

A PARTICIPATORY AND SIMULATION BASED PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM: AN EXPLORATORY INTERVENTION STUDY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract : The present study explores the design and implementation of a participatory and simulation-based Personality Development Program as an educational intervention for undergraduate and postgraduate Management and Commerce students at SGRR University. The study adopted an exploratory and intervention-based research design to address student concerns related to communication confidence, professional self-presentation, structured expression of ideas, and employability readiness.

The intervention incorporated participatory and experiential learning approaches including group discussions, communication activities, reflective exercises, resume-building sessions, mock interviews, and workplace simulations. Baseline assessment formats, classroom observation, reflective responses, and participation patterns were used to understand student needs and observe engagement during the intervention process.

The findings indicated that several students initially experienced hesitation during communication, difficulty in structured expression, and limited awareness regarding professional interaction and workplace expectations. Participatory and simulation-oriented activities appeared to encourage greater engagement, self-awareness, communication involvement, and practical understanding among participating students.

The study highlights the relevance of need-based, experiential, and workplace-oriented interventions within Personality Development Programs in supporting student engagement and professional development within higher education settings.

Keywords: Personality Development Program, participatory learning, experiential learning, workplace simulation, intervention based learning, employability readiness, higher education.

INTRODUCTION

Personality Development Programs (PDPs) have become increasingly prevalent in higher education institutions across India, particularly in smaller cities and towns, where institutions seek to bridge the gap between academic preparation and professional readiness. These programmes aim to develop soft skills, including interpersonal communication and professional competencies that are crucial for career success. Students today are expected not only to perform well academically but also to communicate effectively, work in teams, handle professional situations, and adapt to workplace requirements. This is especially important for university students, as professional readiness plays a significant role in career growth.

According to Cornet *et al.* (2024), participatory approaches combined with experiential learning can effectively transform educational programs to achieve a measurable impact on personal and professional growth. Yet most PDPs operate without rigorous need assessment, lack inclusivity for linguistically and socioeconomically diverse student populations and often focus disproportionately on superficial elements of personality such as appearance and accent rather than substantive competencies. Most programmes emphasise lectures and theoretical discussions with limited student participation and practical exposure. Consequently, students may grasp concepts but often lack confidence in applying them to real work situations.

Keeping this gap in mind, the present Personality Development Program was designed and mconducted for undergraduate and postgraduate students of Management and Commerce at Shri Guru Ram Rai University, Dehradun, Uttarakhand. The program was developed after observing the needs, communication gaps, confidence levels, and employability concerns of students. Instead of following a fixed or standard format, the training was designed in a needs-based and participatory manner.

A baseline format was used at the beginning of the program to collect information regarding student expectations, self-perceived strengths and weaknesses, communication challenges, career concerns, and areas requiring improvement. In addition, an informal interaction and discussion with students was conducted to better understand their learning needs, confidence levels, and professional concerns. The inputs collected from participants helped in designing sessions according to the specific needs of the student group.

The program mainly focused on experiential learning through activities, group discussions, role plays, workplace simulations, mock interviews, team-based tasks, and professional scenario exercises. Students were encouraged to actively participate rather than remain passive listeners. Real work situations were simulated so that students could experience decision-making, teamwork, communication challenges, and professional responsibilities in a practical manner. A major feature of the program was its participatory and simulation-based approach. Students were given opportunities to take different positional roles and solve practical problems collectively. This helped in improving communication skills, confidence, interpersonal interaction, and overall professional awareness among participants.

The purpose of this paper is to present the design, implementation, and observations of the Personality Development Program conducted at SGRR University. The paper also attempts to highlight how need-based intervention, participatory learning approach and workplace simulation can make personality development programs more effective and relevant in higher education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Personality Development in Higher Education

Personality Developments programs are being increasingly popular in Higher Education Institutions due to changing industry expectations and employability requirements. Several studies have highlighted that employers today value transferable and employability-related skills along with academic knowledge. Mwita et al. (2023), greatly emphasised soft skills training in higher education including communication, leadership, teamwork, and problem-solving. Similarly, Sharma et al. (2024) emphasised that employability-oriented learning approaches in higher education improve professional readiness among students. This indicates that higher education institutions need to adopt more practical and skill-oriented approaches for student development beyond classroom teaching. Rajubhai (2024), in his study indicated that Indian Universities are expected to provide learning opportunities that help students develop soft skills alongside academic content. Therefore, PDPs are now considered an important component of higher education, especially in management and commerce disciplines for enhancing employability.

