



EMERGING ISSUES IN YOUTH EMPLOYMENT GLOBAL AND INDIAN SCENARIO: AN ANALYSIS

Social Science

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KEYWORDS

Introduction

A skill is the acquired ability to execute a task in a given time and resources. Skills can be hard or soft. Domain specific technical skills are hard skills whereas transferable and personal attributes falls under the soft skills. These soft skills are valued over hard skills by employers (Saunders and Zuzel 2010). Bertson in 2008 defined employability as the perception of the individual to get employment. The employability skills are not necessarily getting a job done, rather it is the ability to stand out from a cohort of job seekers (Brown and Hesketh, 2004). It was concluded in this study that the perception of employability differs between the employers and employees. Harvey in 2001 said that graduates gain a range of expertise, values and attributes that defines employment.

The changing landscape of the global employment has made qualifications obsolete in getting and retaining a job (Shantaram, and Gandhe, 2012). A strong technical ability along with efficient soft skills is what decides the employability of the individuals. The soft skills include handling crisis, survival skills, etc that help solve problems at the micro level (Andrews & Russell, 2012). This is the reason why most of the multinational organizations recruit people through various methods apart from traditional hiring. Campus placements are a product of these new recruitment procedures (Harvey, 2000) The campus placements too have changed over the years from mere technical assessments to a combination of both technical and soft skills assessments (Knight and Yorke, 2002). In spite of the recruitment procedures in place, the layoffs are also quite high. This questions the credibility of the existing system of recruitment.

Evers in 2001 stated that a graduate cannot secure a job with a professional degree alone. Employers seek soft skills in addition to domain specific skills for coping in the current job markets. The challenge is higher with the graduate employee trainees (Evers, 2001). Bailey in 1990 stated the need for certain generic skills that are transferable for successful functioning in any organisation. Robinson in 2007 emphasized the need the employers give for these soft skills. In order to enhance productivity of the employees and the profitability of the organisation, there is a need for efficient workforce that gives higher returns on investment. The efficiency of the workforce depends on the blend of hard and soft skills. These are together known as employability skills. Knight in 2002 emphasized the need to strengthen these employability skills. And these skills have to be strengthened during every stage of the education which in turn would impact the productivity of the organisation. Nagle in 1987 noted that both hard and soft skills are mandatory for the success of the employees at the workplace. These hard skills are acquired during training by the industry professionals (Evers, 2001). Whereas these soft skills are acquired over a period of formal education that directly reflects the lifelong learning process of an individual. Employability skills for the future (2004) report says that this keeps the pressure on the education system for providing students that are fit enough to be directly employed by the organisation, thereby saving the cost to the company in the form of training. Singh in 2008 reported this as the reason why employers look for graduates who are already equipped with soft skills. This finding was reinforced by Tetreault in 1993, who said that getting a job and retaining the same depends on these soft skills and not just on the technical skills. The Committee for Economic Development in 1985 said that higher education should work towards developing these softskills. And this explains why there is an acute necessity to find and bridge this gap in the employability skills of the graduate trainees.

The last two decades has witnessed an exponential increase in the

number of graduate engineers to the existing workforce. This can be attributed to the widespread increase in the number of engineering colleges that has sprung up in the Asian sub-continent. According to an internet based web magazine, the number of engineering colleges has gone up from 1511 in 2006-07 to 3,345 in 2014-15. But a good number of the graduating population remains unemployed or find it hard to secure a suitable employment. The portal put this at 20-33% every year (Dazeinfo, 2014).

This monumental addition of the graduate engineers has created an acute competition crisis with a high supply against a low demand leading to very low salary packages to fresher. The salary packages have failed to beat the rate of inflation. In spite of this huge supply, the demand for skilled graduate engineers remains largely unmet. The skill of the graduate engineering trainees doesn't meet the expected standards. Experts state that 94% of the graduate engineers are not employable (Economicstimes, 2013).

The reason for this skill deficit can be attributed to the lack of soft skills among the graduate engineering trainees. Without soft skills, the high range of technical skills doesn't make sense to the employers who are looking for communication skills, team handling skills, leadership, cross-cultural competency, etc (Shiningconsultancy, 2012).

