

A Study on the Factors Affecting Employability among Students Completing their Higher Education

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Abstract

AzimPremji, the famed industrialist and founder of Wipro Ltd had once stated that 'the challenge before an educational institution does not lie in its supply of talent but rather that of employability'. Business experts consider India as one of the most promising destinations for business and also a country having a young and enterprising workforce. On the one hand, the education commission, universities and the government are seriously and earnestly trying to ensure better education for students, with a right mixture of practical and theoretical aspects being included in the program of study. However, on the other hand, a structured questionnaire survey focusing on fresh graduates who have secured impressive scores and seeking jobs discloses that they do not find themselves employable due to lack of necessary practical skill set, required by corporate houses, worldwide. This leads to a dilemma and predicament as to what could be the reason for unemployability amongst the youth. This study which has been funded by the UGC, under Minor Project attempts to address this gap and find a solution to tackle this issue. However, this study is only a part of the main study and tries to address the opinion and views of students at the Higher Education level towards their curriculum.

Key words: Higher Education, Employability, Intellectual capital.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In India, a growth in the Service Sector is seemingly broad -based, but evidently there seems to be a rapid and expeditious growth in modern services like communications, business and financial services. The Service industry, as is evident, forms the foundation of social and economic development of a nation. The Service Sector is presently a rapidly growing sector in the world economy. The Indian economy is no excuse. The Service Sector presently plays the most dynamic part in our country's economy in terms of employment and contribution to the national income. Presently the Services Sector contributes to around 77 per cent of the overall average growth in GDP as per reports from PTI. Out of the wide range of activities encompassing the Services Sector, the most important Services, with reference to our Indian economy is Health and Education. Both these Sectors have been given much importance as it is one of the largest and most challenging sectors that can boost India's progress further. Both these sectors also influence each other to a great extent.

The Department of Human Resource Development has come up with several schemes and policies to ensure the eradication of illiteracy in the country and they have been successful to a very great extent. However, when the scenario is focused on Higher Education, there seems to be a lacuna where it can be seen that very few who complete their studies are found employable by the corporate houses. Focusing only on eradication of illiteracy is not sufficient to ensure development of the economy. It is imperative that the person seeking education is also employable according to the education he / she has completed; especially focusing on students completing professional degrees, post graduation etc.

Higher Education ensures economic development. However, the Higher Education System should equip students with the necessary skills that could help build his/her competency in fulfilling their personal and social needs. This in turn could help the nation build on its Intellectual Capital. Higher Education can be considered successful, when it can correlate with employability and knowledge acquired with the necessary skill-set. It should develop into a connective link between Industry and University (student community). Undoubtedly, Higher Education can help in inclusive growth by providing quality education, thereby ensuring economic development for those deprived of such facility, in society.

It is also a known fact that Higher Education plays an important role on impacting the development of a nation. It is with this objective that the Indian Government is laying emphasis on Education to its citizens, right from the pre-schooling stage. There are several schemes that are being implemented by the Government to ensure Education not only to children but also to adults. This endeavor by the government has categorically and positively shown its results. We are witness to the number of plans and proposals by governments both at the Centre and States. Free education to the economically and socially deprived citizens, free education for women and free education for children is an attempt to ensure total literacy. On the other hand, being just literate would not suffice in ensuring development of a nation and hence emphasis on higher education would also become a part of the endeavor. The Governments, in association with the University Grants Commission (UGC), Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD), All

India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), etc are playing a very vital role in promoting Higher Education and Research in the country. However, are these efforts by the government and associated bodies showing fruitful results? This study attempts to analyze the outcome of such endeavors and check its effect on the employability of students finishing out of Higher Education Institutions.

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The obvious question that comes to one's mind is whether the scenario matches the objectives with which several schemes, plans and projects are being implemented by the government and educational bodies in India. Though, presently, there seems to be a high percentage of enrolment figures for Higher Education, discussions with the HR Managers of different sectors have elicited the same opinion; viz. majority of the fresh engineering and management graduates are unemployable.

The competitiveness and challenges faced by these fresh graduates remain important issues. Given the fact that parents spend heavily on higher education, they hope to ensure better career prospects for their children. This also includes the economic expectations that they anticipate from their wards. All these factors pose great challenges and anxiety to these fresh graduates after they finish with their education and start looking for suitable employment. The task becomes arduous when they start approaching corporate houses for jobs and become unsuccessful.

