



Industry Expectations versus Academic Skills: A Gap Analysis among Commerce Post-Graduate Students

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Abstract

The present study discusses the difference between expectation of Industry- Academic Skill gap of commerce Post-graduates. The major objectives of this study are: To find out what industries expect from students in terms of their employability skills, to see how students are prepared academically and professionally when they enter the work place, and to determine how different and in need of adjustment are the set of employability skills they bring compared to the skills required by the industries. The study employs primary data which was collected from the students of post-graduate course in commerce schools and the representatives of the industries using the structured questionnaire. Data interpretation has been done through statistical tools like percentage analysis, mean score analysis and gap analysis. The results indicate that students have good knowledge theoretically but they face a lack of practice, communication knowledge, problem solving skills, leadership skills and digital competence needed by the industries. The study also emphasizes on the significance of internship, skill development and upgradation of the curriculum for improving the employability of students. Research highlights the importance of closer collaboration between industry and academics to overcome employability gap and enhance the employability preparedness of commerce post-graduate students.

Keywords: Employability Skills, Industry Expectations, Academic Skills, Skill Gap, Commerce Post-Graduate Students, Higher Education, Industry-Academia Collaboration, Employability Gap.

Introduction

Given that the world today is greatly shaped by globalization and technological advancement, institutions of learning are getting more calls to produce not only high-achieving students but also job-ready individuals. Hiring managers now hire job seekers, who are not only technically knowledgeable, but also possess excellent communication skills, analytical skills, the ability to work with digital technology, teamwork, flexibility, and problem-solving skills. However, there is a gap between the skill developed in the academic programs and the required skill of industry that exists indefinitely. This is known as the □skill gap□, the □employability gap□ or the □skills mismatch□. The problem is more crucial among the commerce post-graduation students as the corporate sector is looking for additional skills besides theoretical knowledge which are multi-dimensional.



Business practices have been changing□fast□especially because of the impact of digitization, globalization and automation, and business employers' expectations are changing accordingly. Graduates with practical exposure, decision making skills, leadership, interpersonal communication and technology skills are highly sought after by organisations. The traditional university curriculum, however, focuses on theory and exam study as opposed to practical and skill development education. As a result, there are numerous postgraduate students whose higher educational level cannot be converted to job security. That means that there are students in their postgraduate studies after their under-graduation level studies who are experiencing problems to obtain some work. A significant mismatch in employability skills of commerce post graduate students and expectation of industries revealed by Jegadeeshwaran and Kaleeshwari (2021). The study highlights that while pupils is competent in ICT and interpersonal skills, there is still areas to improve upon in decision making, business understanding and practical problem solving skills.

Policymakers, teaching youth about employability has become a very important issue of concern for both the educators and the employers. In today's world, employers are looking for employees who can work immediately upon their arrival in the labor force instead of having to be trained. In today's world, employers want to hire the first employee to be able to work right off the bat, instead of having to train them. A company focuses on the soft skills more than the students' academic marks. Professional ethics, team work and adaptability, creativity and communication are more important than academic marks to the employer. Studies show that the students are not handling current industry and practical skills to perform well in a dynamically changing environment (Sarin, 2019). In addition, researches regarding employability have increasingly stressed the need of schools to be aware of the expectations of industry and bring in changes in the system to address the growing disconnect with jobs.

The challenge is more severe in the Indian context due to large numbers of graduates that are being churned out each year, only a few of which would be qualified to be considered 'employable'. The post-graduates in Commerce should possess managerial skills, analytical skills and communication skills, which are deserving of their jobs in Banking, Finance, Marketing, Accounting, Taxation etc in the Corporate Sector. Employers, however, often report problems with graduates unprepared for the realities of the world of work. Hence, the current study aims to investigate the difference between industry expectations and academic skills of the post-graduate students in commerce.

The present study is to examine the differences between industry expected skills and post graduate commerce student's expected skills. The study aims to identify the gaps in students' industry relevant skills and how to improve employability by introducing changes in curriculum, closer linkage with industry and academia, internships, skill development and training programmes. The study's results can contribute to insights for universities, policymakers and recruiters regarding how to better adapt higher education to meet industry needs.



