

Systematic Review of Human Resource Management Practices and Their Influence on the Success of Distance Education Programs in Mauritius

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Abstract: *Study examined HRM Practices and performance/success of distance education program in Mauritius. The review focuses on recruitment, training and development by synthesizing extant research to examine how these HR practices impact educator effectiveness, engagement and retention in online learning environments. The methods used a systematic search of academic databases (e.g., ScienceDirect, Scopus, Springer Link) using well-informed search terms and selection criteria to find appropriate research. The review examines the effectiveness of HR practices in improving educational outcomes, and discusses their relevance for distance education programs. Critical insights indicate that successful recruitment implies proper training followed by robust development, which together can provide the required support to educators, in turn ensuring program success; thus, underpinning HRM as a vital factor in augmenting distance education initiatives.*

Key Words: human resource management practices, distance education programs

INTRODUCTION

Distance education is the form of learning that has taken stage and rightfully so with trends moving to online and remote education throughout the globe. The growth of technology and emergence (or shift) to flexible learning demanded highly effective human resource management (HRM) practices (Kumar & Sharma, 2020). Setting up such programs successfully requires not just a strong technology scaffold, but also good educators who do it well and staff who support the program correctly. Given the importance of recruiting, training, performance management and employee engagement as enabler of high quality and sustainable programs (Louw & Müller, 2021), ensuring human resource management should be a function of all ITS improvements is imperative.

Studies carried out on HRM in educational settings have shown that there is significant relevance to aligning HR strategies with institutional objectives (Altbach & Knight, 2020),

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especially when it comes to distance education, a new complex system which have brought certain challenges like working from a distance, adapting technologically Shehab et al. Distance education is a general trend of promoting higher education expansion, especially as Mauritius has continuously been enhancing its distance programs, especially post COVID-19 (Chittoo & Bhurtun, 2021). At the end of the day, though, how well these programs work depends on the universities' ability to recruit and place high-quality educators in digital learning settings.

HRM supporting distance education is not the same old thing that HRM has done with F2F for decades. The recruitment strategies need to move beyond hiring academics who are experts in their subject matter, but also qualified and experienced online tutors (Anderson & Dron, 2019). Moreover, staff needs the competency to deliver quality education in a virtual environment via training and development programs (Palloff & Pratt, 2018).

Mauritius is emerging as an important destination for distance education and the research literature remains silent on investigating whether the HRM Practices in educational institutions are contributing towards making a difference in this ever-increasing focus (Zubair & Hassan, 2009). A systematic review is required to investigate the influence of HR strategies on the success of distance education programs in Kenya because this gap in research. This study seeks to identify best practices and offer suggestions that are likely to improve the efficiency of HRM in educational institutions in Mauritius, by reviewing available literature on HRM within the context of distance education.

Statement of the Problem

Distance education has grown into a reality worldwide and issue for all educational institutions. Universities in Mauritius have been addressing the need for flexibility by making distance education programs increasingly available, especially as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and for students looking for non-traditional study environments (Chittoo & Bhurtun, 2021). Yet, the effective utilization of this technology charged knowledge needs human resources that requires a strategic management, in a neglected subject in current literature (Altbach & Knight, 2020).

The role of human resources (HR), such as recruitment, training, and engaging employees is a vital factor in the quality and continuity of distance learning programs (Kumar & Sharma, 2020). However, schools are struggle to find and retain employees who possess the required knowledge about their subjects as well as technological literacy for carrying out online teaching (Anderson & Dron, 2019). The absence, of HR strategies tailored to overcome these barriers namely in Mauritius with its growing distance education may attenuate the possible success of such programs (Chittoo & Bhurtun, 2021).

However, research shows that with the implementation of virtual learning environments, educators will need continual professional development and training (Palloff & Pratt, 2018). Nevertheless, some study institutions simply have nothing in place to offer individualized distance education Adeira (2019) limiting HR provisioning and deployment strategies that

support educators' DLE practice readiness. The problem with this is that education administrators might provide quality distance education to answer all of these questions affecting student outcomes therefore being effective in their program.

It has, however, received little academic attention as far as HR practices and their impact on the success of such programs in Mauritius are concerned. This gap is a very serious concern because educational institutions are getting into distance education without fully addressing the human resource issues to ensure their long-term success and sustainability not only from within but also considering effectiveness (Berge & Muilenburg, 2013). It is therefore imperative to conduct a systematic review of the current literature on HRM practices and their impact on distance education to locate insights, diagnose what has been found deficiently identified, and offer suggestions for reforming HR mechanisms applied in Mauritius' distance education.

