

# **Improving Exam Performance Among Low Achievers of 3<sup>rd</sup> Year B.A.(Hum) Programme offered by Institute of Distance Education, University of Swaziland.**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This project was undertaken to diagnose difficult course content by students in different low performance courses and to wash out these difficulties with the help of a tutor support as well as help these learners for enhancing their exam performance and thus passing out in low achieving courses. Out of 64 low achievers only 32 being 50% had replied to a Questionnaire for diagnosis of difficult content, expectations from tutors and some other comments in four subjects as below. The students in History had some academic difficulties in H202, H213&H305 courses with some expectations in H202& H305 and some additional comments in H202, H213&H305. Similarly, in Theology & Religious Studies, they had academic difficulties, expectations from the tutor and some other comments in only T3P2 (TRS 303) course. In African Language & Literature, academic difficulty was in AL210, AL300, AL301, AL304, and some expectations from tutors in AL300, AL301, AL304, as well as some other comments were in AL210, AL300, AL301, AL304. But, in English subject, the situation was worse as they expressed academic difficulties in all courses except in Eng 205. The expectations from the Tutors and some special comments had been in all courses except in Eng 206. The concerned tutors had been advised for making difficult content as easy to grasp by present students and future batches too. An urgent orientation of all tutors/ teachers about their role and responsibilities was felt essential. Necessary Audio/ Video support be developed to explain the difficult course content. 'Learner Association' by grouping students for the same programme may be helpful for interaction among them. A strong habit must be developed for using Internet by IDE students and their tutors. It would help them to be in contact with each other and from one to another for an academic interaction even after contact sessions.

Backwardness or low achievement in subject of studies has no absolute magnitude. It is only a relative term which indicates deviation from the normal in the negative direction, i.e. below average. The University of Swaziland has fixed below 50% marks as criterion to fail in examination. This project has adopted the same criterion, and so, all students getting below 50% marks were labeled as low achievers. It had been observed from Institute of Distance Education records that 57 students of B.A.(Hum) programme had failed and thus discontinued from their respective programmes. The same situation may come in future with existing IDE students for various programmes. It was felt as essential to avoid such ugly situation in future for every programme. The academic career of present low achievers might also be ruined, if no steps were taken to enhance exam performance among them. Low achievement is a product of so many external and internal variables in and around the student. Most of them are Psychological in nature like Low Intelligence, Lack of Motivation to study, Less Interested in study, Shortage of study time, Fear of a low performance in next examination etc. Such students need some remedial help by their Tutors through study. But, the learner performance in different courses of every subject indicated that they are not low achievers in every course of study. They have low performance in some courses which might be due to academic difficulties/ confusions/ questions/ in understanding some course content at different pages of the learning material. A pin pointing solution by the tutor may help the students in washing out the same and finally a better result may make them to pass the examination. As an experiment, the B.A. (Humanities) third year result was considered for this Research Project. The result analysis revealed that 102 students had low performance in BA Humanities third year during 2011 Final Results, but, it came down to only for 64 students after Supplementary results. These 64 students were finally considered members of the target group for this Research Project.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THIS STUDY**

- 1) To diagnose the specific course content found difficult by the target group students in different low performing courses.
- 2) To wash out these difficulties in various courses with the help of a tutor support.

- 3) To help the low achieving learners for enhancing their exam performance and to achieve D or a better Grade.
- 4) To make concerned tutors aware of learner difficulties enabling them to meet the same among future batches of distance learners.
- 5) To suggest some suitable remedial strategy for enhancing learner performance in various courses under consideration for BA (Humanities) Programme.
- 6) To recommend the University of Swaziland (UNISWA) some essential and needy steps for controlling dropout cases by enhancing performance level during examination among IDE students for B.A.(Humanities) programme.
- 7) To initiate similar projects for other IDE programmes, if present project gets a success.

## METHODOLOGY ADOPTED

This was a survey type study covering diagnosis of learner difficulties for a Tutor supported remedy to target group students by the concerned tutors/counsellors. The Final results and the Supplementary results of low achievers had been analysed and it was found that after supplementary examination only 64 students were still trailing behind the passing marks of 50% in some courses. The course wise number of such students was as shown in Table 1, 2, 3, &4. These students were considered as population for this study. The target group students were given a letter supported with blank pages for each low achieving course for their free responses related to following important points.