Literature Review

With rising concerns about the preparedness of graduates for the job market the notion of employability has gained considerable traction in existing academic and professional discourse. Employability is the set of skills, knowledge, attitudes and capacities that help graduates to obtain and retain jobs. A number of research studies have revealed that there is a growing mismatch between higher education outcomes and employer expectations.

Jegadeeshwaran and Kaleeshwari(2021) investigated the study on employability skill gap analysis in post □ Commerce students of Coimbatore District. The study revealed that there was a huge mismatch between students current skills and commitment of the employers. The researchers noticed that although the learners had ICT competency and interpersonal skills, they were also short of critical decision making, analytical and business-related skills which are required in a corporate setting. Higher education institutions were suggested to pay more attention to practical education and skills training to increase the employ-ability.

In India, Srivastava and Hasan (2015) explored the issue of lack of skills and pointed out that the education system is mostly theoretical learning on how to acquire the skills. The authors claimed that employability skills like communication, leadership, adaptability and technology skills are lacking in academia and are needed by industries. The study highlighted the need to embed vocational/industry based training into higher education programmes.

Mukarramah S. Chan, Ab Latif, S. Kurniawan (2012) did a comparative study between perceptions of business management curriculum developers and recruiters of the gap between business management curricula and the needs of the job market. What they discovered is that the skills employers value the most, such as communication, teamwork, critical thinking and some understanding of business, were not the ones being taught at schools and colleges, but rather the theoretical knowledge was the first. The study recommended better tie-ups among university and industries for materials elaboration and internships.

In the study of employability skill development in work-integrated learning, Jackson (2015) found that there are some obstacles faced by graduates in order to become industry-ready. It was found that experiential learning is useful, industrial training, internships and joint projects play an important role in improving employability. The study has concluded that if universities would adapt to other active learning strategies and get their students exposed to the real world they would manage to close the gap to the workforce.

The last few years have also shown that industries have evolved and are now seeking different skills of employability and digital transformation has changed all that. Srivastava (2025) found that in today's modern and competitive world, digital literacy, critical thinking, adaptability and professional communication skills of post-graduate students have become the prerequisite skills demanded by employers. The manner in which they are expected to learn in the workplace differs significantly from their school experience even after revisions in the curriculum and project-based learning efforts.



Likewise, work on 'employability' of graduates show that employers are looking for competencies beyond the technical, such as soft skills. Employers and educational analysts have found that the attributes of resilience, good working relationships, team working and professional behaviour are paramount to success in the workplace. But too many graduates lack the skills to apply these attributes appropriately in recruitment and employment.

Based on the literature review presented, it could be concluded that the employability gap is remained as a debilitating problem in higher education. Earlier research consistently identifies shortcomings such as the lack of communication skills, practical exposure, critical thinking, teamwork and industry-specific skills among graduates. There is a significant body of literature that highlights the need to modernize the curriculum, industry-academic linkage, experiential learning and lifelong skills development efforts to overcome the disconnect between industry needs and academic preparation.

Objectives

1. To find out what industry from commerce expects from the post-graduate students in terms of employability skills and competencies.
2. To explore the academic and professional skill set of commerce post graduate students compared to the industry needs.
3. To examine the difference between industry expectations and academic skill of commerce post-graduate students and recommend steps for bridging the gap with industry to become employable.

Methodology

The present study is descriptive and analytical in nature and objectives focus on individuals' investigation of the difference in skills expectancy among the students of commerce post-graduation. A mixed sources of data—secondary and primary sources—have been employed for the study. The primary data will be collected using a structured questionnaire which will be given to the commerce post-graduate students and it will also be distributed to industry representatives/recruiters to get their views on the perspectives and perceptions on employability skills, academic preparedness, and industry needs. Secondary data will be gathered from academic journals, books, published articles, reports and academic online databases related to the domain of higher education and employability skills. Post-graduate students of commerce from selected colleges/universities will be a part of the study area. A convenient sampling technique will be used for respondents' selection. The resulted data will be analysed using statistical techniques like percentage analysis, mean score analysis, ranking method, correlation and gap analysis to highlight differences between academic competencies and expectations of industry. The study reveals the amount of existing employability gap and recommends framework to bridge the gap for the implementation of skills related to the industry among commerce post-graduate students.