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Despite the development of employability skills being firmly entrenched in higher education's strategic agenda worldwide; recent graduates' standards in certain skills are not meeting industry expectations. A preliminary systematic review of literature was done to understand the topic under study.

A study on 559 engineering graduates from a reputed engineering college in South India along with their performance in various non-technical training were analyzed vis-à-vis their performance in the campus recruitment drives of major Information Technology companies in India was done. Correlation and multiple regressions were performed to test hypotheses. It was observed in this study that knowledge of engineering (GPA) and proficiency in English language

are important predictors of continuous employability (Gokuladas,2011).

Another online survey of 1008 business undergraduates who self-rated their competence against a framework of employability skills typically considered essential in graduates suggested a range of factors influence competence in employability skills. These include geographical origin, sex, work experience, engagement with the skills agenda, stage of degree studies, scope of relationships and activities beyond education and work and the quality of skills development in the learning program (Jackson,2014).

The number of studies from South India is less compared to the western literature. This study aims to address this gap in the existing literature on the employability skills of the graduate engineers.

This study was done to understand the Employers' Perceptions of communication skills and workplace efficiency of Graduate Engineering Trainees (GET's).

Definition of terms

Graduate engineering trainees

Graduate engineers who have been recruited as fresher and have completed at least six months and not more than one year of training in an IT company.

Graduate employability skills

Employers expect a certain range of hard skills pertaining to their discipline and also expect a broader range of soft skills like communication, ability to work in a team, work place efficiency, etc. These skills together constitute the graduate employability skills.

Hypothesis

1. There is a significant association between academic score of the candidates and their communication skills.
2. There is a significant association between academic score of the candidates and their workplace efficiency.
3. The education received in the university is sufficient for the skills expected on the job.
4. The recruitment procedures of the companies are calibrated to the requirement of the companies.
5. The gap of the employability skills are addressed systematically.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Mixed Method study design was used to study the employers' perceptions of the employability skills of graduate engineering trainees. A questionnaire was developed based on the review of literature and the pilot study. A topic guide for qualitative data collection was also developed to gain insights through in depth interviews. Equal priority was given to both the approaches. Data was integrated during interpretation and analysis phase.

Purposive homogenous sampling technique was used. The HR managers were identified from different MNCs where large scale campus recruitment is done. The study was explained and informed consent was obtained from the participants. Only those who were willing to provide information for the study were recruited as a part of the study. The survey questionnaire was circulated through Google forms. Simultaneously, HR managers with good experience in campus recruitment were approached for in depth interviews. Those willing to participate were interviewed. The sample size for qualitative research was fixed as 50 or till data saturation.

The data was collected using questionnaire from December 2017 to April 2018. Since few respondents were HRs in busy schedule and also they preferred online questionnaire, the researcher mailed to the respondents as Google forms after explaining the study to them over the phone. Informed consent was obtained. The interview guide for in depth interviews was administered to 50 experts to obtain detailed data. The audio recorded interviews were transcribed and translated.

The data collected were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 was used for analysis of the data. The audio recorded in-depth interviews were transcribed as extended notes, translated and were initially explored using focused coding and constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Few emergent codes and categories were identified from the

text and added to the existing codes gained from observational studies. Axial coding was done to develop connections between categories derived from all data. Themes were identified by looking for similarities, differences and relationships between categories (Gibson & Brown, 2009).

RESULTS

Sociodemographic characteristics

The following table 1 shows the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants;

Table 1: Sociodemographic Characteristics

Quantitative study	Qualitative findings
The total number of participants is 564. The gender distribution is; Males=308 (54.6%), Females=252 (44.7%), Not willing to answer=4 (0.7%). The mean age of the participants is 32.96 with a standard deviation of 8.401. The mean year of experience for the HR managers is 9.19 with a standard deviation of 8.132.	The total number of participants is 50. The gender distribution is; Males=31(62%), Females=19 (38%) The mean age of the participants is 38.10 with a standard deviation of 2.681. The mean year of experience for the HR managers is 15.60 with a standard deviation of 3.826.

