Blended Learning Approach and Student's Satisfaction: A Case Study of IGNOU Programmes

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Abstract: *The industrial sector in India today is witnessing a huge gap between demand and supply of trained human resources. We have an increasing supply of new entrants into the workforce as well as existing workers looking for new jobs who do not have the requisite skills for these openings. The industry needs today has to meet the growing business requirements. It has been realized by the policy makers that there is a need for launching more skill-based academic programmes and capacity building initiatives as per the industrial needs. Keeping these situations in mind and realizing growing demands of skilled workers, School of Vocational Education and Training (SOVET), Indira Gandhi National Open University has developed many programmes thereby contributing towards developing employability skills of country's educated youth and capacity building of present workforce. Major skill based programmes are being offered through blended learning mode. Therefore one of the objectives of the present paper was to discuss two selected programmes and their major course components. Moreover student's satisfaction in terms of learning materials, academic counselling, various support services and overall satisfaction level about the programme have also been examined in this paper. The present study is based on primary data collected through structured questionnaire and secondary data taken from published documents and reports etc.*

Keywords*: Skill gap, Trained human manpower, Blended learning, Student's satisfaction, Employability.*

Introduction

ODL and its challenges

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is different from the conventional system of education where the target audience is physically away from the teacher. It provides learning opportunities to people who cannot afford time or money for traditional classes or who live in remote areas far from their respective universities or colleges. With the emergence and popularity of Information and Communication Technologies

(ICT) in recent years, the Internet has become the most important tool for delivering distance education programmes. Although ODL offers more people an opportunity to acquire higher education qualifications, it is not always advantageous for learners who are mostly isolated, poor and fully dependent. Sometimes, these group of learners cannot learn through self-learning material alone but have to be supported by classroom environment as well. Open universities organise Academic Counseling and/or Personal Contact Programme to provide learners the experience of classroom teaching learning environment, but these also serve the purpose in a limited way.

For meaningful distance learning, ODL institutions must provide a constant, reliable access to ICTs and students must have free access to the ICT tools and equipment to fulfill their course requirements. But most ODL institutions in the country are still struggling to cope with demands of new emerging technologies. There are also challenges related to mode of delivery of content, formats and its layout that need to be accessible to all persons including persons with disabilities. The modes of training using distance education seem to be viable in developing countries, as there is a continuous adoption of technology from the developed and other developing countries (Mnyanyi, Bakari, & Mbwette, 2011). Offering online programmes through ODL is another challenge faced by ODL institutions.

Recognition, accreditation and acknowledgment are other major challenges in ODL. Although most employers do acknowledge certification obtained through distance learning, certain employers do not.

Non-receipt of immediate feedback in comparison to traditional classroom settings, is also a matter of discussion. In ODL, a student has to wait for feedback until the instructor or academic counselor has assessed his/ her assignment.

Blended learning

Blended Learning approach is turning out to be a successful model in open universities. The term " blended learning" means the use of a variety of media (such as face to face, online, audio, video, print, social medium) and the learning environment (such as instructor-led, team work, self-study and peer group interaction, collaborative learning) that help to reinforce and accelerate mastery and application of learning. The blended learning approach combines theory and practical applications in an effective way to strengthen distance learning programmes.

Blended learning is a student-centered approach to create a learning experience whereby the learner interacts with other students, with the instructor, and with content through thoughtful integration of online and face-to-face environments (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). According to April (2017), "it is a mixture of learning methods that incorporate multiple teaching models which helps cater to the individual needs of the learner, most students have unique learning styles and a blended approach is more likely to cater to those learning styles in comparison to a traditional classroom

teaching experience." According to open and blended learning experts, there are various advantages of this mode of learning such as it improves efficiency in communication between learner and instructor; it saves money as students can bring their own technology device and take advantage of the adaptive learning software by way of using e-textbooks; and it manages student data better as software used in blended learning programme helps the teacher to monitor the progress of the students and offers flexibility in terms of availability and accessibility.

Although blended learning combines effective pedagogy and technologies, the major concern for distance education practitioners and policy makers is whether students are satisfied with delivery of instruction through this approach. This paper tries to highlight some selected courses of IGNOU and their blended design and delivery and at the same time tries to get learners' feedback on certain important aspects of the programmes which shall be discussed in the later sections.

Review of Literature

With the development of new ICT tools from time to time, blended learning is increasingly becoming the foundation of the teaching-learning process. In this transformative phase of education and the use of new ICTs in a blended learning environment, the elements of learner engagement and quality teaching have emerged to be of paramount importance for educational practitioners and planners.