3.2. Limitations of Traditional Personality Development Programs

Higher education institutions have traditionally focused on core subject matter and academic achievement, which does not sufficiently reflect the soft skills required for the job market (Chitra, 2017; Madar 2015). The traditional personality development programs focus too narrowly on 'outer physical looks' rather than a holistic grooming of the 'inner self' such as self-esteem issues caused by classroom failures or personal conflicts (Chitra, 2017). Many personality development programs in colleges and universities continue to follow generalised and lecture based approaches. Such approaches often provide theoretical understanding but limited practical exposure. Research studies have pointed out the passive learning environments reduce student engagement and restrict practical skill application. Studies on employability and workplace readiness suggest that students often face difficulties in applying communication and interpersonal skills in real professional situations despite theoretical training (Scandurra et al., 2024). This creates a need for personality development programs that are more practical, participatory, and connected with workplace realities.

3.3. Participatory Learning Approaches

Participatory learning approaches encourage active involvement of students in the learning process through discussions, activities, collaboration, and reflection. In education a participatory approach indicates a student-centred instructional strategy that shifts focus from passive reception to active engagement (Sheenu & Paul, 2024). Students are active participants in activities such as group discussions, self-directed learning, peer-teaching, presentations, and role plays (Madar, 2015). Madar (2015), in their study on participatory intervention on students generic skills, emphasised that generic skills, which include teamwork, clear communication, problem-solving, and IT literacy are essential for an individual's success in employment and work life. Hazelzet et al. (2024), in their study on participatory employability intervention, observed that participatory approaches improve engagement, involvement, and development outcomes among learners. Researchers have also emphasised that learner centred environments support communication development, confidence building and interpersonal learning more effectively than passive instruction methods. Therefore, participatory methods can play an important role in improving the effectiveness of Personality Development Programs in higher education.

3.4. Experiential Learning and Workplace Simulation in Current Placement Scenario

Experiential learning has emerged as an important approach for improving employability and professional readiness among students. This approach focuses on learning through experience, reflection, and practical application. Recent studies have shown that simulation-based and experiential learning methods improve decision-making ability, confidence, communication, and problem-solving skills among students. Engaging in work-based learnings help students develop emotional intelligence and resilience, which are critical for navigating environments (Konidari, 2022). Evidence supports the effectiveness of experiential learning approaches and simulation based training globally (Cornet et al., 2024), (Kolb & Kolb, 2022). Scheuringa and Thompson (2025) highlighted the positive influence of experiential simulation learning on employability and life skill development. Chandwaskar and Jape (2024) also observed that simulation-based learning helps management students improve critical thinking

and workplace preparedness. Similarly, De Villiers et al. (2024) found that work-simulated learning helps bridge the gap between theory and practice in higher education by integrating real world professional scenarios into the academic environment. These findings support the use of workplace simulation and experiential activities in personality development and employability-oriented programs.

3.5. The Necessity of Reflection

A critical component of successful workplace simulation is reflective practice. As per Konidari (2022), only having an experience isn't sufficient for students and they must engage in transformation process so as to ensure that educational possibility is not lost. Reflection allows students to explore their simulated experiences and connect them to theory (Blake & Bishop, 2013). Evidence links systematic reflection to the development of situational awareness, intellectual humility and a growth mindset (Lane & Roberts, 2022).

3.6. Need-Based and Contextualized Learning Interventions

Need-based interventions focus on identifying the specific development requirements of learners before designing training programs. Studies in experiential and employability-oriented education have emphasised that contextualised and learner-centred interventions create better engagement and learning outcomes. Success of any Personality Development Program largely depends on designing a program which is specific to the development needs of participants attending the program. Researchers have also observed that programs designed according to learner needs and professional expectations become more relevant and effective for students (Sharma et al., 2024). Need-based programs are particularly vital for students from remote or underprivileged backgrounds who may lack exposure to corporate environments, digital infrastructure, or travel opportunities. Many students struggle with a lack of self-confidence, communication apprehension, and shyness, which can stem from limited public speaking opportunities during their formative years (Sasikanth, 2025). In this context, baseline assessment, student interaction, and participatory planning become important elements in designing meaningful personality development interventions.

