



CHALLENGES FACED BY DISTANCE PROGRAMME LEARNERS FOR THEIR CAREER ADVANCEMENT IN UNITED ARAB EMIRATES.

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Abstract

Distance education has emerged as the most preferable mode of higher education for the employed adults across the world. Employed persons undergo such courses in anticipation of certain career benefits. Career advancement of employees is an important dimension of the Human Resources Practices of an organization. This study analyses the impact of distance education towards the career advancement of persons with a specific reference to the Indian expats employed in United Arab Emirates. This paper presents about challenges faced by distance programme learners in United Arab Emirates

Key words: Distance education, Career advancement, UAE.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Human Resources Management practices play a very vital role in achieving the organization's goals and maintain the competitive advantage. Human Resources Management practices refer to organizational activities directed at managing the pool of human resource and ensuring that the resources are employed towards the fulfillment of organizational goals (Schuler & Jackson 1987). The success of an organization largely depends on the intellectual development of the employees. Along with intellectual development of the knowledge worker, technical infrastructures of the organization must be ensured to enhance the effectiveness of the employee and the organization.

Schultz (1993) defined the "human capital" as a key element in improving a firm assets and employees in order to increase productive as well as sustain competitive advantage. To sustain competitiveness in the organization human capital becomes an instrument used to increase productivity. Human capitals refer to processes that relate to training, education and other professional initiatives in order to increase the levels of knowledge, skills, abilities, values, and social assets of an employee which will lead to the employee's satisfaction and performance, and eventually on a firm performance. Rastogi (2000) stated that human capital is an important input for organizations especially for employees' continuous improvement mainly on knowledge, skills, and abilities. Thus, the definition of human capital is referred to as "the knowledge, skills, competencies, and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being" (Healy, T. (2001).

OBJECTIVES

1. To analyze the association of the distance learning programmes with the socio, economic and demographic factors of the learners.
2. To identify the challenges faced by the distance programme learners in United Arab Emirates.

SIGNIFICANCE AND NEED FOR THE STUDY

Most of the expats in United Arab Emirates opt for distance learning programmes offered by the Indian universities for their career advancement. Even the deployed Human Resources from this country have to develop in right direction. Hence, there is need to assess the impact of the distance mode courses of Indian universities towards the career advancement of persons employed in United Arab Emirates.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The findings of the study will be helpful for the universities offering distance mode programmes, career guidance personnel, teachers, and Human Resources Managers in developing suitable policies for the distance learning. The findings of the study will provide useful insights in implementing modern educational technology, better course content, improving the standards of the distance mode courses by the universities in India and will be a useful base for the aspirants of distance learning programmes for selecting suitable course.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

Distance learning, like any kind of learning, can serve different ends, but distance learning appears mainly to serve those who cannot or do not want to make use of classroom teaching. Demanding professional commitments and family responsibilities of many adults often make attending a conventional, full-time, face-to-face course with fixed timetables a rather unrealistic



proposition, and the reasons why adults choose distance education are primarily "the convenience, flexibility and adaptability of this mode of education to suit individual students' needs" (Holmberg, 1989).

All learning requires a degree of motivation, self-discipline, and independence on behalf of the learner, but these aspects are arguably more pertinent in the case of distance learning, where the student is largely self-directed and unsupervised, and expected to be more autonomous. Threlkeld and Brzoska (1994) state that "maturity, high motivation levels, and self-discipline have been shown to be necessary characteristics of successful, satisfied students" (p. 53). One of the main foci of this study is what factors contribute to this notion of "successful, satisfied students."

The major objectives of Distance Education system are:

- To democratize higher education to large segments of the population, in particular the disadvantaged groups such as those living in remote and rural areas, working people, women etc.
- To provide an innovative system of university-level education which is both flexible and open in terms of methods and pace of learning; combination of courses, eligibility for enrollment, age of entry, conduct of examination and implementation of the programmes of study;

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Keegan (1990) identified five main elements of distance education viz., the separation of teacher and learner, the influence of an educational organization, the use of technical media (usually print) to unite the teacher and learner and to carry educational content, the provision of two-way communication so that the student may benefit from or even initiate dialogue, and the possibility of occasional meetings for both didactic and socialization purposes. Keegan's formulation is a useful one and one which appears to have been generally accepted by researchers.

