

Competencies for Better Performance of Professionals for Mukta svādhyāya-pīṭham: MSP

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Abstract

An ancient and multifaceted Indian language Sanskrit is being learnt through some programmes under Open and Distance Learning mode. **Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan** as a leading institution has innovatively established a distance learning institute **Mukta Svādhyāya-pīṭham: MSP** (मुक्तस्वाध्यायपीठम्). This institution is working with a motto-स्वाध्यायान्मा प्रमद (svādhyāyān-mā pramada). This institute is expanding well with its capable human resources. Like any institute **MSP** needs the human resources very competent in accordance with their roles and responsibilities. This is more important in the changing situations.

In this paper the behavioural anchors are defined as characteristics of core competencies associated with the Distance Education management. Competency-based behavioural anchors are defined as performance capabilities needed to demonstrate knowledge, skill, and ability acquisition. Here are very essential, but seven limited competencies for every professional pursuing for qualitative development of **MSP**. Four **Academic**-Teaching and Learning, Communication, Assessment and Motivation and Innovation; and three **Administrative**-Planning, Leadership and Management are discussed in this paper.

Keywords: Distance Education, Academic and Administrative Competencies.

1. Introduction

Distance Education (DE) is not an unknown phenomenon in worldwide educational concerns. In simple terms, it is nothing more than a process of democratization of education. Actually it deals with more flexible and learner-oriented education. DE is characterized by a non-traditional approach which in effect existing norms of traditional education and seeks to provide a new orientation to educational processes. It is now growing with different technological advantages and innovative approaches to create an environment for every human being.

Swamy¹ rightly said that “Distance Education today has come to be accepted as a well recognised mode of education relevant to and necessary for meeting the emerging demands of the ‘knowledge era’”. This is fact that DE is playing now the crucial role in knowledge-based society. In 1992, Drucker² predicted that in the next 50 years, “schools and universities will change more drastically than they have since they assumed their present form 300

years ago when they organized themselves around the printed book.” We can see more changes in present educational institutions and societies. There are various institutions establishing and re-establishing provisions for democratized education for all at every level. Some of them are applying the innovative mode of distance education, which is very effective for socio-economical development of human resources.

With rapid changing time, DE is being considered to enhance the lifelong learning and creates an environment which is easy accessible to deprived and backward learners as well as advanced learners who want to continue their learning. DE exclusively serves to learners in accordance with their socio-economic needs and aims to be individualized, interactive, and independent of time, emphasizing learning over teaching.

Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan-a deemed university under MHRD, New Delhi, is a leading and nodal agency of central government for Sanskrit language. The Sansthan as deemed university and multi-campus institution has ten campuses in nine

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Indian states. The Sansthan is providing the quality education for senior secondary to post graduation and furthermore for research level degrees in Sanskrit and concerned disciplines. As an innovative institution, Sansthan has recently established a distance learning institute **Mukta Svādhyāya-pīṭham: MSP** (मुक्तस्वाध्यायपीठम्).

This institution is working with a motto-स्वाध्यायान्मा प्रमद (svādhyāyan-mā pramada) means don't be indolent for study (<http://www.sanskrit.nic.in/msp.htm>). As distance education institution, it is planning and managing the opportunities to learn about Sanskrit language and literature, and to promote non-formally the heritage of ancient Indian knowledge to all learners. The vision of MSP is very clear to projection of a global perspective of Sanskrit learning. Through the open education many learners find non-formal situations to connect with Sanskrit.



The head office in New Delhi and ten campuses in nine states are study centers of MSP to deliver the learning activities and learner-support services. All centers are being managed by some professionals including principal (who plays also the role of director for DE), coordinator and co-coordinator. These professionals are most responsible persons to execute all activities i.e. admission, conducting the contact programmes, counseling and other support services. The topic of study is identified to study the competencies of the professional as human resources, because the competencies play an essential role in open and distance education system and the success of DE system depends on these competencies.

