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A GAP ANALYSIS OF CAREER EXPECTATION AND WORKPLACE REALITY AMONG MBA PASSED OUT STUDENTS IN COIMBATORE

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ABSTRACT
In today's competitive employment environment, MBA graduates often enter the workforce with high expectations regarding salary, career growth, job security, work-life balance, and workplace environment. However, the actual workplace experiences of many graduates differ from their expectations, creating a gap between career expectations and workplace reality. This study examines the expectation–reality gap among MBA passed-out students in Coimbatore and analyses its impact on job satisfaction. The study focuses on factors such as salary satisfaction, career growth opportunities, managerial support, recognition, workload, and workplace environment. Using structured data collection and statistical analysis, the research analyses the extent to which workplace experiences meet the expectations of MBA graduates and identifies the major areas of mismatch affecting employee satisfaction and career adjustment.

KEYWORDS: *Career Expectations, Workplace Reality, MBA Graduates, Job Satisfaction, Career Growth, Work-Life Balance, Workplace Environment*

INTRODUCTION

In today's dynamic and competitive business environment, management education plays a vital role in shaping the career aspirations and professional competencies of students. A Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree is widely considered a pathway to better career opportunities, higher salary packages, leadership positions, and professional growth. MBA graduates often enter the job market with high expectations regarding job roles, organizational culture, career advancement, work-life balance, and managerial support. These expectations are influenced by academic learning, internships, placement activities, peer interactions, and exposure to corporate practices during their course of study. However, the transition from academic life to the professional workplace is not always smooth, as many graduates experience differences between what they expect and what they actually encounter in their jobs.

The gap between career expectations and workplace reality has become an important concern in today's employment scenario. Many MBA graduates face challenges such as lower-than-expected salary packages, limited career growth opportunities, high workload, role ambiguity, and work environments that differ from their expectations. Such mismatches can negatively affect employee satisfaction, motivation, performance, and long-term career commitment. In rapidly developing educational and industrial cities like Coimbatore, MBA graduates are employed across various sectors including IT, manufacturing, finance, marketing, human resources, and service industries. Despite the availability of employment opportunities, graduates often struggle to align their expectations with actual workplace conditions.

Understanding this expectation–reality gap is important for educational institutions, employers, and students alike. Educational institutions need to equip students with practical exposure and realistic career awareness, while organizations must improve communication regarding job roles, career growth, and workplace culture. Therefore, this study aims to analyse the gap between career expectations and workplace reality among MBA passed-out students in Coimbatore and examine its influence on job satisfaction and career adjustment.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Porter and Steers (1973) examined the concept of expectation–reality mismatch and explained that employees enter organizations with predefined expectations regarding salary, career growth, job roles, and work environment. The study found that when expectations are not fulfilled, employees experience dissatisfaction and reduced commitment. The authors emphasized that realistic expectations are important for better adjustment and job satisfaction among employees, especially fresh graduates entering the workforce.

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Vroom (1964), through Expectancy Theory, explained that employee motivation depends on expected rewards and outcomes. The study highlighted that individuals are motivated when they believe their efforts will result in desirable rewards such as salary, promotions, and recognition. MBA graduates often expect rapid career growth and attractive compensation, and unmet expectations may reduce satisfaction and motivation in the workplace.

Hurst and Good (2009) studied unrealistic career expectations among graduates and found that many students enter employment with idealistic views regarding salary, work environment, and career advancement. The study revealed that lack of exposure to workplace realities creates a gap between expectations and actual experiences. The authors suggested that career counselling and practical exposure can help students develop realistic expectations before entering employment.

Wanous (1980) introduced the concept of Realistic Job Preview (RJP) and explained that employees often experience "reality shock" when actual workplace conditions differ from expectations. The study highlighted that factors such as workload, organizational culture, and unclear job roles affect employee satisfaction. The research concluded that providing accurate job information before recruitment helps employees adjust better to workplace realities.

Dean, Ferris, and Konstans (1988) examined the workplace experiences of new employees and found that fresh graduates often face stress, workload pressure, and adjustment difficulties during the early stages of employment. The study highlighted that lack of organizational support and role clarity negatively affects employee satisfaction and performance. Proper mentoring and onboarding programs were suggested to improve workplace adjustment.

Jackson (2013) focused on work readiness among graduates and found that many MBA graduates possess theoretical knowledge but lack practical workplace skills. The study revealed that graduates often struggle to adapt to workplace expectations, communication requirements, and organizational culture. The author emphasized the importance of internships, industry-oriented learning, and skill development programs in improving workplace readiness and employee satisfaction.

