

EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT AND EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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Abstract

India is one of the country in the world has huge reservoir of manpower. By the year 2022, India will become world's youngest nation. Presently, with one of the highest youth population in the world, India has rampant opportunities and challenges. One of the biggest challenges is to make this pool of talents to be employable (India Skill Report, 2016). Enhancement of employability skills of youth is the key issue India is facing. Many new initiatives have been launched by the Government to improve the employability skills of youth. This study is mainly focused to learn the influence of educational environment on enhancing or developing the employability skills of graduate students at University level. One of the important factors which influence the employability skills of graduate students is the educational environment. The major constructs of educational environment considered for the study are Curriculum, Pedagogy and Institutional Infrastructure. The result of the study revealed that educational environment has an impeccable influence on the employability skills of the graduate students. Therefore the study result leads to the reality that educational institutions and Universities have crucial role to play for the construction of employable graduates to serve to the nation and society as such. Multistage stratified random sampling technique is used for the study. The unit of the study is final year degree students of Government and Aided Arts and Science colleges in Kerala. The sample size is 828 students.

Keywords: Employability Skill, Educational Environment, Graduate students, Curriculum, Pedagogy, Institutional Infrastructure

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1. Introduction

The world of employment is changing hastily. Various industries and its businesses are renovating with new techniques and technologies. Many of the prominent areas of employment of yesterdays are vanishing and many of today's shining and most remunerable jobs may not be exist in the future. As the changes continue new jobs will emerge and old jobs will disappear. National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2010 states that today's employers are looking for skills from graduate students (NACE, 2010). In this circumstance, it is imperative to be flexible and prepared for the life time learning and development especially among graduates. The Universities and higher education institutions must concentrate on mould their graduates with skills and make them to imbibe the quality of life time learning. Therefore while preparing graduates for the world of work, not prepare them for the employment instead prepare them to be employable.

2. Statement of problem

The contemporary job market situation shows that there are lot of opportunities available to the talented and skilled graduates especially fresh graduates. Still various studies revealed that the rate of fresh graduates to be employed is sluggish. In the year 2017, only 21.65 per cent of fresh graduates are hired by the employers and in the year 2016, it was 21.43 per cent (India Skill Report, 2017). The extent of the possession of Employability skill of graduates is one of the determinant factors to win or lose an employment. A person with abridge employability skill will have abridged employment opportunities. Especially in the case of fresh graduates, employers select them based on their level of knowledge, application ability and possession of soft skills. These are the three rudiment composition of employability skills. University education is one of the important factors to develop and nurture employability skills among graduate students. The elements such as curriculum, pedagogy and institutional infrastructure contribute immensely towards the enhancement of employability skills of students. These three elements are considered as the educational environment. Many studies regarding employability skills are available in the literature but no serious studies have been undertaken in the area of the graduate students' educational environment and its relation with the employability skills. So a systematic and scientific study is required in this area. Therefore there exists a research gap. This study is intended to assess the educational environment of graduate students and its influence on their employability skills.

3. Significance of the study

The concept of employability skill is an earnestly discussing topic across the world. In order to lead a smooth and successful professional life, it is required to possess employability

skills. The Employability skill acquisition of a graduate student happens from several sources. One of the prominent sources is the Educational Environment. This study focuses on the influence of educational environment on the employability skills of graduate students.

Developing and nurturing the employability skills of the youth of the nation is the prime agenda of our country. In order to fulfil this purpose, various studies and policy implementations are undertaken by the authorities. In this context, a study regarding the influence of educational environment on the employability skills of graduate students is very relevant.

4. Scope of study

The scope of the study is limited to the final year degree students of Government and Aided Arts and Science colleges in Kerala.

5. Objectives

- 1 To assess the Educational Environment of the educational institutions in Kerala.
- 2 To assess the Employability skills of Graduate students in Kerala
- 3 To study the influence of Educational Environment on the Employability Skills of Graduate students in Kerala.

6. Methodology

The study is descriptive cum analytical in nature. Both primary and secondary data were used for the study. Secondary data needed for the study were gathered through extensive and intensive literature survey. The primary data were collected directly from the final year degree students of Arts, Science and Commerce streams. The secondary sources of data are journals, books, output of workshops, conferences, seminars and so on. A well-structured questionnaire was prepared to collect primary data from the students. Unit of study is the final year degree students studying for Arts, Science and Commerce degree programs of Government and Aided Arts and Science colleges affiliated to the four affiliating Universities viz, University of Kerala, Mahatma Gandhi University, Calicut University and Kannur University. Multi stage stratified random sampling technique is used for the study. In the first stage the University of Kerala has been selected. In the second stage Government and Aided Arts and Science colleges affiliated to Universities have been selected randomly based on lottery method. In the third stage, the final year degree students of Arts, Science and Commerce have been selected from the selected colleges proportionately.

The population for the study is 74, 203 students. The calculated sample size for the study is 398 students. But the sample size raised to 828 students in order to enhance the

accuracy of the study. Out of 213 Government and Aided colleges affiliated to the four Universities, 23 colleges were selected for the study including 9 Government colleges and 14 Aided colleges. 40 students were selected from each college. 392 students, 375 students and 153 students from Arts, Science and Commerce stream have been selected for the study respectively. There are 5 departments from each college and 8 students from each class have been selected.

