



A Study on Essential Aspects of Human Resource Management Curriculum in Universities: Stakeholders' Expectations

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Authors GYP and RSW designed the study. Author HBMCS performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Authors WSKF and MKVRJ managed the analyses of the study. Authors MKVRJ and WGGMJS managed the literature searches. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Selecting a specialization area is the most important and the most difficult decision that undergraduates ever made in their life. It is not only affect to their academic life but also for future personal life. There are number of specializations related to the Business Administration undergraduate degree program and Human Resource Management [1] also one of the significant area which undergraduate can select as their specialization. This paper refers to identify essential aspects of HRM to be included in the curriculum. Data collection was based on primary data which was collected through telephone interview method. The convenience sampling method was used to select eight industrial professionals and lecturers in respective area. The NVivo software have been used to analyze the data gathered from interviews. The findings of the present study suggest that modules in existing HRM undergraduate curriculum should be developed and there is a necessity of adding some new modules/ subjects/ core subjects in practical way. It was significantly identified that modern and digitalized HR practices, some practical sessions should be added to the existing HRM educational curriculum. As an implication of the study, the results will be offered as a

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guidance for the people who are engaging in HRM education system in order to understand the course content of the degree program and this concept recognized key aspects towards the high quality instruction for the development of HRM curriculum. This study recommends future researchers to increase the sample size and gather data even from HRM undergraduates rather than industrial professionals and lecturers.

Keywords: Human resource management; aspects; HR specialization; curriculum.

1. INTRODUCTION

There are thousands of people enter to the universities all over the world as undergraduates every year. Adopting to new life and taking decisions relating to academic purposes are common issues that undergraduates face. Selecting academic major is one of the most important and difficult decision in undergraduates' academic life that influence their subsequent career process. Some universities conduct interaction sessions with undergraduates, industry professionals, recruiters and professors before selecting academic major. Consequently, students have better chance to select best choice as their academic major within different sets of majors according to their ability, capacity, unique interest and needs [2].

When students considering as human resources, it may help to aware about individual choices of specialization/major to gain success over the career process by taking right decisions. According to the perception of students, there are hard- weighted courses and low- weighted courses among the academic majors. Students think that they need to dedicate more to hard weighted majors than low weighted courses. Also, they think that there is relationship between earnings and academic majors. Therefore, students choose hard weighted academic majors because they think riskier majors make better opportunities to earn more. There is a possibility to attract and motivate more students through introducing college majors which have more capacity to earn higher rates [3].

Selecting most appropriate specialization area which suits with individual capacity and other preferences is not an easy task. Sometimes it may stressful and pressurizing for students because they must pay attention for different factors before taking this life changing decision. Decision affects not only students' academic lives but also it affects to their future personal lives. Satisfaction, career opportunities, employment opportunities, continuity of

academic life, financial stability, financial status and social status include to future life. Students need to follow "Good" selection to reach better educational goals and post educational goals [4].

Most of the universities, support students to select their specialization area by providing opportunity to meet and interact with industry professionals and academic professionals in order to aware about possible majors which relate to undergraduate' ability and needs. This opportunity gives massive use of selecting best suitable specialization among different specialization areas for the undergraduates [2]. Kumaradeepan and Sivarajah [5] identified that every student used to consider about two – three other specializations besides their preferred one and give the priority for the one specialization based on structure of the course, learning materials, and good communication level of the teachers as well.

Universities are providing different kinds of degree programs and specialization areas and students can choose one of those specialization areas. HRM also one of those specialization coming under Business Administration degree programs. It can be considered as a well-recognized field in the world that provides path to achieve organizational success through creating, maintaining and improving appropriate and contended workforce. HRM mainly focuses on enhancing standards of living of the people who are engage with the organization. The problem is there are not any sets of guidelines or a sort of standards issued under University Grants Commission in Sri Lanka for Human Resource Management specialization [6,7].

