

GRADUATES' EMPLOYABILITY- A CONCERN FOR THE STATE

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ABSTRACT

India is growing at a fast pace with developments in all fronts including Science and Technology, Economy, Education and so on.

Despite these advancements, ours is a country with a large rate of unemployability among our graduates. As India is one of the highly populated states, the number of graduates passing out every year including both engineers and non-engineers is very high. But, the graduates are found to possess the qualification and not the right set of skills expected by the employers who would like to recruit them. Though the need for skilled manpower is a serious issue faced by the corporate, the percentage of employment is always kept less. The educational institutions who desire to place all their students are unable to keep up their words. This problem of unemployability is a concern for the entire nation because if left unnoticed might lead to irrevocable consequences. This article discusses on the issues and implications of unemployability in India.

Key words: Employability, Employable skills, Graduates, Employment

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Introduction

“The whole purpose of education is to turn mirrors into windows.” Said Sydney J. Harris.

The current education system though target for the same, land up with ambiguity.

Most of the Indian graduates end up with graduation but not with ‘Employment’ the major purpose for which people study.

As it has been rightly pointed by Dr.A.P.J.Abdul Kalam, “India is not facing the problem of unemployment but unemployability.”

The situation is highly deplorable as the National Employability report by Aspiring Minds state that only 17.45 percent of Engineering students were found employable in 2011. The case of non-engineering graduates is even worse with their employability rate revolving only around only 10 percent.

This problem of unemployability is a major concern for the graduates, parents, Educational institutions, Corporate and for the nation as a whole.

The scenario if ignored or given little importance would lead to a Great damage to the country.

Employability vs Employment

‘Employability’ at its simplest level is the ability to become employed or get employment.

But the term has different connotations with respect to the entities who define it.

Employability is a set of skills and personal attributes that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen career(Yorke, 2008).

Moreover, employability skills are the ones which cut horizontally across all industries and vertically across all jobs from the entry level to Chief Executive Officer (Sherer and Eadie, 1987; Bunt et al., 2005).

Though employability is a vital asset to be possessed by every individual who aspire to have a career, it differs in its view by different groups.

From the graduates’ end employability is a set of skills needed to please the employer who recruits. The Employers’ perspective is “Work readiness” that is, an employee need to possess the right set knowledge, skills and attitude and focus them towards the achievement of organizational objectives (Mason et al., 2006).

The institutions' view on employability is to make the students ready for their first employment. They believe that their responsibility ends over there and are least concerned about the career development of the students.

Though Employability is directly linked to Employment the rate of significance given by various groups is yet to be synchronized.

Employable skills

Most of the earlier studies have classified Employable skills into 'Hard Skills' and Soft Skills' Hard skills confine to business related or business specific skills and the Soft skills target on Interpersonal skills. (Andrews et al, 2008). Literature reveals that soft skills are given more weightage in the context of employability. As defined, Employability is a set of skills (Yorke, 2008). The set of skills that need to be acquired differ from individual to individual with respect to their domain, stage in the career life cycle, nature of the job or profession etc.,

Employment is offered to an individual after analyzing the Knowledge, Skill and Attitude of a person. But, earlier studies focus more on the skill component compared to the others when it comes to employability.

The literature argues that 'Employability skills are only non-technical capabilities and do not include technical competence of an individual (Buck & Barrick, 1987).

Most of the earlier studies reveal that after scrutinizing and analyzing deeply, the researchers have identified a set of skills that are cited frequently and clubbed them into three categories.

The three categories include Basic Skills, Higher Order thinking skills and Affective skills.

Each of these categories are imbued with a subset of skills which is totally encompassed as Employability skills.

The table below denotes the employable skills to be acquired by an individual.

Table 1: Table shows the skills in each category

Basic Skills	Higher Order Thinking Skills	Affective skills
Reading Writing Fundamental Science concepts Basic Arithmetic Speaking Listening	Learning Reasoning Thinking Creatively Decisions Making Problem Solving	Responsibility Self Confidence Punctuality Efficiency Self-Directed Good Work Attitude Well Groomed Cooperativeness Self - Motivated Self- Management Self -Control Social Skills Honesty Integrity Adaptability and Flexibility Team Spirit

Employers' expectation and Graduate employability a Mismatch

There is always an imbalance between the expectations of the employers and the graduate candidates who are to be employed.

With the advent of Globalization and Liberalization the industrial sector has witnessed growth and the demand for employees in various sectors is also rising. Despite the growth in the employment market, the number of candidates getting placed every year gets dwindled.

The National Employability report 2014 states that graduate engineers aspire for jobs in specific sectors but they are found least capable to fit into that.

Table 2:Table showing the employability of graduate engineers in different sectors.

ROLE	EMPLOYABILITY (%)
IT ROLES	
Software Engineer – IT Product	3.21%
Software Engineer – IT Services	18.43%
Associate – ITes Operations (Hardware and Networking)	35.37%
ENGINEERING ROLES	
Design Engineer – Non IT	7.49%
Sales Engineer – Non IT	16.54%
NON-TECH ROLES	
Business Analyst – KPO	11.53%
Associate – ITes/BPO	39.84%
Creative Content Developer	15.36%
Technical Content Developer	10.81%

Source:Aspiring MindsNational Employability Report-Engineers 2014

Of 60,000 engineering graduates passing out from various types of institutions all over the country, a meagre percentage of employable engineers exhibits a miserable situation of the Indian Education system which needs to be seriously looked into.

