

Evaluation of Job Placement and Satisfaction of Graduate Students of Virtual University Pakistan

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Abstract

The present study was designed to evaluate the job placement process, competition and satisfaction on part of graduate students from Virtual University of Pakistan. The study was qualitative in nature. Few research questions were framed. The sample comprised of 24 graduate students of Virtual University working on managerial posts in different multinational companies. The sample was chosen through chain sampling technique. An interview protocol was used as research tool. The data from interview protocol was analyzed through thematic analysis technique. It was found that the well groomed graduates of virtual university felt no problem in finding out their proper jobs in multinational companies. It was also found that graduates from FAST institute, LUMS University, COMSAT institute etc competed with graduates of virtual university in most of the cases. It was suggested that courses of competitive nature with respect to their usage in market may be arranged. A strong coordination among institutions of higher learning with national and multinational companies was also suggested.

Key Words: job placement, virtual university, satisfaction level, graduation, job hunting.

INTRODUCTION

As explained and defined in (Wikipedia, 2005) generally E-learning means an approach to assist and enhance learning by means of personal computers, CDROMs, and the Internet. This includes email, discussion forums, and two-way software. Advantages are seen in that just-in-time learning is possible, courses can be modified to specific needs and asynchronous learning is possible. E-learning may also be used to support distance learning through the use of WANs (Wide area networks), and may also be considered to be.

By e-learning, Wikipedia (2005) means the use of computers and internet for the sake of learning that may take a variety of ways including emails, software enabled communication that literally make it possible to have just-in-time learning. Besides internet, Wide Area Networks (WANs) may also be used for electronic form of learning.

However, there are a variety of definitions that are used to describe how information and communication is delivered using ICT infrastructure. It would be prudent to at least identify what some of these definitions and lease note that some are not just from the world of education, the corporate and business sectors also design and promote distance learning. As

education is becoming more of a commodity and streamed to resemble a corporate operation, perhaps we all can learn something from world of economics. It must be noted that it is not the intention of this paper to recommend a clear definition of e-learning since the process of defining e-learning is dependent upon the unique needs and characteristics of programs and on a larger scale universities and countries they represent. In short, e-learning descriptions will probably be similar in nature but defined differently across the Asia-Pacific region due to unique needs of programs. A few e-learning definitions are cited below which represent characteristics of education, industry, tourism, government, and service programs.

There has been a long discussion about defining e-learning across the educational, economic and business worlds. The term has been widely adopted to suit the specific needs depending upon the geographical location and the nature of business. Education has become more a matter of earning money and online, there are wide available resources that provide the facility of teaching even across continents ensuring the degrees and diplomas. Clear cut definition is, however, not the aim of this paper. In fact, it is up to the kind of educational setting where the type of e-learning is introduced. Some of the definitions which is Asia-Pacific based, are given in the following lines.

1. Learning that is accomplished over the Internet, a computer network, via CD-ROM, interactive TV, or satellite broadcast.
2. Self-paced, interactive training programs produced on CD or the Web that contain multimedia elements (ie, sound, video, animations) and automated test questions that provide instant feedback to the trainee.
3. The process of learning via computers over the Internet and intranets. Also referred to as Web based training, online learning, distributed learning, or technology for learning.
4. Any technologically mediated learning using computers whether from a distance or in face to face classroom setting.
5. A process that facilitates education using a network (Internet, LAN or WAN)
6. Self-study training material that is provided electronically (typically, over the Internet).
7. Covers a wide set of applications and processes such as web-based learning, computer-based learning, virtual classrooms, and digital collaboration. It includes the delivery of content via Internet, intranet/extranet, audio and videotape, satellite, and CD-ROM. However, many organizations only consider it as a network-enabled transfer of skills and knowledge.
8. Learning that is facilitated by the use of digital tools and content. Typically, it involves some form of interactivity, which may include online interaction between the learner and their teacher or peers. This term has two different meanings. It can mean a comprehensive offer of courses and "on-the job" e-business training modules for all levels of management for the purpose of accumulating internal e-knowledge and promoting e-business-related networking and the exchange of knowhow. It can also mean learning via electronic media
9. What occurs when education and training (typically credit but also non-credit) are delivered and supported by networks such as the Internet or intranets? Learners are able to learn any time and any place. In this report, we use the terms "online learning" and "e-learning" interchangeably.

There is a range of definitions that have and are being used to address the parameters of e-learning. Corporate, primary/secondary, schools, universities, distance learning programs both, private and public, national and international organizations all have addressed their unique and individualized perceptions of what and how e-learning can be utilized to effective

change. The salient point is the question of how your program will define, design, and sustain your e-learning programs to meet the unique and individualized need of your students.

