

SYSTEMIC CHANGES IN TEACHING, LEARNING AND EVALUATION FOR DEVELOPMENT OF SKILLS AND FOR ENHANCING EMPLOYABILITY OF STUDENTS PURSUING PROGRAMS UNDER THE COMMERCE FACULTY

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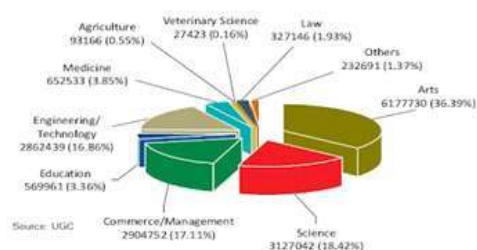
Abstract : Lakhs of commerce graduates and post graduates are churned out by universities across India every year. One of the main objectives of higher education is to make students employable. Is it possible for institutions to give tailor made manpower to industry to suit its needs? Is the onus for preparing industry ready human resources only on institutions of higher education? Are the methodologies and pedagogy currently adopted flawed due to which institutions are finding it difficult to produce employable graduates? This article examines the existing methodologies and explores some structural and pedagogical changes that can help in bridging the gap between industry requirements and skill sets of commerce graduates.

Key words: Employability, skill sets, industry requirements, commerce graduates

Introduction:

Businesses and processes have undergone tremendous changes in recent times. Markets have become very complex. As a result, industry expectations in terms of skills among graduates have undergone a sea change. Good quality employable human resources are one of the prerequisites for economic development. The commerce faculty has been attracting major student enrollment in recent times. Today, there are tremendous employment opportunities for commerce graduates. However, are the commerce graduates churned out by the universities in India capable of exploiting these opportunities? Industries' common complaint is that the graduates are unemployable. According to a NASSCOM report, each year over 3 million graduates and post-graduates are added to the Indian workforce. Of these, only 25 percent of technical graduates and 10-15 percent of regular graduates are considered employable by the industry.

Faculty-wise Students Enrolment in Higher Education 2010-11*



Unemployability is a greater problem now than unemployment. Employability of graduates has been a matter of debate off late. The problem of unemployability is not restricted to commerce graduates alone.

Curriculum and teaching should go beyond mere transfer of information. Graduates should be capable of applying what they have learnt when they start working. Employability is the quality by which an individual is considered productive to an organization by way of deploying his or her skills. Career holic.

Many research papers, articles etc. have been written on employability problems and following is the review of some of them.

“Skill Development : The Key to Economic Prosperity”

Literature Review

Vipin Gupta, Kamala Gollakota & Ancheri Sreekumar, 2003 in a paper titled 'Quality of Business Education: A Study of the Indian Context' have said that Preference for commerce courses among students and parents started increasing in 1980s. Till such time, most preferred science courses. However, companies started hiring commerce graduates and parents encouraged children to pursue undergraduate programs under the commerce faculty. The trend observed in the paper continues today. However, curriculum and pedagogical changes in the commerce courses are necessary to cater to changing industry needs.

Murali Pasupathi, 2011 in an article titled 'How employable are our graduates' says that poor quality teachers and curriculum have resulted in graduates not being able to relate theory to practical application. This is true as application is rarely taught in colleges.

R. N. Bhaskar, 2011 says that 25% engineers, 15% of finance graduates and less than 10% of other graduates are employable in an article titled 'The unemployable literates of India'. Thus it is evident that the problem is not restricted to commerce graduates.

Prof. M.S. Rao, 2012 in a book titled 'Soft Skills for Students: Classroom to Corporate', says Soft skills are very important for employability of students. There is a strong need to revolutionize the present Indian education system by making it practical with employment orientation. The author's interactions with HR professional from the industry also revealed the same.

In the Dasra Report titled 'Leveraging the Dividend: Enhancing Employability in India', an important finding is that the mismatch between the skills acquired by youth and the skills required by industry is a major cause of low employability among Indian youth. Dasra is a leading Strategic Philanthropy Foundation in India and has developed models to ascertain employability problems. Universities and colleges should work closely with such organizations to improve employability of students. It is therefore important to understand the flaws in the existing teaching, learning and evaluation process and explore ways to overcome these flaws.