### (1)Course wise Learner difficulties.(2)Expectations from the Tutor.(3)Other Comments (if any).

Only Thirty two (32) students out of Sixty Four (64) had replied this Questionnaire even after frequent reminders for submission of the same. These responses had been summarised course wise for compilation and were submitted to the concerned Tutors/Academic Counsellors who were asked to prepare their deliberations (as remedy) by covering all of these difficulties/ problems/ queries/ confusions/ questions, mentioned by the target group learners in their responses. Question- answer, learner-learner interaction, Answer of the question by Email or providing some notes etc.were suggested as the options to be adopted by the tutors/counsellors as part of proposed remedial strategy. The target group 32 students had been asked to contact the Project Coordinator, as and when they feel so, for every academic problem. The Project Coordinator had assured them for a solution from the concerned Tutors in future too, if some new problem is reported by the students during this course of action. The Project coordinator had communicated the concerned Tutors/Academic Counsellors about learners' difficulties in various courses (as communicated by the students).The names of students were kept as confidential along with their Questionnaires and were not communicated to the Tutors in order to keep a cordial relationship between both.

## COURSE WISE STUDENT NUMBER FOR THIS SURVEY

**Table: 01.LOW ACHIEVERS IN HISTORY**

S.N.	Course Name	Course Code	Students Identified	Students Responded	Percentage
1.	Historiography/Research Methods in History	H300	04	02	50%
2.	Economic History of West Africa to 1900/ Economic History of West Africa since 1900	H302	02	01	50%
3.	Introduction to the History of Colonial Latin America	H305	18	09	50%
4.	Imperialism and colonialism in Africa in 1920	H202	01	01	100%
5.	Europe from 1789 to 1870	H213	03	02	67%
6.	Europe since 1870	H214	02	01	50%

**Table: 02. LOW ACHIEVERS IN AFRICAN LANGUAGE & LITERATURE**

S.N.	Course Name	Course Code	Students Identified	Students Responded	Percentage
1.	Introduction to Linguistics	AL 210	02	01	50%
2.	Linguistic Analysis of the Main Language	AL300	10	06	60%
3.	History of Linguistics(Western)/ History of Linguistics(Bantu)	AL301	17	09	53%
4.	Modern Literature-II	AL302	03	02	67%
5.	Oral/ Traditional Literature-II	AL303	02	01	50%
6.	Introduction to Grammar	AL304	04	04	100%
7.	Contemporary African Poetry and Drama	AL213	01	00	00%

**TABLE 03.LOW ACHIEVERS IN ENGLISH**

S.N.	Course Name	Course Code	Students Identified	Students Responded	Percentage
1.	Survey of English Literature: The Romantics to the Moderns	Eng205	03	01	33%
2.	A Study of Poetry	Eng206	04	01	25%
3.	Introduction to Critical Theory	Eng204	01	01	100%
4.	Grammar III: Clause Combining and Text Creation	Eng301	22	08	36%
5.	Conversational Analysis	Eng303	09	01	11%
6.	Modern critical Theory	Eng304	20	07	35%
7.	A Study of Drama	Eng305	29	13	45%
8.	A Study of Novel	Eng306	32	13	41%
9.	Research Method	Eng307	14	06	43%

**TABLE 04. LOW ACHIEVERS IN THEOLOGY & RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

S.N.	Course Name	Course Code	Students Identified	Students Responded	Percentage
1.	A Study of the old Testament	T2P1	01	01	100%
2.	Studies in the new Testament1	T3P1	02	01	50%
3.	African Traditional Religion	T3P2	02	01	50%
4.	Early and medieval Church/ The reformation	T3P6	01	00	00%

**TABLE 05. SUBJECT WISE COURSE CODES HAVING STUDENTS OPINIONS**

S.N.	Subjects	Difficult Content	Expectations from Tutors/Lecturers	Other Comments
1.	History(H)	H202,H213,H305	H202,H305	H202,H213,H305
2.	Theology & Religious Studies (TRS)	T3P2	T3P2	T3P2
3.	African Languages & Literature(AL)	AL210,AL300 AL301, AL304	AL300, AL301, AL304	AL210, AL300, AL301,AL304, AL302
4.	English(Eng)	Eng204, Eng206, Eng301, Eng303, Eng304, Eng305, Eng306, Eng307,	Eng204,Eng205, Eng301,Eng206, Eng303, Eng304, Eng305, Eng306, Eng307,	Eng204,Eng205, Eng301,Eng303, Eng304,Eng305, Eng306,Eng307,