When the students select their specialization or degree program, they consider some factors like quality of course content, workload, difficulty level of the subject, knowledge limit and the instructor's experience and competency [4]. Curriculum/course content is a critical aspect in students' academic success and in an academically high performing countries, comprehensiveness and content rich curriculum

consider as the common features in their students success. The purpose of this research is to identify the essential aspects of HRM to be included in the HRM educational curriculum and finally provide recommendations for universities to improve the curriculum.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Human resources can consider as crucial part of the industry whereas without an adequate, skilled and knowledgeable workforce operating within a sound Human Resource Management program, development is hard to achieve. Therefore, learning about Human Resource Management is important that it teaches how to meet business success [8].

Kumaradeepan and Sivarajah [5] revealed that the higher education background continues to develop at a rapid pace where educational institutions are under growing pressure to cater to the students' needs. Most of the students are consider about the subjects of modules when make the decision of selecting specialization. Students choose their program, of that the program offered itself with appropriate content and added value which does not depend solely on the physical aspects of the program [9].

Universities are providing different kinds of specialization areas under those degree programs. Students can choose one of those specialization areas. Human Resource Management [1], also one of those specialization coming under Business Administration degree programs. It can be considered as a well-recognized field in the world that provides path to achieve organizational success through creating, maintaining and improving appropriate and contended workforce. HRM mainly focuses on enhancing standards of living of the people who are engage with the organization [6,7].

Amstrong [10] that the practice of HRM in concerned with all aspects of how people are employed and managed in the organization. To put the concept of HRM into practice would include strategic integration, developing a coherent and consistent set of employment policies and gaining commitment. For these things, high level of determination and competence require for management through academic learning for formulating effective HR function. With the day-by-day changes in the business environment, it creates dynamic environment of HRM. HR professionals need to be prepared for such situation for challenge in

welcoming diverse changes. A well-educated and knowledgeable specialist can adapt uncontestably to those changes [11].

Educational system depends heavily on the human resources for execution of its program. Lectures or teachers are considered as critical resources for effective implementation and realization of the educational objectives and policies at the practical level of classroom. A well-developed curriculum is the greatest aid to effective learning. Therefore, the major premise of HRM in education is that the end results of educative process which will be determined by effectiveness of the learners who learning for self-actualization and national development [8].

Opatha [6,7] identified that it is imperative that HRM is taught in any education program or professional program in the field of Business Administration or Management. Developing a student to the level of a graduate in Business Administration or Management will not become complete without making the person exposed to learning of HRM. Therefore, it should be noted that explanation about why HRM needs to be learnt.

As modern Human Resource Management emphasizes the need to create positions and work tasks according to the preferences and capabilities of worker while respecting people's individually, students should learn about practical aspects for being more effective in the job market. Moreover, learning the use of newest trends in the field is important on effective leadership for future managers [12].

Opatha [6,7] stated that HRM can consider as practical field of studies which needs to develop skills in HRM with the undergraduates and consequently it should be make compulsory practical training as a major component of the degree. It's better if each student in universities and higher education institutions will be required to embark on practical training in both government and private sector organization ion certain period while studying. This will increase the employability of the graduates and in return, it reduces the waiting time for a job after the degree is completed. In Bachelor's degree, whether if it is a general degree or specialized degree, the content of the course is very important to have an appropriate sequence of the aspects of HRM in HRM education curriculum.

Research of a study of Bachelor's degrees in Human Resource Management in three Sri

Lankan leading state universities focus on essential aspects of HRM should be applied and decide right locations to be establish in HRM educational curriculum which content, appropriate location of the courses in the curriculum structure, availability of internship, duration of the internship, availability of independent study, duration of the independent study, coverage of the core skills set, availability of graduate profile and intensity of graduate profile under objective evaluative framework. Results of the study helped to develop curriculum of HRM, in order to decide sequence of courses in the curriculum structure and improve quality level of bachelor's degrees in HRM. Also researcher found that there are few issues in HRM field such as organizations have inappropriate HRM systems and practices, HRM functions handled by people who haven't educational background of HRM, no any practical background for HRM curriculum in some institutions, some owners and managers think that general intelligence, common knowledge, military experience or legal education [6,7].

