

Perception of Academic staff on Multitasking and its impact in HEIs at Oman**Dr. Sangeetha Natarajan (Author)*****Lecturer***Business Studies Department**Nizwa College of Technology, Nizwa**Sultanate of Oman**Email: sangeetha.natarajan@nct.edu.om***Seham Zaid AL-Hinai (Co Authors) ******Ibtisam Thani AL-Omairi****Raja Sulaiman AL-Hinai****Amna Yousuf AL-Harrasi***Business Studies Department**Nizwa College of Technology, Nizwa**Sultanate of Oman***Abstract**

Though few research articles exist studying the perception of academicians in schools and colleges, very few landed up in analyzing multitasking among academicians in Higher Educational Institutions and its impact in teaching learning process. Few studies have attempted to discover the facts that engaging in multiple tasks may be cognitively and physically challenging, ultimately results in over workload, increasingly greater work responsibilities and longer hours, more prone to mistakes and the overall quality of work product can be diminished ending up in mistakes sometimes costly to rectify. This substantiates 'multitasking' turns out to be a challenge that affects the effectiveness and efficiency of academicians' in their institutions, thus supporting its negative impact. As researcher's it is wise to study both the sides of impact, positive as well as negative covering arguments for and against multitasking. Hence an attempt to investigate the perception of the academicians in HEIs on multitasking and its positive and negative impact is tried out with primary data collected from representative samples of academicians in private and public colleges and universities in Sultanate of Oman. The collected data was analyzed using Summary statistics and percentage analysis, Likert's five point scaling technique with mean analysis. The research implications are presented based on which recommendations and conclusions were sought.

Key words: Multi-tasking, Perception, Academicians, HEIs**1. Overview of Education in Oman:**

History says when His Majesty, the Sultan rose to the throne in 1970, there were only three schools in the whole of Oman. The Visionary, His Majesty's first resolution was to develop the education system in Oman. The Ministry of Education was setup to regulate education system in Oman, there after the establishment and development of more and more Higher Educational Institutions took place in the Sultanate. The Ministry of Higher Education strive to promote higher education in the Sultanate including various fields and disciplines that meet the needs of the comprehensive development and labor market. This expansion was not only in the government higher education sector but also in private colleges to contribute to the needs of the Sultanate. The Ministry of Education is fully aware of the idea that, in order to fulfill its ambitious aspirations and objectives aimed at achieving education for all quality, it needs to usher in a complete and large-scale transformation. And to undertake a substantial improvement of its capacities and capabilities in order to implement its policies and projects for developing the Education System in the Sultanate (Maryam Khan, 2016)

2. About higher education in Oman

Higher education comes in the finest stages of education and includes all types of education that comes after secondary education, whether in universities or other educational institutions concerned with education, training or scientific research. Higher education has a prominent role in preparing qualified national cadres at the highest levels to be able to participate effectively in advancing the development movement in the country. In view of the rapid development at the global and local level, the preparation of generations of educated and trained young people at the highest levels is an urgent need imposed by the comprehensive development requirements. So that the country has skilled competencies capable of dealing with international changes and the data of modern technology, and has the ability to interact, take advantage of all developments, prepare a generation of academics, researchers and graduates with higher education levels and fill the needs of the Sultanate of cadres specialized in various fields. Since its establishment in 1994, the Ministry of Higher Education has been working to promote higher education in the Sultanate. Omani private sector had significant contributions, establishing private universities and colleges to contribute to the Sultanate's needs of qualified scientific and technical staff. Higher education is a national goal that everyone seeks to achieve. (Ahmed M. Al-Ghassani, 2010)

3. Higher Education institutions at Oman

Sultan Qaboos University (SQU): Since its establishment in 1986, Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) has developed into a prestigious university, offering enlightening programs that meet high standards of quality. The University has become an established center of knowledge and expertise in fields that relate to Omani culture and national development, as well as a wide range of academic disciplines. The University's preeminence has been achieved by excellence in the enactment of the University's four main responsibilities: teaching; research; community engagement; and cooperation with other Higher Education Institutions in and outside the Sultanate. The University currently has nine colleges: Arts & Social Sciences, Commerce & Economics, Science Education, Agriculture & Marine Sciences, Engineering, Medicine & Health Sciences, Nursing and Law. **Colleges of Applied Sciences:** The directorate of colleges of applied science oversees at the colleges of applied science and its numbering six colleges are distributed in the states of Nizwa, Sohar, Salalah, Sur, Ibri, Rustaq. The college offers programs like information technology, international business management, communication studies and design. In addition, each program of it includes a range of disciplines. The Ministry of Manpower of Oman operates seven regional **Colleges of Technology:** Salalah, Ibri, Al-Musanaa, Nizwa, Shinas, Ibri, Muscat (Ministry of Higher Education, 2019).

