Organisational Support for Job Satisfaction of Academics in A Virtual Contexts at a Selected Institution of Higher Learning in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa

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Abstract

With increased virtualization of high education given the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) as well as in response to the Covid-19 pandemic concern has been raised over the implication of this on the job satisfaction of academics. The aim of this study was to determine the effectiveness of the support given to academics in ensuring job satisfaction of the academics working online. A quantitative methodology which was based on the collection of data using a questionnaire given to academics was adopted. The results indicated that sixty percent (60.4%) of the respondents had received some support by university management. Most support for the virtual environment was provided through workshops and training. However, the support given was not consistent with the other finding that eighty six percent (86%) of the academics had indicated that the major factor affecting their job satisfaction was connectivity and lack of cooperation of students (42.6%). It is encouraged that HEIs should strengthen their relationships and cooperation with supportive institutions for virtualisation such as ESKOM as well as the private and public community.

Keywords: *Virtualisation, organisational support, covid-19, technology, innovation.*

Introduction

Many organizational initiatives fail because they are not problem-based or are simply perceived to be irrelevant in addressing certain phenomena [1;2]. In the context of the present highly turbulent environment which was induced by the technological revolution there has been increased virtualization in higher education. Academics me caught ill prepared for the new work situations resulting in a need for support in order to maintain favourable job attitudes among them. However, the orgainisational support provided had to adequately attend to real problem areas in order to be effective. This study was formulated to consider whether organizational support provided to academics adequately attended to the right areas of concern.

This study assessed the effectiveness of organizational support in enhancing job satisfaction of academics at a selected institution of higher education from the Eastern Cape Province. Essentially the study considered if support provided to academics was addressing the major factor for job satisfaction in the virtual work academic work environment. Increased virtualization has disrupted the traditional notion of job satisfaction and there is need to explore whether support provided for the adoption of virtual systems address the right factors for job satisfaction in such context. Use of virtual technologies that are based on electronic systems (such as online learning resources, video conferencing, online tutorials, virtual meetings and virtual graduation systems) has increased in higher education and support of academics has become critical [3]. This was principally driven by the Covid-19 pandemic as well as the transition to the Fourth Industrial revolution (4IR). Whenever changes of such magnitudes are experienced, job satisfaction become an important matter. In view of this, research into the impact of virtualization on job satisfaction and the necessary support needed by academics has increased [4; 5;6]. In the education sector, the need for continued education during the lockdown which was triggered by the coronavirus led to a serious realization that virtual technologies were critical. Support for academics during the period became important to limit resistance, stress and address unpreparedness to adopt virtual technologies. This support was in the form of training programs, workshops and campaigns that were meant to increase the satisfaction of virtual work

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among jobs. This study was initiated to determine the effectiveness of the support given to academics in ensuring job satisfaction of the academics working online.

Specifically, the aim of the study was: to determine the effectiveness of the support given to academics in ensuring job satisfaction of academics working online at the selected university. Effectiveness in this analysis was considered to be the provision of the right support package or the act of providing support where it is actually needed so to create job satisfaction. In other words, effectiveness was take to be the degree to which the organizational support provided addressed the real areas. As a result, the specific objectives of the study were to: (1) determine where support was needed and (2) establish whether any support being provided addressed the correct areas. These objectives were guided by the questions: (1) what factors affect or have affected job satisfaction and work outcomes? and (2) what is your perception on the effectiveness of the support that you have received from university management when performing virtual work responsibilities?

Literature Review

To understand organizational support for job satisfaction in the context of virtualisation, the human relations school of thought on employee behaviours [7] becomes useful.[8] publication of the Hawthorne experiments, which were conducted between 1924 and 1933, became the basis for studies involving the impact of work conditions on productivity and employee satisfaction. As argued by [9], employee satisfaction occupies an important position in the human relations school of thought on organizational development and competitiveness. [10] acknowledged that job satisfaction is a multidimensional concept that has been understood from many perspectives and theories over the decades. Similarly, [11] also explain that job satisfaction is a concept that is closely related to employee motivation, which makes it difficult and complex to fully dissect. The literature distinguishes three groups of theories for job satisfaction, namely, content, process and equity theories of job satisfaction [12; 14; 13; 14].