Empirical Review

Globally, the empirical literature of human resource management (HRM) practices in remote education underscores that HR strategies play an essential role for educational programs. Human Resource Management (henceforth HRM) practices like recruitment, training and development are considered significant to ensure proper execution of distance learning initiatives (Kumar & Sharma, 2020). For example, research indicates that hiring for dual expertise among teachers in content and digital technologies is a key determinant of the success of online learning initiatives (Anderson & Dron, 2019). In Mauritius, the distance education sector is still undergoing development and has its own set of challenges in terms of recruiting competent individuals to be part an emerging workforce which includes educators who are knowledgeable about online pedagogy (Chittoo & Bhurtun, 2021). This is to say that the precise approach to managing human resources of distance education programs in this context proves crucial for success.

In addition to the technological resources, one of conditional resources which are important in contribution to educatees' success or not is the competency of educators working in distance education (Kan & Ng, 2017) Educators performance within a distant educational strategy must not be ignored based on outcome -base trained and development. As Palloff and Pratt (2018) stated, "to assist the instructor to adapt to the evolving needs of online learning environments, continuous professional development becomes necessary" Teaching instructors in course development principles that affect web-based teaching strategies and how to manage an online classroom, student engagement levels, and knowledge of digital tools has been found through empirical evidence (Berge & Muilenburg, 2013) to result in effective training outcomes. As is the case within distance education environments, such as Mauritius, it appears that educator performance and quality training opportunities provided directly relate to the level of education facilitated (Louw & Muller 2021). Despite this, most of the educational organizations are facing difficulty in imparting good training and development which affects educators performance that leads to low student outcomes (Kumar & Sharma, 2020).

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Sustainable distance education programs rely on HR strategies and the motivation, engagement, and retention of staff. Institutions that employ motivational strategies e.g., based incentives, recognition programs and career advancement were found to have higher educator engagement rate and retention (Louw & Müller, 2021). Certainly, in distance education where there is often a distance between educators and colleagues, support from an HR point of view becomes a significant issue (Berge & Muilenburg, 2013). There is empirical evidence in Mauritius, which reveals the need for more focused HR strategies to retain competent educators and reduce turnover due to the fact that work in higher education institutions are important component of distance education programme continuity (Chittoo & Bhurtun, 2021). Given these results, the following sensible objectives guided the study:

- 1) the contributions of HRM practices in the proliferation of distance education in Mauritius.
- 2) the influence that recruitment and training may have on educator performance
- 3) strategies would work best at creating staff motivation and retention

METHOD

A Systematic Literature Review, known as an SLR search strategy is used to answer the research questions on human resource management (HRM) practices and the success of their implementation in distance education programs in Mauritius. The journals articles collected were analyzed in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) method. The PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) provides a standard; detailed guidelines covering the key items to include in a systematic review, such as title, abstract, methods etc, related materials with quality assessment tool are also useful by providing checklists that can be considered at different stages of methodological process (Conde et al., 2020; Moher et al. 2015).

