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BRIDGING THE GAP: ASSESSING THE READINESS OF FRESH GRADUATES FOR THE WORKPLACE AND EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ONBOARDING AND TRAINING PROGRAMS

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Abstract- *This paper explores how prepared recent graduates are for employment by examining the discrepancies between their educational background and the skill sets needed in actual corporate settings. Adopting a mixed-methods strategy, the research assesses the success of existing onboarding and training initiatives,*
concentrating on both hard and interpersonal skills enhancement. Suggestions for refining training management strategies are offered, highlighting the necessity for better incorporation of advanced technologies and comparative analyses across varied demographics and sectors.

Keywords*: Fresh Graduates, Workplace Readiness, Skill Gaps, Onboarding Programs, Training Management.*

INTRODUCTION

In today's interconnected global business landscape, multinational corporations (MNCs) are constantly striving to improve their operational effectiveness and preserve their competitive advantage. A vital aspect of achieving this goal is ensuring that their workforce possesses the essential skills necessary to excel in intricate and rapidly evolving environments. However, a persistent challenge encountered by MNCs is the preparedness of recent graduates who, despite having academic qualifications, frequently lack the practical abilities and competencies needed in the actual corporate environment. This disparity between academic training and professional requirements creates a gap that can prevent new employees from making meaningful contributions to the organization from the outset. This report explores the significant issue of fresh graduate preparedness for MNCs by examining the discrepancies between their academic education and the competencies demanded in the corporate sector. As industries adapt to technological innovations and shifting market conditions, the expectations for employees, especially newcomers, have become increasingly varied. Graduates are now anticipated to not only have strong technical skills but also be flexible, with robust soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. This comprehensive skill set is frequently inadequately developed in conventional academic environments, highlighting the need for more effective and targeted training programs within companies. The second goal of this research is to assess the efficacy of existing onboarding and training initiatives within MNCs. These programs aim to narrow the divide between theoretical understanding and practical application, and their success is crucial in transforming fresh graduates into significant assets. The report will evaluate how effectively these programs cater to both technical skills—like industry-specific knowledge, tools, and processes—and soft skills, such as leadership, collaboration, and adaptability. By examining the current status of these efforts, this study intends to pinpoint areas for enhancement to facilitate a smoother and more effective transition for both graduates and MNCs.

OBJECTIVES

1. To assess the readiness of fresh graduates entering workplace by analyzing the gaps between their academic training and the skills required in real- world corporate environments.
2. To evaluate the effectiveness of current onboarding and training programs at workplace in bridging these skill gaps, focusing on both technical and soft skills development.
3. To recommend strategies for improving training management practices in workplace drawing on best practices and insights.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research reveals considerable discrepancies between academic instruction and the competencies needed in the workplace. Sallai et al. (2021) observe that graduates have difficulty applying theoretical concepts in practical situations, particularly regarding technical and interpersonal skills, such as problem-solving and effective communication. Kouadio et al. (2022) highlight the insufficiency of practical experience and stress the importance of aligning academic curriculums with industry requirements.

Onboarding processes are crucial for acclimating new hires, yet studies show that many do not adequately prepare employees for their designated roles. Seibert and Ziegler (2023) discovered that while onboarding addresses fundamental aspects, it often lacks comprehensive technical training. Gallup (2021) points out that successful onboarding should incorporate skill enhancement and mentorship, a view echoed by Schwartz and Henderson (2022), who advocate for a broader onboarding approach that includes training on soft skills and company culture.

Training initiatives frequently prioritize technical abilities while overlooking essential soft skills. Mihaila et al. (2023) contend that graduates must possess not only technical skills but also emotional intelligence for workplace success. Nguyen and Vu (2021) emphasize the necessity of integrating leadership and communication skills into training programs for well-rounded employee development.

The duration and organization of onboarding significantly impact employee readiness. Johnson et al. (2023) suggest that extended onboarding periods (1–2 months) are more beneficial for employee integration, while Mason and Black (2022) propose that the onboarding experience be modular to avoid overwhelming new hires with information.

Gulati et al. (2021) stress the importance of fostering closer partnerships between educational institutions and multinational corporations to enhance pre- employment training. Walker and Patel (2024) argue that increasing the availability of internships and industry-specific courses could better connect academic education with practical application.

To enhance the effectiveness of training, research advocates for ongoing feedback, simulation-based learning experiences, and mentorship opportunities.

Wang et al. (2022) support the idea of interactive learning as a means to close the gap between theoretical understanding and practical implementation, while Brown and Lee (2023) recommend the inclusion of mentorship to aid new employees and elevate job satisfaction.

