

The Impact of Covid-19 on the HR of the Educational Sector in UAE: A Case Study of Abdullah Bin Al Zubair Private School

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Abstract This research studies the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the HR of the educational sector in UAE by taking the case study of Abdullah Bin Al Zubair Private School in Al Ain. The research is conducted through hypothesis testing, as well as the thematic analysis of interview survey. The methodology used for this research includes qualitative analysis of the interviews collected from four different members of the school, i.e. the Principal, HR Representative, Head of Department and a teacher. The interviews lead to the research findings that covid-19 pandemic does have an impact on the HR of UAE's education sector, as it currently faces a lot of challenges in finding, hiring and retaining employees. Many businesses have laid off staff and cut salaries in order to reduce costs because of the financial crunch faced by all businesses, especially in the private sector. At the end, the research provides some of the recommendations that could be implanted by the HR of education institutes in order to improve their operational efficiency.

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic, HR, Educational Sector, Operational Efficiency, Abdullah Bin Al Zubair School

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1. Introduction

Human Resource Management lies at the heart of every organization. It is an important function of all organizations around the world. No organization can do without a proper human resource management, as it involves the management of all the human resource of organization that takes part in the completion of organizational plans and goals. HRM basically includes recruiting, training and motivating employees in order to make them valuable asset for the organization and the achievement of its goals [1]. It is responsible for maintain the internal organizational environment in a way that promotes learning and growth. It is mostly done by training employees and evaluating their performance time to time. Like all other organizations, HRM is equally important for education sector, as it is implemented in schools, colleges, and other educational institutes. In terms of education sector, HRM is responsible for the development of both, organizational employees as well as the students [2]. However, the sector has been greatly effected due to the covid-19 pandemic. All learning has been shifted to online channels which poses a challenge for the HR of educational institutions to manage and evaluate the performance of employees, as well as the student body.

This research aims to highlight the importance of human resource management in education sector and the effects it has faced due to the Covid'19 pandemic. It will adopt the qualitative research methodology according to which interview surveys will be interpreted and analyzed. Based on the interview results and hypothesis testing, this research will represent the findings and recommend some of the strategies that the Abdullah Bin Zubair Private School could implement.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Covid-19 pandemic has transformed the ways in which organizations operate all over the world. The HR management of all organizations have faced challenges and gained more responsibility in their operations of managing employees, as they have shifted to remote working methods [3]. HR management of companies is not only considering new ways of management, but also considering laying off extra staff in the face of current pandemic. UAE has also been hit greatly by the pandemic, due to which all business including the education sector had to be shifted to hybrid model of online learning. This transition posed some serious challenges for the HR of companies, schools, colleges and universities to manage their human resource in the most effective ways amidst the pandemic.

The problem identified for this research is the gap that has been observed in terms of the impact of covid-19 pandemic on the education sector of UAE, especially on the Abdullah Bin Zubair Private School. Therefore, it will be addressed through this research.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to highlight the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the education sector of UAE, specifically Abdullah Bin Al Zubair Private. It will highlight how HR of private education sector has been impacted due to the pandemic and what challenges will it face in terms of HR practices in the following year, as it will focus on the HR practices and challenges of the ABZ private school. Resultantly, it will help the HR management Of ABZ School and other private schools in identifying their current challenges and will recommend a few strategies that these schools can implement for better performance under the current circumstances.

1.3. Research Question

The main research question that will be addressed through this study is:

What is the effect of Covid-19 on the HR of the education sector in the UAE: A case study of Abdulla Bin Al Zubair Private School?

Furthermore, it will include a few more questions in the same context. They will be answered through this research as well:

- How has Covid-19 pandemic effected education in general?
- What is the status of current employment and HR in the private sector of UAE?
- How will employers hire new employees amidst the Covid-19 pandemic?
- How challenging is it for schools to carry out online learning and manage it?

1.4. Hypothesis of the Study

By taking into account the two main variables discussed in this research, following two hypothesis are developed for the purpose of their testing as well as evaluation through proper analysis:

H1: Covid-19 pandemic directly affects the HR of education sector in the UAE.

