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Analyzing impacts of sabbatical leaves of absence regarding faculty members, University of Tehran

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Abstract

Improving the Sabbatical leaves of absence from the university by the faculty members as a continuing process; require assessment of outcomes or impacts and reorganization of influencing factors in comprehensive approach. Getting feedback from faculty members for integrating their perspectives in planning processes as a participatory and accountable action - reaction-interaction chain, is main objective of this research. Methodologically, surveying research using quantitative research paradigm based on questionnaire has been in concern. Researcher's designed questionnaire was collected from 120 selected faculty members, using statistical simple random sampling method. Data has been collected in the year 2004 and was analyzed by using factor analyzing technique using SPSS software. According to findings the impacts of sabbatical leaves of absence of faculty members, can be classified in five components. The first factor called the professionalization factor explained 32.4% of the total variance. The second factor called the psychological/ cultural effects explained 19.3% of the variances. The third factor called Social - scientific capacity-building factor explained 17.8% of the variances. The forth factor called institutional productivity explaining 10% and finally the fifth factor was called individual motivation's factor explaining 8.9% of the Total variances. In conclusion, based on obtained findings, some appropriate mechanisms are suggested for improving the sabbatical leaves of absence for faculty members, such as strategic planning and proper policy making.

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Key words: Higher education, University of Tehran, Faculty Members, Faculty Development, Sabbatical Leaves, and Factor Analysis.

1. Introduction

Today in many countries, the main challenges are to acquire productive goals, developing entrepreneurship ability, facilitate the management of the wisdom in all levels for economic and sustainable development by the local, National and international manpower. Many governments are aware of the importance of the education and invest a huge amount of the money in public education and Higher education (Sameti and et.al., 1993).

In real, investing on the Higher education represent a very important investment on development of human resources. In a process of transmitting insights, knowledge and skills to the volunteers of education, the institutions of higher education have important role for educating individuals in technical, vocational, managerial and professional capabilities. Also the ability to conduct research and to introduce new scientific findings for solving the main problems of the todays challenges (Woodhall, 1992).

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Considering the Higher education components, human resources, specially faculty members have a crucial role in realization of academic excellence in the Higher education institutions. The missions of the Higher education within a country are approaching excellence regarding sciences and technology and also to realize the development within the country and the region based on evolving and ever-changing economic, social and services (Arasteh, 1992).

Also redefining cultural, ecological, technological, political, scientifically know-how for a sound living and a sustainable living environment for all, by approaching excellence in sciences, technology, education and communications this mission will be possible. The success and effectiveness of any kind of the programmed intervention, facilitating, supporting for political, educational and organizational activities toward realization of excellence in the higher education's institutions need to have well prepared faculty members for education, research and outreach responsibilities. Since every day the speed of ever-changing knowledge and technology is increasing, therefore opportunities for faculty members for updating their scientific potentials through experiential learning from co-faculty members can be recommended through use of the sabbatical leaves of absence from the university for a well defined period of time to other universities world wide.

Increasing the level of knowledge, updating teaching and research's skills and empowerment of the faculty members can lead to a professional university toward a better rank in compare to other universities of the world. Comparative analysis of professional duties will have the benefit to make the necessary adjustments in the educational behaviour of the individuals. Participating in educational activities of the other universities in other countries in overall will empower the faculty members in cognitive, experiential and affection domains. Historically in the country of Iran the sabbatical leaves of absence started some times in the second half of the nineteenth century in the time of King Fathali Ghajar in the Ghajar's dynasty by the action of the Abbas Mirza (The national council of Iranian research, 1993).

Some individual believe using the process of the sabbatical leave of absence by the faculty members are costly, without sound management and the supervision is not helpful (Eghtesadi, 1993). In any case using sabbatical leave of absence from the university is an ongoing opportunity for empowering the faculty members. According to Bagherian (1993) equal opportunity for all faculty members to use the period of the sabbatical leave of absence from the university would increase the job attraction as being a faculty member.