It is thus in light by now after going through these definitions, that e-learning has been taken by various bodies according to their needs and requirements like schools, universities, national level intuitions and international level cross cultural organization, corporate and the world of business etc. These establishments have applied their own view of e-learning that lead to the conclusion that students needs come first as the modern educational cry of the day is student-centered approach being adapted in every curriculum and syllabus.

According to (Bates, 2005), Globalization promotes universities in developing countries to invest heavily in the use of learning technology within their learning systems. The introduction of new learning technologies, the fast expansion of the Internet and the introduction of the World Wide Web (www) have made significant changes in education. Higher education in Pakistan has also undergone profound changes due to recent technological advancements. Whereas the quality of higher education is influenced by a number of factors including the ways learners learn by themselves. There are a number of advantages in these technologies and one of them is to offer opportunities for learners to enhance the possibilities of more individualized and self-directed learning. There is a drive for Web-based supports that have been shown to provide prospect for supporting student-centred learning modes (e.g. Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2005). (With the passage of time, universities all around the world are investing bulk in the in the practical installation of modern technologies. The globalization has resulted in a new shape of the world especially due to internet and the World Wide Web, as forwarded by Bates (2005). This international scenario left Pakistani higher education commission in order to improve the quality and quantity of higher education in the country as it has a correlation with the self-directed form of learning with the amalgamation of modern science and technology. There are other reasons for promoting the cause of using technological equipments. There are online available resources that maximize the possibilities of more and more learning resources (Dabbagh & Kitsanta, 2005).

In Pakistan, there is a growing interest in using modern technologies to facilitate the process of teaching and learning at higher education level. E-learning is being more rapidly adopted by many universities and is designed to become a larger part of the educational experience of students in years to come. A review of modern research in e-learning argues the need for a theoretical or conceptual framework that educators can use in distance education (Phipps & Merisotis, 1999). (The universities and institutions at higher education level are showing an increasing interest in the field of modern means of educating masses i.e. e-learning. The concept is a bit new by now but still a growing inclination is felt among the youth where they see a potential and kinetic benefit in using modern technologies thus enhancing the experiences of the students. As suggested by Phipps & Meristotis, (1999) that the purpose of such a review is to produce a theoretical framework where the foundation of modern distance learning education programs can be laid down.

There is a need not only for a strong theoretical and empirical research base, but also for design principles derived from theory and research (McCombs, 2000a, 2001a, 2001b). Support is growing for the design of distance education that focuses on the learner and on the best available knowledge about human learning (e.g., Bonk & Cunningham, 1998). By broadly focusing on the learner, in the process of moving dynamically from novice to expert across diverse nonlinear paths, research-validated principles are needed to understand and create learning experiences that capitalize on the richness and complexity of human learning. “That is our challenge how to design educational systems where technology is in service to, values, and supports diverse learners and learning context” (McCombs, 2000a, p. 12). Bonk and

Cunningham (1998) stress the importance of reviewing learner-centered principles, constructivism, and socio-cultural theories and applying them to the e-learning environment. Education must engage in a paradigm shift that focuses on “learners and learning” in order to meet the needs of the changing world. (McCombs (2000a, 2001a, 2001b) has stressed the importance of principles which should be based upon the theory. Two things; one the learner centeredness and the other is the best available quality of education, are the areas of main focus (e.g., Bonk & Cunningham, 1998). The kind of education which should be provided to distance learners must not be lesser in any respect from the one being achieved by the regular attendants of schools and colleges or universities. These stuff should also be rich in variety as well in quantity. McCombs (2000a, p. 12) has referred this fact or challenge being confronted by the curriculum designers is the integration of information communication technologies in education for the best possible change. He further favored the central role of students in educational system, the application of constructivism and socio-cultural theories in order to improve and integrate e-learning.

STUDENT SATISFACTION

Kotler and Clarke (1987) define satisfaction as the desirous outcome of a task or job that pleases one's esteem. Rad & Yarmohammadian (2006) defined it as the willful accomplishment which results in one's contentment. The satisfaction plays a major role in the determining the originality and accuracy of a system especially the educational system as higher the level of satisfaction the higher will be the level of students' grooming their skill development, course knowledge and mentality. According to Zeithaml (1988) satisfaction is the resultant outcome of an institution's administrative as well as educational system's coherent performance. Because the students will be more satisfied and motivated for completing their studies if the institution provides an environment which facilitates learning i.e. the institution contains proper infrastructure for educational utility accumulated with essential parameters of professional and academic development. (Rodie and Kleine 2000) posited a view that the students will be more motivated, loyal and good performers if their institution holds essential educational facilities with affective staff of teaching and training.