Results from quantitative study

Employability skills

The following tables 2 and 3 illustrates the percentage of responses given by the respondents on communication skills and workplace efficiency where the responses were <3 on likert scale [On a scale of 1 to 5; 1=minimum, 5=maximum].

Communication skills

The study revealed that the HR managers felt that 61% of the graduate engineering trainees lack flow of ideas while writing, 72.3% of them lack level of persuasion and 53.2% find it difficult in sharing the information with others.

Table 2: Communication skills

Questions	Percentage
Flow of Ideas while writing	61.0%
Level of persuasion	72.3%
Sharing the Information with others	53.2%
Networking with others	42.6%

Workplace efficiency

59.6% of the respondents stated that the quality of leadership is low, 63.8% lack negotiation skills, 58.2% lack goal setting skills, 50.4% lack sensitivity towards opportunities, 52.5% find it difficult to take responsibility, 58.2% have difficulty in prioritising, 67.4% lack skills for anger management and 55.3% don't recognise the need for self-improvement and timely remedial action.

Table 3: Workplace efficiency

Questions	Percentage
Self confidence	35.5%
Quality of leadership	59.6%
Negotiating skills	63.8%
Goal setting skills	58.2%
Sensitivity towards opportunities	50.4%
Translating Ideas into action	47.5%
Taking responsibility	52.5%
Ability to prioritise	58.2%
Skills for anger management	67.4%
Recognising need for self-Improvement and timely remedial action	55.3%

Inferential Statistics

The following table demonstrates the correlation between various parameters. The tests reveal that employability skills are positively correlated with each other. When one set of skills are present, others are present too and vice versa.

Table 4: Correlation tests between various parameters.

Parameters	R value	P value
Communication skills and workplace efficiency	0.572	<0.005

Results from qualitative study

- 1) The low employability skills of the graduate trainees depend on the following factors (Table 5);

Table 5: Factors affecting employability skills of GETs

Personal factors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning style and practices - Interest to learn/acquire soft skills - Value attached to learning soft skills - Weightage given to academic score than soft skills
Interpersonal factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Weightage given to academic score than soft skills - Value attached by peer groups/immediate social circle to acquiring soft skills
Institutional factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Less attention given to soft skills - Schools/colleges focus more on academic scores than soft skills - Experiential learning is less - Less opportunities to acquire soft skills
Structural factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Curriculum is designed to focus on academic scores - Curriculum does not reflect the skills required on the job - Curriculum and examination pattern promotes rote learning than skills

- 2) Recruitment procedures do not reflect the skills required on the job. The present recruitment procedures are;
 - Academic scores oriented
 - Group discussion
 - Interviews
 - Aptitude
- 3) The gap in recruitment procedures and the employability skills required leads to poor performance on the job leading to subsequent layoffs.

Discussion

The present study reflected the global scenario as indicated in previous worldwide studies. The study reemphasized that a graduate cannot secure a job with a professional degree alone (Evers, 2001). Employers seek soft skills in addition to domain specific skills for coping in the current job markets. The challenge is higher with the graduate employee trainees (Evers, 2001). The need for certain generic skills that are transferable for successful functioning in any organisation has gone up (Bailey, 1990; Robinson, 2007). In order to enhance productivity of the employees and the profitability of the organisation, there is a need for efficient workforce that gives higher returns on investment. The efficiency of the workforce depends on these hard and soft skills and requires strengthening (Knight, 2002; Nagle, 1987). And these skills have to be strengthened during every stage of the education which in turn would impact the productivity of the organisation. These hard skills are acquired during training by the industry professionals (Evers, 2001). Whereas these soft skills are acquired over a period of formal education that directly reflects the lifelong learning process of an individual. This keeps the pressure on the education system for providing students that are fit enough to be directly employed by the organisation, thereby saving the cost to the company in the form of training (Employability skills for the future, 2000). This is the reason why employers look for graduates who are already equipped with soft skills (Singh, 2008; Tetreault, 1993). The higher education should work towards developing these soft skills (The Committee for Economic Development, 1985). And this explains why there is an acute necessity to find and bridge this gap in the employability skills of the graduate trainees. Any program at the undergraduate level should focus on both these hard and soft skills. Further studies are required to study the difference between various streams of graduate engineering trainees (GETs).

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