Systematic Review Process

Identification

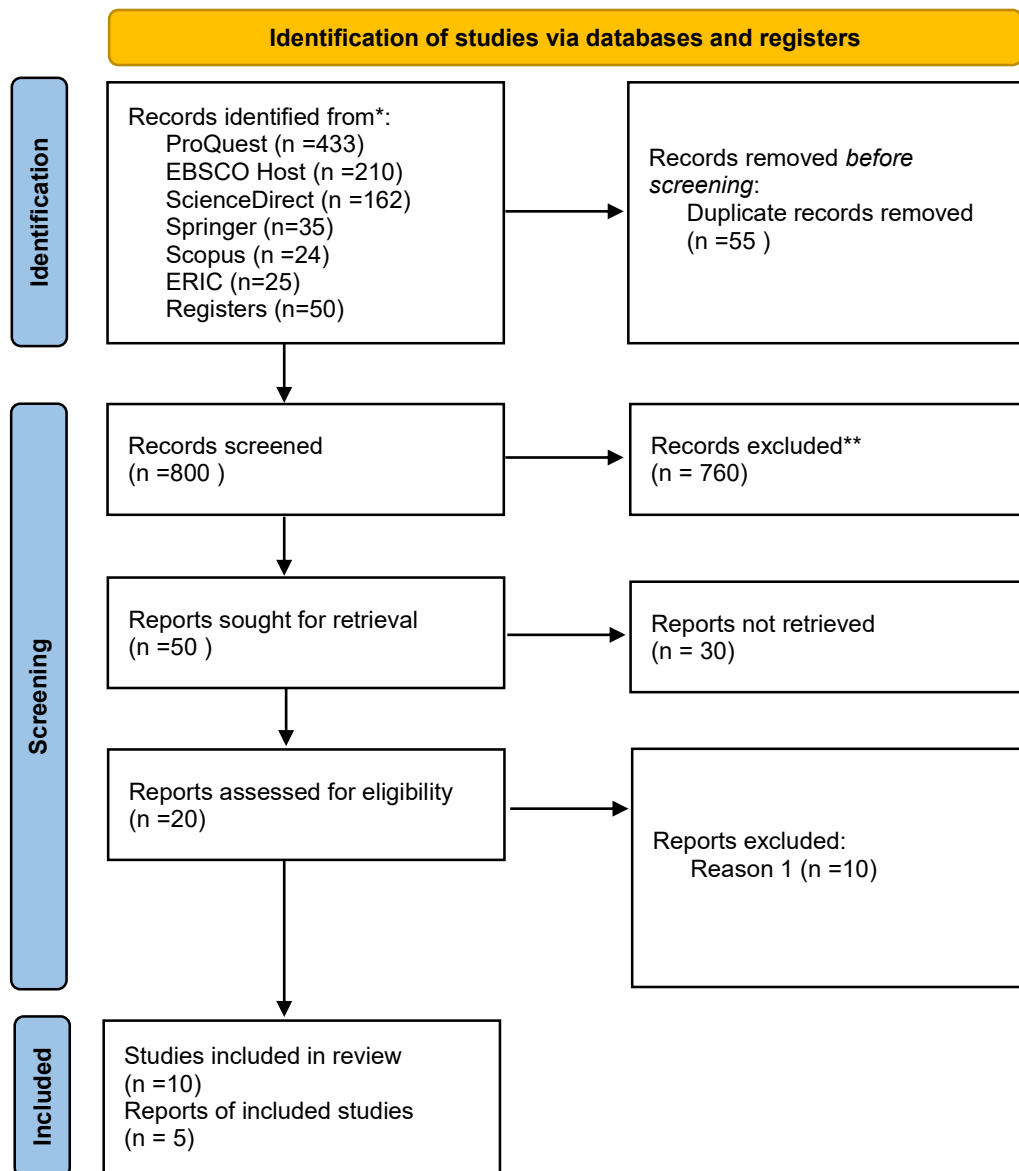
ScienceDirect, Scopus, SpringerLink, ProQuest and EBSCOHost was searched to look for the literature. Four main search terms were generated from the research questions, Human Resource Management, Distance Education, Educator Performance and Mauritius. A systematic review and synthesis of our expanded database was conducted, with all included references searched in relevant databases using a comprehensive list of synonyms and related terms. The search strategy combined keywords and phrases (e.g. TITLE-ABS-KEY, pulumi) to ensure that we captured the most relevant literature and returned 897 results across the databases mentioned. Another 30 papers were found from other sources and thus, in total, 927 journal articles remained categorised at this point.

Screening

The screening process adopted standards from the PRISMA guidelines (Moher et al., 2009), as seen in Figure 1. Articles were included in the review if they reported any research on cultural competency and mental health in higher education, limited to peer-reviewed journal articles (excluding conference proceedings, books, book chapters, and systematic reviews). It is focused on English. and trying to avoid the translation issues Because the focus of the search was current HRM practices, articles and monographs were only included if they had been published between 2010 and 2024. No geographical limitations were imposed to widen the scope of the review. After 72 duplicate studies had been excluded, the review proceeded with 855 articles.

Eligibility

Incomplete, or irrelevant articles were removed in the eligibility phase Fig 1: Meta-analysis data extraction Form Full size account Fig. 1 Quality Assessment of Included trials Full size table. In this phase a systematic review of the remaining 855 articles in their entirety including sections such as titles, abstracts, methodologies, results and discussion. Non HRM focused pieces in the distance context were also excluded submissions from any other source without associated empirical data concerning educator performance and HR strategies. Following this process, 825 articles were excluded for not meeting the criteria established by authors and there are thirty articles that met these criteria and therefore they were eligible for full review. However, after screening, 15 of those articles were considered for the final review because they met the study objectives.