(Satisfaction is the pleasure of one's esteem as defined by Kotler and Clarke (1987). On the other hand Rad & Yarmohammadian (2006), satisfaction is self-contained mode of head and heart. In educational context, the success of an educational system depends largely upon the satisfaction being derived by the students learning in it. In fact, the more satisfied and contented the students feel, the better they perform. Zeithaml (1988) supports the combination of administration and education side by side. It means that both the members of administrative staff as well as the educational staff should work in collaboration within the environment of cooperation rich with the spirit of teamwork. The students will learn more in learning friendly environment. Rodie and Kleine (2000) links motivation on the part of the students with the facilities available at the school building and the kind of teaching environment they provide.)

The teachers' performance in the class and outside the class is a significant feature of enhancing students' impartiality, motivation and satisfaction. According to Wachtel, (1998) the students' rate their course instructors' performance and his methodology of teaching as the prime indicators in their educational development and successful completion of their studies because higher the intellectual ability of the instructor the better will be the students' evaluation (Edstrom, 2008) and consequently more will be the reliability on the teaching staff (Sproule, 2000). Teachers' ability, excellence, coordination and reasonability greatly influence students' class performance. The students are greatly influenced by the educational activities their teacher or instructor coordinates for them. Shevlin, Banyard, Davies and Griffith (2000) stated that the teachers who teach with punctuality, accuracy, reasonability and logical approach in a student friendly manner are more popular. (Elliot and Shin 2002). Because

students level of satisfaction increases by working with those course instructors and lecturers who properly handle the assignments, projects, exams and facilitate students' logical reasoning and aptitude development (Dalton & Denson 2009). (There is strong correlation between the satisfaction of the students and the performance of teachers. In fact, most of the students have pointed out the teachers; lecturers as well their way of teaching methodology have a major role in their success. They complete their studies in time because the teachers evaluate their students in a timely manner (Wachtel, 1998). Edstrom, (2008) suggested better performance depends upon the better performance of the teachers which will obviously increase the reliability of the teachers (Sproule, 2000). The really dedicated teachers can influence the life of the students in the classroom as well as outside the classrooms. It is established truth that the students perform in a better way when they are taught and trained by excellent teachers. Teachers are popular among students who teach with logic and accuracy (Shevlin, Banyard, Davies and Griffith, 2000). The lecturers, who teach enthusiastically, checking the assigned work of the students, and doing other duties like handling projects and facilitating the students, are actually the sources of the students' satisfaction (Dalton & Denson, 2009).

PERCEIVED SERVICE QUALITY

The perceived quality is defined as the ones' justification about the excellence of a product or service (Zammuto et al. 1996). According to Dyson et al., 1996 the service quality is so called the better and standardized output delivered by a service. The service quality in the educational sector particularly in the higher educational institutions is the fundamental aspect of educational excellence. According to (Alridge and Rowley, 2001) when students perceive the institution's quality and standardized learning environment facilitated with intellectual faculty, appropriate facilities of learning and infrastructure, their interest in their organization will explicitly be retained. The students are motivated from the academic as well as the administrative efficiency of their institution. (Zammuto et al., (1996) defined 'perceived quality' as the justification on the part of the consumer about the adequacy and excellence of a product or service. The standards provided by the service or product signify the service quality (Dyson et al., 1996). As far as the service quality in education sector is concerned, that largely depends upon educational excellence particularly at the higher education level. Altridge and Rowley (2001) positioned students' interest as directly dependent upon the quality of institution and the standardized learning environment with the best possible facilities along with the support of administrative staff.) Spooren, et. al (2007) posited a view that the organizational harmony, teachers' intellectual ability, professional development, transparency in students' evaluation, feedback and training are the important features that mentally develop the students . Students' mental development as forwarded by Spooren, et, al (2007) has a relationship with the performance of the teachers teaching at the class, harmony of the institution, feedback and training. The maintenance of other essentials of quality service in education i.e. well managed and updated libraries, security systems, medical facilities, class decoration and facilitation with multimedia and sitting arrangements along with administrative staff's cooperation play a vital role in educational support and development (Dick and Basu 1994). Dick and Basu (1994) are of the view that if adequate facilities are made available to students like library services, computer labs, medical aids facilities, etc at the educational institutions to the students, will retain them in the circle. According to Soutar and McNeil (1996) both academic and administrative issues of an institution are extremely important in determining the performance of students, development of organizational image and quality assurance. The performance of the students (McNeil, 1996) and establishment of a well-reputed educational institution largely depends upon the collaborative working of both academic and administrative staff. Elliot and Shin (2002) found that the highly significant variables in the model that appear to directly impact on overall customer satisfaction with