Result and Analysis

Primary data were gathered from Commerce Post-graduate students (120) and Industry personnel (30) using a structured questionnaire for studying the problem of the present study.

The analysis tried to pinpoint the mismatch between the market expectations and the academics' skills of commerce post-graduates. The interpretation was carried out by using Statistical tool as Percentage analysis, Mean score analysis and Gap analysis.

Table 1 Students' Self-Assessment of Academic Skills

Skills	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Mean Score
Theoretical Knowledge	48 (40.00%)	42 (35.00%)	20 (16.67%)	10 (8.33%)	4.06
Communication Skills	22 (18.33%)	38 (31.67%)	40 (33.33%)	20 (16.67%)	3.18
Digital Skills	30 (25.00%)	44 (36.67%)	28 (23.33%)	18 (15.00%)	3.43
Problem Solving Ability	18 (15.00%)	36 (30.00%)	42 (35.00%)	24 (20.00%)	3.00
Teamwork Skills	35 (29.17%)	46 (38.33%)	25 (20.83%)	14 (11.67%)	3.68

It can be observed in the table, 40.00 % of students found theoretical knowledge as excellent with mean 4.06 followed by 35.00 % of students who found it good with mean score of 3.80. The teamwork skills also got a positive feedback as 38.33% rated as good and 29.17% rated it excellent. However, comparatively lower performance was observed in communication skills and problem solving ability, 33.33% and 35.00% of the respondents respectively rate their performance of this tasks to be average. The results indicate that academic knowledge is good but the skills related to practical aspects and employment are moderate level.

Table 2 Industry Expectations Regarding Employability Skills

Employability Skills	Highly Expected	Moderately Expected	Less Expected	Mean Score
Communication Skills	24 (80.00%)	5 (16.67%)	1 (3.33%)	4.76
Practical Knowledge	26 (86.67%)	3 (10.00%)	1 (3.33%)	4.83
Digital Competency	22 (73.33%)	6 (20.00%)	2 (6.67%)	4.66
Problem Solving Ability	25 (83.33%)	4 (13.33%)	1 (3.33%)	4.80
Leadership Skills	20 (66.67%)	8 (26.67%)	2 (6.66%)	4.53

The results indicated that 86.67% of the industry representatives rated the skill of practical knowledge from commerce post-graduate students as most important employability skill. Likewise, 83.33% had pointed at the importance of problem-solving skills and 80.00% had pointed at communication skills as crucial. 73.33% also viewed Digital competency as being important. The findings reflect a clear indication that the industries rate the competencies more important which are acquired through practical approach and competencies acquired in real terms within the work field rather than in theory.

Table 3 Gap Analysis Between Academic Skills and Industry Expectations

Skills	Students Mean Score	Industry Mean Score	Gap
Communication Skills	3.18	4.76	1.58
Practical Knowledge	2.96	4.83	1.87
Digital Skills	3.43	4.66	1.23
Problem Solving Ability	3.00	4.80	1.80
Leadership Skills	3.12	4.53	1.41

The above mentioned table shows that there is a gap between academic skill acquired by the Commerce Post-graduate students and the Industries clearly. The biggest gap in the three knowledge areas was between practical knowledge (1.87) and problem-solving ability (1.80) and communication skills (1.58). Regarding it comparatively, the lowest gap was seen for the ability to use digital skills (1.23). The results revealed that while students have a good theoretical knowledge, they lack the skills and competencies necessary for the workplace such as those expected by the employers.