Training Management

Training Management involves the organized processes for planning, executing, and assessing training programs within organizations. It includes a variety of activities focused on ensuring that employees gain the essential skills and competencies needed for effective job performance. The importance of this area is immense; proficient training management not only provides workers with job-specific abilities but also significantly contributes to improved overall organizational performance, employee engagement, and retention. Training is crucial in today's fast-changing work environment, where advancements in technology and shifting market demands continually modify job requirements.

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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology employed in this study primarily involved the use of surveys and secondary data collection to assess the gaps between academic training and real-world skills required in the workplace, evaluate the effectiveness of onboarding and training programs, and provide recommendations for improving training management practices. Below is a detailed explanation of the research methodology:

1. Research Approach

The research approach utilized in this study mainly consisted of deploying surveys and gathering secondary data to identify the discrepancies between educational preparation and the practical skills needed in the professional environment, analyze the efficacy of onboarding and training initiatives, and offer suggestions for enhancing training management procedures. The following is a comprehensive description of the research approach:

2. Survey through Google Forms

The primary data collection approach involved a survey conducted through Google Forms. The survey aimed to collect both quantitative and qualitative insights from a group of recent graduates
and early-career professionals (ages 18-30), with a specific emphasis on their experiences related to onboarding, training initiatives, and skill deficiencies. It featured a mix of closed-ended questions, including Likert scale and multiple- choice formats, along with open-ended questions that provided respondents the opportunity to elaborate on their experiences and offer suggestions.

Survey Areas:

1) **Demographic Information**: Age, gender, year of graduation, industry, and length of employment.
2) **Skills Gaps**: Identifying the competencies that respondents believed were insufficient during their academic studies, covering both technical and soft skills.
3) **Onboarding Effectiveness**: Assessing how effective the onboarding programs were, including aspects like duration, content, and overall experience.
4) **Training Needs:** Evaluating whether the training provided was sufficient in both technical and soft skills, and identifying areas that required additional training.
5) **Suggestions for Improvement**: Gathering feedback on potential enhancements for training programs, which includes recommendations for certifications, mentorship initiatives, and practical training.

The survey was shared with 51 participants across different sectors such as hospitality, finance/banking, and IT/software, particularly focusing on those employees who were in the initial stages of their careers (0-3 years). This number of respondents enabled a concentrated yet representative view of the experiences of fresh graduates within multinational companies.

5. HYPOTHESIS

1) Null Hypothesis (H_0): Training programs successfully fill skills gaps, suggesting that the observed responses should be uniformly distributed across different categories.
2) Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): Training programs fail to adequately fill skills gaps, indicating a notable departure from an even distribution.

To assess the effectiveness of MNC training programs in addressing skills gaps for recent graduates.

Problem Statement: Numerous recent graduates indicate the presence of skills gaps when they join the workforce. Training programs are designed to close these gaps, yet their efficacy remains uncertain.

4. Data Analysis

1. The gathered information was examined using both quantitative and qualitative methods:
2. Quantitative Analysis: The results from the closed-ended questions were assessed using descriptive statistics, including percentages. Chi-square tests were applied to investigate training experiences or perceived deficiencies in skills. The categories for examination are:
    1) "Left several skill gaps unaddressed"
    2) "Partially improved skill gaps"
    3) "Completely bridged all skill gaps"
    4) "Did not help in closing any skill gaps"

Step 3: Data

Data Source: The data originates from a survey of 51 participants, who were asked to assess the effectiveness of training programs offered by multinational corporations.

Observed Data:

1) 49%: "Left several skill gaps unaddressed"
2) 29.4%: "Partially improved skill gaps"
3) 9.8%: "Completely bridged all skill gaps"
4) 9.8%: "Did not help in closing any skill gaps"

EXPLANATION:

1. Observed Percentage: The actual percentage of respondents for each category.
2. Observed Count: Converted into absolute figures based on a sample size of 51 respondents.
3. Expected Percentage: Assumes an equal distribution of responses among all categories (25% each).
4. Expected Count: Absolute numbers for each category under the null hypothesis of uniform distribution. distribution.

