



Causative Variables and Suggestions for the Retention of Students in Extension Education and Communication Management

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ABSTRACT

Extension Education and communication management is one of the pillars of home/community science education that was designed to extend the approach of home/community science knowledge and allied discipline to the families and communities with professional excellence. With the advancement in education sector, there is a declining enrolment rate in home/community sciences. Hence, the present research was carried out purposively with the college students and teachers/ professors selected from home/community science colleges/departments from six universities of five states. The information pertaining to the causative variables behind student drop outs and suggestions for student attraction and retention was gathered from 166 students and 51 teachers respectively. According to students and faculties, no linkage with the NGOs and the media organizations, ineffective extension competencies of faculty members and extension strategies, lack of practical based approach in the courses and focus on traditional curriculum and lack of infrastructure facilities/computer labs/ editing software were the major causes of student drop-out from the concerned subject and decline in its enrolment rates. Further, students and faculty members also suggested to put forward the inter-linkages with the NGOs/local bodies/universities /government organizations, participatory collaborations with the government schemes on rural development, integration of new extension related courses in the curriculum and reforming the traditional curricula of the pedagogical studies and inclusion of formal training for computer/ video-recording software and animation in the departments for retention of students in the course. It was clear from the study that there needs to be reconsideration and transformation in the extension department to attract the students towards it as it is the multidisciplinary subject with the emphasis on skill enhancement in developmental planning and communication through a balanced combination of academic and training inputs.

Key Words: Causative Variables, Communication Management, Education, Enrolment rate, Extension, Home/Community Sciences and Retention.

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture and its allied field is an important sector of Indian economy as it contributes about 17 per cent to the total GDP and provides employment to more than 60 per cent of India's population. The productivity on land depends on the success of national development plans and programmes, growth of industries and improvement in living

standards, education and public health of rural people. The government has launched various developmental programmes and home/community sciences are contributing in maximizing its benefits to the target population via awareness and effective dissemination of authentic information. Home/Community Science takes note of the ecological conditions of the rural families and educates them

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on the methods to maximize the benefits accruing from them. Home/Community Science education is thus crucial in imparting correct extension know-how and related skills among the youth of the country.

The community science as a discipline, has undergone a great revolution in its definition. Home science initially started as a subject for women and girls in preparation for motherhood and domestic life but with the advancement in subject and time, it is now described as a multi-purpose programme of study taken up by both girls and boys. It has attained new dimensions in its concerned departments viz. Foods and Human Nutrition, Family Resource Management, Human Development and Family Studies, Clothing and textiles; and for the popularization of these departments there is inclusion of Extension Education and Communication Management. It encourages and gratifies the individual's interest and develops skills and capacities for better vocations, careers and professions. Hence, it has evolved as an imperative tool for empowering women at household and community level (Raghuvanshi, 2018).

Extension Education and communication management is one of the pillars of community Science education that was designed to extend the approach of community science knowledge and allied discipline to the families and communities with professional excellence. This multidisciplinary subject emphasizes on skill enhancement in developmental planning and communication through a balanced combination of academic and training inputs where the priority is on preparing a personnel for working with and for the people and developing media tools to strengthen the extension services. But with the advancement in education sector, there is declining enrolment rate in home/community sciences. So, there arises the need for introspection to popularize the subject and find out the causative variables that have an impact on the enrolment rate of students. However, there is still no substitute for traditional sciences like agriculture

and its allied fields like home science. While the need for proficient agricultural and home scientists is still there, it is not necessarily translated into higher enrolments of students in these areas, posing a risk to the longevity and quality of these sciences. Bayer media in collaboration with National 4-H council (2019) explored the opinion of parents, teachers and students on the importance of agriculture in high-school curriculum and concluded that low awareness of career options in agriculture sciences is a primary factor leading to the limited pool of skilled applicants.

Success of an educational institute is rated not only based on development of technologies but also on demand and marketability of product i.e. quality of students and their placement. In spite of great demand and opportunities of home and agriculture sciences education in banking, insurance and retailing sectors, multinational companies, and governmental and non-governmental organizations students are unaware about the career avenues in respective disciplines (Rana et al. 2018). So, in order to attract more students towards Home science extension education, it's imperative to identify the factors that cause to withdraw them from the subject and also determine their idea and suggestions for retention in community sciences. Keeping above factors in mind, the present study was designed with the objective to identify the causative variables for student drop-outs in Home/Community Sciences in the field of Extension Education and Communication Management and to get suggestions from students and faculty members for attracting and retaining students in the field of extension education and communication management

