the study included those learners who registered for the Management Programme of IGNOU at Madras Regional Centre during 1990 to 1992 and attached to Port Blair Study Centre of IGNOU. The universe came to 31.

The study was conducted in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

Development of Managerial Skills

The extent to which learners of the management programme of IGNOU acquired skills has been studied. The learners were asked to record their preferences for each skill. There were three preferences given as great extent, to a certain extent and not at all. The learners were asked to record the preference for the following skills, if they attained any.

1. Communication skill.
2. Decision-making skill.
3. Analytical skill.
4. Public relations skill.
5. Negotiation skill.

The study observed that in the case of the communication skill, 25 percent of learners opined that they attained this skill to a great extent, 60 percent to a certain extent and five percent did not attain the skill. 10 percent did not have any option for this question.

In the case of the decision-making skill, 35 percent of the learners opined that they attained the skill to a great extent, and 60 percent to a certain extent, and five percent did not have any opinion on the matter.

In the case of the public relations skill 40 percent opined that they acquired the skill to a great extent, 45 percent to a certain extent and five percent did not attain any skill. 10 percent did not respond to this question.

Regarding the negotiation skill only 20 percent opined that they attained the skill to a great extent, 50 percent to a certain extent and 15 percent did not attain any skill, 15 percent did express any opinion for this question.

Media in Distance Education and Skill Development

The role of media in distance education in developing the managerial skill was examined. The extent to which the following media helped in skill development was studied. the learners were asked to indicate their preferences for the following media in order.

1. Self-instructional material.
2. Audio-lessons.
3. Video-lessons.
4. Counselling.

It was observed that for self-instructional material 65 percent of the learners gave their first preference, five percent each for second and third preferences and 20 percent last preference. In the case of audio lesson, no learner gave his first preference, 10 percent second preference and 40 percent gave fourth preference. 30 percent did not have any opinion on the matter. Regarding video 20 percent gave first preference, 40 percent second preference and 25 percent gave third preference. 15 percent did not express any opinion on the matter. As regards academic counselling is concerned it has been observed that 15 percent gave their

first preference to the media, 35 percent second preference, 25 percent gave third preference. 25 percent did not have opinion on the matter.

Media and Career Development

The extent to which media in distance education facilitate career development of learners has been studied. The learners were asked to record their preferences on a three-point scale i.e. Highly facilitated, facilitated to a certain extent and not at all. The impact of the following media was studied.

- a) Study materials.
- b) Assignments.
- c) Video and audio lessons.
- d) Counselling.

The study revealed that in the case of study materials 65 percent of the learners opined that this media highly facilitated their career development and 35 percent to a certain extent. In the case of assignment responses, 50 percent opined that this media facilitated career development, 30 percent opined as to a certain extent and 10 percent opined that this media did not facilitate their career development. 10 percent did not have any opinion.

As regards video is concerned 35 percent opined that this media highly facilitated their career development, 50 percent to a certain extent and five percent opined that this media did not facilitate their career development. 10 percent did not have any opinion on the matter. In the case of counselling only 30 percent opined that this media highly facilitated their career development. 40 percent to a certain extent and for five percent it did not facilitate their career development. 25 percent did not have any opinion for this question.

Skill Development and Managerial Functions

The study also examined the extent to which the acquisition of the managerial skill was useful in performing the following managerial functions.

- a) Planning
- b) Organising
- c) Co-ordination
- d) Control.

It has been observed that 30 percent of the learners opined that the acquisition of the managerial skill was highly useful for them to perform the managerial function of planning and 60 percent held that acquisition of the managerial skill was useful to a certain extent to perform planning.

As regards organising, it has been revealed that 25 percent opined that the acquired managerial skill was highly useful for them to perform this managerial function, whereas 65 percent opined that the acquisition of managerial skill was useful only to a certain extent to perform managerial function of organising. 10 percent did not have any opinion for the question.

In the case of co-ordination, it has been observed that the skill was highly useful to do this managerial function, whereas 65 percent opined that the acquisition of the managerial skill was useful to a certain extent to perform the managerial function of co-ordination. Five percent did not express any opinion for this question.

In the case of control as a managerial function only 15 percent opined that the acquisition of managerial skill was highly useful to perform this function, whereas 60 percent opined that the acquisition of the managerial skill was useful to a certain extent for performing this managerial function. 25 percent did not have any opinion on this question.

Findings

It has been generally assumed that development of the managerial skill is possible through the conventional formal mode of education. This study revealed that distance education also facilitated development of the managerial skill. Empirical observation justified that among the five skills observed, learners of management programme of IGNOU could develop analytical skill to a large extent, the followed by decision-making skills, communications skills, public relations skills and negotiation skills.

The various media employed in distance teaching such as the print media, i.e. self instructional material, audio lessons, video lessons and counselling, facilitated the development of managerial skills. Among these, the print media was found to be more effective in developing the managerial skill as preferred by learners of the management programme. This is followed by other media such as audio, counselling and video.

Another finding observed in the study is that the various media employed in distance education also have got an influence on their career. The training they received through distance learning, i.e. through multi-media helped them to gain skills and practical experiences in various areas of management. Among the media, learners preferred study materials as having positive impact on their career development. The course content and style of presentation of the study materials impressed the learners and facilitated their professional development.

The acquisition of managerial skills through distance education also facilitates the performance of various managerial functions such as planning, organising, co-ordination and control. The effect is observed to a great extent in the performing the managerial function of controlling which is followed by organising, co-ordinating and planning.

In distance education, learners have to complete certain number of assignments. In IGNOU, these assignments are compulsory. The learners of the management programme opined that the pattern of these assignments also facilitated skill development.

Suggestions and Policy Implications

Distant learners have to acquire more practical orientation regarding the skill development. For this, the present arrangement may not be sufficient. It is suggested that a sort of tie up arrangements can be made with some industrial concerns of the area so that the learners can receive practical training in skill development. Through this arrangement, the learners get chances of interaction with industrial concerns.

The library facilities at the study centre including reference books, and copies of study material should be strengthened. The video lessons should cover all aspects of the syllabus.

The counselling sessions for management are not adequate especially in the study centre, Port Blair. This should be strengthened.

It has been observed that question pattern of Term End Examination is relevant for developing the managerial skill. One suggestion to make the question pattern more effective for skill development is that it should move towards practical aspects of skill development rather than theoretical. It will be a convenience for the learners if the question papers of past years are made available at the study centres for ready reference.

Conclusion

Developing countries are faced with the problem of abundance of unskilled manpower along with the acute shortage of skilled personnel. Education and training are required to overcome the barriers. Education and training should be expanded in all sectors for the development of productive resources. On the job training should be provided. Knowledge of modern methods will help in improving productivity.

It is the requirement of the management sector to develop skills for better managerial performance which leads to skill development. Managers who are on the job get a chance to gain new skills through the programme. The programme imparts skills by applying the multimedia approach. Practical and empirical orientation have also been provided in the programme.

With its network spread over the whole of the national territory, the University through its management programmes can create a base for managers to develop skills. This will help the development of human resources. Distance education programmes backed with mass media have an impact upon the human resource development in the country.

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