

ABSTRACT

Workforce flexibility is an employment strategy that has emerged as a response to cut costs and improve efficiency. It is a firm's capability to reconfigure, expand, or contract its human resources and processes according to changes in business conditions. Flexibility focuses on alternative work arrangements such as the use of contractual and temporary workers. It involves a set of activities that the firm pursues to change its human resources and processes according to changed environmental and organizational requirements.

The changing life style preferences and career patterns of people demanding for more leisure time, less rigidity in working time and more control of their time has also hastened the adoption of flexible work patterns.

This paper looks at the concept of workforce flexibility in the context of distance education. It is noted that distance education is an industrialised form of teaching and learning where management practices such as the composition and employment patterns of human resources management are defined by the prevailing work conditions at any given time. This paper explores the relevance of the concept of workforce flexibility in distance education using the model of the 'flexible firm' advanced by Atkinson (1984). This model focused on the type of contracts offered by employers and proposed a differentiation between a core

workforce of full-time permanent employees, for whom functional flexibility was seen to be appropriate; and a peripheral workforce of part-time, temporary and sub-contractual workers for whom numerical flexibility was relevant. Empirical findings derived from an analysis