In the beginning of distance education system, the printed study materials provided a lot of flexibility and independence to the distance learners. In spite of having their limitations, these materials provided teachers and learners a platform for interaction between them as they were designed in Self-Learning Material (SLM) format. The availability of affordable technologies offered distant learners a lot of learning support. First, there was multimedia, then audio and video conferencing and more recently online learning tools.

Taking advantage of the emerging technologies, the blended learning has gained tremendous popularity among ODL institutions and even among conventional universities. Using this mode of delivery they are trying to reach those learners who feel isolated from their peer groups and teachers. Both online and blended modalities are cutting-edge educational innovations that open up extraordinary possibilities of reaching countless numbers of students throughout the world. But for innovation to happen, it needs an 'environment that allows all ideas to compete in an open interchange' (Dziuban, Hartman, & Mehaffy, 2014). It is the method which offers greater flexibility to the instructors, thereby freeing up commuting time and giving them opportunity to pursue research and other pursuits. This has changed the traditional teacher-centered approach to a student-centered approach and has restructured the learner's role, thereby re-conceptualizing and revitalizing learning styles assessed (Chen & Jones, 2007). Some researchers feel that blended method

actually helps in building learners' skill, specially making them familiar with the use of emerging ICT tools. Blended learning that's skill-driven mixes interaction with a facilitator through email, discussion forums, and face-to-face meetings with self-paced learning, such as Web-based courses and books. This type of approach is analogous to a chemical reaction, in which interaction with the instructor or facilitator acts as a catalyst to achieve the desired reaction-learning (Valiathan, 2002). Crawford (2017) evaluating music education in blended learning, suggested that blended approach provided an opportunity for students to practice technology skills in navigating online course materials and creating their own digital content for assessment. She further suggests, "it is critical to acknowledge that teachers require appropriate professional development and support to change their pedagogy accordingly in a rapidly evolving digital environment".

According to Lane (2016), blended learning plays an important role in developing employability skills of learners. The author, therefore, advocates blended learning approach, which takes the form of online discussion forums, in combination with face-to-face teaching, as an effective student learning and skills development experience. He further recommends that the development of employability skills should be a core objective of each module in the degree programme. Students should be given the opportunity of developing the key employability skills by each higher education institution adopting an effective system of blended learning, as the essence of the institutional teaching/learning strategy. Similarly Borota (2011) suggests that technology should be used in a blended learning approach that promotes teaching and learning in a collaborative and holistic way. An online discussion forum is much more effective in developing written communication skills than is the case with face-to-face teaching (Vonderwell, 2003).

The rising demand and growing consumer experience with flexible education programs to support career development and lifelong learning has increased people's expectations for quality instruction, effective educational outcome, and finally satisfaction for learning (DeBourgh, 1999). According to Allen, Bourhis, Burrell, and Mabry, (2002) and Wang (2003) in any educational institution, the satisfaction of a student can be determined from his level of pleasure as well as the effectiveness of the education that the student experiences.

Lack of student support at different points of time can lead to lack of motivation, feelings of isolation and high levels of frustration and anxiety in students, all compounding to dissatisfaction and attrition. Therefore, identification of support elements that are important to students and most likely to have an impact on their overall satisfaction is essential to make better informed decisions in the area of student affairs (Sampson, 2003). According to Murugan (2011), quality development in learner support services is imperative to enhance the student satisfaction.

Another important problem faced by the students of open universities is that the

counseling programmes are not conducted strictly according to the schedules. This is more an administrative problem than academic (Venkaiah, 1995).

The review of related literature indicates importance and potentiality of programmes designed with blended learning approach. However, there may be various challenges faced by ODL institutions in adopting blended approach. Some studies have attempted to assess students satisfaction related to course materials (particularly SLM) and support services. Moreover, review of research also shows that students' expectations for quality instruction and effective educational outcome have grown many folds in recent times, which tempted researcher to carry out the present study. The review of literature also provides direction to this study on blended learning and students' satisfaction towards specific academic programme offered by IGNOU. The present research shall be significant in finding out gaps and shortcomings in design and delivery of the programme and suggest some remedial measures.

Background

Skills in Vocational Education and Training

Vocational education, training, skills and knowledge are considered as the major driving forces of economic growth and prosperity of any country. Therefore, India's future, especially in the 21st century, may be depending on the skills and training of employment seekers. According to industry estimate, more than a million people join the workforce every year as the Indian economy is growing at a decent pace, and the demand for labor force is increasing manifold. According to National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), the growing skills gap in India is estimated to be more than 25 crore workers by 2022 (Financial Express, 2015). India currently faces a severe shortage of well-trained, skilled workers. It is estimated that only 2.3 percent of the workforce in India has undergone formal skill training as compared to 68 percent in the UK, 75 percent in Germany, 52 percent in USA, 80 percent in Japan and 96 percent in South Korea.