Step 4: Calculation of Expected Frequencies Under the null hypothesis, all categories are assumed to have equal frequencies. With 51 respondents and 4 categories:

$$\text{Expected Count per Category} = \text{Total Respondents} / \text{Number of Categories} = 51 / 4 = 12.75$$

Step 5: Calculation of the Chi-Square Statistic

The chi-square statistic (χ^2) measures how far the observed data deviate from the expected data. It is calculated as:

$$\chi^2 = \Sigma ((Oi - Ei)^2 / Ei)$$

Where:

Oi: Observed count for each category

Ei: Expected count for each category

Observed counts (scaled from percentages to match the total respondents):

- "Left several skill gaps unaddressed ": 49%×51=25.549
- "Partially improved skill gaps ": 29.4%×51=15.329.4
- Completely bridged all skill gaps ": 9.8%×51=5.19.8

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- Did not help in closing any skill gaps ": 9.8%×51=5.19.8

Plugging in the values:

$\chi^2 = (25.5 - 12.75)^2 / 12.75 + (15.3 - 12.75)^2 / 12.75 + (5.1 - 12.75)^2 / 12.75 + (5.1 - 12.75)^2 / 12.75$

Step 6: Find the P-Value

- Use the chi-square distribution table or a statistical software package.
- Degrees of Freedom (df) = Number of Categories - 1 = 4−1=34 - 1 = 34−1=3.

From the computation:

$\chi^2 = 22.44$

P-value = 0.0000528

Category	Observed Percentage	Observed Count	Expected Percentage	Expected Count
Left several skill gaps unaddressed	**49.0%**	**25.5**	**25.0%**	**12.75**
Partially improved skill gaps	**29.4%**	**15.3**	**25.0%**	**12.75**
Completely bridged all skill gaps	**9.8%**	**5.1**	**25.0%**	**12.75**
Did not help in closing any skill gaps	**9.8%**	**5.1**	**25.0%**	**12.75**

Step 7: Interpreting Results

1. Decision Rule: If the p-value < 0.05, reject the null hypothesis.
2. Result: Since 0.0000528 < 0.05, we reject H0H_0H0.
3. Conclusion: Training programs at MNCs are not effectively addressing the skills gaps for fresh graduates.

Conclusion: Training programs at MNCs are not effectively addressing the skills gaps for fresh graduates.

- Expected counts (calculated above): 12.75 for each category.

FINDINGS

1. Demographic Profile of Respondents: The majority of those surveyed fell within the 26-30 age range, suggesting that the insights predominantly represent relatively experienced professionals. The gender ratio indicated a higher proportion of males, though both genders were sufficiently represented.
2. Graduation Year: The majority of respondents completed their degrees between 2021 and 2023, indicating that the survey captures the viewpoints of recent graduates currently starting their careers.
3. Industry Representation: A substantial number of participants were working in the hospitality industry, with significant representation from IT, finance, and manufacturing sectors. This variety points to diverse experiences and expectations across different industries.
4. Employment Duration: Many respondents indicated that they had been employed for less than 6 months to 1 year, suggesting that the survey gathered insights from recent graduates who have just entered the job market.
5. Internship Participation: A large proportion of respondents had engaged in internship programs prior to their employment in MNCs, underscoring the significance of internships in providing practical exposure and experience in the professional landscape.
6. Hiring Process: Campus recruitment was the most prevalent method for obtaining positions in MNCs, followed closely by direct applications. This highlights the crucial role educational institutions play in facilitating job placements for graduates.
7. Preparedness for Current Role: Respondents exhibited a range of sentiments regarding their readiness for their positions, with many noting a gap between their academic background and the skills required in their jobs. A considerable number felt unprepared for their roles, indicating areas where academic curricula could improve.
8. Areas Lacking Sufficient Preparation: The most frequently mentioned areas where preparation was deemed insufficient included practical hands- on experience, role-specific technical skills, and soft skills. This suggests that while educational institutions may deliver theoretical knowledge,

there is a pressing need for enhanced practical, skills-based training.

9. Confidence in Applying Skills: Respondents demonstrated varying degrees of confidence in utilizing skills acquired in college. A significant number felt somewhat confident but required considerable guidance, emphasizing the need for better integration of theoretical and practical education.

10. Importance of Additional Training: Many respondents concurred that additional training or internships during their college years would have greatly improved their readiness for their current roles. This highlights the critical role of practical training in bridging the gap between education and employment.