Holmberg (1989) advocated that the reasons why adults choose distance education are primarily "the convenience, flexibility and adaptability of this mode of education to suit individual students' needs". Distance learning, like any kind of learning, can serve different ends, but distance learning appears mainly to serve those who cannot or do not want to make use of classroom teaching. Demanding professional commitments and family responsibilities of many adults often make attending a conventional, full-time, face-to-face course with fixed timetables a rather unrealistic proposition.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The requirement of a descriptive research design such as formulating the objectives, methods of data collection, sample selection, process of data collection, and application of statistical tools for the analysis etc have been discussed below.

Period of the Study

This study has been carried out between the years 2012 and 2015. Data collection phase was held between February and June, 2015.

Study Area

Indian expats in United Arab Emirates constitute nearly one-third of the population of United Arab Emirates. Thus, United Arab Emirates is a potential employer of Indian nationals. They are engaged in various levels of employment ranging from blue collar jobs to professional jobs. Many of them left their early education for various reasons. But they pursue their higher education through distance learning. As United Arab Emirates is the most potential country offering employment for more sizable number of Indians, United Arab Emirates is selected as the study area for this research. Entire geographical area of United Arab Emirates, covering all the seven emirates is selected for the study.

Sample Size

Sample is a subset with all characteristics of the population. It is a true representative of a population. The number of individuals in a sample is called the sample size. Determining the number of elements with that the detailed research study that lead to the accurate result with the limited resources is critical. This optimum number of elements in the sample is called Sample size.

Questionnaires have been mailed to 1000 selected addresses. Only 541 questionnaires have been received back. Among them, 94 questionnaires were found incomplete and not suitable for inclusion. Remaining 447 questionnaires have been used in this study. Hence the final sample size is 447 which is higher than the computed adequate sample size of 384.

Data Collection

Data collection in a research process is concerned with research design that holds the validity and reliability of the study. Documents, records and data will establish reliability of a case study (Yin. 1994).

Primary data for this study has been collected through a mailed questionnaire method using a well structured and pretested questionnaire .

Secondary data collected through extensive Literature review of relevant books, formal research thesis, journals, articles and also on-line information related to distance learning and career advancement.

Statistical Tools Applied

Statistical tools are essential for analysis and drawing conclusions. The following statistical tools and techniques were applied in this study for analyzing the data and drawing conclusions.

- Descriptive Statistics
- ANOVA
- Chi-Square

DATA ANALYSIS, RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Description of Challenges faced by the respondents

Type of Challenge	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
Work Pressure and unable to allocate time for the course work	5.03	1.790	1
High Fees and other expenses associated with the programme	4.33	1.871	2
Lack of support from the employers	3.76	1.859	3
No interaction with the Teachers and class mates	3.45	2.061	4
Long travel to attend contact Classes	3.38	1.970	5
Poor Delivery of Lectures	3.15	1.928	6
Lack of support from the colleagues and relatives	3.08	1.940	7

Source: Primary Data Collected by the Researcher.

Consolidated Results of Chi Square Test

Sl.No	Association between Impact on Distance learning Programmes with	Pearson Chi-Square	df	p value	Inference at 5% level of Significance
1	Age	12.929	9	.166	Relationship is not Significant
2	Gender	13.942	3	.003	Relationship is Significant
3	Native State	108.815	30	.000	Relationship is Significant
4	Educational Status	37.133	9	.000	Relationship is not Significant
5	Employment Status	7.755	6	.257	Relationship is Significant
6	Employment Position	51.063	15	.000	Relationship is Significant
7	Employment Sector	27.513	15	.025	Relationship is Significant
8	Monthly Income	32.248	12	.001	Relationship is Significant
9	Course of Study	265.716	33	.000	Relationship is Significant
10	University	77.081	33	.000	Relationship is Significant
11	Eligible Qualification	69.179	12	.000	Relationship is Significant

Source: Primary Data Collected by the Researcher

Analysis revealed that Age and Educational status of the respondents have no significant association with the level of Impact of Distance learning Programmes. But, Gender Native State, Employment Status, Employment Position, Employment Sector, Monthly Income, Course of Study, University of study and Eligible Qualification based on which admission was sought for the distance learning programme etc have a significant association with the level of Impact of Distance learning Programmes.

