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10. Higher Education and Employability Gap in Contemporary Scenario in India

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Abstract

This paper seeks to analyse the role of contemporary higher education in creating employment avenues to graduates and postgraduates. Generally as soon as students get a degree, then they, their parents and society expect them to get employment as the relation between higher education and employment is not separable and the attitude is not that different today. Although, nowadays, they have many more disciplines to study, many professional courses and programmes available online as well as offline through formal and distance education and a significantly large numbers of higher education institutes have been established. Despite the varied choices and increasing number of degree holders, the employers/ recruiters are still struggling to find 'good' 'employable' candidates and on the other hand the candidates are victim of unemployment. This sorry state of affairs compels one not only to think but also to find solutions. In the light of above observations, this paper tries to explore the opportunities available in higher education and challenges one faces as far as employability/ employment avenues are concerned and what should be done to fill the employability gap.

Key words: Higher education, contemporary scenario, employability gap, industry collaboration, communication skills

Introduction

Increase in employment opportunities and good pay packages are the factors which motivate students for higher education so they are mainly concerned about studies which can give them a good career through a job or make them self employed. But they become depressed and frustrated when it does not fructify.

The World Bank document admits that higher education is of paramount importance for economic and social development, and has the responsibility to equip individuals with the advanced knowledge and skills required for positions of responsibility in government, business

and the professions as it increases (the) individual's productivity and incomes, as indicated by rate- of- return analysis but hardly 10% students are found employable even after the implementation of semester / choice based credit and grading system. Despite availability of many more disciplines online as well as offline through formal or distance education institution which has increased significantly, higher education is no more a privilege of elite society only. Resultantly, increasing number of students are getting degrees every year and also become victims of unemployment. On an average, every year 50 lakh people seek employment and a large number of them are professional graduates/postgraduates and at the same time recruiters struggle to find 'quality talent.'

Literature Review

Interestingly, India's graduate outturn has more than doubled in the past decade, with an addition of 3.7 million graduates in fiscal year 2010, a scale unmatched by any other country. This includes 4.97 lakh engineering graduates, and 72,777 engineering post graduates during the year, according to NASSCOM Strategic Review 2010. Approximately 46.13% opt for art, 0.16% for veterinary science, 3.13% for medicine, 6.87% for engineering technology, 0.60 % for agriculture; According to the Confederation of Indian Industry, India needs to build 700 million globally employable workforce, 200 million university graduates and 500 million vocationally skilled people by the year 2020.

If India is compared to China, India has 12 million graduates approximately while China has 24 million. Approximately 83.88% of the total students of Indian higher education are from faculty of arts, science and commerce/ management courses and what is the future of these students as our education system does not provide them employability. Some 60% of the manufacturing personnel in India possess a higher secondary education. Only 2% of workforce consists of formally skilled people while 8% of informally skilled.

Out of every 100 campus candidates, companies are able to recruit only around 15 to 18 persons. While the strike rate is 1: 10 in the auto industry, it is abysmal 1:15 in the insurance sector especially in the frontline. It is really little wonder then if current employability rate is 26% for engineering graduates and 10 to 15% for other graduates, according to NASSCOM.

Objectives

i) To understand the prevailing higher education system in India and the employability avenues it creates and find out how and why the need to reconsider it is first as

ii) To analyse the various strategies, schemes with respect to the global and local transformations taking place at a rapid pace.

iii) To explore the possibilities of employability in Indian higher education system and the challenges that lie ahead in doing away with the employability gap.

Sources of Data Collection

The research method mainly used is library study so the study is purely based on the secondary data collected from books, journals, magazines, newspapers and websites.

Limitations of the Study

This study is made only in relation with secondary data available from various library resources.

Findings and Discussion

The international commission on education, UNESCO report says that education must be organized around four pillars - learning to (i) know (ii) to do (iii) to live together and (iv) to be. Accordingly, employability is more than developing attributes, techniques or experience for a job, or progress within a career but the Indian HE system with exception of a miniscule percentage of institutions, has been unable to produce quality talent and so responsible for the rising 'skill shortages' / 'skill gap'. This is a great challenge for India when India dreams of becoming a superpower.

The 'employer satisfaction survey' of 150 companies by World Bank along with FICCI tells that 64% of surveyed employers are dissatisfied with the quality of engineering graduates . It revealed reliability, self-motivation and willingness to learn are the top three general skill gaps and problem solving, ability to design, conduct experiments and data analysis and reading are the specific skills gaps.

The teacher-centred education system is examination oriented and lacks practical application of knowledge though University Grant Commission has long back felt the urgent need to make some reforms in the syllabus of English and expressed: "The skills of communication, oral as well written, both expressive and receptive, will continue to be at a premium, and teaching will have to try impart a certain competence in these skills." Syllabus Reforms in English, UGC, New Delhi, 1978. (UN, 9)

Besides, the single discipline institutions/ courses focus prematurely on specialist subjects and obstruct holistic learning i.e. "life-skills". The result oriented evaluation system in

terms of pass percentage is another major reason. There is no interface between industry and university too.

