



Linking Degree Programme Curricula and Employability: Need of Innovation in Higher Education Institutions of India

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ABSTRACT

Employability implicitly refers to the full-time student who enters higher education at around the age of 18 and who graduates at the age of 21 or 22, and deals with matters beyond the boundaries of the subject discipline(s) concerned. For older students (many of who will opt to study part-time), employability may take on a different colouring, since they may well have experienced employment and/or voluntary work prior to (or whilst they are) engaging in higher education. For them, the emphasis that they give to employability may be on the development of subject-specific understanding to complement what they have already learned about employability in general. There is also a need to acknowledge the employment-relevant learning that ostensibly full-time students derive from part-time employment as they seek to fund their passage through higher education. Students, therefore, will develop their employability in ways that reflect their particular circumstances. One of roles for the higher education (HE) sector is to supply suitably skilled graduates to the work place. However, the ability of the HE sector to achieve this task has been questioned. Consequently, for HE to meet this role some degree of change within HE curricula might be required.

KEYWORDS : Employability, Higher Education (HE), bridging the gap through industrial input and curriculum involvement.

Introduction

Education is regarded as one that contributes to social, political and cultural and economic transformation of a country. The social sector of a country, namely, health, rural development, education and employment generation has assumed great significance in the new economic regime. The prosperity of any nation is intrinsically linked to its human resources. Human capital is one of the most important assets of a country and a key determinant of a nation's economic performance. An increase in the human development index would lead to high levels of economic growth of the country. Adam Smith (1776) pointed out that a "man educated at the expense of much labour and time ... may be compared to one of those expensive machines" (Smith) and other classical economists observed that expenditure on education could be regarded as a form of investments that promised future benefits. The strength of a nation is dependent on its intellectual and skillful citizens. It can be observed that education is an essential tool for achieving sustainability. Only a quality future human capital can envision development of its nation to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own need. Without a quality human capital, a nation will be weak as there is no human factor that is capable to embark on new initiatives and perspectives. A quality human capital comes from a quality education process. A carefully designed and well planned education system is critical to developing such human capital. Thus, institutions of higher learning play a very important role and the teaching and learning processes in institutions of higher learning should provide such knowledge and skills to future graduates.

A number of issues related to linking graduates from higher education to the workplace have been identified with many literatures. That has suggested a gap between the skills of graduates and the requirements of the workplace. This gap has partly been filled through the development of key skills within the HE curricula; however, from the review of an indicative life science degree programme there still seems to be an inconsistency between the learning outcomes of the degree and the likely needs of typical graduates. The Higher Education system in India grew rapidly after independence. By 1980, there were 132 universities and, 738 colleges in the country enrolling around 5% of the eligible age group in Higher Education. Today, in terms of enrolment, India is the third largest Higher Education system in the world. Much of the state of Higher Education in the country can be attributed to the system of governance and regulation. One of the striking features of the development of Higher Education in India over

the last few decades has been the extent to which private institutions have attempted to respond to the massive demand for education at post-secondary and tertiary level. Though the enrolment increases but there is Skill shortage remains one of the major constraints to continued growth of the Indian economy. Too many young people in the India fail to gain the basic, employability and lower level skills needed to progress in work. Current employment and skills systems in the India are neither fully integrated, nor sufficiently aligned to labor market needs. Insufficient supply of quality skills is one of the main impediments to further economic growth in India. However, the skill shortage is still one of the major constraints in most industries in India (World Bank, 2009b). Many employers emphasized the importance of soft skills during interviews. Also many study strongly discussed that many employers spend significant amount of resources to provide employees with training for improvement in not only technical but also soft skills (Wadhwa, Kim deVitto, Gereffi, 2008) in order to link the skill set demand and supply of labour at different skill levels.