H2: Current employment in the private sector of UAE is affected because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

H3: Covid-19 pandemic *does not* affect the HR of education sector in the UAE.

H4: Current employment in the private sector of UAE is *not* affected because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

1.5. Target Audience

The primary target audience for this research is going to be the management department of Abdullah Bin Al Zubair Private School. The school's management will be able to benefit from this research, as it will highlight the effects that Covid-19 pandemic has on the HR management of the school. It will help the school management in devising

strategies that will aid in streamlining the management system of school during the times of Covid pandemic. It will provide an overview of the current challenges that the school faces due to the pandemic, and will recommend a few strategies that could prove beneficial for the school's management.

The secondary audience for this research is going to be other educational institutions in the UAE, as well as in other parts of the world, that are facing challenges in managing their HR amidst the pandemic. The findings derived from this research could be easily implemented for other education institutions as well.

1.6. Identifying Variables

The variables used in this research are two, i.e. Covid-19 pandemic and HR management of school. Here "Covid-19" is used as an independent variable, as it is not effected by the presence or change in any other variable, however, "HR" is the dependent variable, as it is dependent on the independent variable and is easily affected by the presence or any change in the independent variable.

1.7. Arrangement and Approach of Study

The research arrangement and approach used for this study is exploratory. Exploratory research is a type of research that involves exploring the variables used in the study, which have previously not explored or studied in detail [4]. It will be used for the understanding of the idea undertaken for this particular research. Further in qualitative research, qualitative research method will be used, according to which the data will be collected, analyzed and interpreted qualitatively in a non-numerical form [5]. For this research, interview surveys will be carried out from four different members of Abdullah Bin Al Zubair private School's management departments. They will then be analyzed and interpreted in a qualitative manner.

1.8. Study Limitations

There are a few limitations observed in this research as well. They are as following:

- The focus of this research is on the HR management of Abdullah Bin Al Zubair private school, therefore, it holds 100% true only for this school and cannot be fully applied on other schools in Al Ain.
- Due to the time limitation, only a brief interview analysis of 4 organizational members could be carried out.
- Due to the time constraints and the ongoing covid-19 pandemic, detailed data collection could not be carried out for the primary research of this study.

2. Project Proposal and Planning

2.1. Methodology of the Research

As discussed above, the methodology for this research revolves around qualitative method of exploratory research,

as for this research interview surveys are analyzed and interpreted. According to Jamshed (2014), qualitative research is one of the most common techniques used in interview survey and analysis. The qualitative interview research helps in gathering first hand data based on individuals' opinions and views. Due to the fact that this research involves the interpretation of effects of covid-19 pandemic on the HR department of Abdullan bin Al Zubair School, qualitative analysis is the most appropriate tool used as the methodology of this research.

The interviews were conducted for this research using zoom online medium. There were a total of 4 interviews conducted from 4 different members of School's management, i.e. HR manager, head of department, principal and a teacher. Those interview responses will be interpreted and analyzed for the purpose of this research.

2.2. Corporate Description

Abdullah Bin Zubair School came into being in the year 2012, with the idea to promote learning and create future leaders (Edcare.ae). The school specializes in providing students the opportunity to explore their talents. The foundation of ABZ School is deep rooted with its Islamic values and Arabic culture, but at the same time the school offers a vast learning experience, as it follow international curriculum of England along with various other club and extracurricular activities. ABZ not only focuses on the educational development and growth of students, but also focuses on other aspects related to students' social, emotional, psychological and physical health. It aims to prepare students for the challenges of real world and inculcate in them the sense of competition and growth by providing them all the necessary grooming at young age.