Research Methodology: The paper is based on secondary data and also on inputs received through interactions with HR executives from the industry. It is an exploratory and descriptive study.

Overview of the existing teaching and evaluation process:

Affiliated colleges model: The Indian higher education system was conceived and implemented during the British rule. We have ever since continued with the model of colleges being affiliated to universities. Some of the glaring problems are:

- ✍ When the university grows it may result in too many colleges under its purview and the size becomes unwieldy.
- ✍ Affiliated colleges do not have autonomy with respect to courses, syllabus and the evaluation process. This can adversely affect teaching, learning, evaluation and faculty's motivation and initiative.

As per Indian Higher Education Statistics, there are 700 degree granting institutions, 35500 affiliated colleges and 20 million student enrollments. Top 4 fields of study are: 37% arts, 19% science, 18% commerce and management and 16% engineering and technology. (Source: UGC/Prepared by Dr Education.com)

Teaching, learning and evaluation:

- ✍ Teaching and learning:
 - ✍ Syllabus tends to get outdated and is not updated. Reframing of syllabus should be undertaken as and when required.
 - ✍ The compulsion that syllabus has to be framed keeping in mind the nature of a large population of students, makes the syllabus too simple for students with better capabilities. The syllabus and evaluation process is homogeneous for a heterogeneous group of students.
 - ✍ Faculty finds it difficult to adopt new techniques and the teaching process becomes monotonous.
 - ✍ Application is rarely taught in colleges.
 - ✍ Both teaching and learning have become examination oriented. Teachers are not motivated to go beyond the syllabi and students also do not take interest when a teacher attempts to go beyond the syllabi.
 - ✍ The student-teacher ratio is very high.
 - ✍ Students have very poor soft skills.
 - ✍ Students lack detail orientation.

✍Evaluation:

- ✍There is too much weightage given to performance of students at examinations.
- ✍Stereotypical question papers are set. The questions are predictable. Students may score good marks without really learning much.
- ✍Many teachers and students depend on poor quality text books. As a result students who refer to good quality reference books do not score in examinations as the examiners look for stereotypical answers given in the popular text books.
- ✍The examination system tests the students' ability to memorize and recollect and does not test their understanding and ability to apply.

The way forward

The country needs to take a holistic view and revamp the entire education system right from primary level to higher education. Mere literacy is not enough and steps have to be taken to enable graduates to find gainful employment based on the strength of their qualifications.

The prevailing higher education system needs to be more flexible in terms of adapting to the modern day changes. Promoting liberal education can be a good alternative in this direction to help the system come out of an age-old structured format. Inter-disciplinary studies should be taken by students instead of going for traditional studies.

Educational institutions have to bear in mind the fact we may be training human resources for industries that do not even exist today.

Following are some of the suggestions for improving skills and employability of students pursuing programs under the commerce faculty:

Role of industry and government: Industry and the government cannot conveniently absolve themselves of the responsibility for improving the quality of education. They should be proactive and support institutions of higher education.

Public-private partnerships model can be used for setting up of educational institutions. Government should play the role of a monitoring body to keep a check on profiteering and to ensure equity apart from funding partly. Government has to bear the cost of subsidizing higher education for students from economically disadvantaged section of the population. This is important because, otherwise higher education will become unaffordable to such students. Government has to increase the provision for education in the budget. Funding cannot be left to private parties alone. Private parties or companies can provide funds and play an active role in syllabus framing. Faculty can work closely with the corporate sector. This will ensure that faculty gets the necessary exposure needed to teach application and the practical aspects of the subjects taught by them. Industry should also give consulting assignments to faculty. Faculty can write case studies based on their observations.

Industry can help by providing internship opportunities to students. Faculty should try and find out the aptitude and interest of students and guide them for selecting companies for their internships. Industry can also outsource some routine functions to students.

Shadowing can be very useful for students. Employability skills can be acquired through observation. Industry should cooperate and allow students to shadow their employees. For instance, a student who is interested in a sales job should be allowed to accompany the salesman of a company when he goes on field visits. Students can choose to shadow people based on their career aspirations.