Opatha [6,7] identified fifteen core aspects related to the HRM educational curriculum. The current study used respective core aspects as the supporting document to help the development of the interview questions.

2.1 Objectives of the Study

- To identify essential aspects of HRM to be included in HRM educational curriculum.
- To provide recommendations for universities to improve the HRM curriculum.

3. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to identify the essential aspects of HRM to be included in HRM educational curriculum that influence the selection of HRM specialization made by business students. This study considers as the inductive research that involves identifying the essential aspects to be included into the HRM educational curriculum from certain and determine data, make patterns and come up with the conclusion. Main guidance for the conduct of this research was based on the review of literature to identify essential aspects of HRM to be included in HRM educational curriculum and to provide recommendations for universities to

improve the HRM curriculum. Qualitative approach was used to come up with the conclusion and telephone interview method is used to collect qualitative data from eight Human Resource specialists in order to arriving at the conclusion with better results. The NVivo software have been used to analyze the qualitative data in this research. Thematic analysis is used to analysis the gathered data from interviews. It was considered as the most effective means of reaching the sample of respondents of the sample with less cost and under a minimum time.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following analysis was carried out to analyze the answers given by the participants of the study based on their experience having with the undergraduate HRM curriculum that they are familiar with.

The four question were analyzed as follows based on the answers given by the eight participants separately.

Question 1: What are the current core aspects/subjects/modules in an undergraduate HRM curriculum?

Based on the above answers, the undergraduate Human Resource Management curriculum should include some general subjects like Accounting, Economics, Marketing and Statistics along with some specialized subject areas like e-HRM, recruitment, selection, time management, compensation, training and development, performance management, grievance handling, disciplinary, labor law and strategic Human Resource Management.

Question 2: Do you think current syllabus for Human Resource Management need to be changed? If yes what content would you like to add to the aspects/module/syllabus?

Except from the respondent 03, other respondents are happy with the current undergraduate Human Resource Management curriculum due to the importance of the subjects covered to have an overall understanding on the company operations and due to their relevancy. Respondent 03 argues that the current syllabus only focuses on improving the theoretical aspects rather than focusing on enhancing the practical approach of the syllabus is less.

Table 1. Common aspects of HRM curriculum

Common Aspects of the HRM curriculum		Source
01	Introduction to HRM	A Study of bachelor's degree in Human Resource Management in Three Sri Lankan Leading State Universities
02	HRM context or environment (HR department, job design, job analysis, legal aspect etc.)	
03	HR planning	
04	Staffing or human resourcing (recruitment, selection, hiring and induction)	
05	Performance management	
06	Human resource development	
07	Rewards management (pay, incentives, and welfare)	
08	Employee relations (safety, health, discipline, employee movements etc.)	
09	Strategic aspect	
10	Global or international aspect	
11	Contemporary aspect	
12	HR Measurement or evaluation or HR Analytics or HR Accounting	
13	e- HRM or HR information system	
14	HR research and analytics	
15	Sustainable HRM (including Green HRM)	

Source: Opatha (2019)

