

# Acceptability of PGDAEM Distance Program Among Extension Professionals in India

Ms.S.L.Kameswari<sup>1</sup>, Dr.Veenita Kumari<sup>2</sup> and Ragini Modi<sup>3</sup>

## ABSTRACT

*Distance education, or distance learning, is an educational approach that relies on the Information technology, and instructional systems that plan to provide learning to students who are physically not present in a class room setting. Instead of attending courses personally, teachers and students communicate at times of their convenience and choosing and exchange printed or electronic materials through any suitable technology. Distance education is becoming more and more demanding in the recent times as the latest techniques and technologies can be easily spread to the farthest part of the world easily and connect between organizations as well as the universities to collaborate in different fields. Distance learning will remain as part of e-learning, web based learning through virtual classrooms and digital teamwork, where contents will continue to be delivered through internet, audio, video tape, and conferencing through video; satellite and etc. (Hedge 2004:128-145)*

*The National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE) established in 1987, is an apex level autonomous institute under the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, Government of India. MANAGE is the Indian response to challenges of agricultural extension in a rapidly growing and diverse agriculture sector. Realizing the paramount importance of public and private extension system, MANAGE has launched a one-year Post-Graduate Diploma in Agricultural Extension Management (PGDAEM) in distance learning mode during 2007, under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme "Support to State Extension Programme for Extension Reforms." This study conducts, a feedback analysis to assess the effectiveness and the constraints faced by the SAMETIs and candidates in the PGDAEM Program.*

*The study employed a detailed survey designed as an appropriate tool to generate the vital facts of the people under study. Conducted online and data was collected online by inviting educators to fill the online questionnaire, irrespective of the geographical*

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1. Consultant, National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE), Hyderabad.
  2. Deputy Director (Gender Studies), National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE), Hyderabad.
  3. PhD Research Scholar, College of Home Science
- Corresponding Author Email: [directoraem@manage.gov.in](mailto:directoraem@manage.gov.in)

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location. A set of questions were posted in Google form on issues such as the admission procedure, course fee, funds to the SAMETIs, sponsorship, assignments, project work, examinations, study material, evaluation, backlog policy, medium of instruction, monitoring process, honorarium to resource persons and coordinator, lodging and boarding, institutional charges and suggestions for improvements. As a result, it was found that the respondents expressed that PGDAEM Program is very useful for them to improve their skills in latest extension technologies and techniques in their field situation where they are working. They express and suggest that they need the study material in the colloquial languages, more number of classes for orientation about the program and time for contact classes. They opine that they require update of the latest knowledge time to time which is helped through PGDAEM. They feel only that the busy work schedule is a limitation for them to pursue PGDAEM Program.

**Key words:** PGDAEM, Extension Professionals, Distance Education, e-learning.

## **Introduction**

Distance learning is not a substitute for formal education but rather an experience oriented education. The distance learning gives opportunity to the learners simultaneously with their profession on the field, through training and also helps in improvement of careers. It also contributes to the higher educational opportunities as well as helps to those who cannot leave their work and continue to pursue their higher studies in accredited or high standard universities or institutions for further development of their careers at their own convenience.

The information technology boom has facilitated many learners to proceed and the barriers are removed such as to connect them through online classes or write examinations, download the study material and go for study from the convenience of their homes or work place. This type of learning has become part and parcel of any formal organizations without any hassle of paying or applying for visa etc.

Still there are limitations in distance education like there will not be much physical contact or interaction among the learners, not much of placement options will not be there. It is a bit costlier than the formal education because there is a need of sophisticated equipment and services since it involved information technology. There is not much of spoken communication involved in the learning process. Only advantage is the employer's point of view is give due consideration as the workload will not be disturbed.

Distance education is becoming more and more demanding in the recent times

as the latest techniques and technologies can be easily spread to the farthest part of the world easily and connect between organizations as well as the universities to collaborate in different fields. (Hedge, 2004)

The National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE) established in 1987, is an apex-level autonomous institute under the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, Government of India. MANAGE is the Indian response to challenges of agricultural extension in a rapidly growing and diverse agriculture sector. The policies of liberalization and globalization of the economy and the level of agricultural technology becoming more sophisticated and complex, called for major initiatives towards reorientation and modernization of the agricultural extension system. MANAGE is involved in major initiatives towards reorientation and modernization of the agricultural extension system, for evolving effective ways of managing the extension system through professional guidance and training of critical manpower.