Prevalence of announcements made by several educational institutions promising job offers to students enrolling in their institution is quiet common. These statements imply that the students fresh out of college find it difficult to place them in suitable jobs and hence get attracted to such notifications placed by educational institutions. The NAAC, UGC and AICTE also insist on having a placement officer in every college so as to assist the fresh graduates in their quest for suitable employment. An attempt is being made through this study, which is incidentally being funded by the UGC, under the Minor Project Programme, to focus on the Education Sector and its role in ensuring employability amongst students completing their Higher Education.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study has been formulated based on the following objectives.

- To examine the practical repercussion of the present curriculum in higher education.
- To analyze the problems faced by fresh graduates seeking employment.
- To identify aspects leading to employability among fresh graduates of higher education.
- To seek suitable solutions to assist in employability.

4. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Exploratory and descriptive research design and in particular, cross-sectional research design was preferred for the study. Data was collected through personal and online interviews, in order to increase the reach to respondent, at all higher education levels from diverse educational institutes in Mysore City. Exploratory techniques such as interviews with HR Managers, placement agencies and placement officers at different educational institutions along with interviews with fresh job seekers, secondary data analysis and experience were used to understand the problem

frontier. Descriptive study was used to collect data on various descriptive variables and their relationship in addressing the research problem. *Table-1* gives a brief outlay of the methodology adopted.

Table- 1: Showing the Summary of Research Methodology adopted

Research design	Cross-sectional Descriptive Research Design
Sampling Technique	Judgmental Random Sampling.
Sampling Unit	Fresh passed-out Post-Graduate and Professional degree job seekers from different institutions in Mysore City.
Sample Size	Requested 60, Responded 44.
Research Instrument	Printed Structured Questionnaire.
Data Collection	Through personal and online interviews.

The study adopted the primary method of using structured questionnaire to elicit primary information from the respondents on their views on employability issues faced by them (fresh graduates seeking employment), which was used for making a detailed analysis of the variables in the study and to draw a conclusion. The questionnaire was administered to the sample respondents using the Judgmental random sampling method. The collected data was analyzed with a tabular analysis. A survey structured questionnaire was distributed to 60 fresh graduates having professional and / or post graduate education qualifications, like B.E, MBA, and M.Com, etc., from different verticals located in Mysore city, out of which 44 responded to the questionnaire and provided the database for this study. The respondents were selected on a random basis. The present study has made use of both primary and secondary data for the study. The respondents to the questionnaire are considered as representatives of the population. A survey research methodology is being used in this study to gather data to seek answers to the objectives pertaining to employability among students of Higher Education. The relevant concepts were identified through extensive discussions with several academicians and students who are the stake holders of this study. Since this study is a part of the main study, the analysis and results of the responses received from only one side of the coin, i.e., the '*fresh out of college*' graduates and those who have newly gained employment is being presented.

4.1. Data Sources: The study has employed both primary and secondary data for the study. The primary data required for the study was collected with the help of a structured questionnaire, designed to elicit the required information and data on the subject based on the objectives of the study using the Cross-sectional descriptive research design and Judgmental Sampling Method. The Secondary data was collected from the relevant Institutions (Institutions of Higher Education), Journals, Periodicals, Research articles and Web-sites pertaining to the topic of employability and education.

4.2. Sampling: The study involves the selection of respondents. The respondents chosen for the study were selected on the basis of them being first time job seekers and those who have just gained employment (on their first job), both male and female and between the age group 21 to 35. A total of 60 questionnaires were distributed. 50 were returned out of which 6 were not completely filled and had to be rejected. The total number of respondents is therefore 44.

4.3. Analysis: The collected data has been analyzed using the percentage method using MS-Excel and also SPSS for descriptive statistical analysis.