Large sections of the educated workforce have little or no job skills, making them largely unemployable. Therefore, India must focus on scaling up skill training efforts to meet the demands of employers and drive economic growth (National Skill Development Mission 2015). National Skill Development Mission (2015) strives to create convergence across sectors in terms of skill training activities. Objectives of the Mission are: Institutional Training; Infrastructure; Convergence; Trainers; Overseas Employment; Sustainable Livelihoods and Leveraging Public Infrastructure**.**

Despite the fact that there is going to be a huge gap between the demand and supply of workforce, it is a harsh reality that even today people perceive and see skill development and vocational education and training as the last resort for those who have not been able to progress in the formal system of education. One such factor

that can be attributed to this is vocational training programmes are not updated according to the emerging technological trends and current industry requirements.

SOVET strives for skill based education

Amid the challenging scenario as mentioned above, the School of Vocational Education and Training (SOVET), IGNOU (2011) is successfully providing education and training for skill development to meet the vocational as well as technical requirements for the economic development of the country. As per its objectives, SOVET offers demand driven and value added courses/programmes targeting the formal as well as informal sectors. In this direction it has developed various courses that encourage vertical mobility of vocational education and training. Presently, the School is offering various skill oriented programmes that create an industry-ready talent pool by training students and working people from across the country. However, the present study covers only two programmes offered by the school. It is also worth mentioning that the programmes under the study are being offered through blended learning mode for more than five years, and therefore, it was felt that it is relevant to get feedback from the learners and make the necessary changes (if needed) in the programme, SLM structure, or any other components related to both the programmes. This was one of the major criteria to select these programmes for the study. Details of the two programmes are presented below.

i) **Diploma in Business Process Outsourcing – Finance & Accounting (DBPOFA):** This programme builds understanding of the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) domain, whilst developing personal computing and communication skills. It provides students from small towns/cities and rural areas opportunities to get trained and employed in the BPO sector. The programme has been designed and developed by eminent academicians along with industry experts, BPO training organization and e-learning organization to provide students training with a comprehensive blended learning model. The Programme structure comprises of two Semesters; Semester-I and Semester-II and carries total 32 credits. To be eligible for the award of the Diploma in Business Process Outsourcing – Finance and Accounting, a student has to complete seven courses. Meanwhile, a candidate (working professional only), who has completed Semester one (six months of study in Finance & Accounting), will get an EXIT option and would get "Certificate in BPO Finance and Accounting".

Students are assessed on both theory and practical inputs which are integrated in the course. They also have to go through the e-learning sessions which are totally activity based. The evaluation methodology which is common to both the programmes (DBPOFA & CCITSK) comprises: term-end examination, assignment and verbal exam (practical exam). The verbal examination for the course BPOI-006 (English Communication) tests the communication skills and speaking ability of the candidate along with other parameters like vocabulary, accent, fluency, intonation, paraphrasing, grammar etc. Here the students have

to make face-to-face presentation in front of their examiners on the topics given to them to be prepared in 2-3 minutes by them and presented extempore. During the presentation and interaction, the examiner will evaluate the student on the basis of the above parameters. For the course BPOI-007 (IT Skills), evaluation methodology is based on term-end examination, continuous assessment (assignment) and practicals.

ii) **Certificate in Communication and IT Skills (CCITSK):** The courses, which are being offered in Semester-II of DBPOFA programme, are also being offered as a stand alone programme called "Certificate in Communication and IT Skills" (CCITSK). A student can complete this programme in a minimum period of six months or the maximum period of two years.

The skill related benefits of the above mentioned programmes are as follows:

- targets undergraduates and graduates;

- compliments classroom counseling with e-learning sessions;

- ensures imbibing key skills related to Finance & Accounting in BPO industry;

- qualifies the students to apply for large and middle BPO organizations, and

- improves communication skills and computer skills.

The School follows a multi-channel approach for delivering the above mentioned skill based programmes. The blended approach comprises a suitable mix of: self-instructional printed material (SIM/SLM), audio and video cassettes (A/V), audio-video programmes transmitted through radio and TV, face-to-face counselling at Study Centres by academic counselors, web-based academic support, webinars, e-learning, assignments, practical and projects, Interactive Radio Counselling through Gyan Vani Radio channel and Teleconferencing through Gyan Darshan TV channel.

Following the blended approach to learning, a learner can enhance his/her skills in the area of communication, computer, subject domain knowledge, practical knowledge in the area of that domain. Moreover, communication and collaboration skills, expertise in technology, innovative and creative thinking skills, and an ability to solve problems will also be developed to "prepare the workforce for a changing, interconnected world".

