

RURAL EMPLOYABILITY: - SKILL DEVELOPMENT THE NEED OF THE HOUR

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Abstract

India has made a remarkable performance after adopting the concepts of Liberalisation, Privatization & Globalization. In the global Knowledge Economy India enjoys a very important and an influential place. The astounding progress made in last 20 years has made us one of the most promising nations of the world. However to be a superpower, we need to correct certain critical macroeconomic fundamentals of our nation that has led to the slowdown. One such area, worthy of our attention and action would be the growing unemployment of the educated labour in the economy. It is an ironical situation that so many core sectors and sub sectors of the economy are facing severe shortages of skilled personnel on one hand. And on the other hand our country is battling with high scale of unemployment. Census 2011 reveals 9.4% or 94 people out of 1000 persons are unemployed in India. The obvious reason for this contradictory situation is the lack of employability in graduates passing year on year basis from our Higher Educational Institutions. The employers have often complained about the quality of graduates passing out who score well academically and obtain the desired degrees but are not industrially equipped. Such graduates are unable to meet industry expectations in today's extremely competitive global environment.

The impact of business on educational environment is so evident that we are forced to make amendments in the curriculum. Therefore many new courses were added by almost every university. Mumbai University also made effective changes in the curriculum of every course, method of evaluation etc. In spite of all these changes still there is a gap between the class room and boardroom. The expectations of industries cannot be met by higher education. At times it is also proved that out of 10 engineering graduates only two have good communication skills and ability to converse fluently. So what is that factor which prevents the chances of employability of our students? Can we solve these problems related to employability? This paper aims at finding solutions for the problems confronted with the students as well as teachers. This paper also discusses about the reasons for lack of employability and solutions for removing the problem of employability.

Key words :- Employability, Higher Education, Skill Gap.

Introduction

Higher education can be recognized as an instrument of personal development. It helps in growing an individual's intellectual ability as well as overall personality. With the promotion of economic reform policies, the role of higher education is reinterpreted. Education can be an input not only for economic development but also for inner strength and need for higher education for women especially in rural areas is overwhelming. Approximately one third of India's population cannot read, making largest adult illiterate population.

In the past, several studies have been conducted to trace this gap. A recent incident of N.R.Narayana Murthy criticizing the IIT Graduates might have not gone well with many, but has indeed brought the reality in open. These graduates do not possess the right mix of hard and soft skills to make them employable. So this poses an added challenge for Industry as well as Educational Institutions. The Educational Institutions are already under pressure to meet the

rising demand of quality education, work force needs, the relevance of their programmes the employability of their graduates and overall personality development of the students. Preparing young people to enter the labour market has therefore become a critical responsibility for universities.

Objectives of the Study

The study has been undertaken with the following objectives:-

1. To understand the meaning of employability skills
2. To understand the importance of skills
3. To review the requirements by the firms towards employability skills
4. To find out methods for developing various skills.

Review of Literature

Neither UGC Nor Universities discriminate rural and urban colleges with respect to educational conditions. The set of rules and regulations governing rural and urban colleges are also common. Therefore industry also expect same set of skills from rural students as pointed out by Mr. M.R. Kurup in his article on accreditation of colleges with special reference to rural colleges.

Many people have defined villages as well as employability. Rural India suffers from lack of employability due to reasons such as poor communication skills, organizing skills etc.

India's heart resides in its village and just like a doctor whose work begins with the diagnosis of the heart beat, the planning and execution of any policy for the nation of a billion, has to begin with the learning derived from its six lakh villages says Dr. APJ Abdul kalam our former president.(Kalam & Srijanpal Singh 2011)

There are five reasons cited for the drop out in schools in rural India:-

1. The schools do not have any quality from class rooms ,to benches and desks and teachers.
2. Curriculum is obsolete which cannot provide any skill development.
3. Massive inflation has made life miserable for poor people.
4. Conditions in schools are not improving.
5. Exploitation by politicians due to illiteracy.

According to George Joseph, a Yale University expert on Asia, who declared that 'India will become the largest education market in the world in the next decade' on the sidelines of a US-India Higher Education Summit in Washington in October 2011.

A recent report published by the World Economic Forum revealed that only 25% of Indian professionals are employable by the organised sector.

