

Improving Diploma Training Programs: The Impact and Role of Industry Partnerships

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Abstract:- Diploma training courses play a primitive role in shaping the job market in the present times because young professionals gain deeper knowledge, and enhanced skills aligned with industry needs. Exploration of the evolving dynamics of industry partnerships in diploma training programs has been taken up as the topic for the present research report. The purpose of the research report has been to explore how industry partnerships contribute to the enhancement of diploma training programs, and what the key benefits and challenges associated with these collaborations are in Kuwaiti context. The report has underscored the major implications of the possible collaboration between industry and education realms. Findings of research suggest that though industry partnerships positively impact diploma training in Kuwait, certain challenges remain to be addressed at the earliest through systemic measures. Recommendations provided thereafter focus on how the identified challenges can be directed, and students can be prepared better for the changing job market.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background:

Diploma training courses remain pivotal in the job market of the contemporary era because of their role in gaining deeper knowledge and enhancing skills. In recent times, diploma training programs, such as those focused on business administration, information technology, graphic design, healthcare management, and hospitality management, have gained popularity (Skolnik, 2022). The diploma certificate is valuable as it adds more value to the skill set and knowledge of a student. Fundamentally, the purpose of a training course is to make the students ready for the industry (sgb.ac.ke, 2024). Arguably, such training programs can be completed in less time in comparison to graduation courses, and a young professional can choose to complete such a course in addition to graduate degree or without the same. Those completing these diploma training courses in place of conventional graduation courses find them to be less expensive while preparing them for a certain array of job positions. Diploma training courses help students and young professionals stand out, and thus they are highly sought after (Hunde, 2008; Zakaria et al., 2010).

Industry partnerships have become increasingly relevant in the changing job market context for multiple reasons. Such partnerships are vital for ensuring that training programs are in alignment with the needs of current industry

operations. Further, industry partners can provide important resources because of which training programs become enriched. Also, students can get hands-on, practical learning experiences because of industry partnerships. Lastly, industry partnerships give the opportunity to establish professional networks and successively gain job placement opportunities (King & Persily, 2020). Collaboration of diploma training course institutes with experts from industries can lead to improved curricula. As real-world practices are reflected in such altered curriculum, students can gain more knowledge of the emerging and possible future industry trends (Solnet et al., 2007). It is noted that industry partnerships can lead to innovation following collaborative research. This can enable benefits for the educational institutions as well as organizations as new solutions are developed for company operations (Watters et al., 2016).

B. Problem Statement:

In Kuwait, there has been indications of training programs struggling to remain aligned with the evolving industry needs. The misalignment leads to a major skills gap between the expectations of the employers and graduates, impacting outcomes of employment. A recent report published by Procapita Management Consulting Kuwait, revealed that the Kuwaiti employment market in 2021 had faced considerable challenges. The most crucial challenge faced was the lack of required competencies which was primarily because of a gap in demand and supply (arab times, 2022). While industry partnerships hold the potential to fill this gap, there is a lack of clarity regarding the effectiveness of the same in the Kuwaiti context. Gaining a deeper understanding of the dynamics would be helping in optimizing the partnerships and expanding the quality of training programs at diploma level for meeting the demands of the job market in a better way.

C. Research Question:

How do industry partnerships contribute to the enhancement of diploma training programs, and what are the key benefits and challenges associated with these collaborations in Kuwait?

D. Research Objectives:

- To highlight the practices of industry partnerships in diploma training programs
- To evaluate the impact of industry partnerships on diploma training programs

- To analyze the impacts of partnerships with the public sector and with private sector on the effectiveness and quality of diploma training program
- To identify the possible benefits of industry partnerships in Kuwait
- To explore the challenges and barriers to industry partnerships in Kuwait
- To propose best practices for industry partnerships in diploma training programs in Kuwait.