Research Questions

The research questions formulated for the present study were as follows:

1. Did learners get well designed self-learning print materials and supplementary study materials?

2. Were the concepts defined appropriately in the printed SLM?

3. Were students satisfied with the quality of printed SLM and supplementary materials like audio and video?

4. Did study centres organize/structure the academic counselling properly?

5. What were the level of interactivity between academic counsellors and learners during the counselling sessions?

6. Were the learners satisfied with the clarity of concepts by academic counsellors?

7. Did students get back the evaluated assignments on time?

8. Were they satisfied with tutor comments on assignments?

9. Were they satisfied with the conduct/procedure of examination and time taken for providing them grade cards?

10. What was the overall satisfaction level of students about this particular programme/s?

Objectives

The major objectives of the present paper were:

- to study students' satisfaction in terms of quality of learning materials and supplementary study materials;

- to assess effectiveness of support services like academic counselling, evaluation of assignments, conduct of examination, declaration of results and dispatch of grade cards, and

- to analyze overall satisfaction level of learners.

Research Methodology

The paper is based on primary and secondary sources of information. Primary data was collected through structured questionnaire for learners while the secondary information pertaining to programme structure, pedagogy and credits etc. were obtained from published and unpublished brochure and programme guide. The tool used for the present research was a structured questionnaire containing 17 items which covered aspects like student satisfaction about quality of learning materials and supplementary study materials; effectiveness of support services, conduct of examination, declaration of results and dispatch of grade cards and overall satisfaction level of learners. All the 200 learners enrolled for the programmes DBPOFA and CCITSK between the year 2009 to 2016 in Delhi and National Capital Region (NCR) constituted sample for the study. Questionnaires were randomly distributed to learners who turned up for the academic counselling at their respective study centres based in Delhi and NCR. Total 69 responses of learners were received and analyzed using suitable frequency and percentage.

Data Analysis and Findings

Profile of Respondents

While analyzing the profile of learners, who responded to questionnaire, it was noted that 58 percent were male, whereas 42 percent respondents were female (Figure 1). If we mention in number, 40 respondents were male and 29 female out of total 69 responses from learners.
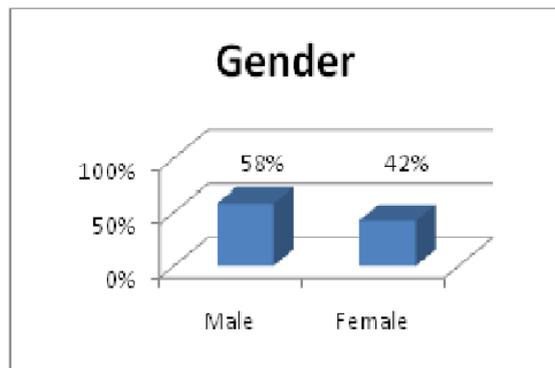

Figure 1: Gender of the respondents (in %)

It was also revealed that most of the respondents (64 percent) were below the age of 30 years. 25 percent were between age group of 31 to 40 years while 12 percent did not respond to the question as indicated in Figure 2.
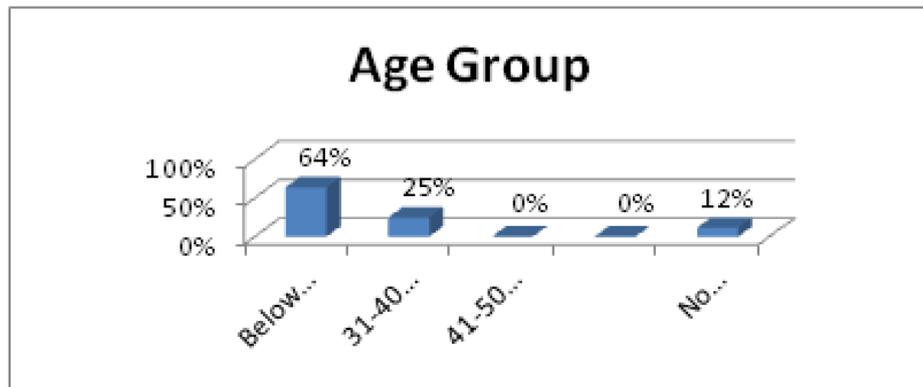

Figure 2: Age group of the respondents (in %)

