QUALITY ASSESSMENT OF DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMMES OF INDIAN UNIVERSITIES 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. Modern Human Resources management focus much on the job satisfaction , commitment and better engagement of employees of the organization so as to achieve its goal with a sustained existence. Career advancement of employees is a vital aspect of the Human resources management in a successful organization. Employees plan their career growth through pursuing higher academic courses. This paper presents about utilization of distance learning programmes of Indian universities in UAE.

Key Words: Distance Education, Carrier Advancement, UAE.

Introduction
The US Distance Learning Association defines distance learning as ''the delivery of education or training through electronically mediated instruction including satellite, video, audio, audio graphic computer, multimedia technology and learning at a distance'' (Leonard, 1996). Types of distance learning technologies include: one-way and two-way interactions using audio (e.g., audiotape, voice mail, audio conferencing), data (e.g., computer-based training, internet), video (e.g., videotapes, video messaging, two-way videos), and combinations of audio, video and data (e.g., multimedia programming, multimedia messaging) (Chute et al., 1999).

Objectives
1. To analyze the utilization of distance learning programmes of Indian Universities by expatriate community in the United Arab Emirates towards various dimensions of career growth such as higher recognition, higher salary, promotion in the present job, moving to a new job etc.
2. To assess the quality of the present distance learning programmes and to offer suggestions to improve the quality of distance education programmes of Indian Universities to be more effective for the career growth of the expat community.

Significance and Need for the Study
Many people have the opportunity to avail education by attending regular institutions. But a major proportion people are unable to attend such regular institutions due many socio economic and environmental factors. Distance learning has emerged as a blessing for such persons.

Universities in India provide various degree and post graduate courses, including technical education, through distance learning mode for the benefit of the persons in India and abroad who are unable to attend regular courses in those universities. Persons working in other countries take this opportunity to upgrade their educational qualification with the objective of attaining further promotions, better emoluments, enhanced recognitions or moving to a new job of higher position. Thus education has always been an important source of career advancement in Human Resources Management arena.

Scope of the Study
Career advancement is the expectation of every individual, whatever may be his line of employment. The present study is an investigation in to the impact of the distance learning courses offered by the Indian universities towards the career advancement of the expats in United Arab Emirates. Though people from more than 150 countries, including India, are employed in United Arab Emirates, the proportion of employees from other countries are very negligible compared to the proportion of Indian expats. Hence the present study is confined to the Indian expats only. This study will throw light on the employers' perception, utility, recognition and reputation of distance mode courses of Indian Universities with a special reference to United Arab Emirates.

Elements of Distance Education
Distance Education comprises of three major elements, Viz., the Policy, The technology and the people as presented in the

Figure:The policy relating to distance education includes the Criteria for Credit/Diploma/Degree, Courseware/Platform Standards, Intellectual Properties, Classification of Virtual Universities, People/Sociological Considerations. The technology covers WWW, Internet, Education Theory, Intelligent Methods and Software Engineering. The people include the Artist, Engineers, Administrator, Student/Customer and Education Professionals

The concept of distance education is used to denote a wide range of learning strategies, referred differently, in different countries such as under:-
1. The correspondence education (in most of countries of the world including India).
2. Home study (North America and Europe).
3. Independent Study (North America).
4. External Studies (Australia).
5. Open learning
6. Open Education
7. Off-Campus Studies (Australia)

All these nomenclatures are used to denote the concept of Online and distance education.
The major objectives of Distance Education system are:
- To provide an opportunity for up-gradation of skills and qualifications; and
- To develop education as a lifelong activity to enable persons to update their knowledge or acquire knowledge in new areas.

Review of Literature
Bates (1991) developed a model for selecting and applying technology to open and distance learning. This enables costs to be analyzed in terms of numbers of learners served, volume of activity, and costs for a particular technology, but the cost structures, enabling decision makers to assess appropriate technologies for particular target numbers of learners. On the output side, variable to be measured are accessibility factors, teaching and learning performance, levels and quality of interaction, user friendliness and speed/adaptability of the tele-learning activity.

Keegan (1996) suggested six basic defining elements of distance education. He observed that distance education is characterized by the separation of learner and tutor as opposed to face-to-face teaching, the influence of an educational organization which distinguishes distance education from private study, the use of technical media, e.g. print, audio, or website to unite tutor and learner, the provision of a two-way communication so that the student may engage in dialogue with the tutor, the possibility of occasional meetings for purposes of interaction and the self-directed nature of the learner's involvement.

Research Methodology
Research Design: The design will help perform the chosen task easily and in a systematic way:A descriptive Research Design is adopted in this study as it is concerned with describing the characteristics of a specific group of individuals, viz., the expats of Indian origin employed in United Arab Emirates.

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: 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.

Population for the study: A population is the set of all elements to be considered for the study. It is an aggregate of the objects, animate or inanimate, under study. The population may be finite or infinite. The population which is proposed to be studied is called the target population.In this study, all Indian expats employed in the country of United Arab Emirates and have completed a distance learning course offered by an Indian University constitute the population.

Data Collection and Sample size: 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. Secondary data collected through extensive Literature review of relevant books, formal research thesis, journals, articles and also on-line information related to

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distance learning and career advancement. This has helped a lot in achieving in-depth knowledge of the distance learning and career advancement to accomplish the research study.

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.

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.