Table 2. Results of question 1

Respondent 01	“The undergraduate Human Resource Management curriculum includes some general subjects like accounting, economics, marketing and stat. Further, e-HRM is included as a specialized area.”
Respondent 02	“The undergraduate Human Resource Management curriculum covers all functions starting from recruitment, selection, time management, performance management, compensation etc.”
Respondent 03	“The main subject areas of the undergraduate Human Resource Management curriculum include the subject areas of recruitment, training and development, performance management, grievance handling, disciplinary, labor law and strategic Human Resource Management.”
Respondent 04	“Subjects like human capital management, HRM, Information technology in HRM include in HRM curriculum. HRIS, Counselling and Industrial Psychology, Occupational Health and Safety, AHRM (Advance Human Resource Management) also included in HRM curriculum as well.”
Respondent 05	“HRM curriculum mainly focused on theoretical subjects like organizational behavior, introduction to HRM as very basic subjects. Some soft skills subjects as interpersonal skills related subjects and few IT related subjects also included in the curriculum.”
Respondent 06	“Strategic management, human capital management, human capital development and also the career readiness and business etiquettes are some of the co modules coming under HRM specialization covered in 3 rd year and apart from that covering research methodology, performance management and compensation management and professional relationship and networking. In 4 th year mainly continuing the comprehensive research project and the strategic HRM, labour law and industrial relations, labor economics, counselling and industrial psychology, occupational health and safety and international perspective.”
Respondent 07	“HRM specialization basically focuses on HRM subjects such as HRM Principals of Management, some law subjects and personal developments modules.”
Respondent 08	“When starting from the history of the HRM to the current situation of the HRM, there are many functions. They are, what are the contracts of the employment? Participative management, what is the procedure of the recruitment and selection? And training and development. HR is all about how recruit the employee, develop the employee or else let the employee go out.”

Table 3. Results of question 2

Respondent 01	"I think that it is essential for a Human Resource Management professional to know the general areas like accounting, economics, marketing and stat, as they would provide them better understanding on the application of Human Resource Management to other areas as well". He has emphasized that a subject like stat would be need for research projects also.
Respondent 02	"I think that most of the subjects are covered under the curriculum, but it is essential for the students who are following Human Resource Management course need to understand about this strategic alignment of Human Resource Management towards these core company objectives".
Respondent 03	"I am not much happy about the current syllabus context with the any focus not given on the practical approach of the subjects". He has emphasized on having knowledge on the practical application of the subject as they supposed to enter the corporate world not only with the theoretical knowledge.
Respondent 04	"I think always the business content is changed and HRM also needed to change according to that. I believe more analytical parts should be added into the curriculum.
Respondent 05	"Already there is a very good syllabus. But it would be better when digitalization HR related subjects add, IT related subjects and automation. When it comes to IT related subjects, I would like to say more excel related things like how to draw graphs, how to do basic analytics in excel should be added. Excel, Data Analytic related subjects should also be included in introduction tools like Tableau, Microsoft share point as wise. Language skills such as English language also should improve. Soft skills must include through basic knowledge like how to behave in the society or how to interact with people"
Respondent 06	"I mean based on the opinion of the industrial experts it would reveal that more focus on HRIS side where need to align HR practices with the IT related aspects. Apart from that need to give more priority for the analytics side of the HR practices, Green HR practices and also the Sustainability and Diversity Management at the workplace as well."
Respondent 07	"I'm suggesting it's great that campus should maintain a way like selecting specialization starting it in the second semester of first year, so it could be much time constrain for students to focus more about subjects like Financial Accounting. Meanwhile when talk about other subjects, subjects in second, third and fourth years are necessary"
Respondent 08	"I think the current syllabus in the sense there is no standard war of the current syllabus. Normally the HR functions are there. But when we get a normal syllabus, all the concepts, theories everything is there except the Practical Situations. I would recommend better to add more value to the syllabus in respective in terms of Practical situations like how to handle a practical situation. Some significant modules I would like to add to the curriculum such as personality development, communication and ethical, international HRM and I would recommend to add how to handle the social media and how to deal with the technology"

