

Higher Education And Employability Skills

Dr.K.R.Subramanian

Professor of Management and Senior Consultant

Abstract: One of the important areas of concern for our economy is Full Employment. In spite of large scale growth and development in institutions offering higher education in India, the ground reality is that employability of various qualified youngsters churned out of our educational system remains a question mark. There are several factors responsible for this dilemma. One of the objectives of this research paper is to identify such factors. This research paper proposes to analyze the available data through a thorough search and desk analysis of work already done on the related subject areas. Attempt will be made to explore the areas which are critical for employability of our students coming out of higher educational institutions. We would also consider what skill sets are lacking in our students and how this can be provided through soft skill training and Personality Development programs. This is a matter of concern for corporate companies searching for potential recruits. At the concluding part of this paper suggestions would be given as to how the situation can be improved as the country is bracing to face challenges of the 21st century.

Keywords: *Full employment, employability skills, factors and dilemma, Personality development.*

1. Introduction

Employability Skills are the transferable skills needed by an individual to make him or her 'employable'. In addition to a good technical understanding and knowledge of the subject, employers often look for a set of skills that they want from an employee. These skills or skill set as they are called are like Team working, Problem solving, Self-management, Knowledge of the business, Literacy and numeracy relevant to the position, ICT knowledge, Good interpersonal and communication skills, While ability to use own initiative is needed, the individual needs to follow instructions and Leadership skills where necessary.

National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) has observed that huge number of college graduates enter the workforce every year, India has the potential to provide workforce for the world by 2020. Yet we are today suffering with an awfully low employability rates in metropolitan cities like Chennai, Delhi and Bengaluru. The reasons advanced for such low employability rate are lack of language skills, outdated academic syllabus, insufficient practical sessions and a total absence of career counseling facilities. Erstwhile Union Minister of Human Resource Development, Smriti Irani in Lok Sabha said, "In this regard, a scheme has also been notified under National Employability Enhancement

Mission (NEEM) to offer on the job practical training and adopted National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF) to enhance the employability of young graduates.” The Government has set up a target to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher Education to 30% by the end of year 2020.



Figure 1: Business Skill

Employability skills are general skills that are necessary for success in the labor market at all employment levels and in all sectors. These skills, which may be taught through the education and workforce development systems, fall into three broad categories: Applied Knowledge—the thoughtful integration of academic knowledge and technical skills, put to practical use in the work place. Effective Relationships, the interpersonal skills and personal qualities that enable individuals to interact effectively with clients, coworkers, and supervisors. Workplace Skills—the analytical and organizational skills and understandings that employees need to successfully perform work tasks.

2. Objectives And Methodology

There is a lot of literature available on the initiatives taken by government and

non- government agencies for improving the higher education institutions and make it available to people at large. Consequently there has been a growth in the educational institutions providing higher education in India to cater to the needs of aspiring youngsters in India. The growth in number of institutions offering higher educational degrees and diplomas is proof of this initiative. While the availability and accessibility to higher education has improved, the quality of education and the products of education need a critical examination because their employability has not improved concurrently and the opportunities available are few and far between. This paper attempts to identify this critical GAP in employability of our graduates and post graduates and suggest steps for improvement. With this in mind the following specific objectives were identified for the purpose of this research paper;

1. A critical review of the employment scenario
2. Identify critical reasons for un-employability of our products from institutions of higher learning.
3. Through GAP analysis identify critical deficiencies in skills
4. Current efforts and future needs to fulfill this GAP
5. Future and scope from the projected views.
6. Suggestions and recommendations

While a lot of data is available through previous research in this critical area and also though related research work, the problem was one of identifying, classifying and selecting suitable data

through literature search and review. This has been attempted with some degree of satisfaction. The author is thankful to the enormous data provided by researchers in this area through published literature and web sites. A list of papers, books, periodical and publications referred for the purpose of this paper has been given at the end of in the form of References.

