

A STUDY ON THE COST AND THE IMPACT OF LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE USING ONLINE LEARNING IN THE MANAGEMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

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ABSTRACT

This paper evaluates the online education programs in general and also its impact on new joiners in Information Technology (IT) sector towards learning new generic and specialised skills. Many employers prefer students who have done the course in full time mode. Resources who have passed in distance education mode are less preferred. In IT sector, employees are recruited with any basic degree with little background in computer application. The employees in the band having a work experience upto 5 years tend to improve their skills by opting for computer science/IT courses offered through distance education. Even resources who have improved their skills with additional MCA/MSc – Computer Science degree through distance education are not considered for core project activities. The paper also dwells on the cost aspects of online education. The word “online” is a new jargon in the academia and the opposite of this is “offline”. The words online and offline are borrowed from information technology sector. Ever since the universities commenced the courses it was always full time course for both undergraduate and post graduate courses. With passage of time, many universities were commenced and the educational sector was monitored by a central agency for devising the curriculum and also for recognising the degrees. The University Grants Commission came into existence and became the controlling authority for all the universities across India. Through their wide powers they even went to the extent of making the degrees defunct. Such is the command of the UGC that they started regulating the curriculum for all the courses in science, arts and humanities. When the degree becomes defunct, the employee is unable to utilise the degree for future promotion and other jobs outside the present organisation. The researcher in the present study has focused on the role of online learning and its impact on the cost. The cost factor is two fold - one for the university and other for the employee. The researcher has considered the various approving authorities that are involved and their impact on online education.

Keywords: Online, Information Technology, UGC, Curriculum, Cost factor

Introduction

The purpose of education for an individual is to acquire knowledge and grow up in their career. Education can be classified into three categories – school education, undergraduate and post graduate.

School education commences from first class to twelfth class and this forms the desideratum of education. Basic education is taught at schools and upto to the tenth standard general subjects are taught. In plus two, specialisation courses are offered to the students. It can be either science or commerce domain. Graduation courses are basically based on the domain learnt during the plus two and there are exceptions to this. Certain courses are offered to both science and commerce students. In Tamilnadu there are 12 state universities, 1 central university and 1 open university which offers arts, science and humanities courses. Apart from this, there is one university for engineering courses. There are specialised universities for teacher education, sports management, agriculture, fisheries, law, medicine and music. There are many deemed

universities across Tamilnadu. The researcher for the present study has focused on the universities offering arts, science and humanities courses.

During the 1980's distance education programs were commenced by the universities in tamilnadu in order to have a wide reach for the students. However every now and then there were hiccups in the courses offered by the universities because of UGC regulations. Subsequently there were divergent views on the validity of the distance education programs in toto. The universities continued to offer courses and for a few courses, UGC stepped in with an iron hand to derecognise them. The entire distance education program was in limbo. Distance education was considered as a boon for employed personnel to embellish their academic qualifications. Job openings in government sector preferred candidates with full time education. Hence unsuccessful candidates approached the court and the ruling went against the interest of the students. Theoretically the curriculum for full time and distance education programs are identical and

the number of papers are also similar. It is only because the program is pursued through distance mode, the students become ineligible for government jobs. The basic question that arises is why do universities continue to offer distance education programs when there is no clarity provided by the UGC and MHRD. This question is elusive and even till date there is no clear answer. During the year 2009, online programs were offered by a private institute in New Delhi for certificate programs in law. The entire course delivery and examination was made online. Subsequently there was no headway in the state universities with respect to offering online courses since the approval has to come from the UGC. The big impact of corona virus (COVID in short) made the UGC honchos to think differently. Universities were allowed to offer online courses and evaluate students through online exams without monitoring. UGC went ahead and approved online education programs on par with full time education. The stigma attached to the distant education should be removed theortially after the advent of online courses. The researcher has studied this issue and provided an insight into this aspect as well.

Statement of the Problem

The courses offered by schools and universities are based on personal classes. For distance education programs, contact classes were held to create awareness about the subjects. However after the COVID pandemic, online learning has become a norm and whether the cost of online education is comparable with full time education is to be studied in depth. Cost factors cannot be derived directly since there is a cost for both the university and the students. The university should provide a robust infrastructure to offer the online programs and the student should also have equipments to view the online programs. There seems to be a disconnect in the understanding by the university and UGC. University and UGC assumes that the student possess a smart phone which is internet enabled. But there are remote areas within Tamilnadu where internet does not work throughout the day. This misconception needs to be addressed immediately. The present study tries to

understand the high level cost involved in online learning.

Objectives of the Study

1. Evaluate the factors that contribute to the cost of online learning
2. Evaluate the satisfaction level of the employees who have undergone online learning
3. Evaluate the linguistic skills of the employees
4. Provide recommendations for improving the linguistic competence of the employees

Scope of the Study

1. The present study is focused on the courses offered by state univeristies in Chennai. The nature of online education and their impact on cost and linguistic skills of the employees who have pursued courses in distance education are evaluated.

Review of Literature

For the topic under study, there are no direct literature which can be sighted. Online education became a normal part of curriculum. However the opinion of the experts are divided as to the effectiveness of the delivery. The researcher's main focus is on cost factor. Studies related to the cost were carried out with respect to the utility of management systems and other areas. But the cost factor of online learning has emerged just now and it needs to be understood before a cost model can be evolved. Basic assumptions in this area can be based on availability of internet with appropriate bandwidth, equipment to view the course, download and read the course material. This leads us to major cost factors that are involved: Cost for internet and cost for equipment to view and download the course material. Based on the available literature the cost of minimum bandwidth works out to Rs.999 per month and the cost of laptop or a smartphone with a basic configuration is Rs.20,000/- which is a fixed investment. A normal student should invest around Rs.21,000/- to attend an online program.