A student of engineering spends four years of his or her time in an institution to gain command over their chosen field along with other necessary skills. The reality is pathetic to know that majority of the engineers (freshers) are found to be poor in their domain knowledge. The fact is that they are not able to apply the principles they study during their course in the job they aspire for.

On the other hand if we look at the situation of non-engineers, the case is worse with still lesser employability compared to Engineering graduates in spite of wider range of opportunities available to them.

Table 3:Table depicts the employability status of graduates(non-engineers):

SECTOR/ROLES	EMPLOYABILITY (%)
BUSINESS FUNCTIONS	
Sales And Business Development	15.88
Operations/Customer Service	14.23
Clerical/Secretarial Roles	35.95
ANALYTICS AND COMMUNICATION	
Analyst	3.03
Corporate Communications/Content Development	2.20
IT AND ITeS INDUSTRY	
IT Services*	12.97
ITeS and BPO	21.37
IT Operations	15.66
ACCOUNTING ROLES	
Accounting*	2.59
TEACHING	
Teaching	15.23

Source: Aspiring Minds' National Employability Report-Graduates 2013

The overall scenario of this unbearable employability is due to the skill gaps that are prominent among the graduates both engineers and non- engineers.

The studies related to this have identified that graduates do possess skills but not the right set of skills expected by the employers for jobs in different domain. Graduates who seem to be skillful in one category lacks in the other.

For example, the study conducted by Aspiring Minds has identified that graduates who aspire for a job in 'Accounting' field do have good communication skills but do not have the expected knowledge and skill in their domain area.

The Lacunae in Skill Development

Strenuous efforts are made to improve upon the employability of the Indian graduates, but the outcome is negligent. The major problem lies with the curriculum of the Educational system which concentrates only on teaching the concepts but not on its applications.

It is admirable to know that the system expects the students to learn more and have multifaceted knowledge and therefore focus only on maximum content coverage. This forces the teachers also to concentrate on the content coverage which just get reproduced in the examination and not found useful anywhere else.

But, mere knowledge without the skill of putting the learned concepts into practice is not ready to fetch a job for the candidate in the corporate. Our educational system gives little importance to the practical exposure.

Except for a very few institutions, the lab classes and practical sessions conducted are modified theoretical classes where all instructions are spoon fed and readings are recorded and results provided. Most of the private institutions, for the sake of admissions, want to project themselves as cent percent result producing colleges and therefore all their teaching and training are only exam oriented. The cognitive skill of the students are curtailed. They are not made to think. So, the students learn, write examination, and forget. It is pathetic to find that graduates who appear for an interview are unable to answer fundamental questions in their domain.

The educators find it difficult to adopt 'Experiential Learning'. 'Doing is remembering'. If the classes are bifurcated into theory and practice giving equal importance for both then there is a possibility of improving the domain knowledge skills.

However, having good proficiency in the subject but unable to express it also leads to unemployability.

Almost all organizations consider communication skills as the essential skills to be possessed by the graduates who opt for employment. Communication skills included reading, writing and listening preferably in English.

Therefore, employability cannot be gained by just mastering one or a few skills. May be, a fluently speaking candidate have brighter chances of employment but not an assured one as it requires the possession of other skills too.

The educators take an effort in imparting soft skills to their students (other than technical or hard skills) through workshops and guest lectures conducted by experts who are sourced from outside.

But they tend to forget the fact that skills cannot be developed overnight or in a short span of time. Skills are something which need to be put into practice and hence take time in getting enhanced. Above all skills are interlinked with one another and requires a systematic approach in acquiring or honing them.

Implications of unemployability

Greater percentage of non-employable graduates is a great concern for the state. The graduates passing out of the institutions if remain unemployed is a burden to the family who spend a hefty amount in educating the children. The students who avail Educational Loan from banks and other financial institutions are unable to repay if remain jobless. These types of accumulated bad debts cause an irreversible damage to the economy.

The institutions who pose themselves of higher percentage of placement, to attract new students for the upcoming batches, find it hard to do so due to many of their graduates remaining unemployed.

On the other side the companies who are in need of skilled employees are not able to acquire the right talent because of the lack of employable graduates with the right set of skills.

Above all, the educated mass if remain idle due to the lack of certain skills have the possibility of being driven towards unethical, illegal and socially vulnerable deeds which affect the society at large.

Conclusion

Employability is the concern all over the world. Almost every country be it a developed one or a developing one is facing the problem. But for a country like India this seems to be a very serious issue as it hampers the overall development of the nation. The higher rate of unemployability prevailing in our country (both with the case of engineering as well as non-engineering graduates) is a serious issue which has to be dealt with immediate effect. The system of education which churns out only graduates but not employable candidates need to be completely revamped. The collective and sincere effort of students, parents, educational institutions, corporate and the government is sure to lift up the status of our graduates and bring the nation to the forefront.

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