3. Review Of Literature

Employability skills are a set of skills and behaviors that are necessary for success in every job. These skills are sometimes called soft skills, foundational skills, work-readiness skills, or job-readiness skills. Employability skills allow you to: communicate with co workers, solve problems, understand your role within a team, make appropriate choices, and be responsible for your own career. Personal qualities, habits, and attitudes influence how you interact with others. Employers place great value for these skills because they are linked to how you manage relationship with coworkers and customers, your job performance, and your career success.

Chithra R (2013) in her study entitled “Employability skills -a study on the perception of the engineering students and their prospective employers”, has analyzed the perception of Employers as well as the employees towards employability skills required for entry level engineering graduates in multinational software companies. From the two different sets of questionnaires developed to assess the perception of skill set required by employers and graduate students the study revealed a

significant difference between the perception of students and their employers. The conclusion was that, the students with work experience have better awareness of the employability skills than the students with no work experience. Enhancing the skills and application of knowledge through specific training will enable the workers to perform their jobs in the best possible manner and that is the need of the hour. Rajkumar Paulrajan (2011) in his study entitled “Employability skills in Chennai retail market, India” with objectives of understanding the requirement of skill set for jobs investigated method of developing employability skills , estimate human resource requirements of organised retailing industry and to assess the employability skill set. Statistical tools used were Skill Matrix and Analytic Hierarchy Process. The underlying skill set required in getting and sustaining employment in the organised grocery and vegetable retail industry was identified. The study concluded that, a mix of academic qualifications, important vocational skills and personal skills and selling skills were found necessary for entry level jobs. Employers in retail industry are looking for people for their managerial jobs with different skill set such as academic qualifications, communication skills, leadership skills, teamwork skills and experiential learning from work.

Padmini.I (2012) in her study entitled “Education vs employability- the need to bridge the skill gap among the engineering and management graduates in Andhra Pradesh” found that Education and training create assets in the form of knowledge and skills which

increases productive capacity of manpower which is referred to a human capital. The throw light on the employability skills required for technology and management graduates, the initiatives taken by the State Government towards skill building of technical students, and how soft skills can be integrated with curriculum thereby grooming the professional students for employment. The author used secondary data that identified soft skill to be the most critical skill in the current job market especially in the area of technology. It was concluded that the Human Resource in term of quality and quantity are India's biggest assets, to gear up education system through various innovative and initiatives. Rajanibala J. Shah et al (2014) in his study entitled "A study on factors affecting employability skills of management students" identified the factors of employability for them. The statistical tools used were exploratory factor analysis and ANOVA. The findings revealed that major factors are analytical skills, self-understanding, general management and work culture, leadership and problem solving ability and communication. The study suggested that, the management institutes should start continual training and workshop programs for familiarizing the students about the current need and market expectations by the different employers of different sectors.

HRD Minister Rajnath Singh, on October, 2014 said that it is important to focus on skill development. Not even one Indian university featured in the list of top 275 universities in the world, according to the Times Higher Education Survey. Quoting Wheel box

on Employability the minister said "only 34 percent of our graduates are employable". 60% of total population available for working and contributing towards GDP, but out of the total pool only 25 % is capable of being used by the market and demand-supply gap of 82-86% in the core professions; IT industry would face the shortage of up to 3.5 million skilled workers

Aspiring Minds (2014) in their research study found that 47% of graduates are not employable in any sector, given their English language and cognitive skills. The need for improved focus on vocational training, specific targeted intervention in areas of computer and English skill are highlighted. Less than 25% students are able to apply concepts to problem solving. Our higher education system needs to lay greater stress on application of concepts and discourage habit learning. Employers should also start questioning their traditional ways of selecting and sourcing graduates and find new ways to reach employable youth.

Confederation of India Industry (CII) in their survey found that only 10 % of MBA graduate employable and 17% of the Engineering graduates employable. 25% of the candidates are used in the job market and 60 % of the population are only available in working and contributing towards GDP. IT industry faced shortage of 3.5% employability skill for the requirement of the job. All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) developed model curriculum for different programs under technical education after involving industry representatives in their curriculum development activity as part of skill

initiatives under different sectors, which is improving the employability. The AICTE has identified 16 Sectors and 79 Specializations and also developed required curriculum for the different levels of skill in their respective specialization/sectors.