Research Methodology

1. The study has been carried out in state universities in Chennai and the researcher used a descriptive method. Convenience

sampling method was used by the researcher to collect data from the respondents. 40 samples were analysed from the employees working in the IT sector comprising of both male and female gender.

Data Analysis

The data obtained through the questionnaire was segregated based on gender based on a four point Likert scale and the following analysis has been carried out

- a) Percentage analysis
- b) Chi square testing

Limitatons of the Study

The study is limited to state universities in Chennai only and therefore, the findings of the study cannot be extended to other universities. Also each course has its own challenges and it will vary based on the student's understanding of the concepts. All the findings and observations made in the study are purely based on the respondents' answers which may vary across different cities within Tamilnadu

Hypothesis for the Study

1. There is no relationship between cost and online learning
2. There is no relationship between the online courses and cost

Analysis and Interpretation

Analysis based on questionnaire

Table 1

Online learning increases cost	Number of employees	Percentage %
Strongly Disagree	1	2.5
Disagree	12	30
Agree	24	60
Strongly Agree	3	7.5
Total	40	100

From the above table, it can be inferred that 60% of the respondents agree that online learning increases cost and 7.5% strongly agree about it.

Solutions to decrease the cost for the student

Table 2

Online learning increases cost	Number of employees	Percentage %
Internet subsidy	12	30
Laptop subsidy	4	10
Printed notes	6	15
Soft copy of the text book	18	45
Total	40	100

From the above table, it can be inferred that 45% of the respondents has opined that soft copy of text books to be provided and 30% has stated that subsidy on internet charges to be provided.

Impact of linguistic skills on online learning

Table 3

Impact of linguistic skills	Number of employees	Percentage %
Very High	30	75
High	8	20
Low	1	2.5
Very Low	1	2.5
Total	40	100

From the above table, it can be inferred that 75% of the respondents have stated that there is a very high impact of linguistic skills and 20% have stated that there is a high impact of linguistic skill based on online learning.

Chi-Square Test

Ho: There is no relationship between cost and online learning.

Table 4

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	208	3	69.3333	2.23656	0.22629	6.59138
Within Groups	124	4	31			
Total	332	7				

Inference

Since the calculated p value of 0.226 is greater than the level of significance of 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Ho: There is no relationship between the online courses and cost

Table 5

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	167	3	55.6667	8.90667	0.03037	6.59138
Within Groups	25	4	6.25			
Total	192	7				

Inference

Since the calculated p value of 0.030 is less than the level of significance of 0.05, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Summary and Conclusion

The study has focused on the cost factor related on line learning. Though the hypothesis related to cost and online learning is rejected, the hypothesis related to cost and online courses is accepted. Cost does not vary across the course. There is only cost applied to access the online course portal. The researcher has broken down the cost into three components. A) Fixed cost comprising the laptop or smartphone. B) Variable cost for the internet usage C) Miscellaneous cost for scanning the documents and uploading them into the portal. Combining A, B and C, theoretically online courses are costlier compared to direct mode of education for a student. Similarly for the university, they need to have a robust infrastructure to upload the course materials and download the answer books for evaluate them. Additionally if they want to monitor the students using camera during the exams, they need to invest in the infrastructure. Hence one can safely conclude that online courses increases the cost for the university also.

The next area of concern is the linguistic competence of the employees who have undergone online learning. The study has shown that their linguistic competence has been affected to a large extent. The employees

don't get opportunity to speak and interact with other colleagues (students) of their batch and thus their linguistic capability is affected. Online courses can be a method for mitigation for a short duration and it cannot be a panacea for normal mode of education. Also UGC and employers should not discriminate between normal, distance education and online courses since the curriculum and the number of papers are identical. The need of the hour is to relook at the entire educational system and not a new educational policy. The new educational system should be holistic and provide opportunities for the students to upgrade their skills and move forward in their career and should not act as a tearjerker and jeopardise their career with a stigma of derecognizing distance education/online courses. Linguistic competence plays an important role in human resources management not only in the IT sector but also in other sectors. Hence face to face learning has its own advantages over online /distance learning. At the same time, there should not be any bias towards students/employees who have undergone online/distance education courses for career progression. They should be treated on par with normal candidates and their skills should be recognized. In order to improve linguistic competence, courses on communication should be made mandatory, irrespective of the branch of study. Techniques like shorthand improves the listening skill of the students and this will improve their communication skills. Since

communication involves listening and students/employees cannot communicate if they are unable to listen properly. Similarly vocabulary management course should be taught to the students, irrespective of the branch of study. In IT sector, communication forms the fulcrum of understanding the technical requirements. Hence use of appropriate vocabulary by the human resource is important. The most often used words by employees in the IT sector are:

- a. OK
- b. Fine
- c. Will look into it
- d. Ya
- e. May be

- f. Sure
- g. Well
- h. Basically
- i. Mmm

Based on the present study the authors conclude that linguistic competence is essential for career progression in IT sector. Though there are different modes of learning, online learning can be used to refresh the memory only. Also there should not any discrimination between learning through normal mode and online/distance mode. It is not just cost versus benefit of online or normal learning. It is more to do with the recognition and approval of the courses by the authorities and employers.

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