RESEARCH GAP

Existing literature highlights the importance of employability skills, participatory learning, experiential learning, and workplace simulation in higher education. However, limited research is available on need-based and simulation-oriented Personality Development Programs specifically designed for management and commerce students in university settings. Most existing studies focus either on employability or experiential learning independently, while fewer studies examine the combined use of participatory learning, workplace simulation, and need-based intervention within Personality Development Programs. Therefore, the present study attempts to address this gap through the design and implementation of a participatory and simulation-based Personality Development Program for management and commerce students in higher education.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Based on identified research gap and the need for participatory and experiential learning approaches in higher education, the present study was conducted with the following objectives:

1. To design and implement a need-based Personality Development Program for management and commerce students.
2. To examine the role of participatory learning approaches in students engagement and skill development.
3. To explore the effectiveness of workplace simulation activities in improving professional readiness among students.
4. To understand student responses toward experiential and simulation-based learning methods.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopted an exploratory and intervention-based research design to develop and implement a participatory and simulation-oriented Personality Development program for undergraduate and postgraduate students of management and Commerce at SGRR University.

The study focused on understanding student needs, designing contextualised learning experiences, and observing student engagement, participation, and professional readiness throughout the program.

6.1 Research Design

The study followed a qualitative and experiential intervention approach. The Personality Development Program was designed as a need-based and student-centred learning intervention rather than a fixed or standardised training module. The overall design emphasised participatory learning, experiential activities, workplace simulation, reflective learning, and practical application of professional skills. The intervention aimed to improve communication ability, confidence, teamwork, workplace understanding, and professional behaviour among students through active participation and simulated professional experiences.

6.2. Participants and Sampling

The participants of the study included undergraduate and postgraduate students from Management and Commerce disciplines at SGRR University, Uttarakhand. Participants were selected through purposive and convenience sampling based on their participation in the Personality Development Program. The program was conducted from 9 March 2026 to 30 April 2026 and included a total of 22 sessions conducted across two batches. Although additional sessions were initially planned, the program concluded after 22 sessions due to declining participation during the later phase of implementation.

6.3. Baseline Assessment and Need Identification

A baseline assessment format was administered to all the 81 participating students before the commencement of the program. The format included rating-based responses related to communication confidence, structured thinking, and career readiness along with short reflective questions intended to understand student concerns and development exceptions from the program. A total of 40 student responses were received for the baseline assessment. In addition to baseline format, informal interactions and discussions were conducted with students to gain deeper understanding of their learning needs, placement concerns, behavioural patterns, and professional aspirations. Inputs collected through both formal and informal methods supported the development of a more contextualised and student-centered training structure.

An endline assessment was also planned to support comparative evaluation of student progress after the intervention. However, due to declining participation and limited response submission during the later phase of the program, endline responses could not be collected for meaningful comparative analysis. Therefore, the study primarily relied on qualitative observations, reflective participation, and experiential engagement during the implementation process.

6.4. Program Structure and Session Design

The Personality Development Program was designed in a structured, sequential and result-oriented manner. Each week focused on specific development outcomes related to communication skills, confidence building, teamwork, workplace readiness, interpersonal interaction, and professional behaviour. The sessions were planned progressively so that students could gradually build self-awareness, participation confidence, communication ability, and professional understanding through continuous practice and engagement. The program

followed a participatory and experiential learning approach. Instead of relying only on lecture-based teaching, students were encouraged to actively engage in discussions, activities, simulations, and collaborative learning exercises. The sessions included:

- Formal introductions,
- Articulating thoughts in a structural manner,
- Communication exercises,
- Group discussions,
- Resume building
- Reflective discussions
- Collaborative activities
- Workplace simulations
- And mock interviews

Workplace simulation activities were used to expose students to practical decision-making situations and professional interaction patterns. Students were encouraged to actively participate, assume professional roles, work collaboratively, and apply learning in simulated workplace contexts. The program also incorporated structured learning formats, guided practice activities, student support resources, reflective home assignments and activity-based tasks to support continuous confidence building and self-development among students. These activities were intended to reinforce classroom teaching, encourage reflection and encourage continuous self-development beyond the sessions.