As far as employment status of the respondents is concerned, data analysis showed that majority of respondents (61 percent) were employed in various private and government sectors of the industry, while 30 percent were not employed (Figure 3). Nine percent of respondents did not respond to the question related to employment status.
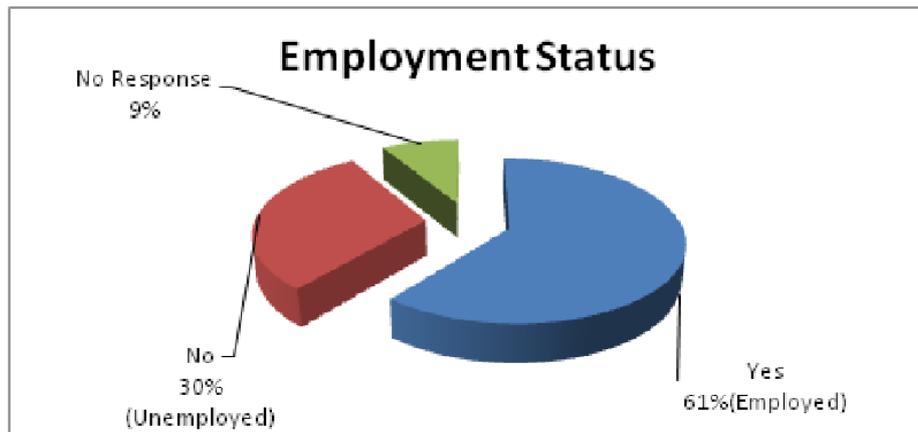
Figure 3: Employment status of the respondents (in %)

Self-Learning Materials

In Open and Distance Learning, where learners and teachers remain at a distance, the Self Learning Materials (SLMs) play a crucial role in learning process of students. If Self Printed Learning Materials, are well designed considering ODL requirements, pedagogy and instructional design, have potential to guide students, like a teacher who is not present before learners during his/her study of SLMs. According to Keegan (1990), printed learning materials should be designed in such a way that they include as many of the characteristics of interpersonal communication as possible. Therefore, printed SLMs should carry easily readable style, careful structuring of content, self-assessment questions and model answers. After analysis of data, it was found that 46 percent of learners enrolled in DBPOFA and CCITSK programmes who responded to the structured tool were very satisfied with the clarity of the concepts given in the printed SLMs (Figure 4), while 43 percent were satisfied and 10 percent of learners responded by saying "can't say". It is to mention here that supplementary materials pertaining to English communication course of the programme are also available in audio form. Meanwhile, responding to question pertaining to supplementary materials like audio and video, 33 percent learners responded that they were very satisfied, 42 percent satisfied, 23 percent didn't comment while only one percent of students were dissatisfied.

Student Support System

Support Services

In any ODL system Learner Support System plays a very crucial role in teaching-learning process and constitutes an indispensible component of this system. Student support services cover a wide range of functions starting from producing the learning materials and making them available to students to arranging contact programmes and conducting examinations (Koul & Ramanujam, 1989). Support provided pertaining to supply of learning materials to learners has paramount importance. In the present
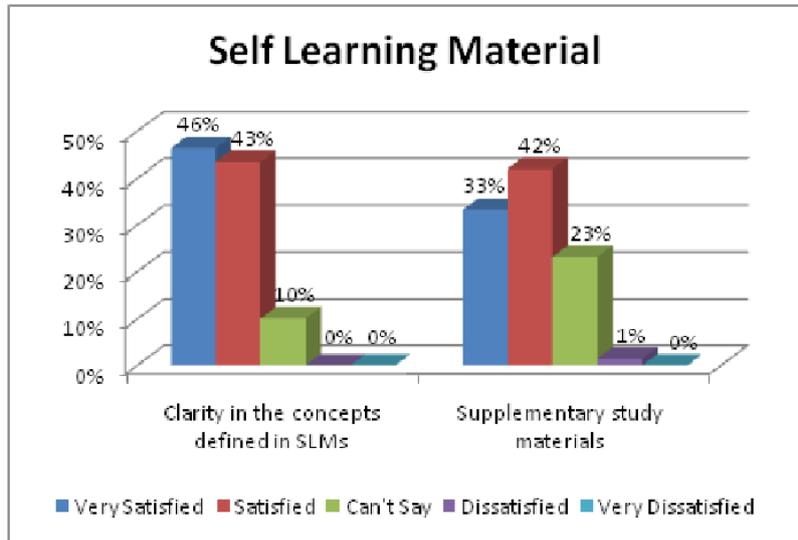
Figure 4: Students' satisfaction level about SLM