DISCUSSION

What is the perspective of educators and administrators engaged in offering distance education programs at Mauritius on the role of human resource management practices in facilitating effective delivery of such programs?

The importance of human resource management (HRM) practices in underpinning successful delivery and continuity of distance education programs is recognised in the literature as a requirement for program effectiveness and enduring success. Mauritius is experiencing a growth in distance education and with its unique set of challenges that educators and

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administrators face in the online learning environment, HRM practices play an important role. Interestingly, it is reported that certain HR strategies like recruitment, training & development and employee support have important role to play in effective delivery of the distance learning (Berge & Muilenburg, 2013; Kumar & Sharma, 2020).

Singhu & Lakhman (2004) also indicate that one of the fundamentals for employing students has become effective recruitment and selection processes to ensure students have the necessary qualifications in both application subject matter expertise, as well as online pedagogy. There has been research in the area of distance education suggesting that having a right teacher who is good with technology, adapted to online teaching and learning, able to work only by telephone or via computer can make or brake delivery technology (Anderson & Dron, 2019). However, the challenges in attracting such talent remain because of scarce educators with an experience in online education at Mauritius (Chittoo & Bhurtun, 2021). HR managers have to formulate recruitment strategies that target education professionals who satisfy not only academic and but also distance education's technological and communication requirements. Moreover, HRM practices that focus on diversity in hiring have been shown to bring a wider array of skills and viewpoints, improving the quality of distance education programs (Altbach & Knight, 2020).

Training and professional development are key to enabling educators in the delivery of distance education. Human resource management (HRM) practices such as enabling continuous training on digital tool use, virtual classroom management and student engagement online have also been linked to the success of DE programmes in a number of studies (Palloff & Pratt, 2018; Kumar & Sharma, 2020). This recent move to the online mode of delivery is necessitated by the pressing need for pedagogical change, however many educators in Mauritius are still transitioning from traditional face-face classroom settings and success with this shift will to dictate largely on the value of training provided for these institutions (Chittoo & Bhurtun, 2021). In distance learning scenarios, HR departments will need to provide answers to related issues and structure professional development programs around unique requirements for educators. This should be a generic distance education course, covering not only the technical aspects but also items like helping faculty to design their courses, do various kinds of assessments and how to get students interacting with one another online. One provision associated with educator success was the continuous, high-quality professional development (Louw & Müller 2021).

In addition to recruiting and training of educators in DL programs, HRM practices supporting longitudinal support mechanisms are also pivotal for maintaining the quality of distance education. Research indicates that HR strategies, such as offering mental health services, scheduling options and professional development opportunities to support educator well-being are critically important in retaining good educators (Berge & Muilenburg, 2013). In distance education, where instructors may experience feelings of isolation, freelance content creation back burner burnout overload from an increased workload, and students need the "Turbo talker" booster; stable HR functions are essential. Related studies Gallagher, et al., (2017), Louw and Müller, (2021) show that the support of institutions reviewed in serves to sustain the

participation in distance learning programs on the part of educators. It is particularly crucial in Mauritius where the open and distance education sector is expanding and attention should be given to HRM practices that address educator well-being and retention. HR departments play a key role in addressing educator burnout and turnover by improving support and retention, reinforcing the long-term human resource required to sustain these distance education programs.

The literature suggests that HRM practices potentially significantly enhance the success of the implementation of distance education programs in Mauritius, especially as part of initiatives in recruitment and selection, performance management, training and development, and rewards and benefits systems. Strong HR strategies, in turn, support the capabilities of educators and longevity and commitment to distance education possible. Implies the need for HR departments to contribute directly to the success of distance education by providing direct and consistent support to educators and administrators.

What influence do HR practices (recruitment, hiring and development) have on educator job performance in distance education settings: A study of perceived effects by educators and their supervisors

Recruitment, training and development are major human resource management (HRM) practices influencing the performance of distance education educators. Findings from this research have implications for the performance, motivation and success of educators who work in online learning environments. Educators themselves and their leaders are aware of the significance of HR practices in improving teaching performance as well as enabling successful distance education programs (Bhuasiri et al., 2012; Palloff & Pratt, 2018).