2.2.1. The School's Activities

Abdullah Bin Zubair School focuses on the learning and development of its students by allowing them experience all other activities as well, apart from the academics. The curriculum that the school follows is UK curriculum, therefore it ensures international level education for children. It is used for students of key stage 1 which includes the classes KG2 and Grade 1, and key stage 2 which includes classes from Grade 2 to 5. The school is also currently in the process of considering COBIS (The council of British International Schools) in order to implement and provide education that complies with the international UK standards of education. ABZ School's major focus lies on the foundation years of students' development which include primary classes. It includes areas like personal development, social development, grooming, emotional development, communication, language, problem solving, creative development, knowledge and reasoning skills [6]. All of these facets contribute towards the effective development of students for their higher education, as well as for their practical lives. Apart from these, the school provides a good and conducive learning environment to students through highly comfortable

classrooms that are equipped with all the facilities that students need for their academic learning, as well as their extracurricular activities.

2.2.2. Strategic Management

The strategic management of Abdullah Bin Zubair school revolves around its vision, vision and core values. Therefore, they are discussed further:

2.2.2.1. Vision

"At ABZ Private School we believe that every member of our community should Enjoy, Aspire, Achieve!" (ABZPvtschool.com)

2.2.2.2. Mission

"ABZ Private School is a learning community where achievement and effort are celebrated. Embracing local and British values. We strive to inspire and challenge young minds in a supportive develop the skills needed to thrive in an ever-changing global world." (ABZPvtschool.com).

2.2.2.3. Core Values

The core values of ABZ School comply with its mission and vision. Some of the basic elements of school's core values that revolve around its students are [6]:

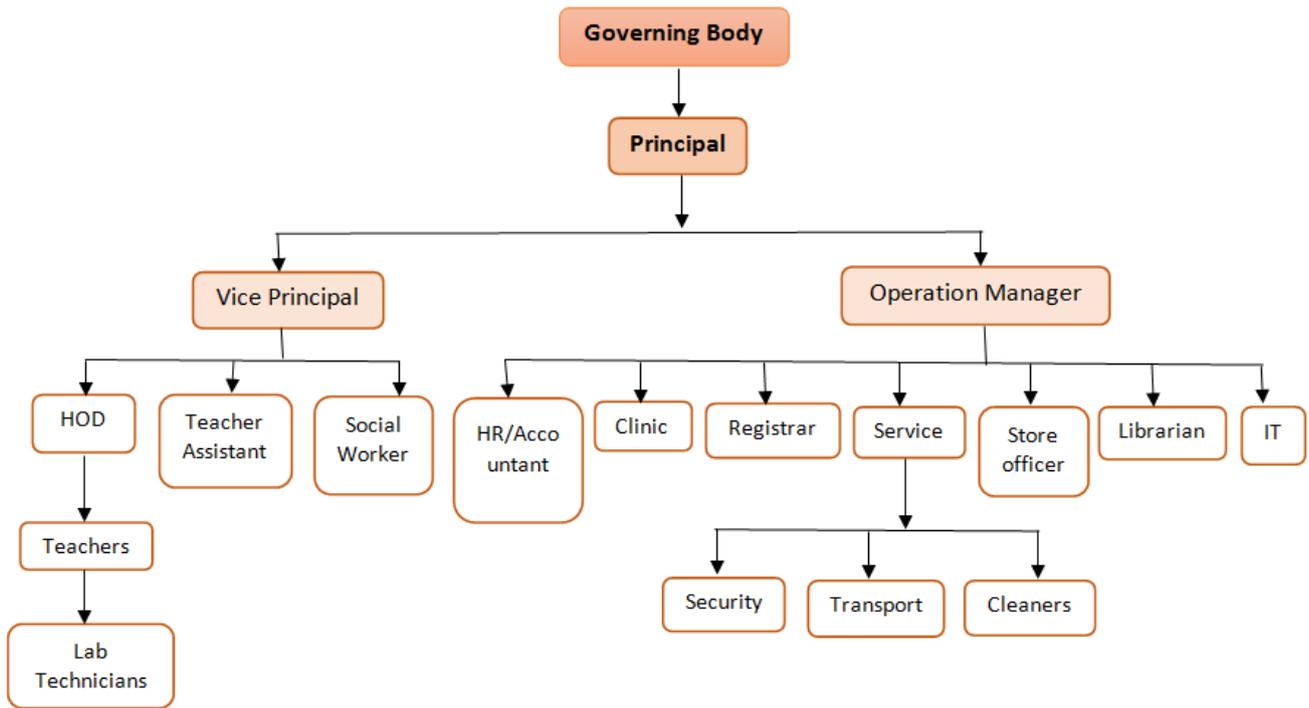
- Supporting and challenging learning environment
- Quality education along with extracurricular experience.
- Personal, physical, mental and emotional grooming.
- International standard (UK) learning and development
- Appreciation of Islamic values and Arabic culture
- Teachers' professional development programs and workshops
- Partnership and compliance with parents as well as the overall governance structure.