7. Review of Literature

7.1 Educational Environment

The educational environment means the learning environment. In simple words, educational environment is the physical surroundings within which learning takes place. The American Medical Association (AMA) defines the learning environment as “a social system that includes the learner (including the external relationships and other factors affecting the learner), the individuals with whom the learner interacts, the setting(s) and purpose(s) of the interaction, and the formal and informal rules/policies/norms governing the interaction” (AMA Conference, 2008).

The facilities and surroundings provided by the educational institutions and Universities are considered as the educational environment for the study. More precisely, the totality of the students’ experience and exposure from the educational institutions and Universities are called the educational environment. The following factors of Educational Environment are considered for this study. They are (1) Curriculum, (2) Pedagogy and (3) Institutional Infrastructure.

7.1.1 Curriculum

Curriculum has got a wider spectrum. It is considered as the heart of any learning institution. Therefore in its broadest sense, Curriculum refers to the “total learning experiences of individuals not only in school, but in society as well” – Bilbao et al (2008).

Curriculum is an organised set of experiences to which learners are subjected so that their behaviour will be modified in a desired, predetermined manner (Wylie, M., 2008). For this study, three aspects of Curriculum are taken into consideration viz, (a) Curriculum aims and objective (b) Curriculum content (syllabi).

(a) Curriculum goals and aims: Curriculum aims and objectives are the broad statements of long term intentions or expectations that the students to pursue and accomplish as a result of exposure to a series of segments or units of a course or program. A curriculum objective attempt to specify the tasks which the students will be able to do at a certain

points in a course, whereas a curriculum aims or goals describes the intended direction of the course (Miller, 1986).

(b) *Syllabi*: A syllabus is an outline or brief statement of the main points of the course of a program. Syllabus of a course never gives you the complete knowledge about the course. It can be considered as a key to enter to the world of knowledge regarding a particular course.

7.1.2 Pedagogy

The classroom transaction of curriculum by the teachers is called the pedagogy. The workplace skills can be developed through class room transactions. According to Bernstein, pedagogy “is a sustained process whereby somebody(s) acquires new forms or develops existing forms of conduct, knowledge, practice and criteria from somebody(s) or something deemed to be an appropriate provider and evaluator” (Bernstein, 2000).

For the purpose of the study the following aspects are considered for understanding the effectiveness of pedagogy followed in different colleges in Kerala. They are (a) teachers’ capability, (b) classroom transaction, (c) teaching techniques and (d) external environment exposure given to the students.

7.1.3 Institutional Infrastructure

Institutional Infrastructures are the infrastructure facilities provided by the institutions to the students. Providing a comfortable physical environment to the students to learn and grow is essential. Universities and other higher education agencies are insisting about the minimum infrastructure facilities that the institutions should provide to the students. It is evidenced in the literature that better infrastructure facilities of educational institution will enhance the learning outcome of students. Enhanced learning outcome is the enhanced knowledge skill, application skill and personal skill of students. Enhancement in these three skills leads to the enhanced employability skills. The following are the different category of infrastructure having influence on Employability Skills. They are, (a) Learning Related Infrastructure, (b) Student Development Related Infrastructure and (c) Ecology Related Infrastructure.

(a) *Learning Related Infrastructure*: It comprises sufficiency of library facilities, books and periodicals, reading facilities, computer and experimental lab and other technological support including WiFi facilities.

(b) *Student Development Infrastructure*: It consists the extent of provision with smart classroom facilities, classroom arrangements, premises of the institution, infrastructure facilities for co-curricular activities, facilities provided for arts and sports activities, facilities

for students' amenities such as availability of water, lighting, electricity, internet and the like and student health care facilities.

(c) *Ecology Related Infrastructure*: Eco-friendly initiatives of the institution, ecological climate of the institution in relation to the concept of 'Clean Campus' 'Green campus', institutional initiatives for making drug free campus, anti-ragging and prevention of abuses, institutional initiatives for students' external exposures, institutional provisions for student welfare activities are part and parcel of ecology related infrastructure.

7.2 Employability Skills

Employability is the ability of a person to acquire the initial employment, sustain and maintain the employment and to obtain another employment if required (Hillage and Pollard, 1998). Employability skill means the skills or qualities or attributes to be possessed by the job incumbents. In short, it is the self-assurance and readiness for the world of work.

7.3 Educational Environment and employability skills of graduate students

Educational environment is one of the crucial aspects to influence the employability skills of individuals. The factors of educational environment viz, Curriculum, Pedagogy and Institutional Infrastructure can have a positive or negative influence on one's skill enhancement process.

Various research studies so far conducted advocate that University curriculum has strong positive influence on enhancing the employability skills of graduate students. Many of the skills that are included under the broader banner of employability skills are not only needed for academic success but also for successfully carry out an employment.

The relationship between Curriculum and students' employability Skills enhancement has long been acknowledged. Embedding employability into the core of higher education will continue to be a key priority of Government, Universities, Colleges, and Employers. (HEFCE, 2011).