This study is premised on observations that there is need for organizational support to academics to enhance their performance in the virtualized context of work. In defining the virtualization concept, [15] explain that virtualization in the work context describes the neglection of and shift from physical work modes to online systems, which involves the performance of tasks anywhere at any time. As an emerging concept, there are many angles from which virtualization can be analysed, including how it can be achieved and how it impacts traditional practices [15]. Virtualization has been considered in the form of various concepts that describe limited face-to-face mode in teaching and learning. [16] study considered virtual teaching in the form of digital learning. In explaining the transition to digital modes of teaching and learning, [16] explain that there is a distinction between traditional teaching and Internet-based teaching and learning. In doing so, the Internet is identified as the disruptive factor that has facilitated the shift from face-to-face physical learning to digital learning. What is clear is that virtualization is a departure from traditional forms of teaching and learning where conduct is direct and physical.

In respect of the higher education sector, [17] conceptualized virtualization in terms of the digitalization of education. On the other hand, [4] describe the concept of virtualization in terms of e-learning. To [18], virtualization has been described as remote learning to explain the physical distance between students and their teachers. Despite the myriad of terms adopted by different scholars across the globe, the concept of virtualization is explained by the shift to non-physical forms of learning and instruction. In the same manner, [19] focus on the adoption of an e-textbook or a digital learning resource to explore the transition to virtualization systems. The development of the virtualization concept can be traced within education. When considering the historical roots of higher education,[20] argue that racially-entrenched views and attitudes affected the provision of skills among Africans. In order to ensure the realization of racial justice in the education sector, digital inequalities which affect the full adoption of virtual systems, support of academics may be necessary. In many cases, previously disadvantaged groups continue to be poor digital tasks thereby requiring support. In other words, the provision of adequate support can be an essential strategy to address the historical background of higher education in South Africa where skilled personnel were expected to be of European races only. Support is necessary to ensure that the education system does

not strengthen the position and domination of those who are digitally advantaged in South African society. Job related support systems can include on-the –job training on virtualization infrastructure as will as the provision of necessary assistance for job satisfaction while performing virtual tasks. This should be considered important given the growth of virtual job tasks in the higher education system globally.

Methodology

The study was based on the positivist paradigm that there are observable patterns that can be objectively explored in respect of the support provided to academics in this virtual context. As a result, quantitative data was collected for this study using the survey method of research which relied on a questionnaire. The population comprised of 190 academic lecturers in the selected HEI while the sampling frame consisted of the 128 academic lecturers who had worked for the selected HEI for more than six months. The determination of an appropriate sample size was done using [21] formula. Despite there being many formulas and methods for the determination of sample sizes, the formula below that was used has been observed to be suitable in business and administration sciences where the study is associated with the collection of categorical data.

$n = \frac{P(100-P)Z^2}{E^2}$ (*n* represents the sample size, *p* represents the proportion of respondents possessing the required characteristic and z denotes the level of confidence level - a 95% confidence is often considered appropriate while E denotes the error - often taken as 5%). Table 1 shows the sample characteristics for the participants. The actual selection of respondents was structured across faculties in order to ensure balanced views from the respondents. In the end the number of academics who were randomly sampled to participate in the study is as provided in Table 1. The majority of the respondents were from the Faculty of Natural Sciences and that of Enginnering technology while the least were from the Faculty of Education. The academics were randomly sampled to provide the data.

Table 1: characteristics of the sample

| Faculties	Academic lecturers	Sample size
Faculty of Management Science	39	19
Faculty of Engineering and Technology	48	34
Faculty of Education	19	13
Faculty of Natural Science	56	48
Faculty of Humanities, Social Science and Law	28	14
Total	190	128

Findings and Discussion

The respondents were asked to provide the factors that affected their job satisfaction while working online and the responses were as in Table 2 and Figure 1.

Table 2: Responses to the question - Based on your experiences working online, what factors affect or have affected your job satisfaction and work outcomes?