- Percentages
- Frequency distributions
- Arithmetic mean
- Variance and   standard deviation
- Correlation
- Multiple regression
- **T-test**
- **Analysis of variance (ANOVA)**
- **Chi-square test**
- Factor analysis

Data Analysis, Results and Discussions
Analysis of the data on Career Advancement Benefit through Distance Learning Programmes and their Course of Study indicated that 41 (9.17%) respondents with MBA and B.Ed courses of study   have stated that the distance learning programmes were useful to get the promotion. Also, 52 (11.63%) respondents with the same courses of study have stated that the distance learning programmes were useful to get a new job in a better position. Distribution of Respondents by their Career Advancement Benefit through Distance Learning Programmes and their Course of Study is presented below

Distribution of Respondents by their Career Advancement Benefit and their Course of Study

Course of Study	No Career Advancement Benefit	To retain the existing job	To get enhanced salary	To get the promotion	To get a new job in a better position	Total
Certificate	0	4	0	0	0	4
Diploma	2	0	0	0	0	2
B.A	15	0	0	8	3	26
B.Com	25	0	4	7	20	56
BBA	5	0	0	2	0	7
B.Sc,/UG.IT	14	0	0	6	13	33
P.G Diploma	3	0	0	0	0	3
M.A	8	0	3	3	7	21
M.Com	6	0	0	0	3	9
M.Sc	4	0	0	3	0	7
B.Ed	53	29	6	9	28	125
M.B.A	70	20	8	32	24	154
Total	205	53	21	70	98	447

Source: Primary Data Collected by the Researcher

Analysis of the data on Career Advancement Benefit through Distance Learning Programmes and their University of Study indicated that 48 (10.74%) respondents studied through Annamalai University   have stated that the distance learning programmes were useful to get the promotion. Also, 69 (15.44%) respondents studied through the same university have stated that the distance learning programmes were useful to get a new job in a better position. Distribution of Respondents by their Career Advancement Benefit through Distance Learning Programmes and their University of Study is presented Distribution of Respondents by their Career Advancement Benefit and their University of Study

| University | No Career Advancement Benefit | | | | | |
	No Career Advancement Benefit	To retain the existing job	To get enhanced salary	To get the promotion	To get a new job in a better position	Total
Alagappa University	12	4	3	8	7	34
Annamalai University	123	37	11	48	69	288
Banasthali University	2	0	0	0	3	5
Calicut University	25	9	4	9	14	61
Madurai Kamaraj University	0	0	3	0	4	7
Sikkim University	3	0	0	0	0	3
IGNOU	32	0	0	1	0	33
M.G.University	0	0	0	3	0	3
University of Madras	4	0	0	0	0	4
Bharathiar University	2	1	0	1	1	5
Manonmaniam Sudaranar University	1	1	0	0	0	2
Bharathidasan University	1	1	0	0	0	2
Total	205	53	21	70	98	447

Source: Primary Data Collected by the Researcher

Quality of Course Materials
One of the important dimensions of the quality of a distance learning programmes is the high quality of the course materials. Eleven perception statements on the quality of the course materials have been included in the questionnaire on which the required data were captured on a five-point Likert summated scale. Mean score for these 11 statements have been computed which ranged between 0 and 5. These scores have been coded as, 0-1 as Very Low , 1-2 as Low, 2-3 as Moderate, 3-4 as High and 4-5 as Very High.

Analysis of data indicated that 66% of the respondents have indicated the quality of the course materials as High and another 16.8% have indicated it as Very High.

Distribution of Respondents by their Perception on Quality Course of Materials

Perception on Quality of Course Materials	Frequency	Percent
Moderate	77	17.2
High	295	66.0
Very High	75	16.8
Total	447	100.0

Source: Primary Data Collected by the Researcher

Course Infrastructure
Quality of the distance Learning Programme also depends on high access to study centres, Faculty, contact classes and many other infrastructural facilities related to the course. Analysis of data captured on 6 questions relating to the perception on infrastructural facilities revealed that 71.1% of the respondents have stated that the Quality of Course Infrastructure is High and 12.8% have stated it as Very High.

Distribution of Respondents by their Perception on Quality of Course Infrastructure

Perception on Quality of Course Infrastructure	Frequency	Percent
Low	10	2.2
Moderate	62	13.9
High	318	71.1
Very High	57	12.8
Total	447	100.0

Source: Primary Data Collected by the Researcher

Recognition for the course

Expats in United Arab Emirates pursue higher studies in anticipation of some career advancement benefits. Courses offered by Indira Gandhi National Open University are not recognized in United Arab Emirates stating that they are under 'Open University System'. Hence it is imperative that the courses offered by a university should have a recognition and reputation among the public, more specifically, among the potential employers in UnitedArab Emirates. Data were captured on nine questions relating to the recognition of the distance learning programmes of Indian Universities. Analysis revealed that 67.8% have stated a high level and 7.8% have stated very high level of recognition for the courses.

Distribution of Respondents by their Level of Perception on Recognition for the course

Perception on Recognition	Frequency	Percent
Moderate	109	24.4
High	303	67.8
Very High	35	7.8
Total	447	100.0

Source: Primary Data Collected by the Researcher

Suggestions and Conclusion

1. About 17.2% of the respondents have indicated the quality of the course materials supplied for the distance learning programmes as moderate. The quality of the course materials have to be improved by universities offering the distance learning programmes
2. About 16.1% of the respondents have stated that the Quality of Course Infrastructure is either moderate or low. Hence, infrastructure of the distance learning programmes in United Arab Emirates has to be improved by the authorities concerned.

Online and distance learning system has contributed a lot towards the mass reach of education which could not have been achieved through regular courses of the universities. The potential of the distance learning programmes cannot be under estimated. Specifically for the employed mass, the distance learning is the only option for pursuing higher courses without hindrance to the job they hold.

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