The recruitment of educators into DE programs who have the skills and attributes required for functioning in a virtual environment is fundamental. Successful recruitment includes finding individuals that not only have strong content knowledge but also the ability to use digital tools and experience with online pedagogy. According to Richter et al. According to Al-Fadhli et al. (2011), those educators who are more tech savvy and have some experience in online pedagogy can be better equipped to conduct such virtual classrooms effectively (Al-Fadhli et al., 2011). If distance education is expanding in Mauritius, the impediment may lie in drawing those competences towards distance education because of a shallow pool of candidates having such capabilities (Chittoo & Bhurtun, 2021). Educators and supervisors alike are clear that their recruitment approaches in this distance setting should highlight suitable adaptability with technology for effective performance of educational service provision. Effective recruitment processes are associated with improved job performance and satisfaction of educators (Alonderienė & Pundzienė, 2016), which in turn contributes to success of teachers in the distance education programs.

It is difficult to ensure the skills required for successful distance education teaching are embedded in educators so training programs are essential. It is evident in the studies that effective training regarding online teaching, tools of digital world and virtual classroom management leads to maximum performance of an educator. However, Palloff and Pratt (2018)

argue that when teachers are well-educated in different areas, this gives them the skill of being able to make full use of technology for effective teaching, student involvement as well as online learning experience. In Mauritius, making up for lost teacher quality I found guidance on the importance of effective and efficient training programs in increasing educators' ability to perform and their satisfaction. As Bhuasiri and others (2012) suggest, training in technical skills as well as pedagogical strategies further prepares instructors to deliver quality instruction. Additionally, professional development continuously keep educators up to date on new teaching practices and technology (Palloff & Pratt, 2018), indicating this promotes better education. Opportunities in development are definitely a big help in improving an educator for they do continue to learn and excel throughout their career. HR best practices in this category signposts towards professional development, such as workshops, conferences and elevated training sessions. Educators who are given continual exposure to opportunities for development demonstrate a greater job satisfaction and engagement (Bhuasiri et al., 2012). Development opportunities are essential for performing at a high level in distance education settings (Harris et al., 2020), where ongoing change can be challenging such as staying abreast of new technologies and pedagogical approaches. Supervisors and instructors in Mauritius see the importance of this opportunity to instil a culture of higher education continuous quality improvement that eventually translate into better teaching practice and program success.

In distance education settings, the practices followed in Human Resource (HR) are of enormous significance in determining the performance of educators. Proper hiring ensures that educators have the necessary competencies for online teaching and continuous learning opportunities can further improve their qualifications to provide quality education through online modalities and adapt to changing needs of distance education. Both educators and supervisors had identified the importance of these HR practices in enhancing educator performance, which in turn contributes to achieving the goals of distance education programs.

What human resource strategies effectively increase staff motivation, engagement, and retention in distance education programs in Mauritius?

One of the most important strategies is human resource management (HRM), which plays a key role in motivating and engaging staff members, as well as helping to retain them, something that is especially relevant for labour-intensive or distance education programs where the nature of work provides unique challenges for potential educators. Various HR strategies in literature show how online education settings especially in Mauritius long for a motivated committed workforce. Factors that can be varied to reduce the individual-level effects on faculty satisfaction and retention include processes such as allowing flexible learning schedules, professional development (Bhuasiri et al., 2012; Harris et al., 2020) incentives based on performance, and empathy in organizational culture.

i. Opportunities for Professional Development

Providing continuous professional development is the most effective any HR strategy that can be used to encourage staff toward motivation and engagement in distance education programs. Finally, as Palloff and Pratt (2018) argue, faculty who receive training that builds on their digital literacies, pedagogy skills in a virtual environment, and content delivery show increased

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levels of job satisfaction and engagement. Given the growing use of distance learning in Mauritius, HR managers understand that it is imperative to invest in the development programmes necessary for educators cultivate capabilities enabling them to transition into online teaching environment (Chittoo & Bhurtun, 2021). While making educators in all sectors clear the competencies, will also lead directly or indirectly to motivate and retain them given such programs can add on to their professional growth.

For example, research has shown that educators who have a source of support for their professional growth are more likely to stay in the profession (Harris et al., 2020). Professional development works as a major strategy for retention in the opinion of both educators and HR managers, due to its association with continuous education and career progress on the part of teachers. This results in increased morale and retention, as employees become engaged.

ii. Performance-Based Incentives

In a distance education programme, another effective HR Strategy is performance-based incentives. Bhuasiri et al.(2012), Dal-Chin, et al. (2012) suggested that teachers are more likely truly to be motivated if performance is rewarded with bonuses, promotions or recognition which underline and say very clearly what is significant. Distance education is an environment wherein educators face challenges to interact with learners who are typically absent or difficult to see and where resource constraints constrain workloads, so incentives provide a way for staff to capture their efforts. According to Chittoo and Bhurtun (2021), HR managers of Mauritius increasingly make use of performance-based reward system to encourage educators for outstanding virtual teaching.