A review of available information and research data gives an idea of the essential skills that are expected from a recruit. Be well organized. An organized person is respected and followed. Punctuality is the hall mark of a successful individual, arrive at work on time, or early and be dependable. One needs to have a positive attitude toward work and put in high levels of effort and perseverance. The one who completes tasks on time and accurately is well respected, even if it is unpleasant at times. A successful person seeks out information to improve skills and is always flexible and adaptable. Every organization expects the employee to understand dress code or uniform guidelines and maintain personal hygiene.

The personal skills, attitudes, and behaviors that drive your potential for growth which will enable you to achieve greater possibilities when you can, are summarized as: Demonstrate Positive Attitudes and Behaviors; Feel good about yourself and be confident; Deal with people, problems, and situations with honesty, integrity, and personal ethics; Recognize your and other people's good efforts; Take care of your personal health; Show interest, initiative, and effort. The other set of personal skills will include; setting goals and priorities balancing work and personal life, planning and managing

time, money, and other resources to achieve goals, To assess, weigh, and manage risk, Be accountable for your actions and the actions of your group and be socially responsible and contribute to your community. Your adaptability to work independently or as part of a team, carrying out multiple tasks or projects, learning from your mistakes and accept feedback, coping with uncertainty will make a difference. Be innovative and resourceful: identify and suggest alternative ways to achieve goals and get the job done and be open and respond constructively to change. You should be willing to continuously learn and grow, assess personal strengths and areas for development, set your own learning goals, identify and access learning sources and opportunities and plan for and achieve your learning goals. You have to be aware of personal and group health and safety practices and procedures, and act in accordance with them. The skills and attributes you develop have to contribute to productivity: You will be better prepared to add value to the outcomes of a task, project, or team when you can: understand and work within the dynamics of a group, ensure that a team's purpose and objectives are clear, be flexible: respect, and be open to and supportive of the thoughts, opinions, and contributions of others in a group, recognize and respect people's diversity, individual differences, and perspectives, accept and provide feedback in a constructive and considerate manner, contribute to a team by sharing information and expertise, lead or support when appropriate, motivating a group for high performance, understand the role of conflict in a group to reach

solutions and manage and resolve conflict when it is appropriate .



Figure 2: The Importance of Transferable Skills

The importance of Business Training and on the job skill updating cannot be over emphasized. What is not achieved through education in higher institutions of learning is achieved and compensated by skill development and training programs of companies to Required skill sets to its employees. Participation in Projects and Tasks is an important aspect of current employment scene. You need to plan, design, or carry out a project or task from start to finish with well-defined objectives and outcomes. While developing a plan, seek feedback, test, revise, and implement work to agreed-upon quality standards and specifications. Selection and usage of appropriate tools and technology for a task or project and adapting to changing requirements and information is essential. You can succeed by continuously monitoring the success of a project or task and identifying ways to improve.



Figure 3: Importance of business training and retraining

The University of Sydney, Careers Centre Level 5, Jane Foss Russell Building (G02), 160 City Road, Darlington NSW 2006 has identified following critical skills required for performing jobs successfully.

Communication Skills

The University has identified important skills like Listening, understanding and speaking clearly, Writing appropriately for different audiences, Persuading & negotiating effectively, Demonstrating empathy, assertiveness & tact, Understanding the needs of customers/clients, Establishing relationships & using networks, Sharing information & proposing ideas, Fluency in English & other languages, Logically summarising information or data and Chairing a meeting

Teamwork Skills

Team working is a term used by all; but to effectively work n teams following skill sets are important. skills like, Working effectively with people of different ages, gender, race, religion or political persuasion, Identifying the strengths of team members, Recognising own strengths & limitations, Clarifying team roles & performing agreed tasks, Demonstrating leadership as appropriate, Coaching, mentoring & motivating others, Giving & receiving constructive feedback, Resolving differences of

opinion, Collaborating & contributing to team results.