**TABLE06. SUBJECTWISE COURSE CODES HAVING NO STUDENT OPINION**

S.N.	Subjects	Difficult Content	Expectations from Tutors/Lecturers	Other Comments
1.	History(H)	H214,H300,H302	H213,H300,H214 H302	H214,H300,H302
2.	Theology & Religious Studies(TRS)	T2P1,T3P1,T3P6	T2P1,T3P1,P3P6	T2P1,T3P1,T3P6
3.	African Languages & Literature(AL)	AL302,AL213, AL303	AL210,AL302, AL303,AL213	AL303,AL213
4.	English(Eng.)	Eng205	-	Eng206

**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

The Analysis revealed that in History, the students had some academic difficulties in H202,H213&H305, with some expectations in H202& H305 and some additional comments in H202,H213&H305. Similarly, in Theology & Religious Studies, they had academic difficulties, expectations from the tutor and some other comments in only T3P2 (TRS 303) course. The scenario in African Language & Literature revealed that they had academic difficulties in AL210,AL300, AL301,AL304, and some expectations from tutors in AL300, AL301, AL304, as well as some other comments about AL210, AL300, AL301, AL304. But, in English subject, the situation was worse as they expressed academic difficulties in all courses except in Eng 205. The expectations from the Tutors and some special comments had been in all courses except in Eng 206. The concerned tutors have been advised for making easy to grasp the difficult content and prepare their deliberations among future batches of students for same course in such a way that new students find the same content as easy one and not as a difficult one. An urgent orientation of all tutors/ teachers about their role and responsibilities must be organized by IDE. Every Programme Coordinator must organize a one day meeting with all new students and their tutors enabling them to understand their role in Distance Education system, and, various activities to be done as well as course content to be covered by them. Necessary Audio/ Video support be developed to explain the difficult course content. This Audio/ Video support may be made available to students on line by IDE as well as off line through UNISWA Library. The IDE students may be motivated to form a 'Learner Association' in their locality by grouping students for the same programme. They may meet in person and talk or chat on line among themselves and discuss their difficulties among themselves. Use of Email and Internet for an effective communication is a cheaper media for them. A strong habit must be developed for using Internet by IDE students and their tutors. It would help them to be in contact with each other and from one to another for an academic interaction. In this setting, a question raised by one student and its answer by another will reach to all, making all benefitted. It is good that UNISWA has been allotting Email ID to all students who must develop a habit of using the same for interaction among themselves. It may be helpful for the academic Counsellors/Tutors to become familiar with the course content where the students had some difficulties during study and provide a remedy for the same.

**OBJECTIVE WISE DISCUSSION**

This Research project was undertaken to diagnose difficulties with low achievers of B.A. (Humanities) programme with an intention to upgrade their exam performance. This project had revolved around seven objectives. An objective wise discussion of the findings is stated on the coming pages.

**1) To diagnose the specific course content found difficult by the target group students in different low performance courses.**

The target group low achievers were served Questionnaire/ Opinionnaire for different low performing courses in all four Subjects. They had expressed the specific course content where they need some additional help/support for a content clarity. These have been listed in Gist of various findings of this study.

**2) To wash out these difficulties in various courses with the help of a tutor support.**

The concerned tutors had been informed about the course content which was found difficult by the low achievers who had desired some help/support for the same. Also, these tutors were advised to prepare the same content with more explanation for coming batches also. Apart from the academic difficulties, the expectations from the tutor, and some other comments by the students, had also been informed to the Tutors with a purpose for an improvement. The tutors were advised to take necessary steps for meeting these difficulties.

**3) To help the low achieving learners for enhancing their examination performance and to achieve a 'D' or a better Grade.**

The diagnosis of the difficult course content had been done on the basis of an opinion survey from target group low achieving learners through a Questionnaire/ Opinionnaire. This might had been done by the concerned tutors to help these low achieving learners through an academic support. A further analysis of exam performance may be done about these low achieving students, to see the improvements made by these low achievers.