6.5. Data Collection and Observation

The study primarily relied on qualitative methods of data collection. Data and observations were collected through:

- Baseline assessment formats,
- Informal students interactions,
- Mid-session assessment formats,
- Session observations,
- Activity participation, reflective discussions,
- Student feedback,
- And behavioural observations during simulation exercises.

Student engagement, communication involvement, confidence levels, teamwork, participation patterns, and responsiveness during experiential activities were observed throughout the implementation process.

NATURE OF THE STUDY

The present study is exploratory, practice as well result-oriented, and intervention-based in nature. It attempts to examine the relevance and effectiveness of participatory and simulation-based Personality Development Programs in improving student engagement, experiential learning, and professional readiness among Management and Commerce students in higher education settings.

FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS

7.1. Baseline Developmental Concerns Among Students

The baseline assessment and reflective responses indicated that several students experienced challenges related to confidence, communication, and professional self-expression. Rating-based responses and written reflections suggested that many students lacked confidence in presenting themselves, expressing ideas clearly, and participating in group communication situations. Students commonly reported difficulties related to nervousness, anxiety, fumbling while speaking, lack of words during interaction, fear of judgement, and hesitation in expressing thoughts publicly. Some students also mentioned feelings of being ignored during communication, under-confidence, and becoming blank during speaking situations. The reflective responses further indicated that students expected the program to help them improve confidence, communication ability, public speaking, leadership qualities, professional self-presentation, and overall personality development. Employability and career readiness also emerged as important concerns, with some students expressing participation in the program primarily to improve job readiness and workplace communication. These observations highlighted the need for a structured, participatory, and practice-oriented Personality Development Program focused on confidence enhancement, communication involvement, interpersonal interaction, and workplace preparedness.

7.2. Week 1: Formal Introduction

The first week of the program focused on formal self-introduction and communication awareness. Early interactions and classroom activities revealed that several students were unfamiliar with the structure and expectations of formal introductions commonly required in professional and interview settings. Many students appeared more comfortable with informal self-expression but lacked clarity regarding professional self-presentation and workplace communication requirements. Structured introduction formats were provided to both undergraduate and postgraduate students to support organised and confident self-expression. Students were encouraged to prepare and present their introductions using the suggested format. As part of the activity, students were also encouraged to record self-introduction videos for communication practice and self-observation, and a few students actively participated in sharing recorded responses.

Observations during the sessions indicated that many students were unfamiliar with the structure and presentation style of formal introductions expected in professional environments. Many students initially struggled with organising thoughts, maintaining confident body language, and communicating comfortably in English during formal interaction. Students who experienced difficulty in English conversation and self-expression appeared to benefit from the guided communication formats and structured practice activities. The flexibility provided to students for gradually modifying and upgrading their interactions according to their comfort level appeared to reduce hesitation and

encourage participation. The activities also highlighted the importance of structured guidance and practice-oriented communication exercises in improving student confidence and professional self-presentation skills.

7.3. Week 2: Structured Expression of Ideas and Self-Reflection

The second phase of the program highlighted the importance of structured communication and reflective learning in improving student participation and self-expression. Observations during communication activities indicated that several students experienced difficulty in organising thoughts and expressing ideas clearly during discussions and interactive exercises.

The introduction of the PREP technique helped students understand the importance of presenting ideas in a structured and logical manner. Guided examples, classroom practice, and assignments encouraged students to communicate with greater clarity and confidence during group interaction and speaking activities.

Early reflective exercises also revealed that many students were unfamiliar with the distinction between personal strengths and professionally relevant strengths required in workplace settings. Students initially identified general personal qualities more easily than professional competencies related to communication, teamwork, leadership, or workplace behaviour. The activity appeared to increase student awareness regarding professional self-presentation and employability-related skills. A reflective feedback activity conducted at the end of the second week further encouraged students to evaluate their own performance and participation. Students identified both strengths and areas requiring improvement based on their experiences during Weeks 1 and 2 activities. The reflective process appeared to support greater self-awareness, communication consciousness, and active engagement among participating students.