Baher (1993) in relation to main challenges of the sabbatical leave of faculty members believe that there are many constraints toward using this opportunity by the faculty members, These constraints are such as negative bureaucracy, unfriendly actions of other countries toward applicants, and not well defined proposals for better use of such periods which can reduce the productivity of such actions.

Laan an Rodrigues Pereria (1989) in a study which has been done in Mosambique has recommended a policy to use F.A.O financial assistance to send the faculty members, Experts and teachers to other universities of other countries for a well defined period of time. From strategic planning in order to institutionalize the opportunities of the sabbatical leave of absence from the university, there is a need for strengthening the international cooperation. Mosavi Zare (1999) using the possibilities of the Iranian researchers and scholars in other countries for providing a suitable channel for exchange of graduate students and faculty members within some accepted arrangements, In real using the sabbatical leave of absence is a channel for international cooperation and understanding.

Arasteh (2006); Sharghi (2001); W. Van den Bore &et.al (1989) in a study about the effects of North and South cooperation in Russia recommends the empowerment of higher education, providing the infrastructure for outreach of the developing countries' university faculty members to use the period of sabbatical leave of absence and to do participatory research projects in an institutionalized and professional development in higher education through participative approaches in scientific projects.

Poespodarsono & Gurinto, (1989) in an analysis of the trend for reaching to excellence in higher education at the college of agriculture in the Brawijaya University has indicated that the role of international cooperation and exchange with foreign institutions such as cooperating with the Australian government in the context of planning for cooperation of Australian universities with Asia and the project for international development 2, also Netherland's universities‘ foundation for international cooperation for exchange of faculty members for their use of the period for sabbatical leave of absence from their university is one of the important factor for human resource’s development and can upgrade the academic standards of the mentioned university.

Shute (1989) defending and defining the status of international cooperation for improving the higher education's status in developing countries has indicated that in spite of some weaknesses we can not ignore the advantages of International University‘s Exchanges within the context of the sabbatical leaves and/or other
kinds of cooperation. The sabbatical leave of absence has many positive, negative, observable, and non-observable outcomes. In this regard Arasteh (1993) indicates that along with scientific outcomes of the sabbatical leaves, one can follow his personal scientific interests, experiencing work independence causing motivation and job satisfaction. Also experiencing participatory scientific cooperation with co-faculty members which can have benefit for reaching to a sense of cooperative attitudes is internationally. The role and advantages of sabbatical leave of absence from the universities on the job satisfaction of faculty members are emphasized in the studies done by Tuntivanich (1989).

Sima (2000) and also Clifton& Wallin (2004) The results of their studies more or less show that continuing opportunities for faculty members to use the period of the sabbatical leaves is wise to be provided. In other words to be organized and institutionalized within the structure of the universities, necessary budget could be allocated for its continuing operation. In real, giving the opportunity of sabbatical leaves to the faculty members, giving financial support to them has the meaning of paying regards and respect to transfer of technology and empower the ability of the faculty members to have new innovations and maintain applied past innovations localized in the country. A comprehensive master plan for professional development of the faculty members is useful.

Valas (1976) believes that there is a need to see the process of the sabbatical leaves from the university within a context of a system, in order to define its status within the university structure, he recommends to study the effective factors for developing a sound program.

2. Research methods

A surveying design along with the researcher's made questionnaire has been the instrument of the research, for maximizing reliability and validity of the questionnaire, calculating Cranach's alpha and expertise reviews has been used. After screening the questions the quantity of the mentioned Alpha was 0.78 points for the scales of the questionnaire and was acceptable statistically. The sample population in the mentioned research has been 120 university of Tehran's faculty members determined according to Morgan's sampling table. Simple random sampling method using the list of the faculty members which was prepared according to the conditions of the research design has been used to fill the questionnaires.
For implementing the research design, a library research along with intensive interviews were conducted, a scientific frame work of study for the processes of sabbatical leave of absence of the faculty members was prepared, review of literature was done and the questionnaire was prepared with a flexibility of "0-10 points" giving the options to the respondent for answering the questions. Data processing was done accordingly, and SPSS software was used to gain the results of the research study, using the options for factor analysis statistical method. Two sets of positive and negative outcomes of sabbatical leave of absence were arranged in order to reach to a sound conclusion.