Responses		
	N	Percentage
Connectivity	99	86.1%
Cooperation of students	49	42.6%
Too much workload	27	23.5%
Lack of knowledge of online systems	21	18.3%
The support the university gives with regards to online teaching	16	13.9%
Lack of clear direction of what needs to be done	33	28.7%

Table 1 shows that connectivity was considered the main challenge in online working. Connectivity challenges related to poor network, availability of electricity as well as internet data and bundles. Ths affected the satisfaction of the academics with virtual arrangements. Eighty six percent (86%) of the respondents indicated that connectivity was the main challenge. There was also a notable (43%) indication that cooperation of students was also a major challenge in online working. The results of Table 2 were also graphically presented as in Figure 1.
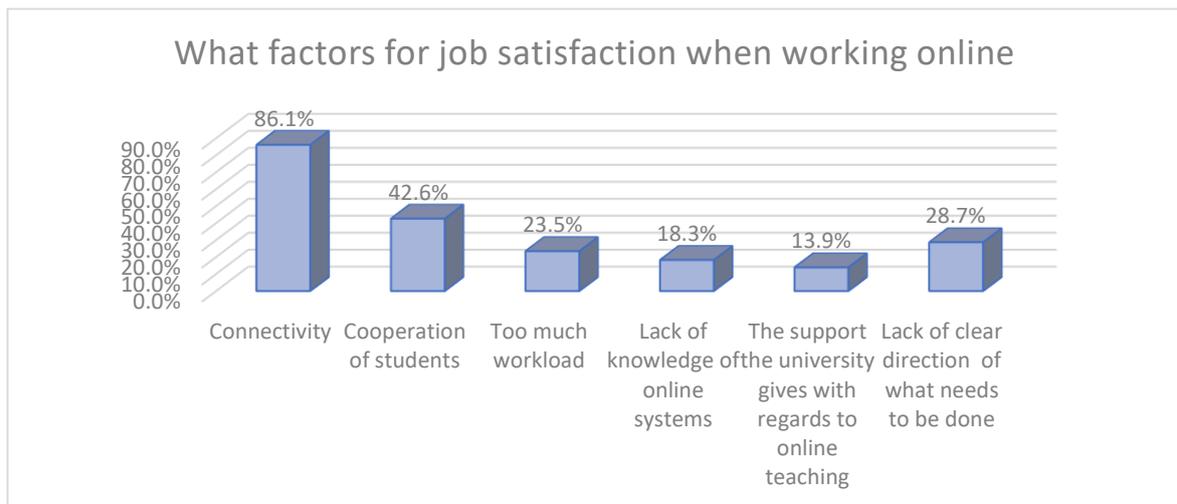
Figure 1: factors for job satisfaction in virtual contexts

The indication in Table 1 and Figure 1 was that respondents' job satisfaction and work outcomes were mostly affected by connectivity issues. Connectivity issues that were reported were likely to relate to load-shedding and network coverage. Furthermore, less than half (46.6%) of the respondents reported student-related issues such as lack of cooperation, absenteeism, and data/connectivity challenges. The study also inquired whether the respondents had the skills, knowledge and abilities to perform and compete in virtual settings and the results are as presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Possession of knowledge and skills for virtual work

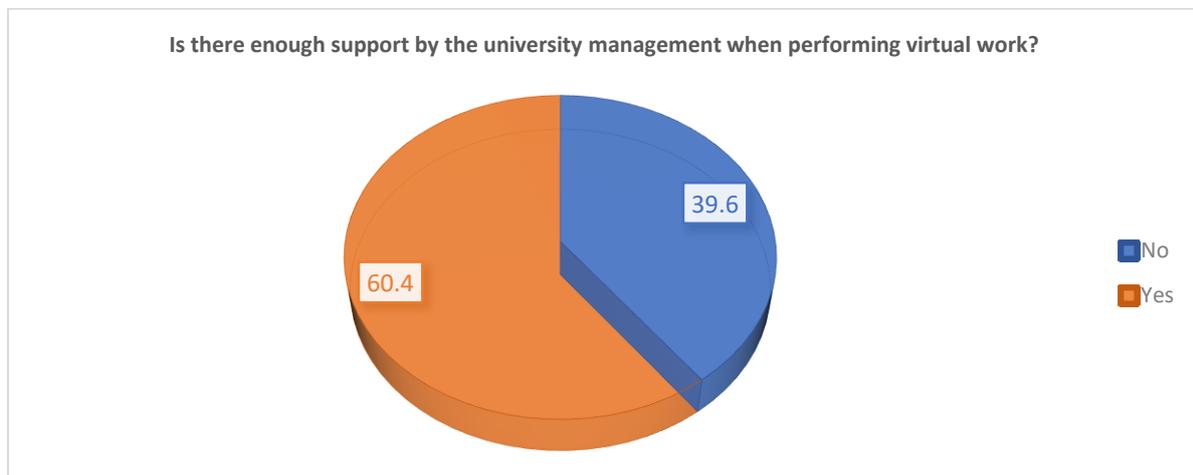| Responses		
	N	Percent of Cases
Knowledge (Basic)	4	4.2%
Knowledge (Average)	2	2.1%
Knowledge (Competent) interpretation	11	11.5%
Knowledgeable	12	12.5%
Expert knowledge	10	10.4%
Abilities/Skills (Teaching, assessing, uploading material, recording lectures,library usage, discussion forums, academic administration,research, Powerpoint presentation)	55	57.3%
Abilities/Skills (Blackboard, Moodle, Wise Up, Teams, icall)	6	6.3%