Systemic changes at the university and college level: The number of affiliated colleges under each university should be restricted.

Colleges should have autonomy with respect to programs offered, framing of syllabus and evaluation. Framing of syllabus should be a combined effort among institutions offering primary and secondary education, institutions of higher education and the industry. As of now there is a complete disconnect between schools, universities and industry. This can help in stage-wise meaningful framing of the syllabus. Concepts should be taught at the higher secondary level and application has to be taught at the undergraduate and post graduate levels. Reframing of syllabus should be responsive to industry needs as well as proactive.

The students- teacher ratio needs to come down. For this, if required more number of colleges and more number of divisions in colleges should be established. This would not be too difficult under the public-private partnerships model.

New need based programs should be introduced. In rural areas, programs such as bachelor's and master's degrees focusing on the commercial aspect of farming, food processing, handicrafts, tourism, hospitality, carpentry etc. can be offered. A formal university degree will not only help in enhancing

employability of rural youth, it will help in better professional management of rural businesses and also ensure dignity to such occupations.

Creating an enabling learning environment: Teaching and learning should be research based. Research based learning has a number of advantages. The learner's reading habits will improve. He/she will be exposed to perspectives and interpretations of different people and experts. This will enable the learner to come up with his own perspectives and interpretations. This ultimately will lead to knowledge creation. Research will also inculcate humility in students.

Colleges can have a system of appointing students as teaching fellows. Teaching fellows can help the teachers by guiding students of lower classes for their project work. They can also assist in the research projects undertaken by faculty.

As of now only professional courses offer specialization at the undergraduate level. Even in commerce faculty undergraduate programs, students should be able to specialize in the area of their choice right from the first year. Core subjects should be offered based on the student's choice. The number of subjects that a student should learn in the three years of the undergraduate program should be fixed and a wide choice should be offered. The choice of subjects other than core and ancillary subjects for commerce courses, could even be music, fashion designing, astronomy, gemology, geology etc. For such subjects students should be permitted to attend classes in institutions that offer such programs and those institutions can teach, evaluate and award credit points based on the student's performance.

Sensitization of students to problems and needs of the society is essential. Social work should be compulsory for which students should be given credits.

Soft skills training should be imparted to students. Employers are of the opinion that hard skills such as expertise, domain knowledge etc. will help an employee in doing the job but soft skills help him/her to fit into the organization. Industry can help in conducting such programs.

Colleges should have a strong network of alumni. Alumni can help by mentoring, sharing their industry experience with students and also teach practical aspects of different subjects. Students can shadow an alumnus while he/she is at work.

Alumni can enhance students' awareness of the requirements and realities of the graduate labour market and encourage their engagement in employability support. HEIs should develop and encourage this important network. Maureen Tibby. (2012)

Every undergraduate program should compulsorily have a subject on computer applications and use of information technology.

Colleges offering undergraduate programs can have an entrepreneurship development cell. A strong network of angel and venture capital investors and organizations such as TIE (The Indus Entrepreneurs) can help in building and strengthening the entrepreneurship cell. Owners of start-ups, self employed alumni, angel investors, venture capitalists etc. can be invited by the entrepreneurship development cells of colleges for mentoring students. Students who have business acumen can thus become employment creators and employers instead of employment seekers. Students should be sensitized to the social environment in India and the problems faced by the common man. There are many community based businesses that are dying. Students and faculty can help such community based businesses by helping them to create sustainable business models.

Conclusions

Employability of graduates in general and commerce graduates in particular is a matter of concern. The current education system needs a revamp and it needs to be more dynamic. Systems and structures that worked earlier may not be suitable now. Educational systems and structures that have stopped delivering should be revamped or if necessary should be replaced with more vibrant and dynamic systems and structures. Changes in the business are inevitable and industry requirements in terms of human resources will also change. Therefore we need an education system that can respond quickly to changing employment opportunities. A concerted effort among universities, affiliated colleges, alumni, government and the industry is crucial for addressing the issue of employability of commerce graduates.

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