4. Multitasking and its impact:

Multitasking in simple words denotes the practice of doing multiple things simultaneously like editing a document or responding to email while attending a teleconference. If a person does several different things at once, then he may be referred to as a 'multi-tasker'. In today's busy world, multitasking is considered common in any field of work at all levels in an organisation.

Multiple tasks and responsibilities might seem the best way to get a lot done, but as people try to do more than one thing at a time may actually diminish productivity and performance. Experts support focusing one task at a time, to get the job done quickly and correctly. Professionals must be careful when they choose to do more works at a time, for better task completion in an effective way (Margaret Rouse, 2013). Recent research demonstrated that switching from one task to the next takes a serious toll on productivity. Multi-taskers have more trouble tuning out distractions than people who focus on one task at a time. Also, doing so many different things at once can actually impair cognitive ability (Göran Brante, 2009).

5. Significance of the study:

Education is an important need in initiating and preparing a student through learning, which enables him/her to play active roles in society. It provides knowledge that prepares every individual to

understand the social-cultural foundation, which ethically and morally leads to build citizenship and in turn nation. Teachers are the frontline individuals in the provision of education service. Lecturers are the human resources who control the operations of Higher education institutions in terms of transferring knowledge, skills and attitudes to students. In short, teachers are essential players in promoting quality education.

Few research studies have discussed whether multitasking among teachers is beneficial or if it causes lack of concentration and cognitive load (Bennett, Maton, & Kervin, 2008; Junco & Cotten, 2012). Few studies have attempted to discover facts like multitasking make them more experienced, but scientific results indicated that they are not so good. Notable challenges are identified that affect the effectiveness and efficiency of academic staff performance in colleges due to overload and multitasking. Hence an attempt was made to ensure if academicians really benefit from multitasking or if they are willing to do teaching and learning only which they ought to perform and to convince all stakeholders to revise and provide better solutions accordingly.

6. Scope of the study:

The present study examines various multitasking roles performed by academicians and the reasons for accommodating and evading multitasking in course of their daily work life. It covers all the academicians from different departments covering private and government HEIs in Oman.

7. Statement of the problem:

People are not always content doing one thing at a time. Frequently, they multi-task, that is, they engage in multiple tasks aimed at attaining multiple goals simultaneously. Multi-tasking involves concurrent performance of two or more functionally independent tasks with each of the tasks having unique goals involving distinct stimuli, mental transformation and response outputs. Multi-tasking enables people to achieve more goals and to experience more activities. However, engaging in multiple tasks may be cognitively and physically challenging.

Today's job scenario compels the academic staff to assume multitasks in their profession this ultimately results in over workload. Downsizing, fear of job security and an uncertain economy often prompt workers to accept or take on increasingly greater work responsibilities and longer hours. This increased level of performance does not necessarily result in increased levels of productivity. In fact, it can lead to problems and circumstances that actually reduce earnings for an institution. It is a known fact that an employee working longer hours is not necessarily getting more work accomplished. A staff who is tired, overworked or is attempting to juggle multiple responsibilities is more prone to mistakes. The overall quality of work product can be diminished due to a heavy workload, and mistakes can be costly. Thus, the impact is positive as well as negative. Hence, the present study investigates the perception of academicians on multitasking and its positive and negative effects at Higher Educational Institutions in Oman.

8. Objectives of the study:

1. To know and understand the various multitasking roles assumed by academicians in HEIs at Oman.
2. To study the reasons for accepting multitasking roles and its positive impacts academicians in HEIs at Oman.
3. To examine the negative impacts of assuming multitasking role and to identify the reasons for avoiding multitasking roles by academicians in HEIs at Oman.

