

COVID-19 and its Impact on Quality of Work Life in the Academic Sector

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Abstract: *The whole world is facing the curse of a recent pandemic called “COVID-19 or Corona Virus”. It has been spread like a wildfire and affected the whole world very badly. India is also facing its vigorous impact and almost everyone is suffering from its effects like stress, anxiety, loneliness, mental and physical illness. Like other sectors, the impact of COVID-19 can be seen in the education industry also. It is not possible to conduct the classes in regular classrooms. The education system is disturbed in all the manners, students, teachers, and the entire stakeholder community is in dilemma for the smooth conduction of online classes. Teachers are undergoing through stress due to the various challenges caused by the recent scenario. They have a big responsibility on their shoulders to educate the students in this adverse situation with the help of online education. Teachers are working under constant pressure to adopt new ways of teaching with the use of technology and different tools to make the learning process worthwhile, which affects their quality of work - life also. This research paper will highlight the current situation of COVID-19 and its impact on QWL in the academic sector.*

Keywords: Quality of work life, academic sector, pandemic, online teaching

1. Introduction

The recent outbreak of Corona Virus or COVID-19 started in Wuhan, China in December 2019 and spread rapidly in the world. World Health Organisation (WHO) declared COVID-19 as a pandemic on March 11, 2020. People are losing their lives day by day and the whole of humanity is being stuck in an agonizing situation. To control the transition of the corona virus governments have imposed a lockdown for social distancing and now the vaccination is being done to boost the immunity. People are stuck in their homes, only essential services like medical facilities, supply of groceries, banks, etc are allowed. This situation is harming everyone, people are suffering from an increased level of stress, anxiety, loneliness, and fear when they see their loved ones dying in front of them and feeling helpless. There is an uncertainty in everyone's mind that when everything will be OK? When we will come out of this heart - wrenching situation?

Human resource is the most important asset of an organisation. The success of an enterprise depends on the efforts of employees therefore it is necessary to look after their overall satisfaction. A satisfied employee will be more motivated towards his job and will show an increased level of productivity. The growth and success of an organisation largely depend on the hard work of human resource, therefore now employers and employees understand the importance of a good working environment and HRD. The satisfaction level of employees depends on different factors like good remuneration, a healthy work environment, safety, incentives, and training programs. A balance between work life and personal life plays a very significant role in the overall satisfaction level of human resource.

At present employment is affected in all the sectors, people are losing their jobs, due to social distancing norms people are working from home. Many employees are terminated because employers are not able to pay their salary; many are

not able to continue their jobs because they are suffering from the coronavirus and because of this employees are suffering from many issues like mental and physical illness. Many employees are overburdened and they are working at less pay as organisations are trying to take work from fewer employees to cut the expenses, this creates a stressful situation for employees.

2. Literature Review

Kanagasabapathy and Arunkumar, (2020) conducted a study to investigate how teaching professionals manage their Work Life Balance in pre and post - pandemic periods. The respondents were dissatisfied with their working environment and they were receiving minimum pay from management. This research study clearly describes that in the pandemic situation quality of work life of the teaching professionals will be affected. To improve this situation interaction between authorities and teachers should be enhanced to understand Work Life Balance issues during and after pandemic periods. Teachers should be encouraged to share the difficulties faced by them and together with their superiors solution can be formulated.

Thomas K. P et al., (2020) suggested that social support is necessary for everyone during the COVID-19 scenario. Everyone around the world is affected by this situation; the educational field - education process is also at a standstill. Teachers are having stress which has affected their psychological wellbeing and total quality of work life. Educational leaders like school leaders and immediate supervisors should support teachers as the teachers are facing a lot of problems due to the current scenario. Teachers should pay attention to their psychological health and emotional well - being and must take care of their quality of work life.

Balanagalakshmi et al., (2020) conducted a study on the faculty members of private colleges in Andhra Pradesh. It is

found from the results that, there is a positive association between QWL factors and Job satisfaction. QWL can be improved by designing suitable HR policies to increase job satisfaction. Work stress can be reduced by optimising workload, fair remuneration should be provided based on their experience and work done and job security can be provided by removing contractual obligations.

H. H. D. N. P. Opatha, (2020) suggested that as coronavirus is spreading everywhere we need to ensure the safety of employees by taking some preventive actions. Employees are the lifeline of any organisation, their health is necessary to ensure smooth functioning of the organization. Preventive actions are required to control the spread of this deadly virus, employees health can be taken care of by preventive and corrective measures.