study, 33 percent of learners were very satisfied that they received learning materials on time. 57 percent were satisfied, 10 percent were unable to say anything about the timing of receiving the learning materials (Refer to Figure. 5).
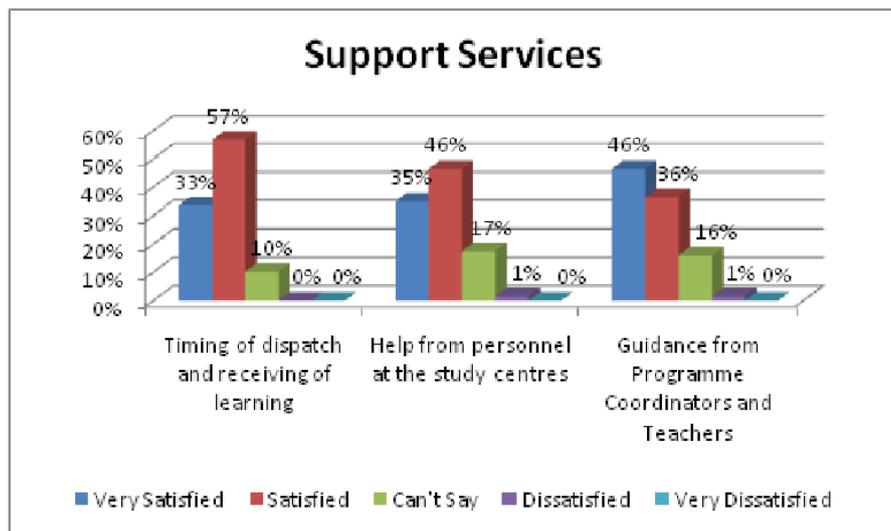

Figure 5: Students' satisfaction level on support services

It is worth mentioning here that IGNOU works under a three-tier system comprising the Headquarters, Regional Centres and Study Centres. Programme Coordinators and teachers are posted at the Headquarters of the university, while academics and other support staff are posted at Regional Centres and Study Centres. Learners are

assigned specific study centres to pursue their programmes, attend academic counselling and receive academic and administrative support. Analysis of data revealed that 35 percent of learners were very satisfied with the help that they received from the personnel at the study centres. 46 percent opined that they were satisfied with the support they received, 27 percent remained undecided while one percent of learners were dissatisfied with the help they received from study centre staff. As far as the guidance from the programme coordinators and teachers from the school is concerned, 46 percent were very satisfied, 36 percent satisfied, 16 percent of learners could not say anything and only one percent found the help as not satisfactory.

Academic Counseling

Academic Counseling is another major component of support services which are provided by tutors, academic counselors or distance education facilitators. This sort of support service actually provides a platform for interaction between learners and teachers, where students get an opportunity to clear their doubts and overcome various personal, psychological and academic difficulties or problems they face during the course of their studies. In Table 1 below, various aspects of academic counseling and learner responses have been mentioned.

Table 1. Students' responses to various aspects of academic counseling

Aspects		Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Can't Say	Dis-satisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Total
Explanation of concepts by academic counsellors	Frequency	28	31	9	0	1	69
	Percentage	41%	45%	13%	0%	1%	100%
Interactivity of counselling sessions	Frequency	25	33	10	1	0	69
	Percentage	36%	48%	14%	1%	0%	100%
Timely communication about changes in the counselling schedule	Frequency	24	28	15	1	1	69
	Percentage	35%	41%	22%	1%	1%	100%
Organization/ structure of counselling sessions	Frequency	24	24	21	0	0	69
	Percentage	35%	35%	30%	0%	0%	100%

From the above table, it is derived that 45 percent of the students were satisfied whereas 41 percent were very satisfied with the explanation of concepts by academic counsellors during the academic counselling sessions held at study centres based in NCR Delhi. 13 percent had no clue whereas only one percent of students were very dissatisfied. As far as interactivity during counselling sessions are concerned,

48 percent of students found it satisfactory, 36 percent opined that they were extremely satisfied with it, 14 per cent had no opinion while one percent expressed their dissatisfaction.

As evident from Table majority of students (41 per cent) were satisfied with the timely communication about the changes in counselling sessions schedule (if any); 35 percent said that they were very satisfied. Meanwhile 22 percent opined that they could not say anything about it and one percent of students were dissatisfied.

While examining the satisfaction level of students with regard to organization and structure of academic counselling sessions, 35 percent of the learners were very satisfied and same percentage of students (35 percent) were satisfied, whereas 30 percent students had no idea about the organization and structure of academic counselling.