9. Review Of Literature

Adi Gaskell in (1990)¹, in his article "How the Culture of Overwork Is Damaging Your Productivity and Your Health" examined the culture of work load was particularly common among

men and found out that employees are busier than ever before, paper published and over-run with work. Denga (1991)², in his article “Impact of the workload on the professional effectiveness of the academic staff”, examined that over work load affect negatively on the performance of the teachers and found out that prolonged stress can produce anxiety which may impair one’s ability to perform a task. Simpson and Romulo (1991)³, in their article on “Workload and Performance”, studied the stress faced by teachers during overwork load. They found out that teachers are burdened with excessive paper works, preparation of visual aids, lesson plans and expected to come up with meaningful research, extension services, counselling students, serving to committee and attending to curricular activities. Debra (1995)⁴, in her article “The Effect of Teachers’ Workload On Students’ Academic Performance in colleges”, examined that working under time pressure can be stressful and found out that employees feel they are being asked to do more than time or ability permits.

Helen Timperley, Vivian Robinson (2002)⁵, in their article “Workload and the Professional Culture of Teachers”, examined the increase in the workload can be attributed, to the ways in which teachers organize themselves and found out an increase in teacher workload and stress has been identified as an undesirable consequence of site based school management. URT, (2004)⁶ studied that there is great increase of teachers’ workload which automatically affect students’ academic performance” and found out that attention is now increasingly given to secondary school’s education. Chiuri (2005)⁷ explored the increase in population and its affect to increase the work load for teachers. Mbunda (2006)⁸, in his article on “The Effect Of Teachers’ Workload On Students’ Academic Performance In Colleges” , examined the factors that add teachers’ workload and found out that workload meant the amount of work that has to be done by a particular person or organization. Reynol Junco Shelia (2010)⁹, in her article examined “that college students use instant messaging at high levels, they multitask while using instant messaging” and found out “They are also more likely to multitask while using information and communication technologies.

Lisa McQuerrey (2012)¹⁰, in her article “Negative Effects of a Heavy Workload”, examined that over workload can lead to problems and circumstances that actually reduce earnings for a company. Komal Nagar (2012)¹¹, in his article “Organizational Commitment and Job Satisfaction among teachers during Times of Burnout”, examined organizations want to maximize productivity by minimizing stress. Melvina Amalu (2013)¹², in her article “impact of the workload on the professional effectiveness of the academic staff”, studied that stress from workload has no significant influence in all aspects of professional effectiveness. Mohammed Alkahtani, Ali Ahmad, Saber Darmoul (2016)¹³, in their article “Multitasking Trends and Impact on Education” examined that multitasking enhances the effectiveness and efficiency of doing an activity and found out multitasking has been traditionally viewed as a positive characteristic.

Alison Doyle (2018)¹⁴, in his article “Key Insights for Addressing Multitasking in a Job Interview” explored that teachers are more efficient when allowed to focus on one task at a time and found out in most situations employer questions if he can juggle a few things at once. Wim A. Van der Stede (2018)¹⁵, in his article “Multitasking”, he found out that academics who have inherently multifaceted jobs requiring their attention across a range of activities (research, teaching, service)—that is, professors multitask.

Having studied the related reviews, the researchers try to fix the gap between previous research and the present study, based on which the following conceptual framework is defined.(refer Fig:9.1)