A strong, vibrant and responsive extension with an expanded mandate is a prerequisite for achieving faster, sustainable and more inclusive growth through agriculture and agricultural extension services need to assume new challenges and reform itself in terms of content, approach, structure and processes and their delivery and implementation.

There are around one lakh public extension functionaries in India. These extension functionaries shoulder a challenging responsibility in providing extension support to a large population of farmers. They can play a crucial role in addressing the serious concerns in Indian agriculture such as major percentage of small holding farmers, significant yield gaps, disparity in input usage and deterioration of natural resources. The public extension system is indispensable and needs strengthening to match the scale and diversity of agriculture in India. (MANAGE, 2022)

Besides this, there are a large number of private extension players like agribusiness companies, farmers' organizations, agripreneurs, input dealers, NGOs and cooperatives which complement, supplement, and partner with the public extension system at the grassroots level. There is a need to encourage and empower them through capacity building for improving their effectiveness in extension delivery system.

Realizing the paramount importance of public and private extension system, MANAGE has launched a one-year Post-Graduate Diploma in Agricultural Extension Management (PGDAEM) in distance learning mode during 2007 under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme "Support to State Extension Programme

for Extension Reforms.” The programme has completed fifteen years and the fifteenth batch is in progress. Over this period, more than 20,000 candidates from agriculture and allied sectors have been enrolled in PGDAEM. The PGDAEM being a unique intervention for strengthening the capacities of extension personnel, has gained a lot of interest and popularity in recent times.

Since its inception in 2007, the programme received full support of the Government of India (GoI) untill the Financial Year 2014-15. With effect from Financial Year 2015-16, the States are getting the support of the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation & Farmers Welfare (DAC & FW), Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare (MOA&FW), Govt. of India under Extension Reforms Scheme to the tune of 60%,90% and 100% for General States, North-Eastern States & three Himalayan States and Union Territories respectively. The remaining amount (matching share) 40% and 10% for the General States and North Eastern & three Himalayan States respectively, is contributed by the concerned State Governments.

The PGDAEM Program completed 15 years, and the admissions of the 16th batch are in progress. In this context, a feedback analysis is done online to understand the effectiveness and the constraints faced by the SAMETIs and candidates in the PGDAEM Program.

### **Objectives:**

- To study the effectiveness of PGDAEM Program from MANAGE among the studied candidates in their work situation
- To realize the constraints in running and studying PGDAEM Program
- To extract suggestions for better implementation of the program

### **Methodology:**

A google form was generated by the PGDAEM section for evaluating the effectiveness of PGDAEM and constraints faced by the SAMETIs and candidates who studied the program. It was conducted similar to a study to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses in universities in Spain during the pandemic. (García Peñalvo, 2021).

This current research was mainly based on collecting people’s beliefs, opinions, attitudes, motivation, and behaviors towards the PGDAEM Program using a survey design. A detailed survey was designed and adopted in the study as an appropriate tool to gather vital facts of the people under study. The study was conducted online, and data were collected online by inviting educators

to fill the online questionnaire, irrespective of the geographical location. A set of questions was posted in Google form on issues such as the admission procedures, course fee, funds to the SAMETIs, sponsorship, assignments, project work, examinations, study materials, evaluation, backlog policy, medium of instruction, monitoring process, honorarium to resource persons and coordinators, lodging and boarding, institutional charges and suggestions for improvement. The participants in the study were briefed about the purpose of the survey at the beginning and related consent. Responses were collected over a period of one month for which 60 respondents actively responded. Statistical tools such as frequency, percentage, mean and Mean Percentile Score (MPS) were used to analyzed the data.

### **Feedback forms link:**

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdZ8PCuyUH3OT2hGuhlo-XarI4G8jRAAEF-iP\\_grNWGzIzEqw/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdZ8PCuyUH3OT2hGuhlo-XarI4G8jRAAEF-iP_grNWGzIzEqw/viewform)

### **Results and Discussion:**

The PGDAEM Program completed 15 years, and the admission of the 16th batch is in progress. Therefore, a review of the functioning and implementation of the programme, review of the structure of the study material and knowledge gained from the course material was done to attain feedback from the SAMETIs of all the states to assess the effectiveness of the programme at the field level. The respondents were requested to fill a Google form generated by PGADEM section, MANAGE in order to extract feedback about the PGDEAM Program in order to understand whether the programs' objectives were achieved. A link was sent to the SAMETIs to send their feedback regarding the programme, which ran over fifteen years and submitted the information.