All professional competencies will be categorized into two groups: academic and administrative. Both competencies deal with core and functional competencies. Academic competencies mean communicational, teaching/course development, tutorial, student support service, and research and evaluation etc. administrative competencies deal with planning, leadership, supervising and controlling etc.

2. The Rationale of the Research

The rationale of the project is very clear. Without any suitable competency, the human resource of any institution at any level will be no more able to succeed. There is essentiality of competencies in any institution. In distance education, there is a need of different competencies in human resources in accordance with the roles and responsibilities. The situations of distance education are changing every day and the researchers are trying with different views and objectives.

There are some researches that show the importance to think of competencies regarding to distance education institutions. Williams⁴ identified thirteen roles and thirty general

competencies as well as role-specific competencies, and observed that roles of leader/change agent and trainer emerged as significant for successful implementation of distance education programs. Interpersonal-related and communication-related skills were necessary across all roles and dominated the top ten general competencies. Further he stated that institutions of higher education can use the results in the staffing of distance education programs and in the design of staff/faculty development. Next He cited Rothwell and Cookson (1997) provided a review of various competency studies that have helped define roles and competencies of human resource development professionals.

Again Williams⁵ stated here the general competencies are a foundational skill set that can be considered entry level for any of the roles. They include competencies related to communication and interpersonal skills, administration and management, technology, and instruction. The level of mastery of a general competency will vary from role to role. Some of the general competencies are primary to one role, such as change agent skills to the role of leader/change agent, for example, and secondary or tertiary in the function of other roles. Dooley⁶ studied through a developed a self-assessment instrument to document growth in distance education core competencies. The authenticated results were reported in three areas: individual and average growth in core competencies, open-ended verification of growth, and attitudinal change. These are basics for effective operations of all distance education programmes.

Levy⁷ classifies six areas as factors to plan perfectly any online programme in higher education: vision and plans, curriculum, staff training and support, student services, student training and support, and copyright and intellectual property. Here the Staff Training and Support is basic factor to be willing to adopt this new learning paradigm. Instructors need to be cognizant of how the details of their course will be implemented in the new environment. Effective ODL requires the instructor to not only have knowledge of the content area, but also to have interpersonal skills to effectively communicate with their students online⁸. Instructors will be assuming a broader role as planners, designers, guides, mentors, and facilitators and will no longer be seen as leaders and lecturers⁹.

Dooley⁶ have new ideas about the skills and competencies through SWOT analysis. They found that higher education institutions increase the use of technology to further distance education initiatives, it is important to recognize the role that perspectives within the institution play in formulating a strategy for effective development and implementation of distance education. This study seeks to provide insight to these perspectives by examining the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The perspectives of administrators, faculty and support units were not found to be dramatically different, in

fact many of the perspectives were the same. Based on Rogers' attributes¹⁰, it was concluded that the rate of adoption of DE technologies could be enhanced through revised policies/procedures and the development of strategies to address critical issues.

Determining competencies needed for a given profession is an important first step, but the difficult task is in trying to measure and verify that competence! Industries, as well as universities, are struggling with appropriate techniques to document professional growth and learning over time. One method for addressing this problem is to develop and use competency-based and behaviourally anchored rating scales to measure student growth. In this study, behavioural anchors are defined as characteristics of core competencies associated with the mastery of content. Competency-based behavioural anchors are defined as performance capabilities needed to demonstrate knowledge, skill, and ability (competency) acquisition. Competency-based behavioural anchors require considerable time and effort to develop; however, they provide more accurate judgments than item-based scales (Buford & Lindner, 2002).

In present situations, the next generation of learners appeals the fact that the professionals should carry on to play. Second, if the human resources want to improve their quality and develop professionalism in their tasks, they should have the opportunity for self-assessment and very positive attitudes to it. Definitely the project will be accepted as self-assessment by human resources of MPS. Third, in Sanskrit educational scenario, this project will check the suitability of contemporary efforts of MPS as well as other institution willing to create new dimensions with deep regards at all levels for quality Sanskrit education especially at higher education level, where education is required very specialized and democratized.

