

## **A study on bridging the employability skill gap in higher education – NEP 2020 & beyond**

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### **Abstract**

A total of nearly 44.50 Lakh students graduated in the year 2018-19 under BA, B.Sc. and B.Com. courses in India as per the report from MHRD. While on an average 15% of students opt for higher studies balance throw themselves in job market immediately on completion of the courses. But how many of them could bag a job is the big question. While we are churning out a large number of graduates every year, the biggest challenge that our education system faces today is its ability to make our students employable on graduation. Educational framework at undergraduate level is a very structured yet a straitjacketed system. The syllabus for the courses offered in the Universities is prepared primarily keeping in mind the level of basic knowledge imparted at the school level, intensity of concepts, theory and practicals / tutorials that can be grasped in three academic years and the base required to be prepared for the post-graduation / higher studies. It is not apparently aligned to the need of employers. The job-market looks at students with altogether different lens for recruitment. A quick look at the pattern of written examination conducted for government jobs clearly highlights that our formal education in the under-graduate level does not specifically prepare the candidates for the same. And as a result, coaching centers have lapped up the opportunity to bridge this gap. The private sector on the other hand involves multiple rounds of selection starting from written examination in the domain knowledge to aptitude test to group discussion to behavioral tests to personal interviews by HR and Subject Matter Experts. Here too, the formal education falls short in meeting the expected level of preparedness to crack these recruitment processes. The endeavor of any education has to be to make these students employable. This needs a paradigm shift in the attitude and the methodology of the education system. The education system will have to be SMART, which is Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely. Introduction of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recognizes and addresses majority of these issues. Even in the absence of immediate policy shift, local interventions can be taken to mitigate this gap.

## Introduction

A total of nearly 44.50 Lakh students graduated in the year 2018-19 under BA, B.Sc. and B.Com. courses in India as per the AISHE 2018-19 report from MHRD [1]. While on an average 15% of students opt for higher studies balance throw themselves in job market immediately on completion of the courses. But how many of them could bag a job? That's a big question. While we are churning out a large number of graduates every year, the biggest challenge that our education system faces today is its ability to make our students employable on graduation. Lest the issue is addressed, the much-hyped Demographic Dividend would soon turn into Demographic Liability disrupting the very fabric of social harmony. The issue needs a closer investigation and introspection at the same time.

### A. Educational framework

Educational framework at undergraduate level is a very structured yet a straitjacketed system. The courses offered in the Universities are pre-approved by the Universities and the syllabus is well defined by the Committee of Courses. The syllabus is prepared primarily keeping in mind the following aspects:

1. Level of basic knowledge imparted at the school level
2. Intensity of concepts, theory and

practicals / tutorials that can be grasped in three academic years.

3. Prepare the base for post-graduation / higher studies

The syllabus is routinely reviewed by the Committee of Courses to keep pace with the advancements in the respective fields of study.

### B. Job Market & Recruitment Process

India being a vast country has equally varied job scenario. The job opportunity in Government sector at Centre, State and semi-Govt establishments is quite miniscule as compared to a vast job market in the private sector which offers jobs in the organised as well as unorganised sector.

Government sector jobs have a well-established skills and qualifications requirements for selection through a well-entrenched selection process. While Class IV recruitment is now strictly on the basis of written examination without any personal Interview, recruitment at other levels involves the both.

Coming to the private sector where a structured approach is followed for recruitment in an organised sector, it involves at times multiple rounds of selection starting from written examination in the domain knowledge to aptitude test to group discussion to behavioural tests to personal interviews by HR and Subject Matter Experts. The private sector adopts another channel for recruitment, i.e. Campus Recruitment.

### C. Employability Skill gap

The job-market looks at students with altogether different lens for recruitment, i.e. their suitability and employability. Employability, in general, is a holistic measure of assessing a candidate on the basis of his knowledge, skills and personal attributes.