Literature review

It is widely believed that the connection between higher education and employment has become more complex. The twenty-first century workforce has experienced tremendous changes due to advances in technology; consequently, the "old way" of doing things may be effective but not efficient. Entry level college graduates have not acquired the skills necessary for the workforce and, as such, are not prepared for the demands of industry careers (Peddle, 2000). The National Business Education Association (NBEA) stated that the shortage of skills confronting today's dynamic workforce goes beyond academic and hands-on occupational skills. James and James (2004) agreed that "soft skills" is a new way to describe a set of abilities or talents that an individual can bring to the workplace. Soft skills characterize certain career attributes that individuals may possess such as team skills, communication skills, leadership skills, customer service skills, and problem solving skills (James & James). "Employers Value Communication and Interpersonal Skills" (2004) suggests that one who communicates effectively, gets along with others, embraces teamwork, takes initiative, and has a strong work ethic is considered to have an accomplished set of soft skills. As per Nasscom Press Information note "From India's young demographic profile which is an inherent advantage, to its vast network of academic infrastructure that churns out 3.1 million graduates annually, to its English speaking workforce, the country offers an unmatched mix of human –power benefits to

organizations." Despite the strong fundamentals, there are already growing concerns about parts of the existing available talent pool being unsuitable for employment due to a skill gap. Another survey of employers shows that only a handful of the 1400 engineering schools in India are recognized as providing world-class education with graduates worthy of consideration for employment (Globalization of Engineering Services, 2006). National Knowledge Commission (2009) report holds "command over the English language is perhaps the most important determinant of access to higher education, employment, possibilities and social opportunities. So there is a need of attention to focus on employability skills and the industrial requirement.

The term employability

There are many definitions for the word of employability with the concerned of different authors. The general term employability is taken as a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy. There are a number of points to be made regarding this working definition.

1. It is probabilistic. There is no certainty that the possession of a range of desirable characteristics will convert employability into employment: there are too many extraneous socio-economic variables for that (e.g. national, regional and/or local economic health, and the demand/supply ratio for the characteristics in question).
2. 'Skills' and 'knowledge' should not be construed in narrow terms. The richness of these concepts is elaborated below, and in the companion guide, Embedding employability into the curriculum.
3. The gaining of a 'graduate job', and success in it, should not be conflated. Higher education awards describe the graduate's past performance but some achievements vital for workplace success might not be covered, not least because of the difficulty of placing a grade on aspects such as drive, co-operative working and leadership. Large organizations may be able to fill in any gaps by recruiting through assessment centres, which use a greater range of (expensive) assessment techniques.
4. The choice of occupation is, for many graduates, likely to be constrained. They may have to accept that their first choice of post is not realistic in the prevailing circumstances, and aim instead for another option that calls on the skills etc. they have developed. (Note here the value to the graduate of adaptability and flexibility.)
5. It may not be possible to maximize the benefits to all interested parties. The employer's interest in appointing a graduate implies its self-interest in maximizing the benefit. The returns to the individual and the community are, from the employer's perspective, second-order, and the contribution of the individual appointee to the economy as a whole will be diffused to the point of invisibility (though, of course, human capital theory would expect economic benefit from the totality of appointments made by employers).

Research Gap

The evident of literature supports that the employability skill and soft skills proficiency is important to potential employers. However, employees of many fields are reported to be deficient in employability skill. Through the literature, the education institutions should aware about their curricula design and they all should Furthermore, the literature revealed that research is needed in the area of employability skill so that improved instructional methodology may be developed and applied by the educators.

Need and importance

Very careful attention needs to be paid to the term of employability and the industrial requirements. The recent attention on employability skill development has been brought about for various reasons. Askov and Gordon (1999) noted such reasons. They stated that "welfare reform legislation, major demographic shifts in the labor market, and the continual expansion of the U.S. economy have led to major changes in American business, which has seen unemployment rates fall in many regions to twenty-five year lows". With employment rates on the decline since the early 1990s (Morley, 2001), employers have become concerned more than ever with locating and preparing good

workers (Robinson, 2000). While many companies provide technical training specific to the job description, few offer training in employability skill development. In a study of 1,420 informational technology companies, approximately half of the respondents acknowledged that they had taught some form of employability skill development to their employees (Surmacz, 2005). According to Surmacz (2005), those who do provide such training are failing "because they do not improve individual comprehension, understanding, insight, or motivation" Tetreault (1997) argued that employability skills are lacking in the workplace because people are not prepared prior to entering the workforce. Employers blame higher education institutions for not preparing graduates for work beyond the classroom. Regardless of who is at fault, graduates must possess the employability skills demanded of industry to acquire and retain jobs (Tetreault, 1997). Therefore, higher education institutions should exert more effort in preparing graduates in their employability skills.