3. The Objectives and Research Questions

The objectives of this study are to investigate the status of the basic competencies in human resources working in MPS for distance education in the field of Sanskrit language and literature. The study further shows to develop competency based behavioural anchors for that human Resources. The study will be accomplished with following three objectives:

- To assess the level of competencies of professionals working in MSP.
- To create an opportunity to self-assessment for professionals working in MSP.
- To suggest to improve the role and quality of professionals working in MSP.

The following are two research questions that were accepted:

- What are the academic competencies the professionals have?
- What are the administrative competencies the professionals have?

4. The Methodology

The study occupies a systematic and scientific approach in the sense of a process. The process is called methodology in behavioural terms. Kerlinger¹¹ rightly introduces that scientific research is systematic, controlled, empirical and critical investigation of natural phenomena guided by theory, and hypothesis about the presumed relations among such phenomena.

In this study, the researcher has accepted a very concise but systematic process to for a behavioural design including sampling, constructing of a tool, data collection, and analysis. The descriptive or Standard Survey Method is accepted in this study. This method helps a researcher to find out the actual status of various aspects that are concerned with a problematic issue. There are certain reasons to accept such a method. First reason is to identify the nature of current situation or occurrence. Second one is to compare the situation in standardized perspectives. Finally this study is based on survey method and without any contradiction and assumption. A genuine idea is accepted to know the present situations of professionals as MSP needs for better performance.

5. The Sampling

In this study, the population was very limited and the researcher found no difficulty to communicate with all members of MSP. And there was no need for any sampling technique as provability or non-provability. All members were contacted through the questionnaire and genuinely requested for responses in August 2011 to March 2012. After all only thirty members cooperated for data collection. Some members were communicated more than six times through e-mail, telephone and personally. The other professionals were also communicated through email and face-to-face contacts, where the coordinator or co-coordinator was not found, and sometimes the other professionals were working very sincerely for every activity i.e. teaching and learning, counseling, planning, leading and assessing and so on.

The detail of all members is being presented in next Table 1. The all members are shown in two categories as contacted and received the responses successfully. As presented in the Table 1, there are eleven of institutions. All professionals are separately classified into four categories.

Table 1. Details of all professionals: communicated and responded

Professionals for Distance Education		State	Director and Dy. Director/ Principal		Coordinator		Co-Coordiators		Other Professionals	
			PC*	PR**	PC	PR	PC	PR	PC	PR
S. N.	Campuses		(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)
1	Administration/ Head Office, New Delhi	Delhi	1+1	0+0	1	0	2	2	2	2
2	Jammu Campus	J&K	1	0	1	1	01	1	2	2
3	Lucknow Campus	U.P.	1	0	1	1	01	1	2	2
4	Allahabad Campus	U.P.	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
5	Puri Campus	ODISHA	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2
6	Trichur Campus	KERALA	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
7	Shringeri Campus	KARNA.	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
8	Mumbai Campus	MAHA.	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0
9	Bhopal Campus	M.P.	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2
10	Jaipur Campus	RAJ.	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
11	Garli Campus	H.P.	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
Total			12	3	10	7	12	8	16	12

*PC–Professional Communicated, **PR–Professional Responded

6. The Study Tool

A Questionnaire was constructed by study holder under supervision of study-tutor and experts. The seven categories were decided first according to seven competencies and fifteen to twenty five statements to each category. These categories are conceptualized according to seven competencies assessable for the study. *After initial item analysis and useful suggestions of tutor as well as experts, there are different quantities of statements in each category.* Finally, the questionnaire has eighty statements in all seven categories. *There are four options to each statement: always, frequently, sometimes, and never.* For more accuracy, there are some statements having negative implication and mixed anonymously. The statements are being presented here according to each competency in two categories positive and negative.

7. Data Analysis

The data was analysed twice as decided for research questions. First all eighty statements were classified into seven categories in accordance with seven competencies including four academic and three administrative competencies. The respondent had four options to each statement. The four options are following as Always, Frequently, Sometimes and Never. The score was analysed with percentage.