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present research was carried out purposively with the college students and teachers/ professors that were selected from home/community science colleges/departments from Maharani College (University of Rajasthan, Jaipur, Rajasthan),

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Choudhary Charan Singh Haryana Agriculture University, Hisar (Haryana), Gobind Ballabh Pant University of Agriculture and Technology, Pantnagar (Uttarakhand), Maharana Pratap University of Agriculture and Technology, Udaipur (Rajasthan), Maharaja Sayajirao University, Vadodra (Gujarat) and Avinashilingam University of Women, Coimbatore. The information pertaining to the causative variables and suggestions for their retention in Extension Education and Communication Management was gathered through an online Google tool survey and some were contacted personally and others through the mail-id, which led to total 166 students and 51 teachers. The results were coded initially and on the basis of frequency of the respondents were recorded and tabulated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Deriving causes behind student drop-outs from concerned subject teachers and students

The majority of the students (69.9%) pointed out that there was no linkage with the NGOs and the media organizations and ineffective extension competencies of faculty members and extension strategies (65.6%) are resulting in drop-out from the subject. Further, more than half of the students (59%) reported that due to lack of practical based approach in the courses and focusing more on the traditional curriculum has resulted in decline in enrolment. Faculty members reported lack of practical based approach in the courses (84.30%) and believed that focus on traditional curriculum has made the students to drop-out from the subject. Furthermore, 64.7 per cent of the faculty members highlighted that there was lack of infrastructure facilities/computer labs/software editing has resulted in decline in enrolments. Also, there is deficient grassroot level approach (56.9%) and the skills developed are not at par with the current digital scenario (52.9%), which is causing low enrolment in extension education.

Apart from the variables mentioned in the figure,

faculty members also discussed other causes behind increasing student drop-outs like slow up gradation to latest extension technologies in the teaching process, inadequate exposure of the students and teachers alike to the field, misconceptions and confusions about the true nature of extension education and how home science extension differs from agriculture extension. Also, some problem areas were highlighted in the responses of the students like lack of in-depth study and research in mass communication and journalism and bleak linkages between the teaching departments and extension agencies which limit the exposure of the students and reduce interest, resulting in higher drop-outs. Extension education students also reported struggle in finding their identity in the job market and their footing in the home science fraternity.

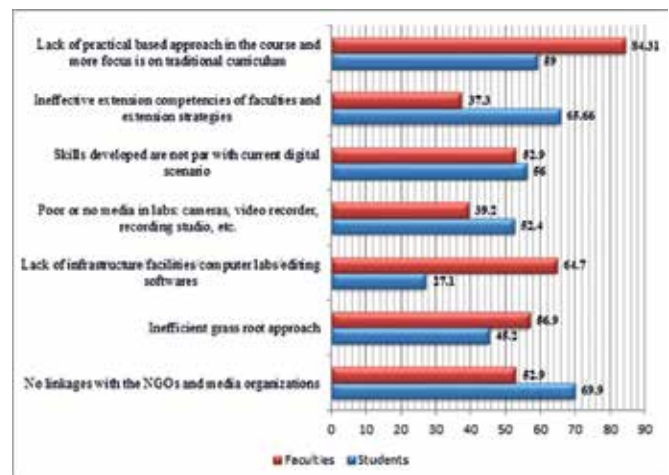


Figure 1: Causative variables resulting in drop-out in Extension Education and Communication Management

Suggestions to attract and retain the students

The figure 2 revealed that majority of the students (72.9%) suggested to put forward the inter-linkage with the NGOs/Local bodies/Universities/Government organizations while 55.4 per cent suggested for participatory collaborations with the government schemes on rural development respectively. Equal number of suggestions (45.8%) from the students further reported that there should be inclusion of formal training for computer/ video-recording software and animation and inclusion

of video recording studios in the department and universities respectively.

Apart from these tabulated suggestions, other suggestions were also reported by the students as up-gradation of course curriculum, appointment of more experienced and creative professors/ teachers, more emphasis upon the techniques of media and communication and inclusion of new extension strategies in the curriculum.