2.2.2.4. School Team

The current staff hired by Abdullah Bin Zubair Private School comprises of 43 employees in total, which include 10 admin members, 8 support staff members, 24 teachers and a principal. All of these staff members work as a team in order to achieve the School's goal of providing quality education and learning to students of all classes. All of the teachers are provided training that complies with international teaching standards, as they have to teach the students following those standards. Similarly, the administration deals in all HR and operations related tasks of the school by managing all of the resources in an effective way. Support staff provides all of the clerical and other support activities that are part of school's daily routine. The principal, being in charge, looks after all the staff, students and other affairs in the school to see if everything is done in a proper manner.

2.2.2.5. Organizational Chart

The organizational chart of Abdullah Bin Zubair School looks like:



2.2.2.5. Business and Functional Strategies

The business and functional strategies of ABZ School revolves around its effective management by aligning all the resources with the school's goals. As already discussed, the ABZ School aims to spread quality education by employing quality staff that provides the best knowledge to students. It focuses on building a strong leadership structure at school that promotes growth and learning. It promotes a flexible and conducive environment in which teachers and students contribute towards the school's goal of learning and development.

2.2.3. Current Projects Undertaken

Abdullah Bin Al Zubair Private School focuses on fostering the physical development of students as well along with the academic development. Because of this motive, the school carries out various activities and programs in which the students participate, as they help in improving their confidence. However, there are now current projects undertaken by the school because of the Covid-19 pandemic that has been in place for more than a year now. All of the projects and activities in school require physical participation of students which cannot be carried out under current circumstances as everything has shifted to online channels.

2.3. Industry Analysis

The private education industry of UAE is saturated by a number of schools that compete with each other on the basis of their curriculum, activities and overall quality of education. ABZ School faces a heads on competition from other private schools like Al Dhafra Private School, Ittihad national Private School and LIWA International School. All of these schools, along with some other private schools follow international curriculum that promote high quality education and learning all across the regions.

Moreover, because public schools receive government support, private schools constantly face the challenge to innovate and improve in order to compete with each other.

2.3.1. Porter's Five Forces Analysis

Porter's five forces analysis is done in order to access the competitiveness of the industry in which the business operates [7]. In case of ABZ School, it is carried out to determine what kind of pressure does the school faces from its competitors operating in the same education industry of Al Ain UAE.

2.3.1.1. Threat of New Entrants

Threat of new entrants can be defined as the possibility of new schools entering the industry and taking over. In case of ABZ School, it is high as these schools fall in the private category which is open to everyone. Any new school can start its business by adopting modern standards and curriculum to provide quality education. Therefore, the threat of new entrants in private education sector of UAE is high.

2.3.1.2. Threat of Substitutes

Threat of substitute can be defined as the possibility of a new school entering the industry with the same level of education and curriculum as offered by the ABZ School. It is also relatively high in the industry, as any new school can start operating by following the UK curriculum and following the modern education standards just like ABZ School.

2.3.1.3. Bargaining Power of Suppliers

The bargaining power of suppliers is relatively less in the education industry, as all schools follow their own curriculum. It may vary from school to school, but even in case if it's same, the bargaining power is not high as the curriculum is available to all schools at equal rate.

2.3.1.4. Bargaining Power of Parents/Students

Bargaining power of students and parents can be relatively high in the industry, as there are a lot of private schools now operating in the region with high quality education. This increases the bargaining power of parents, as they are more inclined towards the schools that offer quality education at low prices. Similarly, due to the current Covid-19 pandemic schools are already going through challenging times. In such times, it is difficult for them to charge low as they have to maintain their revenue stream as well in order to manage other resources.