Balaram Bora, (2017) concluded that even in the Academic sector; the following 18 components are most important that play important role in the QWL of employees. They are Adequacy of resources, Adequate and fair compensation, Autonomy of work, Emotional Intelligence, Employee Attitude, Facilities, Job Challenges/ Job responsibility, Job satisfaction, Job security, Leadership styles, Nature of Work, Occupational stress, Opportunities For Growth And Advancement, Organizational commitment, Organizational culture, Relationship and cooperations, Training and Development and Work Environment.

Anindya Mallick, (2021) suggested that education institutions' should take initiatives to set up smart classrooms with the help of government programs or by institutions themselves it will be helpful in the technological innovation in the education sector. Due to COVID-19 government has imposed social distancing norms and teaching - learning is going on through online classes. Online classes require good internet connectivity and the availability of devices like laptops or smartphones, which are mostly limited to urban areas. Students living in rural areas cannot afford them therefore initiatives from education institutions and government is necessary.

Nalwade and Nikam, (2013) had studied the correlation between QWL and job satisfaction and performance. Results concluded that social integration in the work organisation has the greatest relationship with overall performance. The principal's leadership affects the total quality of the work life of teachers. Three dimensions of personality extroversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness are positively correlated with QWL.

Lokanadha Reddy. M and Mohan Reddy. P, (2010) The researchers identified that quality circles, management by objectives, suggestion system, and other forms of employees' participation in management are helpful to improve QWL. Different techniques to improve the quality of work life are job redesign, career development, flexible work schedules, job security, etc. These techniques can be helpful to any organisation to improve the quality of work life.

K. S. Sekhara Rao and et al., (2018) this research study highlight the quality of work life of University teachers

under various dimensions. Teachers of educational institutions play a very significant role in the economic growth of the nation by giving their knowledge, skills, and effort. To increase the satisfaction level of employees, organizations need to work on job designs and adopt that leadership that can motivate employees. Improved level of quality of work life leads to high job satisfaction level and it helps to reduce employee turnover.

Rashmi Chari, (2021) addressed the difficulties faced by teachers during this pandemic. Teacher's mental health and wellness are very important for quality learning, so teachers should pay attention to their health. All the stakeholders should also stand by the teachers and acknowledge their efforts. They should take some small steps to ensure the mental and physical well - being of teachers.

Rebecca Collie and Andrew Martin, (2021) when teachers perceive their school leaders as more autonomy - supportive they are able to navigate common challenges at work more effectively. Autonomy supportive leadership can be implemented by listening to teachers' needs, acknowledging and attempting to understand issues from teachers' perspectives, seeking teachers' input in decision making, etc. Social support and adaptability are highly important for teachers in this tough situation of COVID-19.

2.1 QWL and Academic Sector

Quality of Work Life refers to the favourableness or unfavourableness of a job environment for the people working in an organisation. Quality of work life not only includes job and good compensation, but also includes physical and mental health, teamwork, education, recreation and leisure time, and a friendly work environment. Quality of work life aims to the improvement in organisational performance and employee satisfaction. Employees are the most important asset of an organisation, so it is important to understand the needs of employees and develop a working environment which provides job satisfaction and help in the progress of employees and the organisation. Robbins (1989) defined Quality of work life as, "A process by which an organization responds to employee needs by developing mechanisms to allow them to share fully in making the decisions that design their lives at work". QWL is the degree to which work in an organization contributes to psychological wellbeing and material well - being of its members as defined by Harrison.

The academic sector plays an indispensable role in the development of a country and for the effective functioning of any educational institution teachers are the most important human resource. Teachers of a nation have a great responsibility on their shoulders of shaping the future of students. So, it is important to think about the well - being of teachers, their job satisfaction, total work environment, etc. If employees are satisfied with their job then there will be more productivity, a positive approach, less turnover rate, and absenteeism which will help smooth functioning and growth of the organisation. Walton (1975) proposed eight major conceptual categories of quality of work life which are as follows: 1) adequate and fair compensation, 2) safe and healthy working conditions, 3) immediate opportunity to

use and develop human capacities, 4) opportunity for continued growth and security, 5) social integration in the work organisation, 6) constitutionalism in the work organisation, 7) work and total life space and 8) social relevance of work life.

If the total quality of work life is being taken care of in the organisation then there will be more motivated and satisfied employees. Nowadays it is very difficult to make a balance between personal and professional life which creates stress among employees. Especially the female teachers have double responsibility as they manage their work and home both and sometimes they feel overburdened. Therefore the management or the head of the institutions should follow such a work culture that is beneficial for institution and employees both.