3. Results

Based on the findings of the research, the quantity of the KMO was equal to 0.832; the quantity of Bartlett was 900/58, which was significant at 99 percent level, Table 1.

Factors were classified in five groups or components, Eigen value, Percentage of variance and Cumulative percentage of variance were determined and are presented in the Table 2.

According to the results of this study presented in Table 2 the factor of Approaching professionalism (11 variables) with the Eigen value of 11.023 causes %32.422 of total variances, The second factor (seven variables) "Cultural and psychological effects" with the Eigen value equal to 6.559, represents %19.921 of the variances, the third factor (six variables) "Approaching higher scientific capacity" with Eigen value equal to 6.048, represents %17.787 of the variances, The forth factor (four variables), "Institutional productivity" with Eigen value of 3.411 represent 10.33 percent of total variance, and the fifth factor (four variables) "Personal motivation" with Eigen value equal to 3.018 represent 8.876 percent of total variance.

The commutative quantity of the five mentioned factors (32 variables) is equal to % 88.409 representing the total variance resulted from this study. Correlation matrix of factors with attitude constructs after rotation in factor analysis is presented in Table 3.
The first factor "Approaching toward professionalism" has covered eleven variables regarding the outputs of the sabbatical leave of absence from the university; this factor represents vocational and professional efforts of the faculty members, to achieve higher excellence in their profession. Writing and publishing books, articles and/or improve their insights, knowledge and skills along with locating necessary documents and save them as copy in traditional forms or using modern techniques of gathering and saving using information and communication technology are among these variables. Attending in the national and international societies, scientific congresses and conferences, becoming familiar with new educational technology and making scientific visits are possibilities for achieving better abilities toward professionalism. The sabbatical leave of absence from the university will give the opportunity to the faculty members to make a self evaluation about their strengths, and scientific weaknesses and review their thoughts toward excellence himself and higher education in general.

There are also some negative outcomes after using sabbatical leave of absence from the university by the faculty members, such as not returning to the home university and wasted financial support. The second set of outcomes is related to cultural – psychological variables, some positive ones are getting a peace of mind for the reason of stopping the genera duties for a short period of time, having a sense of motivation for more scientific efforts, and present himself in international settings. Some negative outcomes are stresses resulted from losing their position within the university, limitation of job's benefits, and miss adjustment of the family members along the process of using their opportunity. Un-familiarity with the new culture, different goals of the family members and posing toward unwanted cultural habits, are among negative outcomes.

The second factor also indicates both positive and negative outcomes regarding Cultural – Psychological variables, the positive ones are refreshed spiritually for more scientific efforts, increasing peace of mind and lower stress for doing universities responsibilities within the period of the sabbatical leave of absence. Some stresses about making suitable adjustments for family members, limitation of extra incomes, leaving some university positions, and not being present for making important decision makings are among negative outcomes.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

Higher education system in the context of a dynamic system, self aware, goal oriented and intelligent system has both quantitative and qualitative dimensions. Sound development of such a system needs improvement in the both dimensions. The role of higher education in social, cultural and economic development is determinant. The manpower needed for all the sectors within the country are educated through the universities. Empowering and developing the universities in the both qualitative and quantitative dimensions, are crucial and can be seen as an infrastructure for development. Faculty members are one of the principle input of the higher
education and are active within the structure of the university, whenever the quality of their abilities are lowering, it is certain that would directly effect the higher education outputs, even the quantity. One important condition for being up to date in scientific know-how is motivation (Gharoon 1994). In order to get motivation, one need to have job satisfaction, and for acquiring the job satisfaction there is a need to gain more skills and have the opportunity to progress.