4.4. Limitations: As with any study, the limitation of this study was mainly the limitations of time, getting access to the respondents and collecting responses from them. Since majority of the respondents were job seekers they were more concerned with finding suitable employment and getting them to fill the questionnaire and to discuss the topic was not easy. Secondly the study is restricted to respondents from Mysore City.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The focus of the questionnaire was to analyze the implications of the present system of Higher Education, employability of fresh graduates from these institutions and the opinion of graduates of Higher Education on job prospects. This study was conducted as a study to elicit responses and opinion from the job seekers prior to gathering responses from Corporate Heads (HR Managers), Principals of Colleges providing Higher Education, Placement Officers and Departmental Heads. The questionnaire tries to elicit the pertinent opinion of respondents on Knowledge Management Systems in an organization. The entire questionnaire consisted of 18 statements, given on a 3-point scale rating, and also included open-ended questions to the respondents who volunteered to participate in the study. Statements of the questionnaire incorporated dimensions of course curriculum like objectivity, practicality and employability. Analysis of the response rating showed above average rating of all dimensions of employability aspects.

The opinion survey from fresh graduates seeking employment show, that there are enormous challenges that these inexperienced graduates face while seeking suitable jobs based on their educational qualification when compared to the increasing need for specific skilled workforce in the corporate world. The irony of the issue is that there definitely seems to be plenty of jobs available in the corporate world and surprisingly, an equal number of unemployable youth in the country. This issue is not only a concern for Universities and educational institutions but also for corporate world. The connecting relationship between Higher Education and the Economic growth is profound as it augments the labor market. It enhances the Intellectual Capital of the country.

On the one hand, through this study, an investigation of the curriculum and syllabus being prescribed by the concerned University for its students at different levels reveals a very student friendly education package, with a right mixture of practical and theoretical aspects being included in the program of study. However, on the other hand, a structured questionnaire survey of fresh graduates seeking jobs discloses that they do not find themselves employable due to lack of required practical skill set, required by the corporate. Challenges faced by the student and the quality of education provided by the educational institutions do not seem to match the increasing need for a skilled workforce. Majority of the students passing out of colleges face severe and acute challenges while trying to address the talent shortage needed by the company. This leads to a dilemma and predicament as to what could be the reason for unemployability amongst the youth.

5.1 Major Findings

Out of the respondents' majority were male (65%) and the rest were female (35%) who belonged to the age group 21-35. On the contrary, since the main focus of this study is based on responses received from respondents who were fresh out of college, and those who were new appointees (on their first job assignment), majority of the respondents were in the age group 21-25 (84% respondents).

Respondents were asked the reason for them seeking Higher Education. Majority of the respondents (77%) stated that the reason for seeking Higher Education was for securing better job prospects and enabling them to secure suitable jobs at higher levels. However, when they were asked whether the Higher Education which they had just completed had helped them in securing jobs according to their higher qualification, 54% of the respondents stated that they still found difficulty in securing jobs inspite of their post-graduation qualification and were being offered jobs based on their under graduation level basis. Only 25% of the total respondents stated that Higher Education has helped them in securing a better job. Nearly 72% of the respondents stated that they had to take up add-on (additional) courses to help them find suitable employment as having a post graduate degree / professional degree, did not by itself help in obtaining a suitable job. Again 77% of the respondents stated that there is need for change in course curriculum. *Figure-1* gives a diagrammatic representation as a bird's eye view of the responses received.