10. Research Methodology

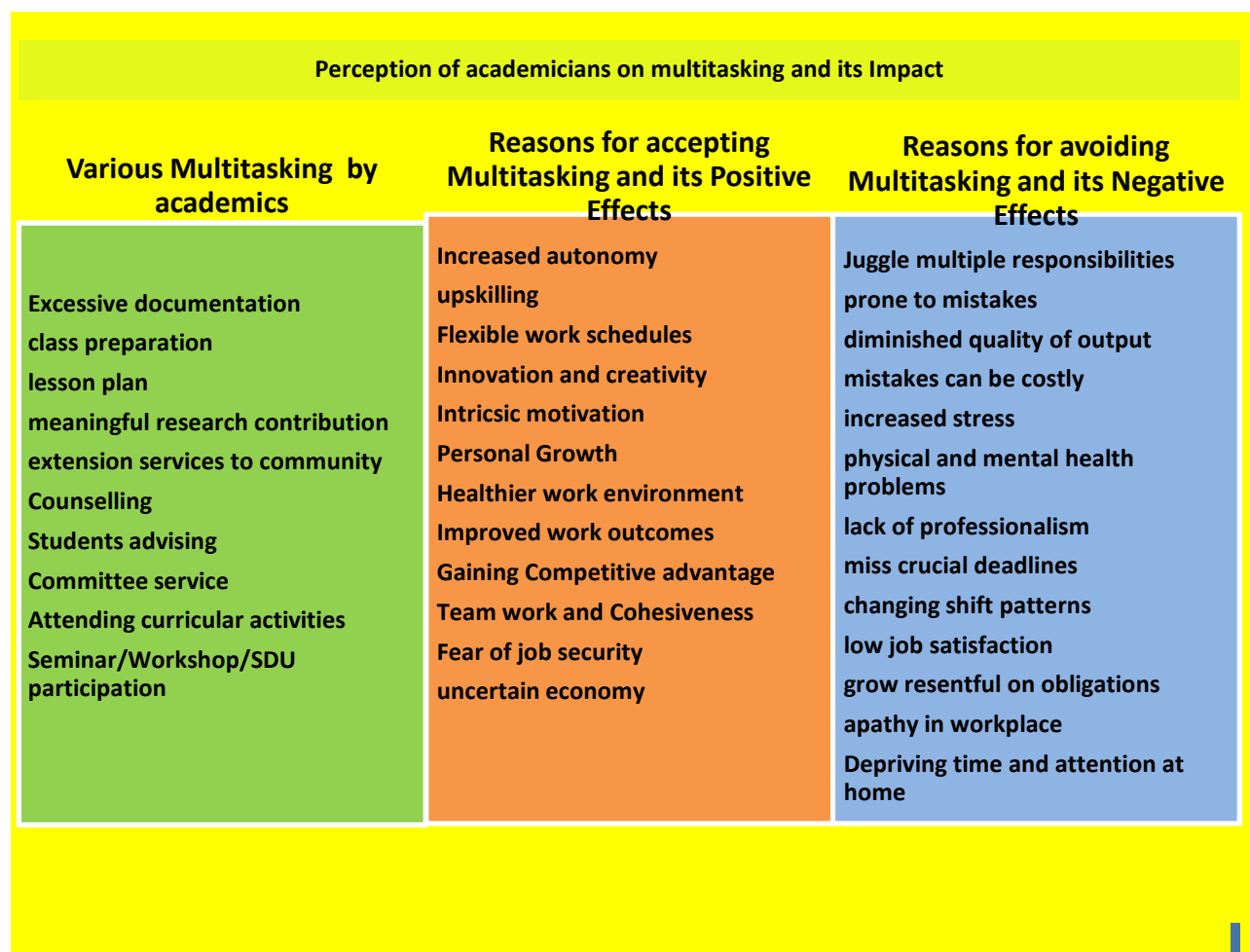
The present study is exploratory in nature as it deals with exploring the reasons for assuming multitasking roles and to identify its positive and negative impacts among academic staff at HEIs in Oman. Thereby the data and facts that relate to the mentioned aspects are to be identified, compiled, to be evaluated in-depth and an insight is framed. The present research use primary data with structured

questionnaire for collecting data that includes the profile of the respondents and the questions that assess the reasons for assuming multitasking roles among academic staffs. Population includes all the academic staff presently working at HEIs including private and government institutions covering all academic departments. Population includes all the academic staff presently working at HEIs including private and government institutions covering all academic departments. Oman's higher education system comprises 63 institutions with 35 public institutions and 28 private, with 7883 academic staff in total. These vary in status between universities, university colleges and specialized institutions. Hence the population N is 7883 (source: Statistical year book of Oman, 2018). Teaching staff accounted for 48.3 per cent of total employees in the government educational institutions and 45.7 per cent in the private higher educational institutions. (Source: Statistics Department at the Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC)). The distribution of the sample size shall comprise the academic staff from all the academic departments in government and private HEIs. The present study adopted Proportionate Stratified sampling where samples from private and government HEIs were collected proportionately to make it a representative sample. The collected data was analyzed using Summary statistics and percentage analysis, Likert's five point scaling technique with mean analysis, Chi Square analysis for testing the association between Gender, Level of Education and various determinants considered for the study.