Out of all the SAMETIs, 60 percent responded immediately and the remaining SAMETIs could not answer due to various reasons such as

- Limited staff in the SAMETI
- Lack of understanding regarding the issues that are included in the form.

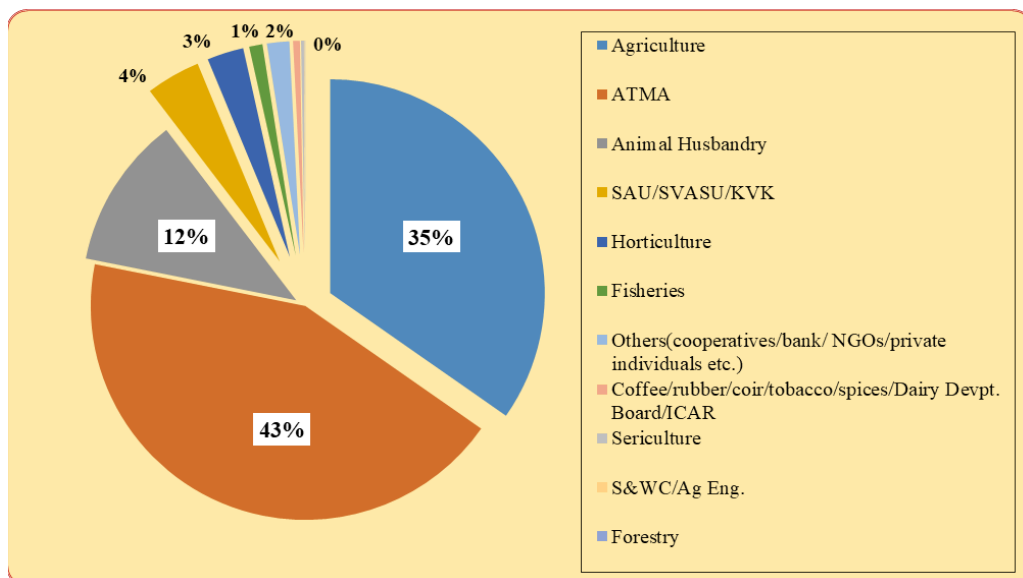
### **The results and Discussion were presented under headlines as follows:**

- i. General profile of PGDAEM Course and Candidates
- ii. Effectiveness of PGDAEM Program
- iii. Constraints in running and studying PGDAEM Program
- iv. Suggestions for better implementation of the program

## I) General Profile of PGDAEM Course and Candidates

### 1. Sector-wise coverage of PGDAEM candidates

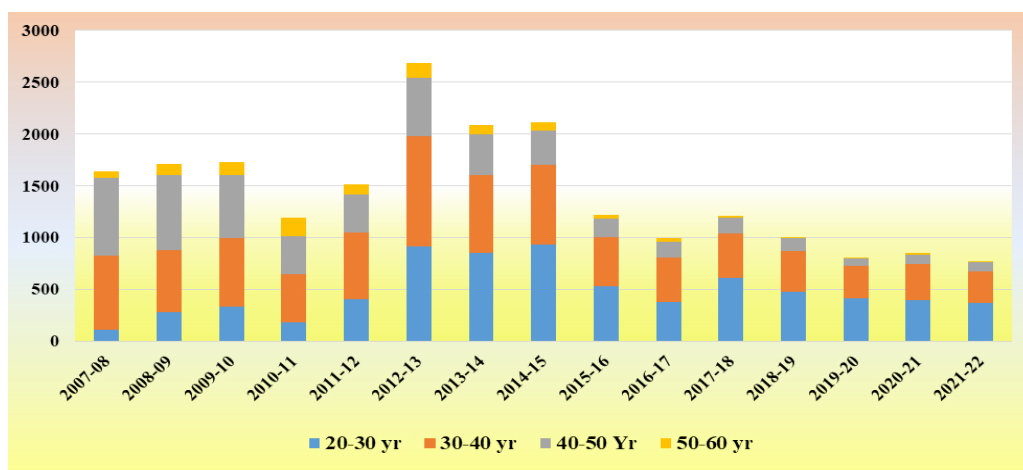
The sector wise coverage of PGDAEM course covered candidates from first (2014-15) batch to 14th batch (2021-22). It was evident from figure 1, that more (43.00%) number of candidates, were from ATMA institutes, followed by 35% were from the Agriculture sector, 12% from Animal husbandry and rest from SAUs, KVK, SVASUs, Horticulture, Fisheries, Forestry and other sectors such as cooperatives, banks, NGOs, coffee, rubber, tobacco, spice, Dairy boards and ICAR institutions. Another SAMETI opined that it was not suitable for veterinary personnel. They also expressed that they were too busy and, were unable to spare much time for the studying the study material.