Limitations of the study

The study suffers from following limitations:-

1. Only five companies were selected and number of students are limited to 100.
2. The data collected from very few teachers.
3. The students are undergraduates of only commerce stream. Science and arts students are not included.
4. The study is limited to cities only since collection of data from rural area was not possible.
5. It is assumed that there is no difference between rural and city college while studying employability.

Employability Skills

University of Mumbai has carried out a survey to check the employability of undergraduates in rural colleges which revealed that of the 5000 students appeared for the employability test only 50 could be placed. The Pro-VC said that university is planning to conduct personality development programmes for students to enhance the employability.

Employability can be defined as “the capability of getting and keeping satisfactory work.”

Gone are the days where employers were very particular with technical skills ALONE. Now HR recruiters are searching for all talents from the employees including IQ as well as EQ. HR People are interested in evaluating soft skills to see if candidates can contribute towards the company’s objectives positively along with ability to build cordial and cohesive relationship with rest of the team members. Employability skills have been defined as “A set of achievements understandings and personal attributes that make individuals more likely to gain employment and to be successful in their chosen occupations”. (Peter Knight & Mantz yorke). These skills can be called as transferable skills or personal skills. The important soft skills expected from a candidate are communication skills, leadership skills, presentation skills, time management skills, job interview skills, and team skills. It is therefore imperative to develop soft skills notably with good etiquette, communication, presentation etc. There are various organisations which gives training in soft skills as programmes, or soft skill courses running as 3months, one month programme etc in all cities. Employability skills are good communication skills, learning skills, organizing and planning skills, problem solving skills etc.

Soft skills are mainly required for our students due to the following reasons:-

- To increase the chances of employability
- To exhibit professionalism
- To increase the chances of placement and promotion
- To ensure job flexibility & rotation
- To face competition

- To adjust with the global culture.

Quality

In Maharashtra enrolment of children in school has risen tremendously but the quality of students has suffered like anything. The Annual Status Education Report (ASER 2012) by the NGO Pratham reveals that in 2010 29% of children in class V could not solve 2 digit subtraction problem without seeking help which has gone upto 39% in 2011 and 46.5% in 2012. Barring AP, Karnataka and Kerala nearly every state showed a decline in mathematical skills when we have celebrated 2012 as year of mathematics. Only 58% of standard V can read standard II text and only 22% can read paragraph without understanding the meaning. This shows the deterioration in communication and reading skills of school students in Maharashtra. From the school level if we are not taking quality seriously, Colleges cannot contribute towards this.

Quality of education is very important while developing skills of a student. The teachers should possess updated information regarding all subjects so that any doubts of the students can be clarified. There is a close relation between the quality and research done by the teachers. Quality of teaching can be improved only with the help of research. India invests very little in research activities. In China about 17 % is spend towards research by higher education institutions where as in India it is only 4%. The major setbacks in quality improvement in higher education system are corruption in various ways, nepotism, reservation system and political interference. India's demand for higher learning can be seen in the increasing enrolment of Indian students abroad. More Indians study abroad than any other nation including china (Arvind Panagariya on higher education) . This shows lack of quality in Indian education system. According to BBC India spends 11% of its GDP on education whereas China 16%.

Skills are also expected in relation with time management, problem solving, business communication, corporate etiquette, and stress management. The overall personality of the student including personal grooming and body language are to be taken care of while developing the skills of an individual. The overall objective of skill development is to make the individual ready to face the corporate world. Towards this development the quality of teaching is very important. The teachers should impart high quality educational standards by giving examples from real life situations, case studies as well as from classics in English literature.

Data Analysis & Interpretation

Data has been collected from the students, teachers as well as organizations to find out their expectations about employability and the required skills. Hundred students were selected from commerce stream and twenty five teachers were selected as samples for conducting the study.

The data has been collected from 5 midsized companies and 5 MNCs working in India. Accordingly the skills which are expected by the employers can be explained as follows:-

Table -1 The top 5 skills that the employers of Indian Companies & MNCs want

Indian Company	Verbal communication	Written communication	Initiative & Team work	Drive	Time management
MNC	Global skills	Leadership	Negotiation skills	Self awareness	Lifelong Learning

Source: Data collected

All Indian companies are giving importance to communication skills both verbal and written as first priority. Indian firms also need initiative for identifying opportunities , team work, and drive to make things happen by their employees. They also expect from the student community effective time management prioritizing tasks and able to work to deadlines.