Table 4. Results of the question 3

Respondent 01	"I do not think that any subject should be removed from the current syllabus as every subject will be helpful for the students in various manner".
Respondent 02	"I do not think that any subject should be removed from the current syllabus as subjects are relevant for the Human Resource Management professionals. However, under the strategic function subjects it is required to focus on the modern strategic part".
Respondent 03	"I do not think that any subject should be removed from the current syllabus as subjects are relevant for the Human Resource Management professionals".
Respondent 04	"I don't think so. Because most of the modules are covering the essential part of the students that they need to perform better when they go to industry one day. So, I think we don't have any necessity to remove the module".
Respondent 05	"Remove in the sense, not entirely remove but more weight that given to certain areas should be adjusted according to the industry."
Respondent 06	"There are certain overlaps in certain modules. Especially strategic related components such as Strategic Management and the strategic HCM much more related. So, if we can avoid those overlapping and just combine as one module that would again be a value addition for the curriculum."
Respondent 07	"I guess personal development modules are great and it will be easy to the students if campus could meet within the orientation. Because rather than doing traditional learning it could be better when doing some personality development parts within the orientation since its now doing first year of first semester."
Respondent 08	"Not remove but add. Because we have to know about the history of the HRM, how it happens, and now modern HRM how it related with human relations in psychology that should be there. So, I don't think if there any topic to remove but better to add few subjects that creates employees more sensitive and handle the situation."

Table 5. Results of the question 4

Respondent 01	"I suppose that it is better to add subject areas on staffing or human resourcing with the employee relations, main for industrial relations combined together". Further, he has emphasized that the syllabus should include practical training subject rather than only focusing on improving the theoretical areas on Human Resource Management.
Respondent 02	"I suggest that it is required to follow modern features of Human Resource Management like modern Human Resource Management systems including Digital HR subjects and modern features of Human Resource Management need to be like, in marketing function, they follow digital marketing. Therefore, I suggest including modern Human Resource Management functions, like modern digital Human Resource Management subjects to the curriculum".
Respondent 03	"I suppose that there should be new subjects coming in like HR analytic where analysis HR data and give information from data. HR analytic, HR information systems (HRIS), those are the new modern subjects that need to be added in present curriculum. These modules should give a proper understanding with the real-world scenarios. e-HRM basically it goes to HR information system (HRIS). It speaks all about HR information. So, the modules, the digitalize way of doing Human Resource Management. Modules like e-HRM, Human Resource Information Systems, modern analytical subjects where students can gain a real practical exposure through the learning modules should be included to the syllabus. Human Resource Management students should be given an opportunity to go to the industry and gain proper training, internship to go to the corporate world and practice practical training in well recognized companies in the corporate world". Practical learnings are very important to Human Resource Management students as well as the modern Human Resource Management modules."
Respondent 04	"If we could make compulsory or mandatory for students to do at least one-year internship in HRM I think it could be better. I believe is if we can extend the industry exposure with the students like internship or any other thing it would be better for the future of HRM curriculum."
Respondent 05	"Any kind of outbound activities like giving leadership skills can be added as suggestion. Actually, it is better if students are gain exposure to like organize events. Best way to develop personality skills as Soft skills again by giving students chance to organize events, take leadership in those events and give chance speak with others."
Respondent 06	"It's better if we can add more weightage to continues assessments as participation on workshops, leadership programs, training programs where include the assessment component apart from the paper based examination component. Through that it will build up the confident, commitment, motivation and the leadership skills of the students who are following the HCM program and as the HCM specialist who are going to specialize particular area they can build up their confident level. They will become more professional and they can hit for the main intention where they want to achieve at the end of their degree program. This means they can be simplifying good jobs and they can compete in the labour market where they can find the exact job that they wanted to get at the end.
Respondent 07	"I prefer practical stuff such as factory visit should be included since the program is mainly focusing even within the second and third years as well. So, they could see the operations might be or the supply chain might be the need to see some real things rather than only lectures and tutorials."
Respondent 08	"Some Group Activities should be adding because most of the HR people especially in Asian countries like Sri Lanka much concern about individual activities. They don't want to be gather group and do activities as they are very individualistic. So, if can add group activities that will build up the teamwork and then it will help to solve immediately when you face real incident. So, Group Activities and some Brain storming sessions, and some case studies and role play should be including to the current syllabus."