10) Limitation of the study:

Duration of study is limited to a period of fifteen weeks only. Hence limited samples can only be collected. Biased responses may have an influence on the validity of the data collected and analyzed.

Fig no: 9.1 Conceptual Framework

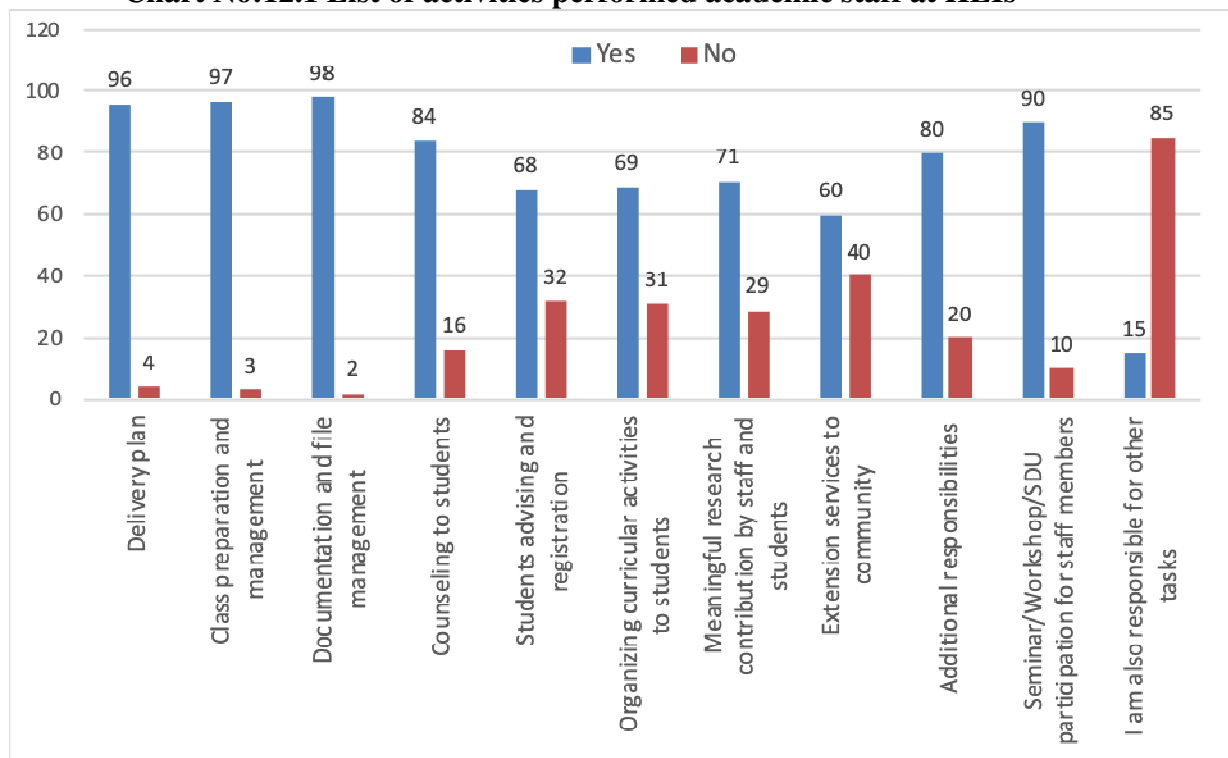


11. Research Findings and Implications:

a. **Demographic profile** of the respondents indicates that the percentage of Omani teaching staff in the private and public higher education institutions was less than expatriates, who accounted for 35 per cent in the government higher education institutions and around 30 per cent in the private higher education institutions of the total teaching staff. Indians topped the list followed by Filipinos, Egyptians, Pakistanis and Tunisians nationality. With regard to the nationalities of the non-Omani teaching staff at the private higher education institutions, again the Indians topped the list with 41.1 per cent, followed by Pakistanis with 7.1 per cent, Iraqis and Egyptians and British. Master's degree was the most common qualification among teaching staff at the higher education institutions. The PhD holders among the teaching staff of the private higher education institutions are 2.1 per cent higher than those in the government institutions. Out of the total number of respondents 80 percent were male and 20 were female and majorities (49%) are between 41 to 50 years of age. Out of total respondents 9 percent hold less than 5 years of experience, 26 percent have 6 to 10 years of experience, 20 percent 11 to 15 years of experience, 32 percent have 16 to 20 years of experience and 13 percent have more than 13 years of teaching experience.