Consolidated Results of ANOVA for testing the impact of Distance Learning Programmes Against Groups of Socio Economic Variables

Socio Economic Variable	Sources of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. p
Age	Between Groups	1.410	3	.470	1.029	.380
	Within Groups	202.319	443	.457		
	Total	203.729	446			
Native State	Between Groups	15.052	10	1.505	3.478	.000
	Within Groups	188.677	436	.433		
	Total	203.729	446			
Educational Status	Between Groups	7.870	3	2.623	5.934	.001
	Within Groups	195.858	443	.442		
	Total	203.729	446			
Employment Status	Between Groups	3.508	2	1.754	3.889	.021
	Within Groups	200.221	444	.451		
	Total	203.729	446			
Employment Position	Between Groups	1.361	5	.272	.593	.705
	Within Groups	202.368	441	.459		
	Total	203.729	446			
Employment Sector	Between Groups	2.647	5	.529	1.161	.328
	Within Groups	201.082	441	.456		
	Total	203.729	446			
Monthly Income	Between Groups	3.191	4	.798	1.758	.136
	Within Groups	200.538	442	.454		
	Total	203.729	446			
Course of Study	Between Groups	11.421	11	1.038	2.349	.008
	Within Groups	192.307	435	.442		
	Total	203.729	446			
University	Between Groups	9.216	11	.838	1.874	.041
	Within Groups	194.513	435	.447		
	Total	203.729	446			
Period of Admission to the Course	Between Groups	3.343	2	1.671	3.703	.025
	Within Groups	200.386	444	.451		
	Total	203.729	446			
Period of Completing the Course	Between Groups	2.649	2	1.325	2.925	.055
	Within Groups	201.080	444	.453		
	Total	203.729	446			
Eligible Qualification	Between Groups	14.908	4	3.727	8.724	.000
	Within Groups	188.821	442	.427		
	Total	203.729	446			

Source: Primary Data Collected by the Researcher

The significance value of p decides whether the difference among the classes is significant or not. For the variables Native State, Educational Status, Employment Status, Course of Study, University, Period of Admission to the Course and Eligible Qualification for the course etc, the value of $p \leq 0.05$. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected at 5% level of significance and inferred that there is significant difference among the mean values of the classes of Native State, Educational Status,



Employment Status, Course of Study, University, Period of Admission to the Course and Eligible Qualification. Regarding the variables of Age, Employment Position, Employment Sector, Monthly Income and Period of Completing the Course, the value of $p > 0.05$ which leads to the acceptance of the null hypothesis and hence inferred that there is no significant difference among the mean values of the classes of Age, Employment Position, Employment Sector, Monthly Income and Period of Completing the Course.

SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

1. 'High Fees and other expenses associated with the programme' was one of the major challenges for the respondents. Universities may fix reasonable fees for their distance learning courses.
2. University authorities and the Ministry of Human Resources Development, Government of India may sort out the problems relating to attestation of certificates from India and from the Ministry of foreign affair of United Arab Emirates.
3. The effectiveness of career advancement of expatriates in United Arab Emirates through the distance learning programmes is only 54.1%. Hence there is a pressing need for the universities to enhance the quality of the courses in such a way that they meet the needs of potential employers.

Career advancement potential for an employee in an organization increases the employees' commitment to his job and job engagement in that organization. Human resources management theory advocates career advancement of the employees as one of the Human Resources Management Practices for sustained achievement of the organizational goals. The accelerated development of open and distance education in India has significant and far-reaching effects on general educational standards in particular and national development in general.

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