It is crystal clear that assessing the quality of higher education needs to formulate policies which are initiated from wisdom and group brainstorming and decision making. Offering opportunities for faculty members to upgrade their potentials would be a wise decision. Sabbatical leave of absence is one process which has proved to have special effectiveness for such developments. Therefore there is a need to study the outcomes for improving the process of using the period of sabbatical leave of absence from the university must be systematized and institutionalized for all faculty members according to sound programming efforts. This has been the goal of the present research. Based on the findings of the research done on the Impacts of using the opportunity of sabbatical leave of absence, the following suggestions can lead to the improvement of such policy in order to approach higher excellence in higher education:

1- Professionalism component:
The variables selected for cognitive understanding of this component were such as Writing articles, books, developing new knowledge, gaining new insights, developing new skills, locating new resources etc with effectiveness on total variance is equal to 32.422 percent, which is high and lead one to the conclusion for formulating a policy for such activities in a proposal submitted by the faculty members at the time of the request. The outcome would empower the faculty members in their scientific abilities.

There is a need to make careful planning in order to reduce the sabbatical leaves of absence’s negative outcomes such as some faculty members not returning home, some kind of reservations may be needed to motivate the individuals to take the responsibility for giving certain period of services after returning home.

2- Cultural – psychological component:
The variables in this component are related to cultural effects, stresses, vocational peace of mind, family peace of mind etc., having effectiveness on the total variance equal to 19.921 percent (Table 3). Changing the style of the life even for a short period of time has its own challenges, when a faculty member goes to a new location with different culture, he and his family for sure experience both excitement and difficulties having effect on their total behaviour, positive outcomes such as seeing and hearing different happenings, experiencing different styles of life, seeing different kind of people and having interactions, gaining some peace of mind, along with negative outcomes such as losing money, passports and/or making mistakes. Also unwanted cultural effects may create stresses for the family members.

Based on this finding the university can formulate a policy and publish handbooks for introducing different cultures along with cultural strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats or provide workshops for the successful sabbatical leave of absence for the faculty members.

3 - Capacity building component:
Some of the variables of this component are attitude changes, developing creativity, finding new ideas, improving their teaching’s style, etc., with effectiveness on total variance equal to 17.787 percent (Table 3) can be both social and scientific, one of the important outcome of using the opportunity of sabbatical leave of absence by the faculty members is social capacity building which only happens whenever the person is faced with some difficult and systematic situation which every action may lead to different conclusion in a serious and determinate conditions and also there exist the chance for scientific capacity building through familiarity with experiences of co-faculty members, and having scientific tours.

In order to prevent early retirement, to increase scientific capacity building of faculty members can be useful. These faculty members can lead Master thesis and Ph.D. dissertation. They can also be as a lecturer in higher education courses.

4 - Institutional productivity component:
Variables of this component are such as approving research contracts with national and international organization, institutes and universities in the country where the sabbatical leave of absence is planned for, income generation, financial losses of the university, not using the university facilities during the period when the faculty member is at sabbatical leave of absence, with 10.033 percent of the total variance (Table 3). With national and international organization, institutes and universities in the country where the sabbatical leave of absence is planned for. Of course there is a probability that the faculty member does not return home, so some thoughts must be given to it for formulating a proper policy for that.

5 – Personal motivation component:

Variables of this component are developing international spirituality, Being known as an international faculty member, having the ability to communicate continuously and making cooperation with specialists, with 8.876 percent of the total variance (Table 3). Therefore such arrangements can be useful in a comprehensive master plan for providing and evaluating processes of the sabbatical leave of absence from the university. To consider both the financial interests and spiritual motivations of the faculty members could be seen in the policy makings. Finally based on this research there are some recommendations for strategic planning of sabbatical leave of absence of the faculty members in a comprehensive approach in order to increase the academic capacities of the universities in Iran. For institutionalization of the sabbatical leaves of absence for faculty members, it is recommended to the Iran's Ministry of Science, Researches and Technology to formulate such policies for, providing financial supports and/or give permission to the universities to develop and implement a master plan along with a system of evaluation toward goal oriented approach for sabbatical leave of absence as a mean for approaching toward excellence in higher education.

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