According to Rao Committee report of 2003, this gap has arisen in recent years due to the mushrooming of a large number of private institutes including technical institutes and polytechnics. "Barring some exceptions, there is scant regard for maintenance of standards," the report said.(ET,12)

Obviously, HEIs must follow a certain standard of education and have qualified instructors and adequate infrastructure. Although National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) was established in 1994 yet accreditation in India appears to be in its infancy in relation to quality.

According to a National Skill Development Corporation report, incremental requirement of various sectors of the industry will rise to 240 million over the next 10 year. Some of the biggest job creators in the coming decade are expected to be auto industry -35 million people; building and construction industry-33 million, textile and clothing-26 million, organized retail-17 million, transportation and logistics-18 million and real estate services-14 million. The IT-ITES industry alone would need about 12.3 million graduates by 2020, as per National Association of Software and Service Companies' (NASSCOM) Perspective 2020 Report. The cumulative talent available up to 2020, based on current supply trends, is estimated at 10 million, so there would be a shortage of about 2.3 million graduates, the report states.

Sanjay Jog , Chief People Officer of Future Group says that in retail industry they mainly require selling skills, knowledge of local language and domain knowledge of the concept related to retail operations besides interpersonal and communication skills.

Similarly Prabhir Jha, Senior Vice President, HR, Tata Motors expresses that in auto sector, candidates with relevant knowledge and specific skills set in niche areas of automobile manufacturing like research and development, testing, computer aided engineering, paint technology and automation technology are in short supply.

These reports clearly indicate that the problem is neither of lack of job opportunities nor availability of qualified candidates but one of employability due to paucity of required skills.

The HEIs need to maximize brain gain by introducing job oriented technical and professional courses in rural and semi rural areas to make student self employed or employable by industry when private knowledge providers are stepping in. HEIs need to bring innovation to

enable students to get hands–on experience and practical orientation. Spoon feeding should be brought down to minimum and the students should be encouraged to participate in and organize various competitive events/festivals and seminars for their holistic development. The international student exchanges through tie-ups with foreign universities needs to be encouraged as it will give students exposure to global practices. Besides, the gaps which exist between industry expectations and academic inputs must be continuously assessed. Accordingly Board of studies and academic senate/council should try to bridge these gaps by revamping the curriculum and interdisciplinary courses need to be introduced to overcome the employability gap.

In addition to it, these institutes should also try to collaborate with reputed organizations like for enhancing both domain knowledge and soft skills. Students need to be sent to industry and certificate courses by industry need to be conducted. Industry also requires to take active interest in the educational institutes. This will cut down on the industry's training costs. According to NASSCOM, the average training expenditure for Indian IT firms on a new recruit to make up for inadequate skills is over 40% of the cost of an average engineering course. The auto and engineering sectors have to run their graduate trainee programmes for around a year. Undoubtedly a few companies across different sectors are entering into partnership with HEIs. For example- Leading retail conglomerate Future Group has joined hands with 16 MBA colleges which offers two-year retail management programme. Global Talent Track says that they try to bridge skill gaps by forming a vital link between the industry and academic institutions. They work with universities and colleges in the tier 2 and tier 3 cities like Sangli, Jabalpur, Mandi. Many HEIs across the country like Manipal, Amity have begun to offer courses in add-on skills at the campus. National Skill Development Corporation (PPP) has aimed at training 150 million Indian citizen by 2020 as they estimate industry will require 240 million people.

Additionally, India also requires to spend more on higher education as the expenditure on Higher education in terms of GDP is constantly on declining stage. Earlier in 1971 government was spending 1% of its GDP on higher education while in 2001 it came down to 0.4% while other countries spend 5 to 6% of GDP. USA spends approximately 6.5%, Germany spends 4.6%. Even France, Thailand and Kenya are spending more than India.

Most of the time, lack of inadequate infrastructure and finance/fund is the oft cited reason by HEIs. That is why private institutes having good infrastructure facility become player in such scenario though still most of the students get education from government run institutes. If proper

infrastructure is not available in any institute, then a lead institute needs to be explored in the area which can take care of the needs of the other institutes in its surrounding.

The demographic dividend of India would bear fruits in coming era only if the youngsters have appropriate knowledge and skill and can cater to domestic and global demands.

Conclusion

Therefore a paradigm shift in education system including examination and evaluation and testing is the need of the hour when education is disseminated through print media and electronic media in this globalised era. For this ambitious target, all the stakeholders of the nation-academia, industry, skill training companies and the government need to get together. They should do something concrete horizontally as well as vertically in this direction at national level.

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