Assignment

Assignments are the real tool through which two-way communication between learners and teachers take place. It helps an institution in continuous assessment of distance learners. Tutor comments play significant role towards effective learning of students. According to Mulay (1986), the didactic comments of the tutors/teachers on assignments provide a meaningful feedback to distance learners.
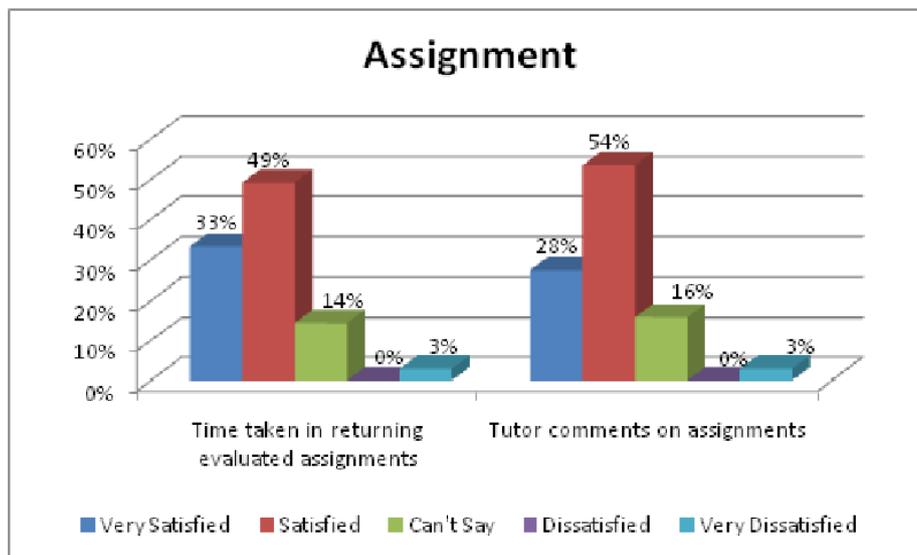

Figure 6: Students' feedback on assignment

From the analysis of feedback received from learners, it is evident (as indicated in Figure 6) that 33 percent learners were very satisfied with the time taken to return the evaluated assignments to them. Majority of learners (49 percent) said that they

were satisfied, 14 percent were unable to say anything while three percent learners were found to be very dissatisfied with the time taken in sending back the evaluated assignments to them. 28 percent learners were found to be very satisfied with the tutor comments or feedback given on assignments they received while 54 percent were satisfied. 15 percent said that they could not say anything while three percent students reported that they were very dissatisfied as given in Figure 6.

Examinations

Support services in ODL also cover learners' assessment and evaluation and thereafter provide them with appropriate grade cards and certificates. At IGNOU, students' performance is assessed through continuous internal assessment and term-end examinations. To a question pertaining to examination procedures, 48 percent learners (respondents) said that they were very satisfied with the explanation provided to them related to procedures of examination. 35 percent of them were satisfied, 16 percent responded by mentioning can't say, while one percent reported their dissatisfaction with examinations (Figure 7).
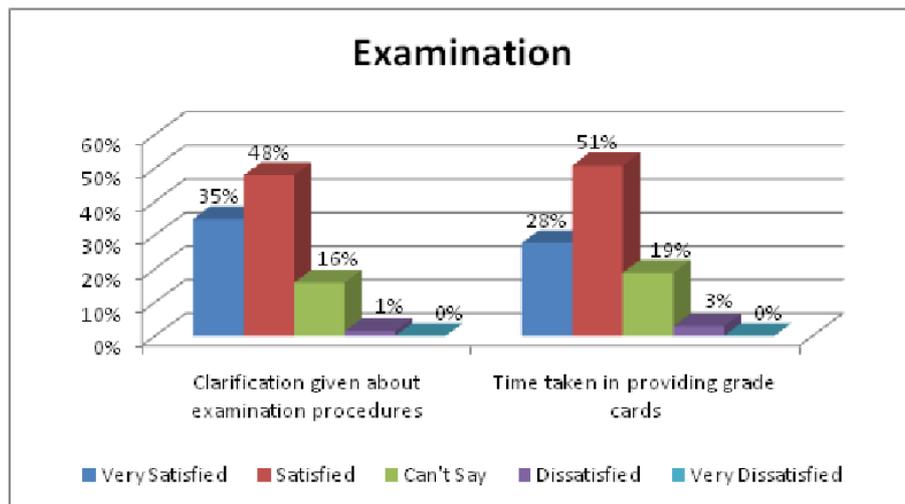

Figure 7: Students' feedback on examination

In response to question on timely delivery of grade cards to learners, 28 percent of learners of DBPOFA and CCITSK programmes of SOVET opined that they were very satisfied, 51 percent said they were satisfied, 19 percent were in category of can't say and only three percent of respondents expressed their dissatisfaction.