Pedagogy is an inevitable element to inculcate a culture of developing skills among students. Adopting Innovative teaching, learning and assessment methods (Scott, C. L, 2015) help students engage in the education process and have an added benefit of helping them to develop attributes which make them attractive to potential employers. Different students come to college with a different set of skills and it is the duty of the teacher to best support their skill development process by creating learning opportunities. Students' interest is more likely to be maintained if they can see the relevance of their studies to their future careers and life beyond University.

The sufficiency of learning, student development and ecology related infrastructure are act as a positive force to improve the knowledge skill, application skill and personal skills which will improve the employability skills of students.

8. Analysis and Discussion

8.1 The level of Educational Environment of the institutions

Table 1.

The mean score analysis of the Educational Environment

Sl.No	Factors of Educational Environment	Students	
		Mean	SD
1	Curriculum	3.47	.4979
2	Pedagogy	3.57	.8192
3	Institutional Infrastructure	3.51	.9144
	Educational Environment	3.52	.7438

Source: primary Data

Table 1 portrays the students' opinion on the educational environment of the educational institutions in Kerala. The mean values of the curriculum, pedagogy and institutional infrastructure are 3.47, 3.57 and 3.51 respectively. Educational environment is the composition of these three factors and the mean value for educational environment is 3.52. It indicates that the level of educational environment of the educational institutions in Kerala is average.

The result of the mean score analysis explained above is reiterated with the help of statistical test. Chi-Square test for goodness of fit has been used for this purpose which is explained in following paragraphs.

As per the table 2, Chi-Square Test for goodness of fit shows maximum number and percentage of respondents opined that the Educational Environment of the institutions is moderate and the P Value is less than 0.01 at 1 per cent level of significance. This means that the perception of students about the Educational Environment of the institutions is moderate or average.

Table 2:
Chi-Square test for goodness of fit of Educational Environment of the institutions

Level of Educational Environment of the institution	Frequency	Per cent	Chi-Square Value	P Value
Low	207	25.00	103.50	<0.001**
Moderate	414	50.00		
High	207	25.00		
Total	828	100		

Note: ** denotes significant at 1% level

Source: primary Data

8.2 The level of Employability Skills of Graduate students in Kerala

Table 3:
The mean score analysis of the Employability Skills of Graduate Students

Sl. No	Factors of Employability Skills	Students	
		Mean	SD
1	Knowledge Skill	3.42	.4872
2	Application Skill	3.56	.5475
3	Personal Skill	3.84	.4988
	Employability Skill	3.60	.4455

Source: Primary Data

Table 3 exhibits the mean score analysis of the employability skills of graduate students in Kerala. The mean values for the factors of employability skills viz, knowledge skill, application skill and personal skill are 3.42, 3.56 and 3.84 respectively. The mean score for overall employability skills is 3.60 which shows the employability skills of graduate students in Kerala is average.

Table 4:
Chi-Square Test for goodness of fit of Employability Skills of graduate students

Level of Employability Skills of Graduate Students	Frequency	Per cent	Chi-Square Value	P Value
Low	201	24.3	117.46	<0.001 **
Moderate	423	51.1		
High	204	24.6		
Total	828	100		

Note: ** denotes significant at 1% level

Source: *primary Data*

As per the table 4, Chi-Square Test for goodness of fit shows maximum number of respondents opined that the employability skill of graduate students is moderate and the P Value is less than 0.01 at 1 per cent level of significance. This means that the perception of students about the Employability Skills of graduate students is moderate.

8.3 Relationship between educational environment and Employability Skills

Spearman's Rank Correlation is used to measure the relationship between Employability Skills of graduate Students and Educational Environment of the Institutions. The result is depicted in the table 5.

Table 5:
Spearman's Rank Correlation between Employability Skills of graduate Students and Educational Environment of the Institutions

Variables	Employability Skill	Educational Environment
Employability Skill	1.000	.463 **
Educational Environment	.463 **	1.000

Note: ** denotes Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Source: *primary Data*

The table 5 exhibits that the Spearman's Rank Correlation between Employability skills and Educational Environment of the Institutions is 0.463 at 1percent level of significance. This means that based on students' opinion, there is 46.3 per cent positive relationship between their Employability skills and Educational Environment of the Institutions in which they study. Hence it can be concluded that better educational environment is leading to enhanced Employability skills of graduate students based on students' opinion.

7. Conclusion

The study result revealed that the Employability skills of graduate students in Kerala and the educational environment provided to them are at an average or moderate level. The study also shows that there is a significant positive relationship between employability skills and educational environment of the institutions. It means that the favourableness in the educational environment will be resulted in positive influence on the Employability Skills of graduate students. Therefore from the study it can be concluded that the Universities and colleges have significant role to enhance and nurture the employability skills of students. The factors of educational environment viz, curriculum, pedagogy and infrastructure facility can play a pivotal role for this purpose. Hence, it is suggested that Universities and colleges have to take measures to improve the educational environment. The curriculum must be updated with current workplace requirements, teachers must be given training to excel their efficiency and effectiveness and to offer standardised infrastructure facility to the students.

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