**4) To make concerned tutors aware of learner difficulties enabling them to meet the same among future batches of distance learners.**

The concerned tutors have been advised to present the difficult Course Content easier to grasp and prepare their deliberations among future batches of students for same course in such a way that new students find the same content as easy one and not as a difficult one.

**5) To suggest some suitable remedial strategy for enhancing learner performance in various courses under consideration for BA (Hum) Programme.**

An analysis of low achieving learners' opinion revealed that the tutors and the learners did not know their role in Open & Distance education system. They need an orientation of the same. The students had expressed a desire for more contact sessions and the tutor should deliver lectures based on every Unit of the course content during these contact programmes. This is wrong and should not be expected in a distance education scenario. In fact, the students are supposed to learn self as an isolated identity. He may present his difficulties/confusions etc. to the tutor concerned in advance using Email/Phone/in person/fax etc. The tutor would like to provide his feedback using Email/ Phone/ in person/fax etc. or he may also take up the same during the contact programmes and discuss with the students. It would help other students also in the class. The tutors (deployed to provide human support to learners) have been in a habit of delivering a lecture on a topic of their own choice in the name of Tutoring/Counselling. They are supposed to motivate the learners for a self-study. These tutors should diagnose learner difficulties/queries/questions using various available media and must prepare their contact session deliberation in such a way that all these difficulties/queries/questions are covered. They may like to motivate students for a group discussion and interaction among themselves. The Institute of Distance Education (IDE) may orient these Tutors as well as the students about their role and responsibilities with each other.

**6) To recommend the University of Swaziland (UNISWA) some essential and needy steps for controlling dropout cases by enhancing performance level during examination among IDE students for B.A. (Humanities) programme.**

It was recommended that an urgent orientation of all tutors about their role and responsibilities must be organised by the Institute of Distance education (IDE). Every Programme Coordinator must organise a one day meeting with all new students and their tutors enabling them to understand their role in Distance Education system, and, with various activities to be done as well as course content to be covered by them. Necessary Audio/ Video support be developed to explain the difficult course content. This Audio/Video support may be made available to students on line by Institute of Distance Education (IDE) as well as off line through UNISWA Library. The IDE students may be motivated to form a 'Learner Association' in their locality by grouping students for the same programme. They may meet or talk or chat on line among themselves and discuss their difficulties among themselves. Use of Email and Internet for an effective two way communication would be a cheaper media for them. A strong habit must be developed for using Internet by the IDE students and their tutors. It would help them to be in contact, always with each other and from one to another among students for an academic interaction. In this setting, a question raised by one student and its answer by another will reach to all, and thus, making all students benefitted. It is good that UNISWA has been allotting Email ID to all students. They must develop a habit of using the same for interaction and communication among themselves as well as with their tutors also.

**7) To initiate similar projects for other IDE programmes, if present project gets a success.**

Looking to activeness and a good response by the target group learners, it is recommended that IDE should take similar projects for other programmes like -Certificate in Portuguese, Bachelor of Commerce, Bachelor of Arts (Hum.), Cert.in French, Bachelor of Education (Adult Education), Bachelor of Education (Primary Education), Bachelor of Education ( Secondary Education), Diploma in Commerce, Diploma in Law, PGCE.

## **OUTCOME OF THIS PROJECT**

The purpose of Distance Education system is to educate the mass as per their mental abilities. Discontinue an educational programme after being failed three times in some courses may compel the persons to remain uneducated throughout their life. Society may feel this group as a burden on them. This case study has become a help to low achievers for washing out their Difficulties, Confusions, Questions and Queries in course content of low achievement, and, finally a ray of hope to get necessary remedy from their tutors for coming up as a successful graduate studied through distance mode of education. It may be helpful for the academic Counsellors/Tutors to become familiar of the course content where the students had some difficulties/problems during study. These tutors may prepare some remedy in the form of more explanation by using various techniques for the difficult course content. This will open all doors for further education as well as for a suitable job to Distance Learners to meet the Bread & Butter needs of their families. This type of remedial work may be initiated in future too for other programmes offered by the Institute of Distance Education, if present project has been found successful in raising learner performance among third year low achievers of B.A.(Humanities) Programme.

Note – The details of various Academic difficulties, Expectations from Tutors ,and, Some other comments in all four subjects like History, African Language and Literature, English ,and Theology & Religious Studies have not been shown here due to 'Word limits' of 3000 for this paper. However, these will be covered in Power Point Presentation during conference session.