b. Results of **summary statistics** indicate the list of multitasking activities performed by academic staff at HEIs. Out of total respondents, 96 percent are responsible for the preparation of delivery plan, 97 percent for Class preparation and management, 98 percent for Documentation and file management. In addition, 84 percent give counseling to students and 68 percent perform students advising and registration, 69 percent organize activities curricular or co-curricular in nature. Meaningful research contributions by staffs are undertaken by 71 percent of academicians and 60 percent do extension services to community. Additional responsibilities were assumed by 80 percent of academic staffs and 90 percent agreed that they participate in Seminar/Workshop/SDU activities.

Chart No:12.1 List of activities performed academic staff at HEIs



c. Likert scaling technique:

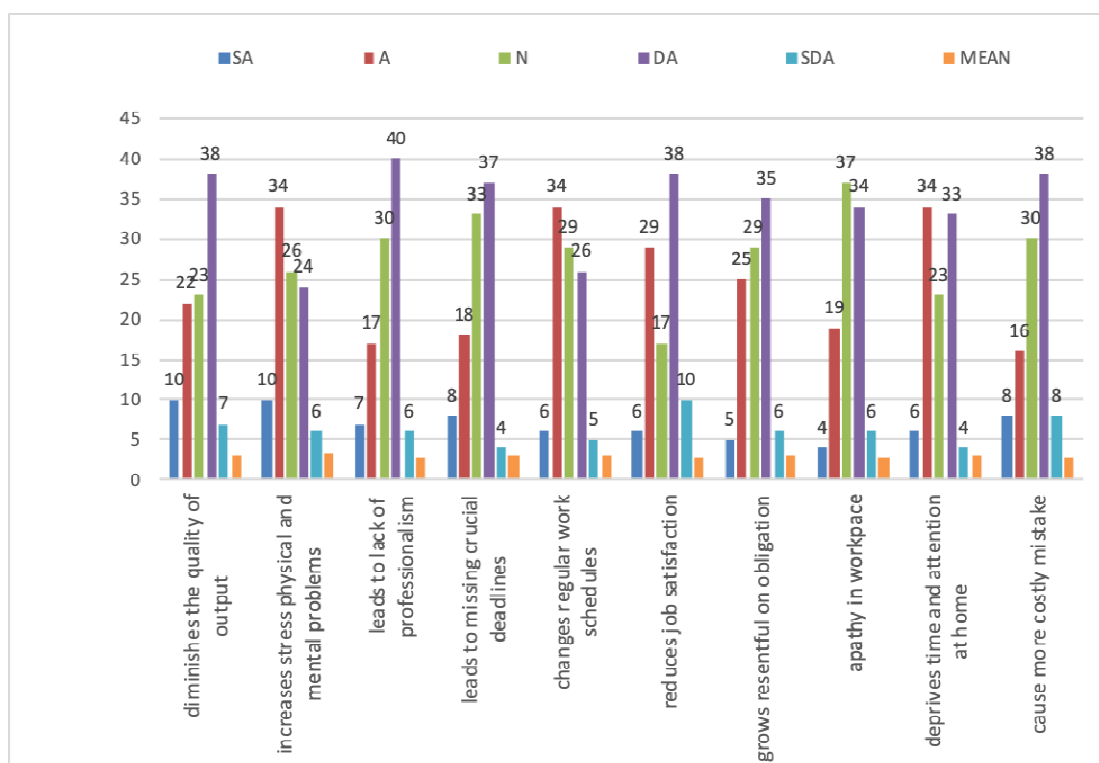
Table No:12.1 Positive impact of multitasking among academic staff at HEIs

