



Employability Gap: A Challenge For Higher Education

KEYWORDS

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Our university system is, in many parts, in a state of disrepair...In almost half the districts in the country higher education enrollments are abysmally low, and almost two-third of our universities and 90 per cent of our colleges are rated as below average on quality parameters... I am concerned that in many states university appointments, including that of vice-chancellors, have been politicized and have become subject to caste and communal considerations, there are complaints of favoritism and corruption.

– Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2007

There has been significant growth in educational institutions over last decade with number of graduates passing out year by year. Professional higher education has spread and reached common man, and ordinary people now dream of becoming an engineer or doctor or management professional unlike few decades back when it was for few privileged class getting into limited government colleges. Thousands of qualified graduates pass out every year and get started with journey to fulfill their dreams.

A graduation degree is considered a pathway to a job in the knowledge economy. India is ranked third in terms of graduates output next to that of USA and China, but in terms of quality we are trailing behind, as hardly 1 per cent of our students get quality education. The statistics of various studies show stark reality. Accordingly nearly half of the country's graduates are not employable in the knowledge of economy.

Statistics with many hues are presented from time to time. Most of them highlight the complexities involved in finding solutions. Here are some interesting facts on employability presented from divergent perspectives:

- According to The National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) report, each year over 3 million graduates and post-graduates are added to the Indian workforce. Of these, only 25 percent of technical graduates and 10-15 percent of regular graduates are considered employable by the industry.
- According to National Survey Office report, (the study conducted in 2009), there are about seven crore Indians who are unemployed or underemployed.
- According to NASSCOM not more than 30% of the engineering graduates are employable.

Most of the college graduates remain unemployable because of the lack of job-oriented training. There seems lack of synchronization between knowledge and application.

Concepts of Employability, Unemployability and Unemployment:

Employability refers to a person's capability of gaining ini-

tial employment, maintaining employment and obtaining new employment if required (Hillage and Pollard, 1998). A widely accepted definition of employability is a set of achievements, skills, understandings and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy (ESECT – Enhancing Student Employability Coordination Team, UK, 2004).

People often get confused between *unemployability* and *unemployment*. Unemployability arises when individuals have educational eligibility but lack in capability and suitability to execute job related activities despite the availability of employment opportunities; while unemployment is a state where individuals have educational eligibility, capability and suitability but dearth of employment opportunities. In India, current situation is more of unemployability rather than the unemployment.

Employability gap:

The present picture is like this:

- The supply end (academic institutions) looks healthy (have enough graduates to offer)
- The demand end (industrial/service sectors) looks healthy (have enough vacancies to offer)

Still, not all graduates get suitably employed and companies struggle to get their demand fulfilled by quality talent. When both the ends are healthy, i.e. have enough numbers to offer, both of them are not happy with the present scenario. The problem can be defined as *employability gap*. This gap exists because youth passing out from various professional colleges in IT education and other sectors are not suitably equipped to get employed in industry. The shortage of skilled labours across many industries is emerging as a significant and complex challenge to India's growth and future.

India has a huge brand name internationally in supplying skilled manpower. According to one estimate around five million Indians work abroad. With its demographic advantage and the large pool of English speaking people, India can well provide the solution to the world's skills shortage problem. But, what is needed is a holistic approach to address the problem of skills shortage within the country. At another level, to become a global economic power, India needs people of caliber to accelerate growth in manufacturing, service sectors or even in agriculture.

The economic development and progress of any nation depends on its higher education system. Our modern

higher education system was established in 1857 by the British and it has not changed much since then. For all this, India needs to cater employability skill.

The employability is a more serious problem and is a major challenge to the entire educational system. There is a great increase in the number of external students appearing for general graduation degree every year. The increase, however, does not guarantee the quality output. There still is apathy toward skill imparting courses. Societal pressure is also responsible for the great number of youth getting graduated. Indian society still looks down upon the people without higher education. There is no dignity of labour or respect for jobs involving physical labour. Only jobs involving intellect are considered respectable. As a result, the son of a farmer would never like to be a farmer even though there are great chances of his becoming prosperous. Attraction for white collar jobs forces students to opt for higher education without the caliber for it which is sure to be resulted into unemployment. There is a great demand for Degree or even Diploma holder from ITI (Industrial Training Institute). Students would rush towards IIT which is but a mirage for majority of them and ignore ITI which is sure to help them get employment.