This paper primarily explores and discusses the correlation between the academic inputs being provided at college (under-graduate) level and the expectation gap from the recruiter's perspective and students' perspective. The paper, at present excludes those who opt for self-employment.

- i. Government Sector jobs: As discussed above, the syllabus of written examination conducted by different recruiting agencies is fairly different from the curriculum covered during academic years. As a result, the student is left with no choice but to obtain these skills outside the boundary of college, invariably spending a fortune.
- ii. Private Sector jobs: And as highlighted above, students have to look outwards for acquiring not only company-specific skills but also softer skills such as communication and presentation skills etc. by spending additional resources.

A closer investigation of the employability

skill gap could be made possible at college level by critically analyzing the in-house data of Campus Recruitment, a direct recruitment process. Under this process different companies visit the campus and hold pre-placement talks highlighting their unique market positioning and their expectations from the prospective candidates during the placement season. They also share the Job Description and tentative compensation structure.

Data was culled out from the database for 44 companies that visited Hansraj College [2] for different roles and successfully offered jobs to our students. The firms can be categorized as under:

➤ Banks	➤ Auditing / Consulting firms
➤ BPO / KPO	➤ Education Service Providers
➤ IT / ITES	➤ Start-up – Sports / Service domain
➤ Consumer Goods	➤ Service Industry – Airlines / Logistics / Travel / Hospitality

Job roles offered by these companies were as under:

➤ Advisor	➤ Analyst – Associate / Business / Business Development / Consulting / Data / Finance / Graduate
➤ Assistant – Audit	➤ Associate – Consultant / Finance / Researcher
➤ Developer - Content	➤ Counselor – Overseas Education
➤ Expert – Subject Matter	➤ Executive – Business Development
➤ Graduate Trainee	➤ Manager – Assistant / Deputy / Operation / Sales
➤ Teacher	➤ Trainee – Executive / Management
➤ Trainer	➤

A detailed analysis of job description shows that in general the following skills and knowledge base are desired by these companies:

- a) Knowledge
  - Acturial valuations
  - Augmented Reality (AR) & Virtual Reality (VR)
  - Corporate Governance & ethics
  - Digitalization & Process Automation
  - Insurance Sector
  - Quality systems
  - Risk Management
  - Scientific Simulations (Sims)
- b) Skills
  - Analytical skills
  - Collaborative skills
  - Communication skills – oral
  - Communication skills – written
  - Fluency in English
  - Innovation
  - Interpersonal skills
  - Interviewing skills
  - Lateral thinking
  - Mentoring skills
  - Problem solving
  - Presentation skills
  - Report writing
  - Research Methodology
  - Teaching skills

Another analysis of Hansraj College’s

placement data throws up even more revealing fact that the job profile offered has no direct correlation to the stream of undergraduate pursued by students.

Job profiles of Consultancy firms and Firms with Sales & Marketing profiles provide equal opportunity to students from all the streams, may it be Arts, Commerce or Science. Likewise Finance Audit Firms provide equal opportunity to students from Commerce and Arts streams.

Job Profiles	B.A.	B.Co m.	B.Sc.	Physi cal Sc.	Grand Total
Consult - Analyst	10	18	9		37
Consult - Associate	4	12	2		18
Finance - Analyst	2	2			4
Finance - Associate	3	4			7
Finance - Audit	1	11			12
Content Developer	2		1		3
Content, Faculty, Advisor	1	1			2
Marketing	10	4	4		18
Sales	7	10	8		25
SMEs	3	2	2	1	8
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>134</b>

Students’ perspective: Over the years students and their parents have realized that the formal education does not provide them with adequate knowledge and skills required by them to make them employable. The analysis of the table above amply proves the point. As a result, they fall back on other sources of inputs such as coaching centres. Since over the years, the pattern of written examination has been standardized and sample papers are available in the market in abundance, these coaching centres have lapped up the gap that exists between the formal education in the under-graduate level and job-specific

knowledge. The institutes have also mushroomed for providing inputs for soft skills. It forces the students to incur huge additional expenditure.