Table 3 shows that more than half of the respondents (57.3%) had abilities/skills such as teaching, assessing, uploading material, recording lectures, library usage, discussion forums, academic administration, research, and PowerPoint presentation to perform and complete virtual job responsibilities. While the respondents indicated that they had abilities and skills, they believed they lacked the knowledge (basic, average as well as expert) relating to virtual knowledge. These findings indicate a need for support in relation to connectivity issues as well as to the knowledge that related to virtual work.

Provision of support

Just as training is important, the provision of support in the performance of jobs is deemed as important for job satisfaction. As a new concept, emerging in workplaces and in the literature, the respondents required support in virtualisation. Table 4 presents responses on whether the respondents received enough support from the university when performing virtual work responsibilities.

Table 4: Responses to the question - Is there enough support from university management for academics when performing virtual work responsibilities?

	Frequency	Percentage
No	44	39.6
Yes	67	60.4
Total	111	100
Missing	4	
Total	115	

The responses provided in Table 3 were also graphically presented in Figure 2

Table 3 and Figure 2 indicate that 60.4% of the respondents believed that there is enough support by the university management for academics when performing the virtual work responsibilities. As seen in Table 4, the support is mostly given through workshop/training (LMSes).

Table 4: Nature of support provided to respondents

Responses		
	N	Percentage
Timely material provision	1	2.0%
E-learning specialist	1	2.0%
Data and Equipment provision (laptops, headphones, routers)	7	14.3%

Workshop/Training (LMSes)	29	59.2%
ICT and related support services	17	34.7%
Online Performance	1	2.0%

The results presented in this study showed that connectivity and student cooperation remained the major challenge in the virtual work environment and the university is misdirected on the nature of support that is required by the academics in the virtual environment. This is especially notable when considering that data and connectivity infrastructure (laptops, headphones or routers) amounted to on 14.3% of the support provided. To address the connectivity challenge there might be need for adequate community engagement which calls for a need to ensure that critical stakeholders such as those who have a critical role in enhancing virtualisation are incorporated. Critical stakeholders included ESKOM as the supplier of electricity, government information technology agencies and funders in both the private and the public sectors.

Conclusion

The literature provided that virtualization has changed the way work is done by academics. It has transformed the nature of assessments; the way academics interact with students, the nature of teaching and online as well as access to study materials. Lack of preparedness for the changes that occurred in the nature of work due to virtualization has created a need for support to ensure that academics remain satisfied with their jobs. Academics were affected by these changes in the nature of work thereby creating a need to explore the kind of support that they needed and whether any kind of support that they received was effectively aligned to their needs. This study found that whereas the major challenge faced by academics is connectivity and student cooperation, the support being provided to academics was not effective in addressing the real needs of the academics. There was indication that the academics received limited support on connectivity and student cooperation thereby making the support generally ineffective. Given the connectivity challenges which affected job satisfaction among the academics in this study, it is recommended that the government should instate a Connectivity Committee for high education who aim would be establish the source of connectivity challenges and find ways of improving it.

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