Reasons for Unemployability and Measures to Increase Employability:

It's high time for the Indian education system to reboot the education by joint initiatives and other measures by individuals, government, industry and academia. Here are some activities that can lighten the problem of unemployability among Indian graduates and post-graduates:

Dignity of work:

In Indian society there are some deep-rooted notions regarding physical labour. We don't have the dignity of labour. At abroad, we are ready to do all kinds of odd jobs, but in our country, we all look for white collar jobs. It is depressing to see the children of farmers turning their backs to farming, and rushing for office jobs, for which they may lack skill or competence. Work-oriented education should begin right from pre-primary education and go up to high school where along with general education, the children should be taught the dignity of work.

Strict Policies for Admission to Higher Education and Evaluation:

Thousands of students pass out graduation and post graduation every year. With the advent of self-finance institutions, more students without caliber are graduating every year. Huge numbers and huge compromises in admissions leave them unemployable. Higher education should be available to the most worthy students and there should be strict entrance test to filter the worthy students. Furthermore, they should be evaluated strictly so that we get quality graduates in every field of knowledge.

Choice of Aptitude-oriented courses:

A large number of graduates are unaware of their aptitude. They choose a particular career not by taking in mind their interest or aptitude but by surrendering to the family or societal expectations. Trained career counselors in higher secondary schools and colleges should advise parents so that everyone doesn't jump onto the IT or engineering bandwagon.

Employability Skills:

Employability skills are the additional skills apart from the

core skills and hard skills. The needs of employability skills differ from country to country and from sector to sector and from time to time. However, certain qualities such as soft skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills, integrity, right attitude, problem solving, decision making and team building skills can be taken as a few common employability skills.

University-Industry Collaboration:

One stark reality in India is that there is a wide gap between the industrial sector and the educational sector. The talent required by the IT industry is different from what a manufacturing industry wants or what a service industry requires. Often, companies do not appreciate the knowledge students have in their specialized area. This gap has to be bridged for the benefit of the future of the young-istan and the future of the nation. Our universities must build collaboration with industry in designing the requisite curriculum for supplying employable graduates in the industry and service sectors. Industries require conceptual skills, analytical skills, verbal skills, interpersonal skills and technical skills. Therefore, it has become imperative of the higher education system to enhance the employability of the youth by imparting required skills.

Industry Internship Programmes:

Moreover, an industry internship programme has to be made mandatory so that the graduates can understand the industrial atmosphere and the industries can identify the talents and skills of the students and employ them whenever the opportunity arises.

Employable Courses/ Reforming Curricula:

India has one of the largest education systems in the world, but there is an urgent need to modernize it. We need more institutions in diverse fields like agriculture, biotechnology, human resources etc., if we want to reap the advantages of our demographic profile. In order to meet the requirements of skilled and unskilled labour, a massive increase in quantity of training is needed. The needs of emerging sectors like retail, automotive, construction and financial services should be taken into account. They have no fixed training courses currently.

Scarcity of ample educational institutions:

There is a shortage of ample educational institutions in India. India today needs at least 1500 universities, but has only 370. There are more than 550 million young people in need of education but do not have educational institutions to go to. India also needs around 1500 IITs, 1500 management institutions and 1500 medical colleges. Moreover, around one million good schools are also required.

Proficient and Trained Teachers:

Capacity also needs to be upgraded in terms of human resource. In other words, we also need to train more teachers, re-skill them according to today's requirement. Young people should be motivated to work as educationists and trainers. This will partly solve the unemployment problem and add to the system a large number of people who can then transfer those skills to students.

Qualitative Improvement in Education:

A change should be reflected in pedagogical methods such as a shift from memorization to the capacity for critical thinking, from traditional academic to practically relevant curriculum and from imparting information to imparting life values.

Mentoring:

Universities should offer mentoring programs to student to reflect on their development needs and career direction. For this purpose motivators and counselors should cooperate with institutions in the process of giving guidance and inspirations to students regarding the ways to increase employability skill from time to time in order to be excellent workers. Apart from that, apprentice programs are suggested to be carried out so that students will be able to understand employability skill better. This program will also serve the purpose to make student realized that employ-

ability skill is as important as technical skills.

The quality of the teachers of Math/Science and language must be improved at the school level. The concept of visiting faculty from corporate can be expanded to provide the familiarity with the real work-situations and technology in the area of industries. The students should be skilled enough to compete with the ever-changing technology. Let us all note it is not just about creating 10 million jobs within the country but it is actually skilling 47 million people to work not only in India but also abroad.

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