Second, the level of all seven competencies was identified on summative percentage of all statements grouped for an individual competency. Here the statements were scored differently. Positive statement was scored as 3 to 'Always', 2 to 'Frequently', '2' to Sometimes and 0 to Never. And the negative statement was 0 to 'Always', 1 to 'Frequently', 2 to Sometimes and 3 to Never. Finally all scores were analysed according to a single competency. The scores were reanalyzed as summative to a competency. The analysis is being presented in the next Table 2.

As Table 2 reveals the highest score has been identified as 64.19% of leadership and the lowest score as 51.11% of Communication competency of all professionals. Here motivation and innovation competency and Management also occupy better situation.

8. The Implication of Two Research Questions

The Table 2 presents the answer to two research questions:

1. What are the academic competencies the professionals have?

Answer: The professional have four basic academic competencies as better is motivation and innovation. Further they have teaching and learning and assessment. The level of communication is still low among all academic competencies.

Table 2. Analysis of the Academic and Administrative Competencies (On the basis of summative score)

Academic Competencies		
S. No.	Competency	Summative Score
1.	Teaching and Learning	56.13%
2.	Communication	51.11%
3.	Assessment	55.37%
4.	Motivation and Innovation	62.57%
Administrative Competencies		
5.	Planning	59.59%
6.	Leadership	64.19%
7.	Management	60.83%

2. What are the administrative competencies the professionals have?

Answer: The professional have three basic administrative competencies as better is leadership. Further they have competency of management. The level of planning is still low among all administrative competencies.

9. Conclusions

The all interpretation shows that the human resources of MSP have the average level of professional competencies as the cumulative scores were found 51.11% to 64.19% to all seven competencies. The competency of leadership has better situation rather than all remaining six competencies and the competency of communication which deals with academic and administrative functions was found very less than other competencies. Now it is realized that the situations are very indicative:

- In teaching activities, the professionals are using the technology-driven presentation, and methods. They simply apply the multimedia and reference materials. For further learning they are interested to attend the seminars, to knowledge and application of technological advances, and some skills for better professionalism.
- It is other point that they have no better skills related to communication competency, but the human resources also indicate to be aware about the public awareness, long term goal-setting of communication.
- For assessment, the human resources show the skills of using computer technologies for assessment, recognizing the readiness of learners, and evaluation based on performance.
- This is found that the resources have basic skills that lead the motivation and innovation as they share the learning

experiences with learners, stimulate the tendencies and inform the learners for further jobs.

- Next competency deals with planning. The professionals have basic skills related to this competency to plan for desired goal, to think on action planning, and assimilate the self experiences.
- The professionals are found good leader too. They help for problem solving, delegate the duties; develop the team spirit among the stakeholders and peer group. Further they work for learners, satisfaction.
- For quality management, the professional arrange, facilitate and promote the overall positive system to optimum utilization of concerned resources. They manage the facilities available in the institutional resources for every learner.

10. Recommendations

This study is very specific and carried on in short terms to understand the basic levels of professional competencies of human resources. But here are some recommendations at both levels: academic and administrative level.

For academic level:

- The human resources should pursue for more learning opportunities to execute better the teaching activities. They should initiate the innovative teaching strategies based on adult psychology and adult learning pedagogy.
- Communication should be based on interpersonal relationship and feedback. The information should be communicated and enabled through the technological advancements.
- The methods of assessment should be more learner-centered and the other aspects of learning as affective should also be assessed as basic learning.
- To motivate the learners, the professionals should stimulate the attitudes and maintain the pace of learning with innovative thinking.

For administrative level:

- The professionals should rethink the policies and plans in accordance with local and regional perspectives. They should consider further the most suitable planning frameworks for effective implementation.
- Leadership is functional element of any management. The professionals should lead the institution with spirit of team membership.
- For total quality management of MSP as distance institution, the professionals should develop the critical thinking through the institutional resource analysis approaches. They should build self-responsibilities for bottom to up organizational setup.

11. References

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