**Figure 1: Sector-wise coverage of PGDAEM candidates from 2014-15 to till date**

### 2. Age wise data of candidates studied PGDAEM Program

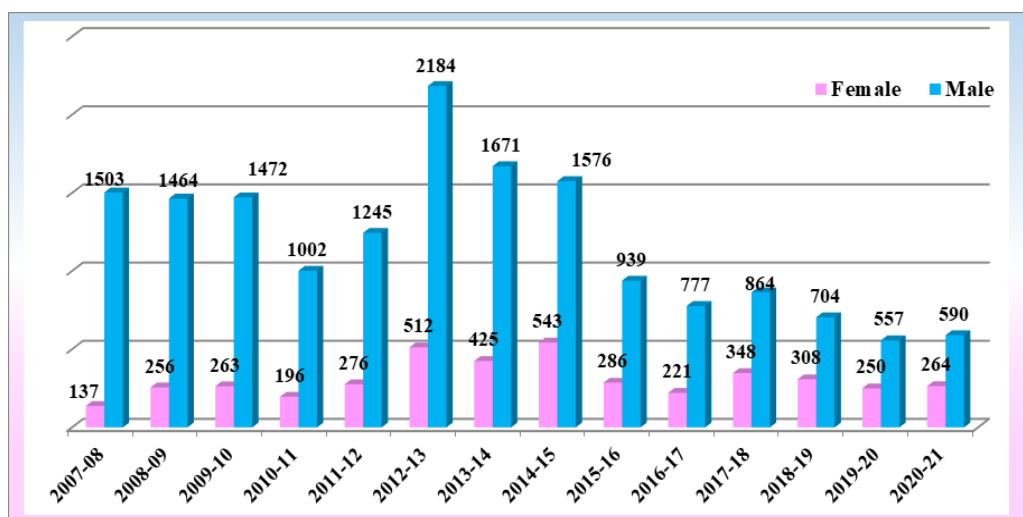
It was observed from figure 2, that there are more no. of candidates aged in between 20-30 years and 40-50 years. Followed by the candidates who were between age (30-40) years and 50-60 years of age.



**Figure 2: Age wise date of candidates studied PGDAEM program**

### 3. Male and Female Ratio

The figure 3 revealed that there were more number of male candidates than the female candidates who pursued PGDAEM program and needed to be encouraged to pursue the program. The female candidates are busy with their families and also with their work place which is hindering them to attend the program.



**Figure 3: Male and Female Ratio of PGDAEM candidates**



## II) Effectiveness of PGDAEM Program

### a) Usefulness of PGDAEM program

**Table 1: Usefulness of PGDAEM program to the extension functionaries**

**n=60**

Response from SAMETIs	Frequency	Percentage
Useful	55	91.67%
Not Useful	05	08.33%
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

From the table 1 it was observed that the respondents were asked to provide feedback on the usefulness of PGDAEM program, around 91.67 per cent of the respondents expressed that it is useful and rest (8.33%) of them felt that it is not useful. They felt that the course was apt to the aspirants with respect to the collection and analysis of basic data and also effectiveness of the course to their field situation. Two of them expressed that the PGDAEM course was useful to the field extension functionaries only.

### b) Applicability of PGDAEM program in field situation

Muthu Prasad et al. (2021) conducted a survey to study the Agricultural Student's perception and preference towards the online learning. The authors explored student's preferences for various attributes of online classes. This study focused on how students perceive online learning, and which format they prefer. There was no inclusion of the pinion of instructors. In another work (Paudel, 2021) surveyed the point of view of both teachers and students on the benefits and challenges of online education amid COVID-19 in Nepal. The study identified several benefits of the situation such as promoting online research, connecting participants to the community worldwide, and having more freedom.

**Table 2 : Applicability of PGDAEM program in field situation**

**n=60**

S. No.	Response from the SAMETIs	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Very much applicable	32	53.34%
2.	Quite Applicable	23	38.33%
3.	Can't say	05	08.33%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100.00%</b>



From the above table 2 it is clearly evident that more than half (53.34%) of the respondents felt the program was very much applicable in the field situation and knowledge is quite applicable (38.33%) to everyone but some were not sure (08.33%). They suggested that the candidates can be given field assignments because it suits in their field experience.