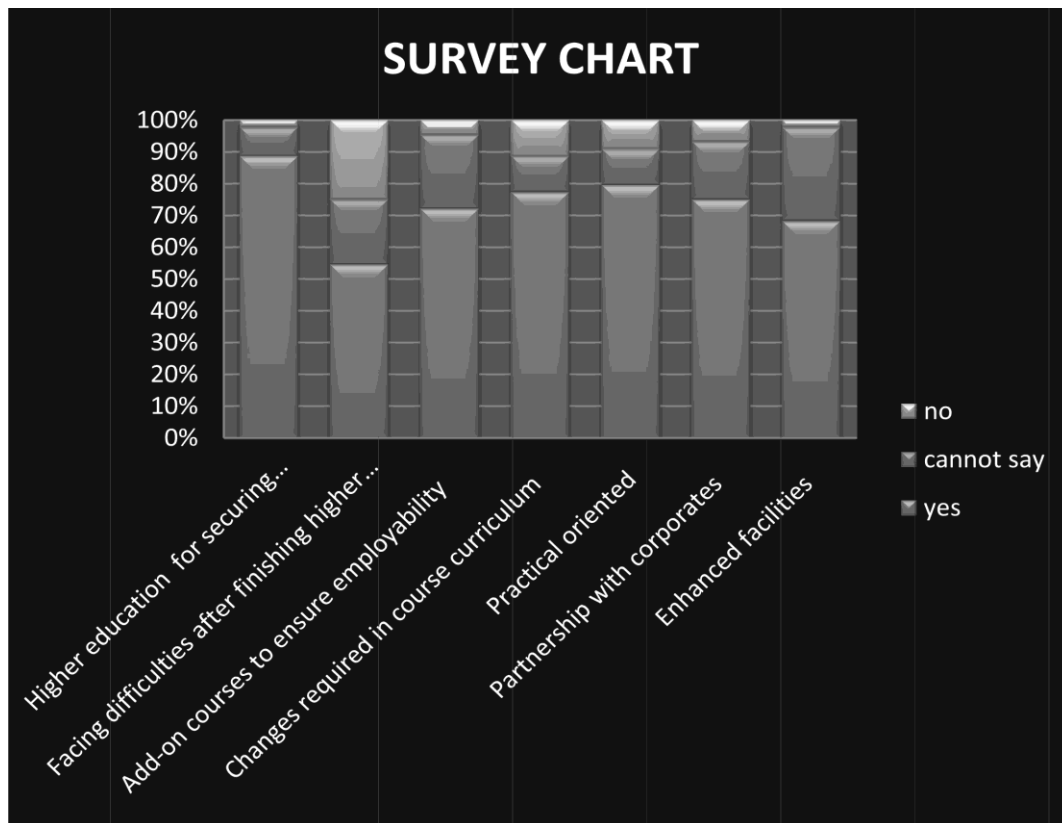


Figure -1 Diagrammatic Birds Eye View of the results of the Survey.

The analysis of the results showed that 80% of the respondents expressed the need for courses (professional courses) to be more practical oriented and 75% of the respondents stated that there should be a liaison between Educational Institutions / Universities and the Corporate Houses to

promote employability among students. All the respondents unanimously felt that the syllabus should be as per industry requirements and should be more focused on 'on the job' training requirements. About 68% of the respondents also stated that Institutions should update facilities like Wi-Fi systems, Cloud Computing and other similar technologies available for students to enhance effectiveness of the courses.

The observations from Table-2 show the Mean scores of the variables. The highest means score was found to be 1.80 which is for the variable, 'More Practical Oriented' focus for professional courses, followed by a mean score of 1.70 for , 'Educational Institutions partnering with respective Corporate Houses' to ensure Corporate / Industry requirement. This is followed by a mean score value of 1.68 for suggestion to 'Change the Course Curriculum' to suit Industry requirements and practical implications. The mean score of 1.27 was identified for 'Facilities for enhancing' practical approach towards the Professional Course Study. From the statistical analysis, we may conclude that all Professional Courses need to have a more practical oriented approach, which could mean more time spent on live projects and internships.

Table -2: Showing the Mean score values for various variables, based on the responses received from the respondents

SL. No	Particulars	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	Changes in course curriculum	44	1.68	.674
2.	More practical oriented	44	1.80	.509
3.	Partnership with corporate and universities	44	1.70	.594
4.	Facilities to enhance the course	44	1.27	.499

Table-3 shows the Correlation between the various variables on factors like (a) introducing add-on courses for students taking up Professional Courses, (like CA,CS /ICWA for Post Graduate students of Commerce or students taking up Finance as a subject of specialization or specific add-on courses for Engineering Graduates). (b) requirements for suitable change in the course curriculum (c) more practical oriented approach towards learning (d) Institutions /Universities, partnering with respective corporate houses to ensure the required curriculum for student learning (e) facility requirement with respect to technology and required software for enhancing learning capabilities for students taking up higher education.

Table -3: Showing the Pearson's Correlation between the various variables that could ensure employability

Particulars		V ₁	V ₂	V ₃	V ₄	V ₅
Add-on courses to ensure employability V ₁	Pearson Correlation	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
	N	44				
Changes in course curriculum V ₂	Pearson Correlation	.14	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.34				
	N	44	44			
More practical oriented	Pearson Correlation	.11	.00	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.45	.95			

V ₃	N	44	44	44		
Partnership between corporate and universities V ₄	Pearson Correlation	.18	-.06	.33	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.22	.67	.02		
	N	44	44	44	44	
Facilities to enhance the course V ₅	Pearson Correlation	-.31	-.01	-.23	-.03	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.03	.93	.12	.81	
	N	44	44	44	44	44