Question 3: Do you think any of these aspects/subjects/modules should remove from current syllabus? If yes what subject or module you like to remove from this current syllabus?

No participant suggests that subjects in the current curriculum should be removed from the current syllabus as every subject can be helpful to the students in various manners and as subjects are relevant for the Human Resource Management professionals.

Question 4: Are there any relatable suggestions rather than add or remove aspects/module from the HRM curriculum?

All the respondents have provided different suggestions on improving the current HRM syllabus to be more effective for the students. They have suggested on new subjects to be added to the syllabus including the technological aspects in relation to HRM and they have also suggested that practical training modules should be included to the syllabus.

The results of the data analysis provide an understanding on the essential aspects of HRM to be included in HRM curriculum that influence the selection of HRM specialization made by business students.

5. CONCLUSION

The research study intends to provide the discussion on the key findings of the research study when compared to the research findings of literature review. Further, this will provide a summary of the research study and appropriate recommendations to improve the HRM educational curriculum to provide more value for the HRM students in contributing more towards the organizational achievements.

To improve the HRM educational curriculum, it is better to develop the curriculum with the subject areas on staffing or human resourcing with the employee relations, main for industrial relations combined. Further, syllabus should include practical training subject rather than only focusing on improving the theoretical areas on Human Resource Management. It is required to follow modern features of Human Resource Management. Modern HRM systems including Digital HR subjects and modern features of HRM need to be.

It is suggested to include modern HRM functions, like modern digital HRM subjects, HR analytics where analysis HR data and give information

from data, HR analytics, HR information systems. to the curriculum. These modules should give a proper understanding with the real-world scenarios. HRM students should be given an opportunity to go to the industry and gain proper training, internship to go to the corporate world and practice practical training in well recognized companies in the corporate world. Practical learnings are very important to HRM students as well as the modern HRM modules.

The findings conclude that even though the current HRM educational curriculum has number of benefits over enhancing the theoretical knowledge on HRM within the students, it is essential to enhance the HRM educational curriculum adding more subjects like Digital HR subjects and modern features of Human Resource Management, e-HRM, HR analytic, HR information systems etc. Further, the HRM educational curriculum should be added with practical approach for the students to enhance their practical knowledge on the subject areas.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the opinions gathering from respondents, researchers have identified that practical background of the HRM field should be added to the existing HRM curriculum such as student must aware about practical knowledge related to the recruitment, training and development and performance management rather than studying common theoretical HRM modules. When consider the modules like e-HRM and HRIS cover all digitalize systems. As recommendation, those every modern analytical subjects need to combine in order to students can gain a real practical exposure through the learning modules.

As another recommendation, some general subjects such as Accounting, Economics, and Marketing should be combined with HRM and give brief idea of those subjects to carry on their future professional life. Most of general subject areas such as Finance, Marketing have specific training programs. Although HR students don't have proper and specific training programs during the learning period at universities. Based on the findings, researchers suggest to introduce specific training programs for HR students as well. Because, practical learnings and industrial exposure are very important to HRM students to success in the field.

Strategic Human Resource Management, also one of important modern HRM practices.

Researchers suggest that students who are following HRM need to understand about Strategic alignment of HRM towards core company objectives and follow modern features of Human Resource Management. Modern HRM functions like modern digital HRM need to be added into the HRM educational curriculum as there can be seen such modern subjects in other specialization area; in marketing specialization have specific modern subjects like digital marketing.

7. LIMITATIONS

The main objective of this research study is to identify the essential aspects of HRM to be included in HRM educational curriculum that influence the selection of HRM specialization made by business students. It was unable to conduct the research covering a wide range of sample due to limitation in relation to the availability of time and resources to reach a high number of samples. More insights on the study might have been understood if the study was conducted with large sample. Further, this study was only focused on a few numbers of questions within the questionnaire only to obtain the understanding on the main research area of the study. It was due to the inherent limitations of the questionnaire data collection method as the participants are not willing to answer long questionnaire.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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