Problem Solving Skills

These skill sets will consist of : Analyzing facts & testing assumptions, Defining the problem & contributing factors, Developing creative, innovative &/or practical solutions, Showing initiative in identifying & solving problems, Solving problems independently & in teams, Applying a range of strategies to problem solving, Designing contingencies, Developing & evaluating a range of options, Making realistic decisions & action plans, Using mathematics including budgeting & financial management to solve problems, Resolving customer concerns in relation to complex issues, Implementing & monitoring solutions, Evaluating processes & outcomes.

Initiative & Enterprise Skills

These will be indicated by Identifying opportunities not obvious to others, Assessing the competitive advantage of ideas, Identifying customer or client requirements, Developing strategic goals, Being creative, initiating ideas & innovative solutions, Determining the commercial viability of ideas, Translating ideas into action, Demonstrating political, commercial, environmental, cultural, etc sensitivities, Liaising with stakeholders & sponsors, Using a range of business communication methods, Marketing & selling a product or service.

Planning & Organizing Skills

Planning and organizing is a basic function of all jobs and you need to have skills like Establishing clear & attainable project goals & deliverables, Defining specifications & quality standards, Planning the use of resources including time, people, finances & materials, Risk

management & contingency planning, Managing time & priorities – setting milestones, Managing tasks - delegating, coordinating, monitoring, Managing people - training, developing, motivating, giving feedback, supervising, Collecting, analysing & organising information, Being resourceful, taking initiative & making decisions, Establishing evaluation criteria & participating in continuous improvement, Reporting on progress & outcomes, Understanding basic business systems & their relationships.

Learning Skills

These skills are indicated by your ability to: Managing own learning, Sharing knowledge & experience in the workplace, Contributing to the learning community at the workplace, Using a range of mediums to learn – mentoring, peer support, networking, information technology (IT), courses, Applying learning to ‘technical’ issues e.g. learning about products & ‘people’ issues e.g. interpersonal and cultural aspects of work, Having enthusiasm for ongoing learning, Being willing to learn in any setting – on & off the job, Being open to new ideas & techniques, Being prepared to invest time & effort in learning new skills, Acknowledging the need to learn in order to accommodate change

Technology Skills

Every employer expects that you will possess skills like: Having a range of basic IT skills, Applying IT as a management tool, Using IT to organise data, Being willing to learn new IT skills, having the occupational health and safety knowledge to apply technology, having the appropriate physical capacity.

Self Management Skills

These skills will be demonstrated by, having a personal vision & goals, Evaluating & monitoring own performance, Having knowledge & confidence in own ideas & vision, Articulating own ideas & vision, Taking responsibility, Working ethically, Working under pressure, Demonstrating resilience

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

A critical review of the job market and employability skills reveals a critical GAP in the skill set, particularly soft skills needed on the job. The figure below clearly indicates the



Figure 4: Competence on the Job

GAPs identified in the competency set required for the job which can be filled up through Training, Learning and on the job experience. When we critically go through the review of literature it gives a clear picture of the serious gaps identified in the requirement of skill sets for employment, which unfortunately is not gained through our higher education system.

Several companies are trying to fill up this gap through Training programs specifically suited for new recruits. A detailed review of skill sets needed for

employment has been outlined. Briefly speaking these skill gaps are: Mainly soft skills like Proficiency In English and other languages used for business communication, Team working, Planning, Learning and self management and in general Transferable skills.

Providing full employment is not only a governmental objective; rather it is implemented through the system of education and training. But Organizations need employees at the entry level to have some basic skills which need to be imparted to them at the time of higher education and before entering the job market. This is an area which needs to be tackled by institutions of higher learning. Either through a well designed curriculum or through external agencies before the students pass out, soft skill and employability skills Training, has to be given as part of their graduation program.

There is a lot of noise in the environment about industry- institution collaboration in curriculum design and development; but this has not reflected in the employability of our students coming out of institutions of higher learning!