university performance (1) Excellence of instruction in major; (2) Able to get desired classes; (3) Knowledgeable advisor; (4) Knowledgeable faculty; (5) Overall quality of instruction; (6) Tuition paid is a worthwhile investment; (7) Approachable advisor; (8) Safe and secure campus; (9) Clear and reasonable requirements for major; (10) Availability of advisor; (11) Adequate computer labs, (12) Fair and unbiased faculty and; (13) Access to information where the students also get motivated from the reliability of the facilities they are provided with, as higher the quality they perceive the higher will be their attraction and affiliation (Keller, 1993). Factors affecting costumers' satisfaction include many things like reputation of the organization, desired classrooms, knowledgeable, available and approachable advisor, quality instruction and well-educated faculty (Elliot and Shin, 2002). The availability of other academic facilities like intellectual faculty, advisors, carrier counseling department are the features that an institution needs for its students' better performance and satisfaction (Bolton and Drew 1991). The services quality is mostly recognized by the cooperation of the administrative staff well as the faculty staff with the students. Majority of the students get de-motivated if they found that the staff is not compassionate and kind. According to Hasan et. al (2008) for quality assurance an institution must train its staff members in a way that it may create a sense of facilitation by means of coordination, cooperation, compassion and empathy. Bolton and Drew (1991) thought of students' satisfaction and better performance as the outcome of facilities like advisors, career counseling and intelligent faculty. The quality in service comes from cooperative administrative and educational staff members. The morale of the students lowers down when they find staff not cooperating with them out of sympathy. Even Hasan et al, (2008) said staff must be properly trained in the areas of coordination, cooperation and team work in order to develop a student friendly environment that enhance the cause of education.

STATUS OF E-LEARNING IN PAKISTAN

According to Masood (2006), the Virtual University (VU), which is a project of the government in collaboration with the private sector, was designed on a modern platform of a Hybrid model of knowledge delivery to provide quality distance education through broadcast media and the Internet, in order to build a critical mass of ICT professionals within the country. The VU aims at bringing together scattered teaching resources on to a single platform and make it available across the country at an affordable cost. The Hybrid model of learning essentially constitutes physical classrooms and computer laboratories, lecture delivery through television broadcasts or video recordings, and student interactions with faculty members and learning resources via the Internet. The condition of e-learning in Pakistan can be guessed from the efforts being made like in the shape of Virtual University (VU) which is a combined project of government and private sectors to promote distance education via the use of technology. The main aim of this hybrid system is to provide a single platform to all the dispersed sources of learning and made them available to the students at reasonable and affordable rates. This includes the classrooms and the computer laboratories. The students use computers and internet to contact their teachers and thus get educated (Masood, 2006).

The platforms being used to impart knowledge over Internet are the Learning Management System (LMS) and the Email. Logging on to the VU-LMS provides students with access to the contents of the lectures, the assignments, Discussion Board, where students discuss their own issues amongst themselves, the Moderated Discussion Board (MDB), where asynchronous Q&A occurs between teachers and students regarding the current/last lecture, and the Graded Moderated Discussion Board (GMDB), where students are given an advance topic for discussion by the instructor (Toor, 2005). The VU is using modern technologies within its platforms. These bases are actually the Learning Management System (LMS) and emails being used for educational purposes. The system at VU-LMS provides access to the students when

they log on to it. They can get lectures, assignments and can have fruitful discussions with peer students and teachers. Another subdivision is Moderated Discussion Board (MDB) that facilitates similar questions and answers while Graded Moderated Discussion Board (GMDB) is the one where the students can get advance topics for discussion by the consultation of the instructor (Toor, 2005).

The Virtual University has been offering many professional degree offering programs on bachelor and masters level in various disciplines like Computer Science, Business Administration, Commerce, Public Administration and Psychology. Beside its degree offering programs the university also offering some diplomas and certificate courses as well. The University has been following a hybrid model of e-learning with many local campuses in many district headquarters of the country along-with T.V channels and LMS. Virtual university has in collaboration with many private institutions in different district headquarters around the country and using those as local campuses, where the student could use the internet and watch the lesson on T.V. There are many professional degree programs being offered at VU in disciplines like business administration, computer science and psychology. Some diplomas and certificate programs are also available. The VU is working in collaboration with many private institutions in various districts of the country which are used as local campuses of the university facilitating the students in getting access to the web-based resources.