RESEARCH GAP

Although several studies have been conducted on job satisfaction, workplace adjustment, and employee expectations, limited research has specifically focused on the gap between career expectations and workplace reality among MBA passed-out students in Coimbatore. Most existing studies mainly concentrate on general employee behavior and organizational commitment rather than MBA graduates' real workplace experiences. Furthermore, very few studies have examined factors such as salary expectations, managerial support, career growth, and work-life balance together in a single study. Hence, this study attempts to fill the research gap by analyzing the expectation–reality gap and its impact on job satisfaction among MBA graduates in Coimbatore**.**

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To identify the career expectations of MBA passed out students in Coimbatore.
2. To examine the actual workplace experiences of MBA passed out students.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts both descriptive and analytical research designs to examine the gap between career expectations and workplace reality among MBA passed-out students in Coimbatore. The study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale from 389 MBA graduates working in various sectors such as IT, finance, marketing, HR, manufacturing, and service industries. Secondary data were collected from journals, books, research articles, and previous studies related to job satisfaction and expectation–reality gaps. Convenience sampling method was used for selecting respondents based on accessibility and willingness to participate.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 01: Expectation of High Salary in First Job

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	70	18%
Disagree	24	6%
Neutral	78	20%
Agree	102	26%
Strongly Agree	115	30%
Total	**389**	**100%**

The analysis shows that 26% of respondents agree and 30% strongly agree that they expected a high salary in their first job, indicating high salary expectations among MBA graduates. Around 20% of respondents remain neutral, while a smaller percentage disagree or strongly disagree. Overall, the findings reveal that most MBA graduates entered employment with strong expectations regarding salary packages.

Table 02: Satisfaction with Current Salary

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	91	23%
Disagree	46	12%
Neutral	108	28%
Agree	111	29%
Strongly Agree	33	8%
Total	**389**	**100%**

The analysis indicates that 29% of respondents agree and 8% strongly agree that they are satisfied with their current salary. However, 23% strongly disagree and 12% disagree, showing dissatisfaction among many respondents regarding salary levels. A considerable percentage of respondents also remain neutral. Overall, the findings suggest that actual salary experiences are comparatively lower than the expectations of MBA graduates.

Table 03: Gap Analysis between Expectation and Reality

Factor	Expectation Mean	Reality Mean	Gap
Salary	3.43	2.87	0.56
Career Growth	3.25	3.03	0.22
Job Security	3.43	3.26	0.17
Work-life Balance	3.42	3.29	0.13
Role Clarity	3.43	3.29	0.14
Learning Opportunities	3.42	3.24	0.18
Recognition	3.36	3.28	0.08
Work Environment	3.48	3.28	0.2
Manager Support	3.44	3.14	0.3
Workload	3.47	3.34	0.13
Overall Mean	**3.41**	**3.2**	**0.21**

The gap analysis shows that the mean expectation score (3.41) is higher than the mean reality score (3.20), resulting in an overall gap of 0.21. This indicates that the workplace experiences of MBA graduates do not completely meet their initial career expectations. The highest gap is observed in salary (0.56), followed by managerial support (0.30), showing that respondents are comparatively less satisfied in these areas. Moderate gaps are identified in career growth and work environment, while smaller gaps are seen in recognition and work-life balance. Overall, the findings reveal a noticeable expectation–reality gap among MBA graduates in Coimbatore, which may influence their job satisfaction and career adjustment.

FINDINGS

The study found that MBA graduates entered employment with high expectations regarding salary, career growth, job security, work-life balance, and workplace environment. Most respondents expected attractive salary packages, supportive management, recognition, and rapid career advancement after completing their MBA degree. However, the actual workplace experiences of many respondents were comparatively lower than their expectations. The study identified a noticeable expectation–reality gap, particularly in salary satisfaction and managerial support. Respondents also experienced challenges related to workload, limited growth opportunities, and differences between expected and actual job roles. The findings further revealed that the expectation–reality gap has a direct influence on job satisfaction among MBA graduates. Graduates whose expectations were relatively fulfilled showed better satisfaction and commitment towards their jobs, while those experiencing larger gaps reported lower levels of satisfaction and motivation.

SUGGESTIONS

The study suggests that management institutions should provide more industry-oriented training and practical exposure to MBA students in order to prepare them for real workplace conditions. Colleges should regularly organize internships, workshops, industrial visits, and skill development programs to enhance practical knowledge and workplace readiness among students. Career guidance and counselling sessions should also be conducted to help students develop realistic career expectations before entering employment. In addition, MBA graduates

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should focus on improving their communication skills, adaptability, and practical abilities to meet organizational requirements effectively. Continuous learning and professional development activities should be encouraged to support career growth, improve job satisfaction, and reduce the gap between career expectations and workplace reality.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that there is a significant gap between career expectations and workplace reality among MBA passed-out students in Coimbatore. MBA graduates entered employment with high expectations regarding salary, career growth, workplace environment, and managerial support, but actual workplace experiences did not fully match these expectations. The study identified salary satisfaction and managerial support as the major areas where expectation–reality gaps exist. The findings also reveal that this gap has a direct impact on job satisfaction and employee motivation. Therefore, there is a need for better alignment between management education and industry expectations through practical exposure, career guidance, skill development, and effective organizational communication. Reducing the expectation–reality gap can help improve employee satisfaction, performance, and long-term career success among MBA graduates.

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