2.3.1.5. Competitive Rivalry

The competitive rivalry is the extent to which schools compete with each other in terms of their quality and prices. There is a high competition because of an increased number of private schools now operating in the region with updated curriculum and technological techniques that comply with modern standards.

3. Research Results and Data Collection

3.1. Organizational Analysis

This study aims to focus on the Human Resource Management of Abdullah Bin Al Zubair Private School and the effect that it has faced due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. It also talks about the HR management of education sector of UAE, as it has been effected by the Covid-19 pandemic in a number of ways.

3.1.1. HR of Education sector UAE and Abdullah Bin Zubair School:

UAE serves as an interesting region to be studied for its human resource management as the country accommodates and provides employment to a lot of expatriates from different parts of the world who settle there [8]. Talking about the education sector, it is generally observed that the HR of education sector is different from all other industries, as it involves the management of teaching staff, as well as the student body. The employees held by educational institutes in the UAE can be divided into two main categories, i.e. administrative employees and academic teaching employees. The administrative employees should be there to support the academic employees, but instead they take charge over them because of the nature of their work which involves human management [9]. The education sector of UAE is relatively new and is divided into public and private sectors. Only the public schools and colleges are supported by the government, the private ones operate on their own [10]. Due to this, they provide all the training and support to the staff on their own and run by their own standards, such as ABZ School which is private school and runs according to the international standards by following UK's curriculum. The HR of education sector, thus faces challenges in the private sector to maintain the good level of education in order to compete in the education industry where there are a lot of other schools performing really well, especially those supported by the government.

3.1.2. Covid-19 Impact on HR of Abdullah Bin Zubair School

Due to the introduction of novel Corona virus, the education sector of all nations around the world have suffered. The online learning system has now become common in order to contain the spread of virus all around the world. However, this online learning comes with its own challenges. A study by Al-Araibi [11] demonstrates that the use and availability of technology depends heavily on the effectiveness of online learning, for both teachers and students. In this regard, Dr Christopher Abraham [12] sounds positive, as according to him all of the regions in UAE are technically equipped to deal the online learning challenges that arouse due to the covid-19 pandemic. All organizations, including schools have now shifted to the remote work model due to the covid-19 pandemic. This has put a pressure on the HR management to manage and evaluate the performance of employees while they are working remotely, as there is no direct check or accountability on them while working from homes. Similarly, the HR department of Abdullah Bin Zubair School has also faced a lot of challenges that resulted because of the Covid-19 impact, as all private schools went out of good revenues because of less number of children, as well as the quality of education compromised because of low salary offered by the HR under current circumstances.

3.2. Data Collection

The data collection for this research is carried out by using primary research method, according to which interview surveys were carried out from the ABZ School's staff and were analyzed for the purpose of discussion.

3.2.1. Interview Sampling

As discussed previously, the qualitative method of data collection has been used in this research, as it helps in the best analysis of interviews collected for research purpose (Canary, 2019). Interview sampling is an effective approach for collecting primary data, as the data is expected to be accurate because it is collected directly from the relevant people [13]. For the purpose of this study, interview samples from 4 different organizational members of ABZ School were collected, which included the principal, HR manager, head of department and a teacher. The purpose of this sampling was to gain insights in to the perspectives and views of the members of Abdullah Bin Zubair Schools from various different departments, and see how their views match or vary with each other in terms of the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the HR practices of ABZ School. This sampling also provided data from different organizational levels, as it included the authoritative staff in the form of principal and other sub ordinary members. This helped in gaining insights into their perceptions and ideas on the current scenario faced by school's management.

3.2.2. Qualitative Data Collected

The primary data collected for this research is qualitative in nature, as it was collected by conducting online interviews from 4 different members of Abdullah Bin

Zubair School. The interview consisted of 12 open ended questions on the impact of Covid'19 pandemic on the HR of ABZ School. The data collected is qualitative, as it contradicts with the definition of quantitative data which includes numerical and statistical data and its analysis [14]. Moving on, for the purpose of qualitative data collected through interview survey, thematic analysis approach will be used.