Apart from all the above skills global firms require appreciation of other culture and understand other languages (global skills), ability to motivate others (leadership), ability to influence and convince others (negotiation Skills) , self awareness i.e. awareness about achievements, values abilities etc, along with continuity of learning throughout our life.

Hypothesis testing

The two hypothesis taken are:-

H₀ :- Skills requirements are different according to the nature of the organization.

H₁ :- There is no difference in skills requirements by the organizations. For testing the relationship chi-square test is applied with a 95% confidence level. Since the calculated value is greater than the tabled value at 0.05 df it is proved that skill requirements are different according to the nature of industry. That is the null hypothesis is rejected and alternate hypothesis is accepted. What is the expectation of a national company is different from international companies. What is expected by a manufacturing company is different from that of service sector organizations. Therefore teachers can do a lot in preparing the curriculum by industry academia discussions and forward the outcome of discussions to skill development centers.

Major Findings

The important skills attributed by them are analytical skills, computing skills, flexibility, planning and organizing ,self confidence and integrity. These can be considered more or less as qualities. As far as the teachers are concerned everyone has opined that the best qualities required for the students can be communication skills and time management. They are not aware of global skills, self awareness and lifelong learning which are the most important requirements as far as a multi- national company is concerned.

Regarding the students sample 80% agreed on communication skills and self confidence as important skill requirement and with respect to time management they were ignorant. The negotiation skills and adjusting with the global culture are totally unknown for them. This indicates lack of exposure about the culture in companies, to the city college students. Also the data revealed that there is a difference between the expectations of Industry and the output of higher educational institutions. This difference can be called as skill gap which should be reduced to nil so that all output will be employable.

Table:- 2

TOP Five skills shortages among Undergraduates	Percentage
1. General awareness	67%
2. Communication skills	64%
3. Leadership	33%
4. Team work	33%
5. Subject knowledge & competence	19%

Source;- Survey

According to the above table subject knowledge and competence is possessed only by 19% of the sample and team work and leadership skills are shown only by 33%. The other observations are as follows:-

Minor Findings

1. Students under study was good with communication skills but were lacking time management and organizing skills.
2. The students are having very good intelligence but very poor with their emotional quotient.
3. They do not know much of team work and do not possess leadership abilities and initiative.
4. The requirements of MNCs are different from Indian companies. They emphasise on team work, leadership skills, lifelong learning and global skills.
5. Indian companies also values inter cultural skills which are unknown for our undergraduates.
6. Even the subject knowledge and competence is very less for the students.

Suggestions and Recommendations

1. The skill quotients of the students should be improved especially that of rural student communities.
2. Skilling curriculum should be designed by the Mumbai University in consultation with Industries and apex associations.
3. Many training institutes can be initiated by the university in which the curriculum design will be upgraded as per the industry needs.
4. DLLE can do a better job by giving training through training institutes or starting diploma courses/ certificate courses.
5. The training institutes should have high quality with benchmarking.
6. University can also send teachers to NSDC for training (formalized training) which can be imparted to students by conducting workshops or training sessions during vacations.
7. University can also think of starting diploma or certificate courses to teachers who can later on give it back to the society or to the institution.
8. Industries can sponsor some of the programmes of the training institute since institutes can provide back up for placements.
9. University through DLLE can become skilling partner so that curriculum can be updated as per the industry requirements.
10. Instead of examination rating of the students should be done as per the standards of the industry norms so that employment is assured for all students undergoing training.

Conclusion

The demographic dividend of India is getting negated because of lack of employable skills. Education continues have the primary responsibility of supporting people's employability. The budget proposal to give Rs. 10,000 to every person availing a certain standard of job readiness through government registered entities addresses critical shortcomings of skilling eco system. This could be an incentive as well as game changer for skill development. Vocational certification can bring a huge change if the rural students cannot acquire a degree. Even railway ministry is preparing a multi- disciplinary training institute which will impart rail related electronics technologies and fill up 1.52 lakh vacancies in future. Instead of NREGA if villages are provided with right skills to enhance farm income and increase job eligibility we can generate more income. India has set an ambitious target of providing skill based training to 500 million people by 2022.

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