II. FINDINGS OF RESEARCH

A. *Practices of Industry Partnerships in Diploma Training Programs*

For more than two decades, industry and academics have been moving beyond basic transactional relationships. A shift towards deeper collaborations established for long-term is becoming increasingly evident with the passage of time. The key purpose of such practices is to have mutual advancement in research and workforce development. Educational institutions and representatives from organizations across industries are working together to prepare students for the industrial world (Lutchen, 2024). Academic industry partnership is thought to be a key representation of a crucial alliance between industry and young professionals. The emerging workforce is armed with diverse skillsets but their response to the evolving digital era is at times not appropriate. A collaboration between educational institutions at every level and industries has multiple stakeholders involved. Such a partnership plays a pivotal role in stimulating innovation and reducing barriers in the development of professionals who translate technology into practice (Pantanowitz et al., 2022).

In the contemporary era, industry partnership models are found to be involving collaborations between varied sectors and educational institutions for the enhancement of quality of training. A prominent model that works towards successful industry partnerships is the work-integrated learning model. By virtue of this students are able to get hands-on experience of real-world scenarios relevant to the corresponding industry. This is made possible through apprenticeships, internships, and education placements in industry settings. Another model of industry partnership worth mentioning is curriculum co-design that allows collaboration between educators and experts from industries. The intention in this case is to update or modify curriculum content so that the same is aligned with the modern industry practices (Kay et al., 2019). Such models of industry partnerships are praised across levels of education, including those focusing on providing training, because of students being ready for job opportunities. The models, through the provision of enabling students to work in real-world projects, are appreciable for bridging the gap between industry skills and academic learning (King & Persily, 2020).

B. *Impact of Industry Partnerships on Diploma Training Programs*

The impact of industry partnerships on diploma training programs mostly remains positive. As diploma training courses remain aligned with the needs of real-world industries, the quality of education is high. The practical experiences that students get when enrolled in such diploma training courses increase the employability chances for them. However, certain limitations are there when it comes to industry partnerships for such courses, and these challenges are multi-faceted. Insufficient funding, limitations of industry or educational policies, and vague understanding of partnerships objectives are the most important ones in this regard. Streamlined collaboration remains the cornerstone of such industry partnerships, which might be lacking in most cases. Vocational institutions can be improving the quality of training courses and their relevance by addressing their barriers. No doubt, only industry partnerships that are well-structured hold the potential to transform training initiatives of institutions into an operational pathway to student employment (Mustafa et al., 2022).

The outcomes of diploma training courses can be significantly enhanced if there is an attempt to fill the gap between practical application and academic theory. Models of work-integrated learning, such as those in practice in countries such as Canada, enable students to get industry exposure. Boost in professional networks and hands-on experience is well appreciated by young minds who want to join the nation's workforce well-prepared. For industries, the key benefit that they gain is access to fresh ideas and emerging talent along with novel community engagement. Overall, the alliance created between training institutes and industries lays the pathway for a dynamic learning environment (Soper, 2024). Companies from all possible diligences from across the globe are keen on fostering innovation so that they can gain competitive advantages. Tapping into the talent pool of the nation that rests on knowledge of innovation and technological advancements is the key measure that companies can take. Industry partnership remains the leading tool that is effective in fulfilling this measure to the core (Sumbodo et al., 2019).

C. *Impacts of Public versus Private Sector Partnerships on Diploma Training Programs*

Public sector partnerships are understood to imply alliances between public institutions and government agencies. The idea is to provide the training institutions with strong support via policy alignment, funding, and access to a rich pool of resources for learning. The focus is typically on systemic improvements that are broad in nature with respect to educational infrastructure. In such cases priority is given to the needs of the public sector, often involving workforce development (Tansen & Monzur, 2012). It is indicated that in the case of public sector partnerships the involvement of bureaucratic agencies is predominant. Further, the process of decision making might be slower in this case because of requirements of adherence to regulations. In addition, public accountability in this case is considerable, and the implication is that there remains an obligation for those undergoing

training to remain answerable to the decision of the public bodies (Remington & Yang, 2020).