2.2 Academic sector and COVID-19

Due to the present situation employees are working from home with the increased level of workload, so it's being very difficult to identify that thin line that separates professional and personal life which leads to frustration. The total work environment of employees is affected in this pandemic as they are working from home and all the work is dependent on the use of technology, employees are working in totally new setup facing new challenges daily. Many of them are not very familiar with this 'new normal' work culture, hence they are struggling to adopt this work culture. In lack of training programs and sufficient tools, it is being difficult for employees to manage work from home efficiently and therefore they work under constant pressure.

The present tragedy of COVID-19 has upset the ongoing education system as the whole system has been transformed to conduct education. Teachers are working under pressure to adopt new ways of teaching with the use of technology and different tools to make the learning process worthwhile, which affects their quality of work life also. This prevailing situation has compelled teachers and students to commence the education process through virtual means. Due to social distancing norms, educational institutions are closed and online classes are being run to complete the syllabus, but online classes are not much successful in rural areas as they face internet connectivity issues. Online classes are most effective in urban areas, as students living in villages are not well equipped for virtual classes.

Teachers are conducting online classes on pre - determined timings; this is the only solution to continue the education process. There are many challenges faced by teachers in this process like good internet connection is required to hold the online classes but in many areas the internet speed is slow. Secondly, to conduct online classes teachers need some training as most of them are not familiar with this new virtual setup. In the classroom, teachers are able to assess the pace of learning of students directly but in an online class, they face difficulty, for online classes they need to develop some unique techniques to assess all students. Proper training is required to use different assessment techniques so that it can be easy to assess the students during online classes. Teachers should be aware of various teaching

- learning materials (TLMs) to enhance the online teaching - learning process.

During online classes, teachers are under continuous surveillance of parents and they feel stressed for being continuously observed by an unwanted intruder while using this unfamiliar source of teaching and sometimes they also face disgraceful comments for their appearance and pronunciation. Despite that teachers have been trying their best to be digitally competent and enhance their skills to provide quality education to the students. It is also challenging to engage distracted students who are also struggling with the impact of COVID-19, social distancing, the new online education system, etc. So it is necessary for teachers to empathise with the changing needs of students, respond to unexpected student behaviour and make modifications in their teaching plan as and when needed. Adaptability is very important for teachers to face this uncertain time; they should be able to adjust their emotions, action plan, and thinking process according to the demand of the prevailing situation.

3. Conclusion

Teachers provide knowledge, skills, and virtue to students. They inspire, motivate, encourage and educate students to live a successful and meaningful life as well; therefore they are considered as the backbone of society. Teachers are undergoing through stress due to the various challenges caused by COVID-19. In this difficult time, all the stakeholders should stand by side of teachers and acknowledge their efforts. The role of educational leaders like school leaders and immediate supervisors is also important for teachers' wellbeing. In recent researches, it is found that when teachers found their leaders more supportive than they navigate challenges at the workplace confidently. Educational leaders can support teachers by listening to their needs and requirement for teaching, involving them in the decision - making process, providing them adequate remuneration and job security.

Teacher self - care is very important; they should take care of their mental, physical and emotional fitness as they are supposed to do counselling of students and parents as and when required. Only a healthy mind and body can take care of others, so teachers should take some time out for them and try to refresh and rejuvenate themselves. Proper planning for providing online education should be done to strengthen the academic sector. Educational institutions with the help of the government or themselves should try to foster online education by technological innovation and improve accessibility so that each and every child can get the benefit of it.

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Author Profile



Shalini Singh is a research scholar at DDU Gorakhpur University and received B. COM and M. COM degree in Human Resource Management from the same university in 2012 and 2016 and due to her interest in teaching, she has also done B. Ed in 2014. She has 5 years of experience in the teaching field in some top schools as a teacher and an academic coordinator. She is a passionate and hard - working person and was recognised for her commendable work in her profession. While providing her service to the education sector she felt the desire to find answers to her questions related to the quality of work life of human resources, so she decided to do research and explore in the field of human resource management in the service sector (especially education

industry) and add some insights in that field. She was born in Lucknow in 1991 and spent her 7 years there, after that her family shifted to Gorakhpur city (U. P.) India. Teaching is in her blood as her mother herself is a teacher so she always strived to provide good education to her children. Shalini has two siblings and she is the eldest one, being responsible from her childhood only she always tried to explore and learn new things besides academics, in her free time she likes to do painting and read books.