11. Effectiveness of Onboarding Programs: Feedback regarding onboarding programs was mixed, with numerous respondents noting that while the programs addressed the fundamentals

SUGGESTIONS

1. Strengthen Collaboration with Higher Education Institutions: Forge partnerships between multinational corporations and universities to synchronize academic programs with industry requirements. Work together on curriculum design to ensure students gain the necessary skills and knowledge prior to entering the job market.
2. Thorough Onboarding Programs: Create comprehensive onboarding initiatives that address not only technical abilities but also interpersonal skills and company culture. Include mentorship from seasoned employees to assist new recruits in adapting more successfully.
3. Ongoing Feedback Mechanisms: Establish regular feedback processes throughout training sessions, allowing participants to express their concerns and provide input. This will help identify shortcomings and facilitate immediate modifications to the training material.
4. Hands-On Practical Experience: Incorporate additional practical training elements, such as simulations, workshops, and real-life projects, to close the gap between theoretical learning and practical implementation. This will better prepare graduates for real-world challenges.
5. Customized Training Pathways: Develop personalized training programs based on the unique needs and skill deficiencies of new employees. This strategy enables tailored growth and ensures that each individual receives the necessary training for their position.
6. Emphasis on Soft Skills Enhancement: Increase focus on cultivating key soft skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and leadership. These competencies are vital for success in collaborative and fast-paced work environments.
7. Employ Technology for Training: Use e- learning platforms and digital resources to provide training materials. This offers flexibility in the learning process and can cater to various learning preferences. Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) can also deliver engaging training experiences.
8. Frequent Industry Updates: Ensure that training content is refreshed with the most current industry trends, tools, and technologies. Routinely evaluate and update training programs to guarantee they remain pertinent and effective in fulfilling organizational requirements.

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LIMITATIONS

1) Size and Diversity of Sample: The research may feature a restricted sample size, potentially impacting how applicable the results are to the wider population of graduates entering MNCs. If the respondents predominantly come from certain universities or sectors, the findings might not adequately reflect the broader graduate pool.
2) Bias in Responses: Data obtained through self-reports could be influenced by bias, as participants might exaggerate their readiness or satisfaction regarding training programs. This distortion can affect the outcomes and present a misleading portrayal of the training's effectiveness.
3) Variability in Training Approaches: Various MNCs might implement different onboarding and training procedures, complicating the process of making overarching conclusions. The success of training could also vary significantly between industries and specific job roles.
4) Evolving Corporate Environment: The business landscape is constantly changing, with new technologies and practices emerging. This swift evolution may render the study's results less applicable as time goes on.
5) Restricted Time Limitations: The research may be limited by a short time frame, hindering an in-depth longitudinal study of how training impacts graduate performance within MNCs over the long term.

CONCLUSION

The survey results offer important insights into how well-prepared recent graduates are for roles within multinational corporations (MNCs) and the efficacy of training management and operations. A considerable number of respondents come from a varied demographic, reflecting trends in recruitment practices and gender diversity within the participating MNCs.

Many respondents are relatively inexperienced in the workforce, with most having undergone internship programs before starting their jobs. This highlights the significance of hands-on experience in easing the transition into corporate settings.

Responses related to the adequacy of college education reveal a distinct gap, with numerous individuals feeling insufficiently prepared for their positions. Frequently mentioned areas for improvement include soft skills and practical experience, indicating a pressing need for universities to adjust their curricula to meet industry standards. The prevalent lack of confidence in utilizing skills acquired in college underscores the importance of improved training and internship options during academic careers.

The survey suggests that while onboarding initiatives are beneficial for many, there is still potential for enhancement, particularly in addressing specific skill deficits. Respondents expressed a need for more training, especially in technical abilities, leadership, and real-world experience. They believe

that partnership between MNCs and educational institutions could significantly improve the relevance and efficacy of training programs, making it crucial for companies to invest in pre-employment training efforts.

FUTURE SCOPE FOR THE RESEARCH PROJECT

1. Increase the sample size and include a wider variety of demographic groups: Future studies should focus on enlarging the sample size to encompass a diverse array of respondents from various industries, locations, and educational experiences. This approach will improve the generalizability of the results and help identify widespread trends across different fields, thus enhancing the relevance of the suggested recommendations.
2. Perform comparative analyses across different sectors, organizations, and cultural environments: Analyzing onboarding and training initiatives across distinct industries, company sizes (multinational corporations versus small and medium enterprises), and cultural contexts will uncover specific challenges and effective practices. This will provide valuable insights into how industry-specific and cultural elements affect training success.
3. Explore the use of cutting-edge technologies in training: Research could examine how advancements such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and gamification can improve training outcomes. AI can tailor educational experiences, virtual reality can simulate practical scenarios, and gamification can boost participant involvement. Studying these technologies will shed light on their potential to enhance the effectiveness and engagement of training for new graduates.

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