### c) Difference in delivery of extension services

The SAMETIs were asked about their observation of the officers' nature of work, whether after the completion of PGDAEM program the services delivery was improved or not. All of them except HAMETI, Haryana opined that they improved in the delivery of services and was good. They said they were with better managerial skills, organizing training programs and obtaining good feedback through their approach. They also said to be more competent in communication of information among the farmers, extension officers and the researchers regarding the updated knowledge. They were good in identifying the key communicators, the proper selection of the print and electronic media to avoid the barriers of communication.

**Table 3: Difference in delivery of extension services by the officers before and after program**

**n=60**

<b>Response of the SAMETIs</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
There is a difference	51	85.00%
There is no difference	09	15.00%
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

The SAMETIs were asked about whether there is a difference in the delivery of services by the officers when compared before and after learning the programme. In this context, they were majority 85.00 per cent of respondents expressed that there was difference in delivery of extension services information, followed by no difference (15.00%) in delivery of extension services by the officers before and after program.

### d) Course content of the PGDAEM program

Many of the respondents felt that they were more confident because they were well acquainted with the latest concepts of extension management and thus were productive in getting good results in their field. They agreed that those who completed the PGDAEM program were more capable and yielded good and encouraging results since they were knowledgeable in the extension modules.

But few of them expressed that the program is not much advantageous to them because they are not applying in their extension activities in the field.

From the table 4, it was perceived that Agribusiness Management (MPS 95.00) was ranked first among all the course contents followed by 2nd rank for Communication techniques (MPS 93.33), 3rd rank for PRA and Interactive techniques (MPS 91.67), 4th rank for Biodiversity (MPS 90.00), 5th rank for Sustainable Agriculture (MPS 86.67) respectively. Rest followed as order from 6th rank to 13th rank as Entrepreneurship development, Market Led Extension, Supply Chain Management, Market intelligence, Information Technology, Research Methodology and Planning for Agriculture, respectively.

**Table 4: Course content of the PGDAEM program:**

**n=60**

S. No.	Course Content	Frequency	MPS	Rank
1.	Extension techniques	53	88.33	V
2.	Information Technology	45	75.00	XI
3.	PRA and Interactive techniques	55	91.67	III
4.	Communication techniques	56	93.33	II
5.	Market intelligence	46	76.67	X
6.	Market Led Extension	48	80.00	VIII
7.	Agribusiness Management	57	95.00	I
8.	Entrepreneurship development	51	85.00	VII
9.	Supply Chain Management	47	78.33	IX
10.	Research Methodology	44	73.33	XII
11.	Planning for Agriculture	41	68.33	XIII
12.	Biodiversity	54	90.00	IV
13.	Sustainable Agriculture	52	86.67	VI

**MPS – Mean Percentile Score**

It was observed participants were more productive and good in community mobilization. They felt that in time of any problem situation, they dealt with it more practically and implemented the activity efficiently according to the needs of local people. The officers established a favorable environment in the field during the delivery of extension services and they also were in with good rapport with the farmers.

The SAMETIs opined that after completing this programme, field functionaries could motivate the unemployed rural youth towards entrepreneurship, started giving importance to market intelligence, supply chain management and emphasize contract farming for deeper penetration into the agricultural extension management and product value addition.

#### e) Contact classes:

**Table 5: Percentage of candidates who attended contact classes**

**n=60**

<b>Attendance of the Candidates</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1%-20%	08	13.33
21%-40%	03	05.00
41%-60%	04	06.67
61%-80%	22	36.67
81%-100%	23	38.33
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100.00</b>

When the SAMETIs were enquired about the percentage of candidates who attended the contact classes, 38.33 per cent of the respondents had (81- 100%) of attendance followed by 36.67 per cent of respondents had (61-80) of attendance to contact classes. About 13.33 per cent attended with (1-20%) rest followed 6.67 per cent had (41- 60%) and 5.00 per cent had (21-40%) of attendance to the contact classes.

#### **III) Constraints faced by candidates in attending the contact classes:**

When enquired with regard to the constraints in organizing the contact classes in physical mode, 50 per-cent did not face any constraints and the rest of them expressed that there are some constraints faced.