Table 4 Opinion of Students Regarding Measures to Improve Employability

Measures Suggested	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Internship and Industrial Training	42	35.00%
Skill Development Programs	30	25.00%
Industry-Oriented Curriculum	26	21.67%
Personality Development Sessions	14	11.67%
Digital Training Workshops	8	6.66%

As can be seen from the table, 35.00 per cent of the respondents believed internship and Industrial Training as the best method to enhance employability skills. 25.00% recommended skill development programs, and 21.67% recommended reform of the curriculum that is oriented toward the industry. In addition, 11.67% advocated to hold personality development sessions and 6.66% advocated to make the digital training workshop. This suggests that students know the value of gaining practical experience and work based training to improve employability.

This analysis shows that post-graduates in commerce are not exposed to practical application, communication skill, leadership and problem solving ability which is expected in industries due to lack of theoretical knowledge. The ability to apply knowledge and problem solving, which were reported as being highly valued by > 80.00% of the industry representatives, were found only moderate by the students. The authors emphasize the importance of the mismatch between the expectations found in the workplace and the knowledge, skills, and abilities acquired in school. Hence, the need of the hour is to modernize curricula, undertake collaborative initiatives between industry and academia, provide internship opportunities, skill development programmes and opportunities for experiential learning for the employability of the post-graduate students in commerce.



Discussion

The current study compared what employers/industry expected from commerce students after completion of post-graduation and their academic skills which was found to be very much out of line with the industrial requirements. The result revealed that students' academic knowledge was good as 40,00 % of them gave the rating of excellent while the others gave relatively lower ratings in communication and interaction skills, practical field experience, digital skill and problem solving. This implies that the current education system continues to be assessment driven and lacks opportunities for hands-on and industry-based learning.

It also found that practical knowledge, communication skills, problem solving and digital competence are areas where skills are perceived to be important by industries. Over 80% of industry representatives rated these skills competencies as very important to employability. The results of gap analysis revealed that the largest difference in practical knowledge was found for skills in Practical knowledge (1.87), followed by Problem-solving ability (1.80), and Communication skills (1.58). The results obtained in the present situation have revealed that business post-graduates possess inadequate skills of the job market required by the business which is prevailing in the modern era.

A significant finding of the study is that pupils feel employability skills and career experience are important to them, too. The respondents indicated skill development program as the most effective measure to enhance employability skills with around 35.00% and industrial trainings with 25.00%. It is true that awareness amongst students on the inadequacy of classroom based learning and the need for industry oriented learning and training is increasing.

The results of the study underline that it is necessary to get even better cooperation between universities and industries to reduce the employability gap. In order to make the commerce post-graduation students job ready, the university should emphasize on curricular updating, practical training, skill development in computer, industrial visits, live projects, workshops and internship. It concludes overall that, in order to improve the employability of graduates by orienting the training towards the expectation of the industry, it is necessary to direct learning programs as a timely response to the demands of the corporate world.

Conclusion

Based on the study, it is concluded that there is a great discrepancy between the industry's expectations of the skills of commerce post graduate students and the actual skills possessed by them in academics. On one hand, students have good theoretical knowledge and, on the other, do not have practical exposure or have not developed their communication skills, problem solving, leadership skills and industry-oriented skills that are crucial in the present corporate scenario. The results indicate that in a highly knowledge-driven job market, employers put great emphasis on obtaining practical knowledge, digital competency, and competence with professional skills, while the existing education system is very theory-focused. The study points that employability gap has emerged as a crucial problem to the higher education institutions, particularly for better workplace readiness and employability of



the graduates and the importance of adopting educational programs that would correspond with the ebbs and flows of industrial demand.

Recommendations

The study reveals that the industry oriented and skill oriented teaching should be encouraged among universities, higher educational institutions to overcome the employability gap among commerce higher education students. Better Industry-Academia interaction is required with internship, induction training, workshop, live project, guest lectures or placement related programme, etc. in institutions. In order to improve employability it is crucial that curriculum is updated to provide more communication, digitization, problem-solving and application capabilities. In addition, continuous skill development, personality development, and career counselling events need to be conducted to equip students with proper skills for the changing roles in society and to enhance their employability.

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