7.4. Week 3: Group Discussion and Professional Communication Behaviour

The third phase of the program focused on group discussion skills and professional communication behaviour. Students were guided regarding do's and don'ts of group discussions, communication tone, body language, appropriate methods of entering discussions, and the importance of avoiding aggressive interaction patterns during professional conversations.

A structured student guide on handling group discussions was provided to support communication practice and professional interaction. Practice-based group discussions on current affairs and contemporary topics were conducted along with immediate feedback and reflective activities. Observations during this phase indicated comparatively higher enthusiasm and participation among students. Several students actively attempted to apply the communication techniques, behavioural guidance, and discussion strategies during subsequent sessions. The participatory and practice-oriented activities appeared to create a lively and interactive learning environment while supporting communication confidence and professional interaction skills.

7.5. Week 4: Resume Building and Career Awareness

The fourth phase of the program focused on resume building and career awareness. Observations during the sessions indicated that several students were unfamiliar with the distinction between a CV, resume, and a biodata, and lacked clarity regarding professional resume structure and employer expectations.

Resume-building activities revealed difficulties among students in identifying career roles, presenting relevant skills, and writing appropriate career objectives. The sessions introduced students to structured resume preparation, ATS-friendly resume practices, employer screening perspectives such as the "6-second resume review" approach, and the use of AI tools for refining resume content and professional presentation. Guided support and personalised feedback during resume preparation appeared to help students develop greater awareness regarding professional self-presentation, skill identification, career positions, and the practical use of technology for employability preparation. The activities highlighted the importance of structured career guidance and application-oriented support within personality Development Programs.

7.6. Week 5: Startup Hiring Simulation and Employability Awareness

The final phase of the program focused on applying learning from previous sessions through a workplace-oriented hiring simulation. The activity included resume shortlisting, group discussions, and panel interview exercise within a simulated startup recruitment setting. The simulation was designed to expose students to employer expectations, professional interaction, and employability related competencies through practical role-based participation. The original activity framework also intended to engage students from both the employer and applicant perspectives to encourage deeper understanding of workplace expectations and recruitment processes.

Observations during the activity suggested that simulation-based exercises created greater engagement and practical awareness regarding communication behaviour, professional presentation, and interview preparedness. The activity highlighted the importance of experiential and workplace-oriented learning approaches within the personality Development programs.

DISCUSSIONS

8.1. Need-Based nature of Intervention

The findings of the study indicate that students required support in areas related to communication confidence, professional self-presentation, structured expression of ideas, and workplace readiness. Baseline responses and classroom observations suggested that several students experienced hesitation during communication, fear of judgement, difficulty expressing thoughts clearly, and limited awareness regarding professional interaction expectations. These observations highlight the importance of need-based Personality Development Programs within higher education settings rather than generalised training approaches.

8.2. Importance of Participatory Learning Approaches

The findings suggested that participatory and employability-oriented learning approaches may contribute towards greater student engagement and professional awareness compared to traditional lecture-based methods commonly used in Personality Development Programs. Jackson et al. (2024) also highlighted the importance of structured employability-building activities within higher education settings. In the program, students appeared more actively involved during group-discussions, role plays, communication exercises,

simulations, and reflective activities. Interactive participation and collaborative learning environments appeared to reduce hesitation and encourage more active student involvement.

8.3. Role of Structured Guidance in Communication Development

An important observation emerging from the study was the effectiveness of structured guidance in supporting communication confidence and professional awareness. Activities such as formal introduction formats, PREP-based communication exercises, guided group discussion frameworks, and resume building support appeared especially useful for students who struggled with communication structure and English expression. The findings suggest that students may respond more positively when communication skills are taught through guided practice and practical frameworks rather than only theoretical explanation.