4. Suggestion

Whatever is given in the form of conclusion needs to be acted on by all concerned. If we have to be successful, our youngsters must get employment for which the curriculum may be seriously considered for up-gradation and improvements to reflect the realities of the job market. One important aspect of our education and industry training and orientation has to be with respect to the career path that will be suitable for the young entrants as per their skills and

choice! As is illustrated by the diagram given below:

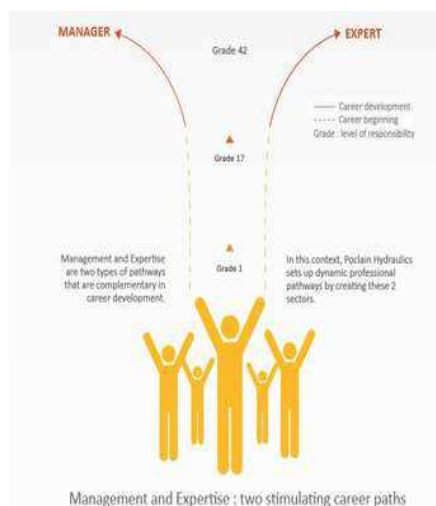


Figure 5: The Career Path

5. References

1. G.Gowsalya et al., International Journal of Advance Research in Computer Science and Management Studies Volume 3, Issue 3, March 2015 pg. 353-360
2. Andrews, m (2013), Why our students need co-curricular, not extra-curricular, activities. Guardian Professional, January 2013
3. Ball, Linda (2008), Bold resourcefulness: redefining employability and entrepreneurial learning. Project Report. University of the Arts London
4. Barnett, Ron (2011) The will to be a professional: how a life-wide curriculum might encourage important features of will. Institute of Education, University of London .
5. Biggs, J (2003 Teaching for Quality Learning at University. Buckingham: Open University Press.
6. Collini, Stefan (2012) What are Universities For? London: Penguin
7. Farthing, S and Bonaventura, p (Eds) (2004) A Curriculum for Artists. The Laboratory at the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art, and the New York Academy of Art
8. Hannon, p (2006) Teaching Pigeons to Dance: Sense and Meaning in Entrepreneurship Education, Education + Training. Special Issue on Entrepreneurship Education, edited by Matlay, H 48(5), 296-308.
9. Harvey, L. (2003) Transitions from Higher Education to Work: A briefing paper prepared by Lee Harvey (Centre for Research and Evaluation, Sheffield Hallam University), with advice from ESECT and LTSN Generic Centre colleagues
10. James, A (2008) Personal and Professional Development (PPD) Learning for Life Creative Learning in Practice Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. University of the Arts London
11. Kemp and Atfield (Eds) (2011) Enhancing Graduate Impact in Business and Management, Hospitality, Leisure, Sport, Tourism, Newbury Berks: Threshold Press
12. Pegg, A, Waldock, J, Hendy-isaac, S and Lawton, R. (2012) Pedagogy for Employability. York: The Higher Education Academy.
13. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2012) Enterprise and entrepreneurship education: Guidance for UK higher education providers. Gloucester.
14. Smith J.A., Mc Knight A. and R. Naylor (2000) "Graduate Employability: Policy and Performance in Education in the UK", Economic Journal, Vol.110, No .6, pp. 382-411.
15. Green and Mc Intosh (2002) "Is there a Genuine under-utilisation of skill amongst the over qualified?" SKOPE Research paper No.30, ESRC Center on skill ,Knowledge and Organisational performance ,Oxford and Warwick University.
16. Heavey and Morey (2003) "Enhancing Employability, Recognizing diversity, London University UK and Higher Education Careers Services Unit.
17. Lonice Morley (2007) "The x Factor: Employability, Elitism and Equity in