Research frame

This study was based on the data collected from Journals, articles, books, news papers and web sites. It is purely analytical in nature

Need of innovation in Higher education

The advent of knowledge-based economy and technological development has triggered fundamental changes to the way we work and an inevitable decline in the demand for less skilled labor. In order to maintain our competitive edge in the field of manufacturing, information technology, automobiles, research and development and other fields, we need a large workforce that is innovative, adaptable and with high education attainment and ability for self-learning. Every individual should understand the world of work and change required for effective employability. The higher institutions education may give due importance to the industry related curricula with value added and spiritual education. Every citizens of India must aware the multiculturalism of world of work and must embrace lifelong learning.

Bridging the gap through industry input

The higher education institution has to establish relationships with industry and they can prepare joint curricula of some subjects which speaks and built the employability skill. And also they can extend focus on introducing Work Integrated Learning (WIL) through sandwich courses and industry placements (Healey 2008). Also, some professional associations are becoming increasingly involved in establishing links between universities and work by providing professional competency frameworks as a tool for eligibility of membership and playing key roles on university curricula consultative committees and focus groups. This industry input is seen by many as invaluable, particularly in assisting the new graduate in their transition to the workplace. The rationale here is to make problems more real world, more relevant to current business structures and strategies and addressing both ethical and technical issues. In a study of graduate perception of the contribution of the university learning context, Crebert et al. (2004: 162) found that both graduates and employers considered industry involvement in undergraduate curricula as highly beneficial, particularly with regards to coping and solving 'real world problems' and time management. They advocated industry involvement beyond curricula input and into the areas of teaching and assessment in work placement scenarios.

Bridging the gap through generic attributes

The term generic attribute refers to an underlying characteristic - encompassing competency, skill, knowledge, trait, value, capability and ability - used to contribute to the community on a professional or societal level in a range of different contexts. The West Review (DETYA 1998) provided a framework of attributes which should be developed in every graduate attending an higher education. These comprised technical competence and a set of generic attributes including, but not limited to: critical thinking, intellectual curiosity, communication skills, information management skills, team working skills and high ethical values.

Work Integrated Learning (WIL)

Initiatives in WIL programs - such as sandwich years, work placements, internships and cooperative education - demonstrate the turning wheel of continuous improvement in undergraduate students education and, in combination with the phenomenal rise of part-time working may increase the real-life experience. Kim, Markham and

Kangelosi (2002: 32) argue WIL programs 'allow students to develop valuable skills such as leadership and communication while applying classroom learning to the real world' and serve as a valuable promotional tool for business schools in the increasingly competitive environment of higher education.

Curricula involvement and an hour practice

Universities are now increasingly recognizing the value in recruiting professionals as guest lecturers, giving students greater awareness of real life work issues to round out their theoretical knowledge (Hogg (2004: 4). As learning under these initiatives involves analyzing and reflecting on experiences in both the classroom and the workplace. The incorporation of graduate employability skills is a key issue in education policy and has served to calm industry concerns over poorly performing graduates and employer dissent. A series of recommendations - made by the Minister of Education, Science and Training - included the need to explicitly identify graduate employability skills in all university curricula, in addition to enhancing their teaching and assessment. Specifically, the conclusion reached was that 'the changing nature of higher education, teaching and learning professionals, in that the teaching of skills has become as important as the teaching of content.

Conclusion

The individual with the employability skill alone satisfy the requirement of labour market. The strength of a nation is dependent on its intellectual and skillful citizens. It can be observed that education is an essential tool for achieving sustainability. Only a quality future human capital can envision development of its nation to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own need. The relationship between higher education and the employability is longstanding. The higher education institutions, industries and students may jointly work for the attainment and effective performance of the world of work.

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