8.4. Importance of Simulation Based Learning

The simulation-oriented activities conducted during the later phase of the program reflected the value of experiential learning approaches in higher education, as students appeared more engaged during simulation-based and practice-oriented activities. Similar observations regarding experiential learning and generic skill development have been discussed by Duchatelet et al. (2024). Jha and Doshi (2025) further suggested that experiential learning approaches integrated within higher education may help address employability skill gaps and improve workplace readiness among students. Activities related to hiring simulations, group discussions, resume preparation, and interview interaction appeared to help students connect classroom learning with workplace expectations in a more practical manner. The intervention further indicated that workplace-oriented simulations may support better understanding of professional behaviour, communication expectations, and employability competencies among students.

8.5. Reflective Learning and Self-Awareness

Reflective activities conducted throughout the program appeared to encourage greater self-awareness among participants. Feedback formats, self-evaluation exercises, and guided reflection activities helped students identify strengths, weaknesses, communication gaps, and areas requiring improvement. The findings suggest that reflective learning environments may contribute positively toward confidence building, communication awareness, and professional self-development among students.

8.6. Participation Challenges in Educational Interventions

The study also reflected practical challenges associated with intervention-based programs in higher education settings, particularly in relation to participation consistency and sustained student engagement over extended durations. Variations in attendance and participation affected continuity during the later phase of the intervention. However, despite these challenges, the program demonstrated that participatory, simulation-oriented, and need-based approaches may create more meaningful and relatable learning experiences for Management and Commerce students.

8.7. Overall Implications of the Study

Overall, the study suggests that Personality Development Programs in higher education may benefit from greater integration of participatory learning, structured communication guidance, reflective practice, and workplace simulation in order to improve student engagement, professional awareness, and employability readiness.

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

The present study was exploratory and intervention-based in nature and therefore has certain limitations. The study was conducted within a limited academic setting involving Management and Commerce students of a single university, which may limit the broader generalisation of findings across different educational contexts and student groups.

Although a baseline assessment was conducted, sufficient enplane responses could not be collected due to declining participation during the later phase of the program. As a result, comparative quantitative assessment of student progress before and after the intervention could not be carried out. The findings of the study, therefore rely primarily on qualitative observations, participant interaction, reflective activities, and experiential responses observed during the implementation process. Variability in student attendance and participation levels across sessions, and engagement across sessions also influenced the continuity and uniformity of the intervention experience among participants. Since the intervention was conducted over a limited duration, long-term impact related to communication development, confidence building, and employability readiness could not be assessed within the scope of the present study. Despite these limitations, the study provides useful insights into the relevance of participatory, reflective, and simulation-based approaches within Personality Development Programs in higher education settings.

CONCLUSION

The present study explored the design and implementation of a need-based, participatory, and simulated-oriented Personality Development Program for Management and Commerce students in higher education. The findings of the study indicated that several students required support in areas related to communication confidence, professional self-presentation, structured expression of ideas, workplace interaction, and employability readiness.

The intervention suggested that participatory learning approaches such as group discussions, guided communication activities, reflective exercises, simulations, and practice-oriented tasks may create greater student engagement and involvement compared to traditional lecture-based Personality development Programs.

Structured guidance formats and experiential activities appeared particularly helpful for students who struggled with communication confidence and professional self-expression. The study also highlighted the importance of workplace-oriented learning experiences in helping students understand employer expectations, professional behaviour, and practical communication requirements. Reflective learning activities further encouraged greater self-awareness regarding strengths, weaknesses, and areas requiring improvement among participants.

Overall, the study suggests that Personality Development Programs in higher education may benefit from greater integration of participatory learning, structured communication guidance, reflective practices, and simulation-based activities in order to create more meaningful, practical, and employability-oriented learning experiences for students.

FUTURE SCOPE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Future studies may explore the implementation of participatory and simulation-based Personality Development Programs across diverse academic disciplines and institutional settings in order to examine broader applicability and contextual relevance of such interventions. The present intervention framework may also be further expanded and adapted for larger student groups to examine the scalability of structured, experiential, and workplace-oriented Personality Development Programs within higher education. Future research may incorporate longitudinal and comparative assessment methods to evaluate long-term impact related to communication confidence, professional behaviour, employability readiness, and workplace preparedness among students. There is also scope for integrating structured industry interaction, placement-oriented training, mentorship support, and technology-assisted learning tools within Personality Development Programs to strengthen practical learning and professional development outcomes.

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