WORKING PROFESSIONALS' PERCEPTION ON VIRTUAL LEARNING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN BENGALURU, INDIA

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ABSTRACT

In this growing competitive world, being a 'jack of all' is a must rather than a 'master of one'. The world has seen more drastic changes in last two decades than it has seen in hundred years prior. These super swift changes demand the working professionals to pull up their socks and be in line with the trend.

For this, the professional employees must continuously keep acquiring new skills and be in parallel with the competitive world. Good number of professional employees voluntarily pickup courses to quench their knowledge and skill thirst. And few companies provide good support to their employees in this aspect of acquiring new skills.

The primary objective of this research paper is to understand perception of working professionals on virtual learning during the Covid-19 pandemic with emphasis on flexibility, cost effectiveness, relevance to job profile, and quality of the course. Primary data was collected online, with 279 respondents from Bengaluru, India.

Understanding the perception of working professionals creates huge market opportunity for various virtual learning platforms to get better as the skilling industry is booming.

Keywords: Covid-19 Pandemic, New Skills, Perception, Virtual Learning, Working Professionals

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I. INTRODUCTION

A hundred years ago, when one person in his or her 20's, starts to work, he or she is more likely to retire from the job in their 60's from the same job profile. In case of previous generation, when one person starts from one job, he or she might change job once or twice and are most likely to be in the same stream but in the present scenario, people change job so quickly and, in some cases, the two job types are wide apart in its nature.

This is not merely because of opened opportunities but also because of increased expectations. The employers are expected to meet the required criteria as the time passes. Being stagnant will only bring risk now. This phenomenon has created huge gap between required job knowledge and employees. While some are aware of what is that they need to improve, some are not even aware of it.

This challenge, however is an opportunity for EdTech industry which is currently growing in high speed. The digital, technological revolutions which have happened in recent times has contributed to chain reactions of innovations and inventions. Probably 50 years ago no one would have thought about a learning model where teaching happens from one place and learning happens in the other part of the globe. Today it is possible only with few clicks.

Whilst E-learning is conducted for various elements like arts and crafts, schooling, tuitions and so on, working professionals have also identified e-learning as a mode to fill up the gap between the required skills and themselves.

There are number of players and plethora of courses are offered for working professionals. The courses which are offered ranges from something as simple as ethics and values to something as complex as technical studies. And the consumers of these courses range from 12 years of age to 60+ of age having work experience of more than quarter of a century.

Even though the courses are offered by number of players and in different forms, the consumption pattern is as follows.

- By an individual/self-learning
- Mandatory courses
- By the organizations

By an individual/self-learning:

When an individual picks up a course with the intensions of improving the skills, acquiring knowledge to meet or enhance one's own self is the one pattern of consumption. Freelancers, individuals looking for growth, employees who are migrating to different departments are common service seekers in this regard.

Mandatory courses:

Some job profile will have certain criteria that has to be met by the aspirant. For example, respective foreign language certificate is mandatory for those who are looking forward to work in that region. This goes on for various work profile. Even though it's a prescribed or required qualification from the organization, it is usually picked up by the individual.

By the organization:

Many organizations occasionally give opportunities to the employees to take up various courses offered by the organization. These courses are usually offered as a part of a collaboration between the service provider and the organizations. These are usually conducted to improve the efficiency of human capital and to keep the employees in the present. The organizations in this case have the opportunities to customize few courses as per the needs and provide more focused learning opportunities.

The following research is conducted to identify the various opportunities in the industry of EdTech with respect to working professionals, which can be exploited by the service providers resulting in better learning experience.

Points to note:

The e-learning oriented research-review content creating platform SkillScouter released some statistical data on 7th of May 2020 regarding the online learning statistics which gives out the idea of mammoth size and growth of the online education industry.

Some of the key points are as follows:

- By the year 2025, the e-learning market globally will hold a market of 325 million USD.
- Today, corporate training is 200-billion-dollar industry where e-learning takes up more than half of the total.
- In the past 2 decades, the growth in the industry has been whooping 900% and it still continues to grow.
- In India, the growth rate is approximately 30% annually.
- Approximately not less than 40% of the fortune 500 companies use e-learning on a regular basis and quite extensively
- As per some speculations, by the end of 2020, approximately 98% of the small business establishments will be using e-learning aspects.
- Gamification, Virtual reality and microlearning are the newest trends in the market on which service providers need to work on.

The above information is of pre pandemic studies and the current situation may vary.

II. **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:**

The primary objective of this research paper is to understand perception of working professionals on virtual learning during the Covid-19 pandemic with emphasis on flexibility, cost effectiveness, relevance to job profile, and quality of the course.

III. METHODOLOGY:

In order to achieve the objective of the study, descriptive research design is adopted. The respondents for the study were 279 working professionals, who are residents of Bengaluru city. They were given structured questionnaire through online media platforms like email, WhatsApp, Facebook. Sampling plan used for this study is convenient sampling to enable collection of data particular to the study.

IV. FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS OF THE STUDY:

1. Age group between 21 years to 30 years comprises of 87% of respondents and the remaining age groups consist of remaining 13% of respondents.

2. 59% of the respondents are performing technical jobs and remaining 41% of the respondents are performing non-technical jobs and have taken up courses in their respective dimensions.

3. 75.3% of the target respondents have 0 to 5 years of experience. 13% of the target respondents six years to ten years of experience. Around 4.7% of the respondents have more than 20 years of experience.

4. The majority of the respondents used laptops for the courses forming whooping 75.3% of the total. Surprisingly the smartphone usage is only 8.2% for these courses. As the working professionals use laptops or computers, it is common to use these gadgets only. The better user interface for these gadgets will make experience seamless for the courses.

5. The flexibility that is present is in online courses is rated as satisfactory by 41% and rated as highly satisfactory by 23.5% by the respondents. Which suggests that the service provided is in right path when it comes to flexibility.

6. A good 58% of the respondents are highly satisfied with the fee paid for the course. Only 15% of respondents are not satisfied with the cost effectiveness of the courses. The service providers have to try and keep this number small and should not allow it to grow further.

7. 61% of respondents felt the course is fully or partially relevant to the job they are performing. The other 39% of the respondents felt that the courses are not completely relevant. This is one of the key elements for the service providers to make sure that the relevancy is high.

8. 35% of the respondents are satisfied with the quality of the course and 28% of the respondents are highly satisfied with the quality of the course offered.

V. CONCLUSION:

The research has certain limitations as it was conducted during a global pandemic and the landscape will be changed to a great extent in the coming years. This, of course is a huge opportunity for the service providers who are rendering in online education, especially for working professionals.

This pandemic has resulted in unemployment, low salaries and many other challenges. Rapid enhancement of one's own skills and knowledge is the need of the hour to sustain in the industry. Nobody wants to become obsolete and upward growth is the only key to survive in the coming days.

Online courses offered will come in handy for this regard and the service providers have to come with wide spectrum of knowledge to offer to meet the expectation. While there are umpteen technical aspects to look about, this research speaks more about the perception of the learners.

The organization, learner and the service provider must work together to come up with suitable curriculum at their flexibility and that can help in creating wonders. Overall, this research shows that there are learners in workspace who have no age boundaries, designation constraints, work experience limits but are only there to learn. Currently there is scope for improvements and opportunities to exploit the available chances.

If service providers can avoid rigidity and come with easily communicable courses, and also have the good accreditations, there will be increase in number of the users, directly resulting in growth.

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