Recruiters' perspective: The recruiters too face a challenge in selecting the right candidate for the jobs advertised. It impacts these firms in two ways:

- i. The firms resort to Aptitude tests to ascertain the suitability of the candidates in addition to the assessment of personal attributes through their work experience, Internships and Positions of responsibilities etc.
- ii. They commit heavily in training during their induction process to align the selected candidates with their specific job roles

### Way forward

As is evident from the list of the desirable skills by the recruiting firms, there is a yawning gap between the expectations of the hiring organizations and the formal education imparted by the institutes. Hence students can not solely rely on the formal education to crack these recruitment processes.

At the end of the day, the endeavor of any education has to be to make these students employable. This needs a paradigm shift in the attitude and the methodology of the education system that has its root in the

Macaulay's Education policy. If we have to make our students future-ready, the education system will have to be **SMART**, which is Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely.

- ✓ The Syllabus must be **Specific** to Industry needs
- ✓ Effectiveness of education shall be clearly **Measurable** in terms of employability on completion of course and must be fine-tuned regularly.
- ✓ The education system must help set an **Attainable** target for bringing employability within reach for the entire population.
- ✓ The educational institutes shall set a **Realistic** target for themselves by aligning the educational inputs as well as extra-curricular activities.
- ✓ The educational system must review and fine-tune the syllabus **Timely** to suit the requirement of Industry.

The recent National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 fully recognized this gap. Under its Higher Education section, it states, '... A quality higher education must enable personal accomplishment and enlightenment, constructive public engagement, and productive contribution to the society. It must prepare students for more meaningful and satisfying lives and work roles and enable economic independence.' [3]

It further acknowledges the problems currently faced by the higher education

system such as; laying ‘... less emphasis on the development of cognitive skills and learning outcomes;’ and having ‘a rigid separation of disciplines, with early specialization and streaming of students into narrow areas of study; ...’ [3]

Hence, the NEP 2020 envisions ‘... moving towards a more multidisciplinary undergraduate education; ...’ with ‘... an increased emphasis on communication, discussion, debate, research and opportunities for cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary thinking....’ [3]

**Success Story at Hansraj College:** At Hansraj College, the management is alive to this gap and has institutionalize numerous initiatives to bridge this gap and maximize placements by adopting two-pronged strategy.

First strategy is to enhance the soft skills of students by encouraging them to participate and successfully manage societies. Currently, there are nearly 50 societies functioning in the college that offer opportunities to the students to conceptualize, plan and manage these societies and clubs thereby enhancing their capabilities such as leadership skills, team building, communication skills etc.

Second strategy is to professionally manage the Placement cell at Hansraj College which plays the lead role in sensitizing the students in preparing them for the recruitment process. The preparation primarily is by way of organizing formal interactions with distinguished alumni and

talks by Industry experts. Various seminars are also held at the campus to showcase the latest industry trends in technology and processes.

Introduction of NEP would now provide a more structured framework for all-round development of these students. Providing Learning Outcomes based Curriculum Framework to students in future would significantly encourage cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary thinking.

The employability can be improved further by exploring and adopting the following initiatives:

- a. Introduction of short courses in the fields of Finance, Insurance, IT etc.
- b. Introduction of short courses / workshops on Communication & presentation skills
- c. Introduction of workshops on Interpersonal & collaborative skills
- d. Introduction of workshops on Analytical & Problem-solving skills

This would mitigate the anxieties and pains of the students making them skilled and employable. This would also attract more firms for recruitment thus making it a win-win situation for all the stakeholders leading to the economic growth of the nation.

#### References:

- [1] AISHE 2018-19 report from MHRD
- [2] Placement Cell data from Hansraj College
- [3] National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Ministry of Human Resource Development