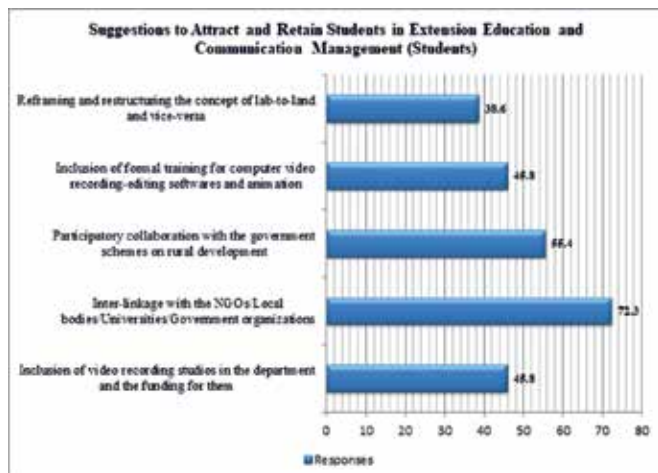


Figure 2: Suggestions to attract and retain the students in Extension Education and Communication Management (In students' perspective)

Data (in figure 3) highlighted that majority of the faculty members (80.4%) suggested that there is need for designing and developing effective extension strategies like decision support system for information dissemination while 76.5 per cent suggested providing an outlook of extension activities by organizing vocational trainings for rural communities and engaging students in it. Further, results revealed the suggestions like participatory collaborations with the government schemes on rural development (68.6%), inter-linkage with the NGOs/Local bodies/Universities/Government organizations (68.6%) and integration of new extension related courses in the curriculum and reforming the traditional curricula of the pedagogical studies were high up in the suggestion list, just like the students.

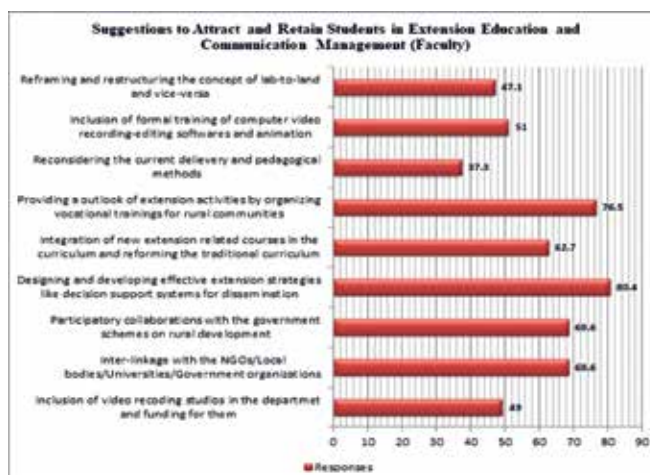


Figure 3: Suggestions to attract and retain the students in Extension Education and Communication Management (In Faculty' perspective)

There were two trends visible in the responses provided by teachers and students. Students' suggestions were more inclined towards extension activities in rural areas and collaborations with the organizations. This further throws light on the serious need to convey and transform the structure of learning and awaking students about their potentials in the field of extension education and communication management as it will address the extension and advisory services for farmers and rural communities and help them build knowledge and making them self-reliant. Students felt the need of more dynamic syllabi which can go beyond the traditional knowledge base and also touch upon the aspects of making students' job/industry ready so that they can easily work with farm and rural families and disseminate the information professionally. Further, they should also be provided with the workshops on scholarships/fellowships, research and extension based jobs like in KVK (Subject Matter Specialist), major examinations like NET, SET, ASRB, etc.

The trends visible in faculties' responses were more inclined towards designing of extension strategies, online publicity, vocational trainings and encouraging software trainings so that the students can benefit from mass communication and can

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diversify their options. The teachers felt that through such changes, extension education department students can become the part of larger ecosystem of rural communities and in turn, take the subject further as they would be linked with NGOs, local bodies and other organizations. Faculty members believed that Extension Education as a subject is restricted to its own boundaries and collaborative with the organizations and integration of subject relevant courses can diversify their field area that would help in building up an inclusive image and will further the opportunities to its students, helping in better retention and lower drop-outs.

CONCLUSION

The findings suggested to go for introspection and hard-work on the part of community science fraternity from extension education departments. In order to work on solutions for retention of students, departments must address the student information to understand the problem. Community science today has the problem of low student enrolments and higher drop-out rates. The biggest cause was lack of diversity of courses in the field and media tools and

recording labs in the departments and universities. The suggestions to solve this problem and address these causative factors were interdisciplinary collaborations and inter-linkage with the media organizations/NGOs/government organizations and reforming the traditional curriculum of the extension education system. While the issue of student retention in home science extension is a pressing one, the suggestions can be implemented with a well thought out plan and improve the degree of attainment rates. Taking advantage of the digital measures and tools available today to reach larger sections of student population is recommended.

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