4. Discussions

4.1. Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is used in order to identify the patterns highlighted in the interview (Mortensen, 2019). The major advantage of it is that it is a flexible method that can be used for an effective analysis in exploratory research. The thematic analysis of interview responses gained for this research is given following:

1. Effect of Covid-19 pandemic on education sector

Principal/ HR/ HOD/ Teacher

Covid-19 has greatly affected the education sector all over the world and in the UAE. Face to face offers good opportunity of good and effective experimental learning. Students also get a chance to share ideas and interact with each other. However, in online learning, students are easily distracted by other things around them when taking classes from him. This effects their retention power and learning abilities. Moreover, some students find online classes challenging because they do not have proper devices to attend those classes and cannot afford the technology required for such classes.

2. Covid-19 effect on teaching staff

Principal

Like other institutions, employees were affected by the Covid-19 pandemic in schools. With social distancing, individual work has replaced team work. Teachers spend more time preparing for lectures online.

HOD

Teaching has been effected as students are distracted. There should be more control over students from parents while taking classes from home, in order to avoid distractions and make the most out of teaching.

Teacher/HR

Teaching has become challenging, as the work load has increased because of online system, as they have to change teaching methods to maximize the learning through online system.

3. Effect on quality of teaching

Principal/ HR/ HOD/ Teacher

Teaching quality has effected tremendously. Many teachers rely on remote teaching instead on active teaching. Teachers find it challenging to access the resources used for teaching. At the same time, students also lose concentration easily which further effects the quality of teaching.

4. Effect on private job sector in UAE

Principal/HOD/ HR/ Teacher

All of the institutions, including schools in the private sector have been effected greatly. They had to lay off extra staff in order to cut down extra costs. Some teachers were asked to leave while those serving had to face salary

cuts because of the challenging circumstances that arouse due to covid-19 pandemic. All private sectors are facing a financial crunch which has ultimately effected the private job sector as a whole.

5. Difficulties for employers in finding and hiring employees

Principal

Employers have become more selective in terms of hiring quality staff, therefore it has become difficult to find and hire employees.

HOD/ HR/

It has become really difficult because the employers are now offering low salaries which makes it difficult for them to hire the quality staff that can ensure quality learning and education.

Teacher

It is not going to be very difficult, as there is a high demand for jobs in the market. Many businesses have laid off staff, due to which the market is saturated with people looking for jobs.

6. Effect on ABZ School's HR department

Principal/ HR/ HOD/ Teacher

They face difficulties in filling gaps, especially in schools as the number of students have decreased and salaries have been cut down. It has become more challenging for HR, as they have now more responsibilities and work load in terms of managing everything and hiring quality staff while offering them minimum wages due to the salary cuts.

7. Quality staff hiring

Principal/HR/ Teacher

It is challenging, as quality staff expects higher salaries while most private schools face financial difficulties as they have lost students. It is difficult to find quality staff that will deliver quality education.

HOD

It is not so challenging, as the newly hired staff members are evaluated on their performance for some time and as a result their hiring decision is made.

8. Challenge for ABZ School's HR to manage and evaluate employees

Principal/ HR/ HOD/ Teacher

There are software systems in place for evaluating the performance of school's staff members. They are provided online demos, swap tests and 2 days evaluation period to access their performance while teaching through online channel. However, it is hard to get face to face feedback from students and teachers which makes the process of evaluation a bit tricky and challenging.

9. Employee management in remote working:

Principal/ HR/ HOD/ teacher

It is possible to manage employees while they are working remotely through remote monitoring system and giving instant feedbacks. Their performance can be accessed and evaluated through online medium when they deliver their services.

10. Opinion for suitable strategies of hiring and evaluating employees:

Principal/ HOD/ Teacher

The school should set up a good and healthy environment that promotes teaching and learning for students. Teachers should be rewarded for their performance and should be encouraged constantly under the current circumstances. In

order to hire quality staff, the school should offer market competitive salary, as it will help in hiring quality staff that will be able to increase the overall quality and recognition of the school.