A study conducted from the 431 student of Virtual University Pakistan [http://tojde.anadolu.edu.tr/tojde26/pdf/article_6.pdf] shows that 89% students agreed with the statement that that virtual education provides alternate opportunities to formal system at higher education level. Significant majority of the respondents (94%) were of the opinion that the virtual education is necessary to keep pace with the world of knowledge explosion in the field of information technology, education and training. A majority of the respondents (86%) were of the opinion that virtual education enhances the performance level of the learners. Study indicates that majority of the respondents (88%) were of the opinion that virtual education integrates nation through uniform system of higher education Similarly, 85% agreed with the statement that virtual education acts as an agent of social change promoting cross-cultural values and 94% of the students were of the opinion that cultural values can get collaboration through virtual education 85% of the respondents were of opinion that tutors give positive comments on assignments.

Resources of research upon Virtual University have produced statistics from 431 students of the system. First 89 % considered VU as a substitute opportunity for higher education while 94 % thought it important to go side by side of the world's advanced nations in important fields of development. The students' performances get better, opined by 86 % of them. The integration of higher education is thought by 88 % of the students while on the other hand 85 % deem it as an agent of social change. The 85 % of the subject favor the system due to the positive environment being developed by the staff of the Virtual University.

METHODOLOGY

The study was qualitative in nature. The major focus was to understand the phenomenon of job hunting, placement and job satisfaction level after securing a job by the graduates of Virtual University of Pakistan. Virtual University offers variety of disciplines at different levels of higher education. It was difficult for researcher to approach the graduates of different disciplines that's why only the graduates of bachelor of computer science were targeted for this study. Snowball sampling technique was applied to identify the respondents and to collect data. Interview protocol was used as a research tool. Interview protocol had two parts; the part one focused on collecting data about job hunting placement and; the part two was designed to collect data about the job satisfaction level of the respondents. The data of the study was analyzed through thematic analysis technique.

FINDINGS

a) Job Placement

Most of the respondents were of the view that they appeared before interview panels 5 to 6 times in job hunting or before joining their current job. More than 95 % of the graduates of Virtual University faced great difficulty in finding their jobs in the presence of competitors from other well known institutes and universities. There are number of opportunities for graduates of computer science from virtual university if they work hard during study. Graduates from Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), FAST University, COMSAT institute of Computer Technology and National University of Science and Technology (NUST) are the competitors in job hunting and get preference by multinational companies in private sectors.

b) Job Satisfaction

It was found that most of the graduates of Computer Sciences (CS) from virtual university spent 3 years in any organization before switching over their jobs in other organizations. Most of the graduates of CS from virtual university were serving on normal position or they could not get highly paid jobs. The graduates of CS working in public sectors work for 7 to 8 hours in a day while graduates working in private sectors work for more than 8 hours daily. The employees of public sectors had more flexible work schedule than those employees of private sectors. The salaries of graduates of CS in public sectors are less than those of graduates of CS in private sectors similarly opportunities for promotion of employees are more in private sectors than in public sectors. Most of the respondents working in public sectors were of the view that they have job security while most of the respondents working in private sectors were of the view that their job security is conditional with performance. Most of the graduates of CS from virtual university reported that in private sectors they have ample opportunities of using their skills and talent, greater opportunities of learning new skills and enjoy more support for additional relevant training and education than those who are working in public sectors.

CONCLUSIONS

It was concluded that due to weak coordination of virtual university management (administration, course developers, implementers) with different public and private sector organizations, the graduates of virtual university were facing difficulty in finding proper jobs. The other well known universities or institutes have better coordination with different sectors. The courses of well known institutes and universities are more compatible with market as compared to the courses of CS in virtual university that may bring drastic change in job selection of employers.

It was also concluded that in public sectors jobs for graduates of CS were normal or average as compared to those who were working in private sectors. The salary structure in private sectors was better for talented graduates of any university because private sectors paid for better performance. Employees of private sectors had more opportunities of promotion than those who were working in public sectors. The multinational companies tried to meet their targets and tried to hire the services of better or more competent personnels. In private sectors, the human resource management mechanisms were very strong and systematic and they provided more opportunities for employees to learn new skill, and utilized these as per the potential of the individual.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of finding and conclusions, following recommendations were made;

1. Well paid interim placement opportunities may be provided to the graduates at the end of their studies.
2. In every semester educational expo functions may be arranged so that the students and their teachers get awareness about the latest trends of the market.
3. Similar courses may be arranged to teach in virtual university
4. Strong relationship may be developed with private and government sectors organizations to create and update the service delivery in Virtual University.
5. Higher management from both private and public sector organization may be involved as resource persons of Virtual University.

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