The results of the correlation test between the above mentioned variables show that there is a positive correlation between all the variables V_1 , V_2 , V_3 and V_4 , excluding variable V_5 , which shows a negative correlation at $-.31$ with significance of $.03$ which shows significance at $.05$. However, V_2 shows a correlation at $.14$ with no significance at $.34$ at $.05$. Similarly, V_3 shows correlation at $.11$ but with no significance at $.45$ and V_4 with correlation value $.18$ with significance of $.22$ at $.05$ values respectively. These statistical results show that 'Facilities for enhancing learning experience' V_5 , does not influence employability.

6. CONCLUSIONS

According to Blair (2002), he identifies a number of prerequisites for a Knowledge Management Programme in any Sector, to be a success. This can be adopted by Educational Institutions of Higher Education as well. The foremost prerequisite is communication. Communication amongst the experts involved in the field of practice, followed by the existence of a Knowledge Inventory, to choose the right knowledge required by the specific departments and the students associated with the respective departments. Education Knowledge experts should have sufficient skills to evaluate the validity and reliability of information from various sources to avoid misinformation and wrong conclusions. This can be done when there is a University -Industry partnership. They should be able to create value through effective decision making both in an unstructured or semi-structured environment.

The study highlights the necessity and purpose of focusing on industry requirements based on practical exposure of the job requirements to all students enrolling for a particular course. The main objective of the study was to emphasize the need for enhancing employability amongst students graduating out of institutions of higher education. By following these practices the objective of this study can be easily achieved.

The study accentuates and emphasizes that Knowledge Management Practices can be adopted in institutions of Higher Education, just as Knowledge Management Practices are being made use of in corporate houses, as it can offer competitive advantage to students in the global scenario by enhancing the skill set and creativity of fresh graduates, thereby making them employable. It helps the industry in being able to directly place these fresh graduates on the job and helps reduce cost of orientation and training. On the other hand, Knowledge Management Practices in educational institutions can attract more students and also the right resource personnel (academic staff), to make students employable. Such practices ultimately helps in fostering team work and

effective team management, which leads to Institution efficiency and garnering intellectual capital for economic growth of the country.

7. DRAWBACKS IDENTIFIED

As is well aware, it is a well known fact that more than 80% of the students largely forget what they learn and studied in the just concluded semester, almost immediately after the semester exams are over. Students believe in cramming notes provided by their faculty or from text books on any particular subject with the main purpose of securing a higher grade in the written exams. There also seems to be an implied understanding that only the best scorers (rank holders) are capable of finding suitable jobs. Higher marks means higher intelligence level in the concerned student and this draws the attention of all the academic members, classmates towards this particular student. However, the gap of theory and knowledge is not addressed and hence this 'intelligent' student and also his family members become depressed when the student is unable to find a suitable job. They are at a loss to understand why a student who has scored very good marks in the written exam is rejected during the interview for a job in a corporate world. It is generally observed that theoretical teaching is given greater emphasis in terms of syllabus and time allotted for theory, enabling the student to score more marks, than practical application of the theory learnt. Bringing about an awareness that students who secure higher marks need not necessarily be employable. This is one of the fundamental flaws of our education system.

Secondly, it is seen (by the number of students appearing for the NET exams and also enrolling for PhD) that many job seekers, prefer to choose the education sector not because of their passion for teaching but because they had earlier failed finding a suitable job in a corporate world and also because the present pay system in the education sector, also being quiet attractive . Many a time these inexperienced students with inadequate research and teaching skills end up tutoring students, which further obliterate and destroy the whole concept of Higher Education. Many Institutions feel it is convenient to appoint a new / fresh graduate as a faculty member as the salary payable to them is less. As the adage goes 'As you sow, so shall you reap'- this holds good for such education institutions where a fresher is appointed to train the students enrolling for the specific course. Therefore, it is not at all surprising to visualize the outcome, when such students who come out of such institutions face critical challenges during job interviews. Quality assurance plays a major role in Higher Education as it will help in regulating the process of imparting knowledge and skill to the students. Hence, there is an urgent need to address this syndrome called 'unemployability 'as it affects not only the student but also the family and in the long run the economy. Immediate steps should be taken to make students employable by grooming them to become successful professionals.

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