Overall Satisfaction

The prime purpose of any academic programme is to satisfy/fulfill learners' requirements by enhancing their learning outcomes according to objectives of the specific programme. Higher education institutions are increasingly recognizing and

placing greater emphasis on meeting the expectations and needs of their (DeShields Jr, Ali, & Erdener, 2005). In view of assessing students' satisfaction, two questions were put forth before the learners. Responding to the first question, 29 percent of the learners provided their feedback as they were very satisfied with the knowledge of the subject they got during their studies, while 54 percent of them said that they were satisfied as shown in Figure 8. Seventeen percent responded by saying that they can not say anything about the knowledge of the subjects they studied. While analyzing the overall satisfaction of the learners pertaining to the two programmes under study, 22 percent opined that they were very satisfied and majority of learners (62 percent) were found to be satisfied. 14 percent reported as can't say and only one percent were found to be dissatisfied.
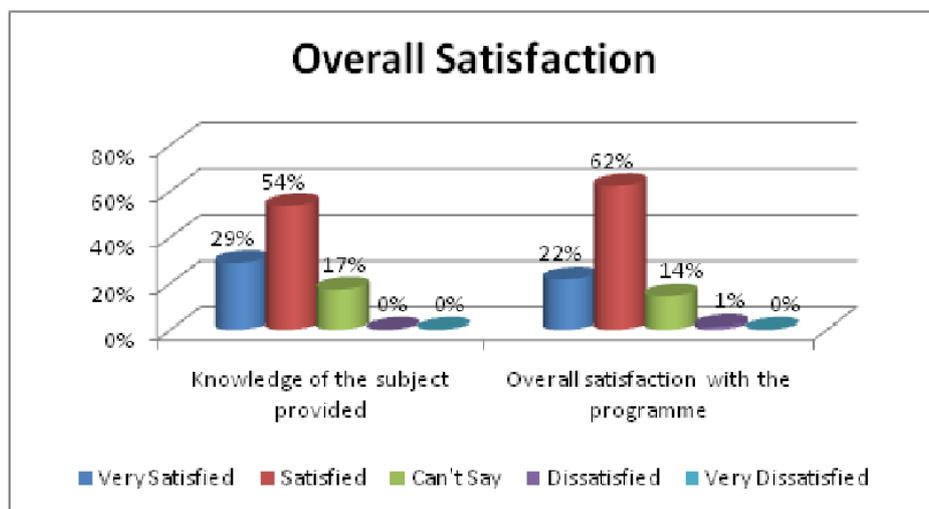

Figure 8: Overall satisfaction level of students about programme

Conclusion

After analyzing the structure and pedagogy of both the programmes it is found that these programmes provide domain knowledge to learners and help them in improving their communication and computer skills. For example, the students who are employed in the BPO industry, manage the tasks like data entry, data management, surveys, payment processing, quality assurance and accounting support. These back offices are integral to a company's core business process and help keep business running smoothly. The students employed at the front office outsourcing services deal with customer interactions. Examples of front office tasks include phone conversations, email, fax and other forms of communication with customers. Moreover, these programmes are not only popular among freshers but have found a good response from the working professionals as well since both hard and soft skills have been infused in these programmes by way of blended learning.

Murugan (2011) suggests that the ODL institutions should identify their quality indicators and practice them best to improve the quality of support services, which will enhance the student's satisfaction level and quality standards of ODL institutions. In the present research maximum number of learners from both the programmes were satisfied with the support they received from the study centre staff and teachers/ faculty from the school concerned. Most of the learners (33 percent very satisfied and 57 percent satisfied) expressed their views that they received learning materials on time. Another important problem faced by the students of open universities is that the counseling programmes are not conducted strictly according to the schedules (Venkaiah, 1995). However, the responses received from the students about Academic Counselling, its organization and the efficiency of academic counsellors was found encouraging in the present study. They also opined that evaluated assignment responses were returned to them on time and tutor comments marked on assignments also helped them in clarifying the concepts.

Maximum respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with the knowledge of subject they got during their studies, while in terms of overall satisfaction of the learners of these two programmes the responses of learners were encouraging as 62 percent found to be very satisfied and 22 percent satisfied.

Implications and Recommendations

After extensive data analysis, following are the specific recommendations which may be useful for ODL practitioners, researchers and institution.

- According to data, 30 percent learners of DBPOFA and CCITSK programmes were not employed, therefore, there is a need to enroll more unemployed youth for training and skill development.

- Although majority of respondents were either very satisfied or satisfied with the clarity of the concepts provided in the printed SLMs and availability of supplementary materials, other aspects of SLMs like language, style, presentation of contents and other access devices may also be studied.

- Learners are required to be updated/oriented further about organization and structure of counselling sessions as 30 percent respondents didn't express their satisfaction.

- Number of dissatisfied respondents is meager (three percent only). A separate study may be undertaken to know the reasons in detail. However, efforts may be augmented to return the evaluated assignments to them on time, with proper tutor comments.

- The findings of the present study may be considered by the ODL practitioners and policy makers which shall be helpful in understanding specific problems faced by learners and how to address them.

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