In contrast, private sector partnerships with educational or training institutions have the prominent role of industry leaders. It is not wrong to say that such partnerships remain more agile, focusing on the changed needs of industries. Technologies, in this industrial era, are rapidly transforming how businesses operate, and therefore changing industry practices. The relevance of training programs is directly linked with real-world projects and internships. When partnership is established between a training institute and private sector organization, the direct pipeline of innovative ideas and skilled talent is immensely beneficial (Mullins et al., 2016). While private sector partnerships are known to be offering targeted and industry-relevant skills, rapid adaptability is possible. But it is noteworthy that having private sector partnerships might be prioritizing skills that are specific to a particular industry in place of wider objectives of education. Also, the chances of less alignment with public policy goals are also there in case of private sector partnerships (Warasthe, 2018).

D. Recent Trends in Workforce Demands in Kuwait

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been felt across the globe, brining unprecedented situations across countries, and Kuwait is no exception. As financial and social challenges increased soon after the onset of the pandemic, the state of economy in Kuwait was deemed to be “unsustainable” (Ajwad et al., 2021). At the core of the structural challenges that the country faces remain the labor market of Kuwait. As young Kuwaitis are entering the labor market, there are expectations of appropriate jobs. Employers are looking for skilled workers who can take the nation’s economy to new scales and reestablish the country’s financial stability. Following a crisis in oil prices in Kuwait, because of the pandemic, job challenges have greatly intensified and the need for a skilled workforce has amplified. Industries in Kuwait are understood to be trying to adapt in response to the massive crisis, and a demand for employees who can sustain growth is understood to be getting more indispensable.

Focused research in the Kuwait context underscores the significance of providing adequate training to existing and potential employees who can take the country’s economy forward. The differential impact of recent industry changes and the labor market dynamics are closely interrelated. This brings in the need of penetration of technical innovations into industries that cater to the needs of consumers and clients with diverse preferences and demands. Prior to the pandemic, the great global financial crisis and recession of 2008 had an adverse effect on growth in Kuwait during 2008-2010. Because of the recent recessionary spells, there was a major change in employment trends during 2016-2017 (Al-Qudsi et al., 2021). According to the International Labor Organization (2022) a considerable proportion of jobs that have developed in Kuwait following the pandemic has been identified to be for those with high skills, and mainly in professional and management categories. The rationale for this has been said to be demand and emergence for new channels of services and communications.

E. Benefits and Scope of Industry Partnerships in Kuwait

In the past decade or so it has been evident that Kuwait is keen on diversification of its economy beyond oil. Heavy investments are being made in projects encompassing tourism, real estate, and finance sectors. Also, entrepreneurship is being encouraged by the government for supporting SMEs. Priority is also being given to educational reforms that focus on sustainability (Olver-Ellis, 2020). At this juncture it is worth noting that several diploma training institutes in Kuwait are uniquely positioned to contribute to the aim of diversifying Kuwait’s economy. These institutions, such as Kuwait Technical College, College of Technology-Kuwait University, the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training, and American University of the Middle East are trying their best to provide practical training and education for meeting the demands evolving job market. Industry partnerships involving such educational bodies hold the ability to improve curriculum relevance and provide students with tools for improving skills.

Kuwait is a Middle Eastern country that has a large section of its graduates and potential employees looking for mentorship and networking opportunities. The growing demand for industry connections pinpoint that needs for robust networking platforms and structured mentorship programs. It is known that networking and mentorship opportunities are crucial for training courses since industry insights complement learning from academics (Al-Ali, 2014). Another area worth exploring is regional collaboration in Kuwaiti training course institutes. Growth opportunities are often seized by companies in Kuwait, like other Middle East countries, by expanding to other countries though some challenges are to be tackled. If partnership is there between institutions of Kuwait and organizations of other countries from the region then a step ahead can be taken by students to become equipped with in-depth knowledge and skills. Such partnerships bring in a promise to advance innovation and subsequently direct extend across various sectors, leading to a robust regional economy (Arman et al., 2022).

F. Challenges and Barriers to Industry Partnerships in Kuwait

Industries in the Middle East have been found to be failing in communicating their needs in a prompt and clear manner. In many cases, there is a lack of communication channels that are structured in nature. Because of the lack of an established array of communication platforms actionable information might not be timely shared with educational institution. Due to this situation, diploma training institutions face the challenge of engaging in appropriate industry partnerships that fulfill the objective of meeting changing industry demands. Delays might be there in training courses because of the need of waiting for suitable opportunities, leading to inefficiencies (Handoussa & Abou Shnief, 2014). In this regard a challenge that seems to be substantial for training institutions is the restricted engagement of industry stakeholders in the delivery of diploma training courses. If such is the case, then the chances of the training curriculum becoming irrelevant or outdated are high (Stachová et al, 2019).