Positive impact of multitasking	SA	A	N	DA	SDA	MEAN
Increased autonomy	34	48	11	6	1	4.08
Up skilling	31	58	7	1	3	4.13
Flexible work schedules	26	47	19	4	4	3.87
Innovation and creativity	32	53	8	4	3	4.07
Intrinsic motivation	22	56	15	5	2	3.91
Personal Growth	32	44	20	2	2	4.02
Healthier work environment	31	49	12	4	4	3.99
Improved work outcome	29	52	16	2	1	4.06
Gain competitive advantages	20	59	17	1	3	3.92
Teamwork and high cohesiveness	31	51	15	2	1	4.09

i. Testing Positive impact of multitasking among academic staff: Out of the total number of respondents, majority of academic staff agreed multitasking escalate autonomy (82%) supported by mean value of 4.08 which signifies favourable response in Likert's Five point scaling technique. Around 89% agreed multitasking aids Up skilling(4.13), 73% agreed multitasking supports flexible work schedules(3.87), 85% agreed multitasking increases innovation and creativity(4.07), 78% agreed that multitasking gives intrinsic motivation to academic staff(3.91). Around 76% agreed that multitasking leads to Personal Growth (4.02), and results in healthier work environment (80%) with a mean of 4.99. Around 81% agreed that worked outcome will be improved by multitasking (4.06). Most of staff (79%) agreed that through multitasking they can gain competitive advantage with a mean of 3.92. 82% of staff agreed teamwork and high cohesiveness is developed by multitasking (4.09).

ii. In assessing the reasons for multi-tasking, around 50% staff agreed that multitasking help them to get rid of job in-security(3.43) and 46% teachers only agreed that multitasking help them in present uncertain economic for their employment sustainability(4.48).

iii. Testing Negative impact of multitasking among academic staff

Chart No:12.3 Reasons for assuming multitasking among academic staff at HEIs


The above chart shows the Negative impact of multitasking among academic staff in HEIs. Out of total respondents, around 45% of staff disagreed that multitasking diminishes the quality of output resulting in an unfavorable mean of 2.9 values. Nearly 44% agreed that multitasking leads to increased stress, physical and mental problems (3.18). Around 46% disagreed that multitasking leads to lack of professionalism (2.79). Around 43% disagreed that multitasking leads to missing crucial deadlines (2.89). Around 40% agreed that multitasking will change regular work schedules (3.1). Majority of teachers (48) disagreed that multitasking reduces job satisfaction (2.83). Develops resentful on obligation due to multitasking is disagreed by 41% of staff (2.88). Around 40% of staff disagreed that the decision about multitasking leads to apathy in workplace (2.81). Nearly 40% of staff agreed that multitasking deprives time and attention at home (3.05) and 46% of staff disagreed to multitasking cause costlier mistake (2.78).

12. Recommendations and conclusion

Education is the key element of national economic performance, resource allocation, and human advancement through training. The present study is undertaken to study the perception of academic staff and its positive and negative effect. This study aims at academic staff in HEIs and tries to observe why some teachers accept /reject multitasking activities? Data was collected from academic staff presently working at HEIs including private and government institutions covering all academic departments. The collected data was analyzed using Summary statistics, percentage analysis, Likert's five point scaling technique with mean analysis to identify the most favourable and unfavourable responses, based on which findings are presented and the following recommendations are suggested:

The best HR practice is to assign the task based on skill and competency of the personnel. If the profile of the person matches with the job nature, any tasks become easy, develop interests and results in productive outcome. If this is followed, the physical and mental stress that arises due to multitasking can be reduced to a greater level. Individually academic staffs are responsible for their delivery plan preparation incorporating teaching pedagogy fitting the given time line thus organizing workloads just not to skip deadlines.

Care should be taken in verifying the workloads of each staff and the number of responsibilities assigned. Sufficient time duration with adequate resources has to be allotted to manage diversified work tasks. This might help academic staffs working overtime from depriving time at home. Academicians assuming multitasking have to be rewarded or their work has to be recognized either monetarily or by way of other work benefits like compensatory holidays aiding mutual benefit to all the stakeholders. This helps sustainability of over workload for a long run in a smooth way.

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