**Table 6: Constraints faced by candidates in attending the contact classes:****n=60**

S. No.	Constraints	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Practicality of the subjects	09	15.00%
2.	The practical classes	03	5.00%
3.	Update knowledge	04	6.67%
4.	Going through the content	23	38.33%
5.	COVID situation	22	36.67%
6.	Medium of study material and instruction in colloquial/ local language	34	58.20%

**Constraints faced by the candidates to attend contact classes:**

The constraints faced by the SAMETIs were such as

- The COVID-19 situation and the social distancing that is prevalent in the country and hence the candidates were irregular in attending the contact classes.
- With regard to the number of classes, they felt that they should be increased. They wished for 5 contact classes per each subject.
- They feel they are a need for providing more time to go through the content and understanding the practicality of it.
- They expressed that there should be contact classes for Project work as it is more apt to the field situations.
- They wanted more orientation connected to extension oriented research, farmer producer company or farmer groups formation, farmers' field schools, high tech machinery execution, case studies' analysis and progressive bank which are helpful to the farmers in the field.
- They desired an extra day for practical exposure on Participatory Development, process of PRA and project management.

**a) Mode of attending contact classes**

According to table 7, Majority 58.33 per cent of the respondents attended contact classes through online mode while 41.67 per cent of candidates attended contact classes through Physical mode.

**Table 7: Mode of contact classes****n=60**

Response of SAMETIs	Frequency	Percentage
Physical Mode	25	41.67%
Online Mode	35	58.33%
Total	60	100.00%

As per the table 7, Majority 58.33 per cent of the respondents attended contact classes through online mode, while 41.67 per cent of candidates attended contact classes through Physical mode.

**b) Study material:**

When the respondents were requested to rate the content of the PGDAEM study material, most of 66.67 per cent expressed that the program content was relevant to their daily work at field, where as 28.33 per cent opined that it was the most relevant to them to learn. Only 5.00 per cent SAMETI felt the content was irrelevant. They wanted the PGDAEM program content to be updated frequently through incorporating the latest courses such as the media related and importantly about social media.

**Table 8: Study Material Content Rating of PGDAEM****n=60**

Response of the Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Irrelevant	03	5.00%
Relevant	40	66.67%
Most Relevant	17	28.33%
Total	60	100.00%

The SAMETIs strongly expressed their deep concern regarding

- If the study material could be prepared in local/ regional language to increase the effectiveness of the program would more easily to the candidates as they are not well versed in English and Hindi.
- The candidates are unable to attend the classes due to their heavy office workloads in their work places.
- With regard to the constraints faced in distribution of study material to the candidates, thirty eight percent of the SAMETIs express their difficulty.
- They received the study material late and sending the study material to the candidate is difficult because they are scattered in throughout the state.

- They want the course material to be distributed at the commencement of the course itself in order to have sufficient time to study for the examinations.

#### IV) Suggestions for better implementation of the program

The respondents were asked for suggestions to improve the programme and they responded with the following points:

**Table 9: Suggestions for improvement of PGDAEM program**

**n=60**

S. No.	Suggestions from the SAMETIs	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Revision of Course Content	15	25.00%
2.	Increase in Number of contact classes	17	28.33%
3.	Increase in number of field based practical classes	18	30.00%
4.	Study material in local language	03	05.00%
5.	Reward of increment to candidates after completion	02	03.33%
6.	Need for orientation meeting from MANAGE	06	10.00%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

#### Suggestions as perceived by the respondents:

- The course content needs to be revised or updated.
- It would also be convenient if the hard copies of reading materials can be sent well ahead of the contact classes and examinations.
- There is requirement for a contact person continuously available for the candidates.
- Physical contact classes may be conducted through offline mode more than one day than each subject in one day.
- Additional hour or contact classes will organize for another 5 days, then it will helpful for the students to get better understanding of the subject matter.
- An extra one day class for practical exposure for Participatory/ Approach/ study material in local language/ examination writing in local language/ PGDAEM Contact Class in online mode along with 2 day physical practical

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class per Semester for relevant section hands on practice. If possible Practical/ field work to be included for the extension functionaries for this course.

## Conclusion

From this evaluation of PGDAEM the respondents expressed that the program is very useful for them to improve their skills in latest extension technologies and techniques in their field situation where they are working. They noted the need for study material in the colloquial languages, more number of classes for orientation about the program and time for contact classes. They opined that they require update of the latest knowledge time to time which is helped through PGDAEM. They feel only that the busy work schedule is a limitation for them to pursue PGDAEM program.

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