HR

Keeping the current unpredictable circumstances in view, there should be no strategy and the system should promote flexibility to deal with any uncertain event that may arise at any time.

4.2. Research Findings

Based on the above thematic analysis of the interview survey, it can be said that both the hypothesis have proved to be true. Covid-19 pandemic directly effects the HR management of education sector in the UAE, as it has become challenging for hiring quality staff and retaining it in the times when businesses are already considering cutting jobs and wages. The effect of pandemic on HR is greatest as it is responsible for maintain the human resource of any organization and without the presence of human resource, no organization can perform well. It will also face challenges in finding and hiring the staff this year, as the pandemic continues. This is mainly because the businesses are in a financial crunch due to which they are not in a position to offer high salaries to the employees, yet they need quality employees that can help them uplift their business and keep it running in the current times. According to the hypothesis, Covid-19 pandemic has thus effected the HR directly, as all such hiring related tasks fall under the HR domain which is now facing a huge challenge to fulfil this responsibility for the organization.

Similarly, it has been proved that the current employment in the private sector of UAE is also effected due to the pandemic, as many companies including schools have fired their extra staff in order to cut down the costs associated with paying a lot of staff members. Apart from laying off staff, employees' salaries have also been reduced, as they are operating remotely from their homes and are relying on online teaching methods. The public sector businesses in UAE are supported by the government. Because of that, the pandemic effects on them are comparatively less because the government efficiently planned to support its employees, whereas the private sector businesses are struggling on their own to overcome the challenges and keep their business going. Similarly, in case of private education sector of UAE, schools are in a constant struggle to retain their current staff and hire more quality staff for the sustainability of their schools. Thus, the hypothesis holds true that employment in the private sector of UAE has been effected greatly because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Businesses are now coming up with more flexible strategies in order to deal with such unforeseen circumstances that can arise at any point in time and have drastic effects on business activities all over the UAE and all over the world.

4.3. Contribution of this Project

This research has addressed the gap related to the impact of covid-19 pandemic on the HR of educational

institutes in the UAE by taking into account the case analysis of Abdullah Bin Al Zubair Private School. The primary research has been carried out on the school for the purpose of analysis. This research's managerial implications could be effective for the HR of ABZ School, as it will be able to access the impact of Covid-19 on its performance and devise some strategies that could lead to better management and development of school to cope with the current circumstances

4.4. Recommendations for Further Development

Keeping in view the above research and its analysis, there are a few recommendations that could help the Abdullah Bin Al Zubair Private School in managing its HR during the Covid-19 pandemic and maximize its operational efficiency:

- The HR should focus on encouraging and motivating teachers at all times, in order to keep their morale high and retain them under the current circumstances when it is really difficult for the companies to find and hire new staff.
- It should consider offering market competitive salaries to the teaching staff, as it will keep them motivated to give their best while teaching and maintaining a high standard of the school.
- School's Feedback system should be improves in order to gain teachers' and students' feedback immediately and implement on it as soon as possible in order to maintain quality education.
- It should consider conducting various online activities to ensure maximum engagement from students as well as the teachers till the time situation gets back to normal.

5. Conclusions and Opinion

The main aim of this study was to identify the impact of covid-19 pandemic on the HR of education institutes in UAE, thus it proved through hypothesis testing and research findings that covid-19 does have impact on the HR practices of education sector, as they have faced challenges in recent times in terms of finding and hiring employees and retaining them. Because there had been a lot of salary cuts in the market because of the pandemic. It has not only effected the schools and their teaching staff, but also the students as their learning effects when there is no constant check on them and there are a lot of distractions for them. This ultimately effects the quality of teaching as well because the students are not able to gain knowledge through online medium.

In my opinion, the ABZ School should consider devising HR strategies that would motivate and empower the teaching staff, as they are the main assets and resource for the school. Their effectiveness can lead to overall effectiveness of schools and its performance. It can be done by hiring smart employees and assigning them fair amount of work for the salary offered, instead of burdening them.

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