- Graduate Recruitment”, 21st Century Society, Vol.2, No.2, pp.191-207.
18. Mason et al (2009), “Employability skill initiative in higher education: what effect do they have on graduate labor market outcomes? Education Economics, Vol.17, No.1, p.1-30
 19. Adriana E. Stoica (2010), “Development and Testing of a Comprehensive Skill Framework for the Successful Employability of MBA Graduates”.
 20. Rajkumar Paulrajan (2011) Employability Skills in Chennai Retail Market, India. ACTA UNIVERSITATIS DANUBIUS Vol. 7, No.5/2011
 21. Kamsuriuh Ahmad (2012) ‘Relationship between employability and graduates’ skill’. International Business Management 6(4)440-445, 2012.ISSN-1993-5250 med well journals 2012.
 22. I. Padmini (2012) ‘Education Vs Employability- the Need to Bridge the Skills Gap among the Engineering and Management Graduates in Andhra Pradesh’. International Journal of Management & Business Studies’. IJMBS Vol. 2, Issue 3, July - Sept 2012
 23. Nidhi Pandey (2012). ‘Awareness of Life Skills for Job Sustainability amongst Management Students’. Tripude’s National Journal of Business Research (TNBJR). ISSN | 2319-5576 Volume 4 | Issue 1
 24. Divya Shukla (2012) Employability Skill among Professionals – Chagrin of HR Executives in Indian Labor Market: A Study on Engineering Graduates of Bhopal City. VSRD International Journal of Business & Mgmt. Research Vol. 2 (8), 2012.
 25. Varwandkar Ajit (2013) Factors Impacting Employability Skills of Engineers. International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR), India Online ISSN: 2319-7064.
 26. Poornima Jain(2013) Globalization and Developing Employability Skills: Challenges and their Solutions with Reference to NPSD & Government’s Action Plan and role of Life Long Learning and Extension Departments. Journal of Business Management & Social Sciences Research (JBM&SSR) ISSN No: 2319-5614 Volume 2, No.5, May 2013.
 27. Vani Bhagwath and Krishna Pal(2013) ‘Employability skills of MBA students in Delhi-NCR’. VSRD International Journal of Business and Management Research, Vol. III Issue X October 2013 .
 28. Chithra.R(2013) ‘Employability Skills - A Study on the Perception of the Engineering Students and their Prospective Employers’ Global Journal of Management and Business Studies.ISSN 2248-9878 Volume 3, Number 5 (2013).
 29. Nidhi Srivastava. RK and Rajanibala J. Shah (2014). ‘A Study on Factors Affecting Employability Skills of Management Students’. International journal of management and development studies Volume No. 3 (2014), Issue No. 2 (February) ISSN (Online): 2320-0685.
 30. Iuliana pârvu (2014) ‘Identification of employability skills – starting point for the curriculum design processes. Economics, Management, and Financial Markets Volume 9(1), 2014, pp. 237–246, ISSN 1842-3191
 31. M.B. Madlani (2014) ‘Rural Employability: skill development the need of the hour’ VSRD International Journal of Business and Management Research, Vol. IV Issue V May 2014 / 149 .ISSN: 2231-248X.
 32. Hari Prasad.N (2014) Alarming Employability Skills Deficiency among Budding Engineering Graduates – a study on engineering graduates in chittoor district. SAMZODHANA – “Journal of Management Research” ISSN 2347- 4270 Vol 3 Issue 1,
 33. Rubvita Chadha et al (2014) ‘Industry’s Requirement for Employability of Management Student in Present Scenario’ International journal of business quantitative economics and applied management research. ISSN: 2349-5677 Volume 1, Issue 3, August 2014.
 34. ASSHOCHAM Employability Survey (2014), adapted from Business Standard Beta at (1. Aspiring Minds’ MBA-

- National Employability Report (2014),
adapted from
(<http://www.aspiringminds.in/whitepapers.html>)
35. ASSHOCHAM Employability Survey
(2014), adapted from Business Standard
Beta at (<http://www.business-standard.com/article/management/only-10-graduates>)

6. Web References

1. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/higher-education-network/blog/2013/jan/22/student-development-university-curriculum-design>
2. http://ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk/671/1/cltad_STAGE1OVERVIEWEXECSUM.pdf
3. <http://learningtobeprofessional.pbworks.com/w/page/15915027/Ron%20Barnett>
4. <http://bit.ly/oeCgqW>
5. http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/EvidenceNet/Clip_Personal_and_Professional_Development.pdf
6. http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/employability/pedagogy_for_employability_update_2012
7. <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/enterprise-guidance>
8. <https://wheebox.com/india-skills-report-2014.htm>
9. <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com>, <http://www.aicte-india.org>