Performance-based incentives have also been shown to boost the levels of self-motivation and – more importantly — commitment among educators to strengthen their teaching practices, as well as happenings within school environments. Supervisors also recognize the need for identifying and promoting excellence in distance education since it contributes to a culture of transparency, responsibility, and quality. Therefore, incentives as rewards are commonly suggested to play a crucial role for maintaining high-performing teachers in distance education (Harris et al., 2020).

iii. Flexible work arrangements along with a supportive organisation culture

Another key HR strategy supporting motivation and retention are flexible work arrangements, which are indeed essential in distance education settings. Studies have indicated that greater levels of job satisfaction can be associated with schedule flexibility, ability to work remotely, and more control over one's class assignment (Palloff & Pratt, 2018). With flexible work policies adopted by HR managers in Mauritius, educators can take and adapt to distance education continued, balancing their work responsibilities with their personal obligations. Such flexibility is particularly useful in an online teaching context and given the differing requirements of students and time zones being crossed.

A supporting organizational context that underscores working collectively and mental health resources is additionally one of the primary reasons why educators do not drop-out of distance

education programs. One of the most important points to note is that their motivation relies on institutional support and distance teaching problems will disappear when teachers have proper resources against it (Louw & Müller, 2021). Through the COVID-19 pandemic, HR managers in Mauritius have found that it is important to create a culture of support and inclusion – whereby educators can work with their colleagues and tap into institutional resources when stressed and burned out. United Nations Development Programme (2020) Community Sense Human Recourses reframing in the context of construction 16 July DP 0309 [Online] <https://www.un.org/> It is important for keeping academics in distance education programs and belongs to institutional help (Chittoo & Bhurtun, 2021). Continuous professional development, performance-based incentives, flexible work arrangements, and building a supportive organizational culture were the most effective HR strategies in increasing staff motivation, engagement and retention in distance education programs in Mauritius.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review illustrates the importance of human resource management (HRM) practices for improving the performance and success of distance education programs, especially in Mauritius. Virtual learning places a premium on the use of effective HR practices to recruit, train and develop educators in order to provide high-quality instruction. One way is by building at the recruitment stage so that educators have both sufficient technical skills and pedagogical knowledge to be successful in distance education areas. In the light of current research results, high standard recruitment process which considers digital competence and skills in teaching online has been shown as prominent predictors for effective educational task accomplishment among academics involved in e-learning (Richter et al., 2011; Alonderienė & Pundzienė, 2016). In Mauritius specifically, whereas the availability of such talents are scarce and dwindling (Chittoo & Bhurtun, 2021).

As important are training programmes, which equip the educators to effectively run these online classrooms and interact with students. Studies have shown that training teachers to use digital tools and to teach online increases teacher confidence as well as how effective they believe their teaching is, which in turn leads to increased job satisfaction and performance (Palloff & Pratt, 2018; Bhuasiri et al., 2012). Continuing professional development in distance learning is crucial as it keeps educators current with technology and best practices, helping to ensure high standards for educational experiences. It also gives employees development opportunities which are relevant to their roles and future aspirations, boosting motivation, satisfaction with work, and encouraging retention by instilling a culture of lifelong learning. Providing professional growth opportunities like workshops and in-house advanced training can improve teacher job satisfaction (Harris et al., 2020). In Mauritius, the progress of distance education is supported by numerous development occasions to support educator performance and addresses the challenges that change in online teaching create (Chittoo & Bhurtun, 2021). c) HR practices in recruitment, training and development: Active implementation of standard HR practices by the university in their programs has a significant impact on the success of their distance education programs. Administrators who concentrate on these facets can improve

educator performance, reinforce program quality and establish the groundwork for long-term distance education success.

Recommendations

It made the following recommendations:

1. Hire : Uphold targeted hiring policies specifically in terms of tech-savvy and digital ready educators with the relevant experience in online pedagogical methods to better delivery distance education programs within Mauritius.
2. Train: Create complete sets of training packages in digital literacy and online pedagogy for more teacher competence to a functional level in distance learning.
3. Provide professional development and incentive structures for continuous development and enhance performance-based measures among educators focused on distant teaching.

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