Institutions providing diploma training courses in Kuwait are also vulnerable to the impacts of financial constraints on when it comes to industry partnerships. Effective training courses that involve industry partnerships need logistics and resources that entail considerable financial support. The effectiveness and relevance of such courses are impeded if proper resource allocation is not there following a limited budget. It is worth mentioning that industries might be facing their own financial constraints because of the economic instability on a national scale. The apprehended outcome is hindering of training courses that are responsive to industry needs (Rybnicek & Königsguber, 2019). Another challenge that has been identified to be applicable to the Kuwait context is lack of awareness among faculty of educational institutes regarding the benefits of industry partnerships (Katoue et al., 2021). Faculty members might not be in a position to grasp the way in which involvement of industry can be enhancing their training courses and improving employability of students.

III. CONCLUSION

It can be deduced that despite the possible benefits of industry partnerships for diploma training courses in Kuwait there are certain challenges. Collaborations between diploma training institutions in Kuwait and industry leaders hold the potential to bridge the gap between evolving industry needs and academic training. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a major shift in the labor market, and employers are looking for talented individuals with specific skillsets matching industry requirements. However, the issues that have been identified to be impeding such a scope of effective partnership, both with public and private sector, are misaligned and poor communication, limited engagement of industry experts, and restricted financial resources. As the economy of Kuwait is diversifying in recent years, well-structured partnerships seem to be a promising tool for making young people ready for varied industries. There is a crucial need to focus on the barriers so that the impact of industry partnerships can be optimal.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For enhancing the alignment between industry needs and institutions in Kuwait providing diploma training courses, strategic recommendations are hereby provided. It is expected that the recommended initiatives, because of their focus on the establishment of strong partnerships, would help the development of such courses in future. Strengthening of industry-academic partnership is beneficial for the country's economy in the long term. If such actions are prioritized by the concerned stakeholders, students in Kuwait would be better prepared to fit the evolving labor market (Bridgeford & Amant, 2017).

- It is recommended that industry experts in Kuwait engage in the development of regular communication platforms with educational institutions that are systemic and formalized in nature. The benefit that would be gained is clear and timely exchange of updated information pertaining to emerging trends, industry needs, and

changes in learning approaches. As a result of this, there would be better alignment of training courses with the requirements of the present job market that has undergone major changes in the past five years or so.

- Securing and allocating financial resources is another major step that must be taken for the establishment and sustenance of promising industry partnerships. It is known that development in infrastructure and technological applications that support learning of professionals who are receiving training across disciplines need financial investments. It is realized that adequate funding approval and systemic allocation of the same would be pivotal for encouraging apprenticeships, internships, and collaborative endeavors.
- The education department of Kuwaiti government is advised to provide encouragement and support to educators to update diploma training course curricula. Designing curricula in a manner that justifies the major and minor changes in industry needs would be advantageous for such training courses. In this regard it is worth mentioning that if feedback from industry experts who are also interested in academic development are integrated into such curricula design initiatives, then the outcomes would be optimal.
- As research has identified a lack of awareness among industry experts and educational institutions regarding the benefits of industry partnerships, it is significant that action is to be taken in this regard. It would be appropriate if seminars and workshops were conducted on a regular basis for highlighting the benefits of industry partnerships. This would increase the engagement of the concerned stakeholders and the commitment of both parties, and thus the effectiveness of industry partnerships in general.
- Lastly, it is recommended that educational institutions that provide diploma training courses develop mentorship and networking programs aligned with the viewpoints and perceptions of industry experts. If students are provided with industry contacts and mentors their career readiness would be enhanced to a greater extent. Helping the young mind build their professional lives and valuing their potential and skillsets would bridge the existing gap between employment in Kuwait and education.

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