

Original Article

Student Perception and Campus Experience about Employability: A Primary Investigation of Higher Education Institutions in Western Uttar Pradesh

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Abstract: As one of the highest young populated state, Uttar Pradesh changing its traditional education system to job-oriented education through the skill development. In this direction, New Education Policy-2020 is playing an important role to enhance the employment skill through the curriculum. The present paper made an attempt to examine the students' perceptions and campus experience on Graduate Employability in Western Uttar Pradesh (WUP) at micro level and also measure employability skill gap among higher education graduates. This paper is based on primary database and 800 sample collected from 03 universities and 04 colleges in Western Uttar Pradesh via well-structured questionnaire. With the help of student's perceptions about employability, we have constructed various parameters of graduate student's employability index viz., Career Development Index (CDI); General Infrastructure Index (GII); Curriculum- Employability Index (CEI); Job Market Perception Index (JMPI) and Students Skill Index (SSI). The results reveals that there is quite skill gap between the universities and colleges. The results also reveal that higher educational institutions are now competing with private higher education institutions, and the focus has now changed towards the employability of students rather than just imparting knowledge. Moreover, the traditional education system is moving towards skill, value-added employability courses. According to the document, the state's education system should leverage its strengths to support structural reforms in the areas of employment and employability as well as the growth of its higher education system. The primary level evidence also indicates that there is a need of hour to bridge the gap between employers' expectation and the serving higher education system.

Keywords: Employability, Higher Education, Student perception, Western Uttar Pradesh.

I. INTRODUCTION

The essential foundation for the country's economic development and global leadership are quality education and skill development. It is through qualified and trained human capital that the economy as a whole develops. In present time, employers are being forced to look for qualified human resources by keeping in view the current economic challenges faced by the entire world. The ability of an economy to produce more gross domestic product (GDP) per worker is closely tied to the availability of skilled and educated labour. Although the ideas of employment and graduate employability are not new, their definitions are nevertheless frequently misinterpreted and even mixed together (Garwe, 2013). According to Yorke (2008), graduate employability refers to a set of accomplishments, such as knowledge, abilities, and character traits that increase one's chances of finding employment and performing well in it. Graduate employability is often referred to as "work readiness," which is the possession of the abilities, knowledge, attitudes, and business acumen necessary for one to contribute positively to organisational goals (Mason, Williams & Cranmer, 2006). According to Kim (2012), graduate employability also refers to a broad variety of skills and qualities that help job seekers land and keep jobs. It is the ability to find work, carry it out, and advance in that work or between employments, claim Knight and Yorke (2004).

Employability is thus viewed as a characteristic that affects educational goals and practises and defines the standard of graduates that the labour market is prepared to accept, according to the literature (British Council, 2014). Employability can be viewed narrowly as work preparation, which is the most prevalent interpretation. In this instance, students are only provided with knowledge and skills that are directly connected to the type of employment they would like to pursue. Studies have shown that while academic credentials are important, employers are more concerned with a job candidate's attitudes and aptitudes, or soft skills, which include problem-solving, flexibility and adaptability, teamwork, confidence and integrity, analytical skills, and communication skills (Kim, 2012; British Council, 2015). Employers now look for the presence of non-academic skills such as analytical skills, communication skills, good interpersonal and social skills, team work, motivation, time management, problem solving, among others, in addition to academic credentials, according to a study by Samuel et al. (2012). This clearly



illustrates the significance of non-academic skills in assisting graduates to find employment. The findings of the Weissmann (2012) study showed that employers are increasingly seeking employees with both soft skills and hard abilities, such as professional, technical, and administrative knowledge and skills.

A professional organisation called the National Association of College and Employers (NACE) links college career services with potential employers. The top 20 skills listed by employers in 2007 were compiled by NACE. These abilities are listed in the following order:

Table 1: List of Employability Skills Prepared by National Association of College and Employers

Rank	Skills	Rank	Skills
1	Analytical Skills	11	Leadership and Management Skills
2	Communication Skills	12	Motivation/Initiative
3	Computer Skills	13	Organizational and Time Management Skills
4	Creativity	14	Real Life Experiences
5	Detail-Oriented	15	Self-Confidence
6	Risk-Taker	16	Strong Work Ethic
7	Flexibility/Adaptability	17	Tactfulness
8	Friendly	18	Teamwork Skills
9	Honesty/Integrity	19	Technical Skills
10	Interpersonal Skills	20	Well -Mannered/Polite

Source: NACE, 2007

India has been a cradle of learning since time immemorial. Being home to the ancient universities viz. Taxila, Nalanda, Vikramshila and Sharda Peeth, etc. and thousands of Gurukuls. The country served not to just natives in their pursuit of greater knowledge but also students from all over the world. Scholars not only crossed the Great Himalayas but also sailed through the seven seas to be a part of our ancient tradition. In ancient times, knowledge was considered a prize in itself that many cherished. But as time never stands still and the price of one generation becomes a means to an end for another, the same has become true of knowledge. As we have transitioned into the modern world, the state of countries' education is characterized by complex statistics like the gross enrollment ratio (GRE) and job-oriented curriculum. With approximately 22 million students enrolled, India's higher education system has the second-largest student body in the world (after China). The enrollment numbers have more than quadrupled over the past two decades, which has been characterised by growth of 7.7% each year. The second-largest gross enrollment ratio (GER) is found in India's higher education system, which rose from 12.3 percent to 18.1 percent over the previous five years. The 12th Five-Year Plan (FYP) established a target for GER of 25.0% for 2017, which would result in an increase of 10 million registrants over the following five years, or an annualised growth rate of 7.8% (AISHE-2020-21). Therefore, officials anticipate that Indian higher education will continue to grow quickly, as it has since 2017. The young work force, which makes up over 62.0% of India's population, is our most valuable resource. Given its potential, talent pool, and innovative culture, India, which stands at number 40 on the Global Innovation Index (GII), is seen as having the potential to become a global innovation driver (PIB, 2022).

The greatest population in India is located in Uttar Pradesh. Literacy is regarded as one of the most important markers of the socio-economic growth of an area, state, or country in the current period of economic and industrial development, where technological advancements are occurring at a very rapid rate. In this regard, UP is one of the states in which the percentage of literacy is almost at its lowest level. According to the Census of 2011, there were approximately 11.5 crore literates in UP, which accounted for a literacy rate of 67.70%. The percentage of literate men is 77.30%, which is higher than the percentage of literate women (57.20%). In Uttar Pradesh, there are many excellent technical institutions. There is currently one technical university, 700 private degree-granting engineering colleges, and 454 institutions offering engineering diplomas, which cover nearly all technical education areas. The state is home to a number of incredibly renowned technical and professional institutions.

"Many feel that there is a skill gap between the manner in which students are prepared for the real world in a university setting and what they will need to be successful in the workplace and for life in general" (Shivpuri and Kim, 2004). Employers like to work with candidates who are prepared for the workplace. Universities are encouraged to think about incorporating leadership into their programmes in order to bridge the perceived "skills gap" in the workforce. Students are an essential component of every educational system, so it is impossible to disregard the impact that their perceptions have on how the educational system is changing. Students' varied intellectual and cultural backgrounds have an impact on how they view schooling. Analysing their reactions is necessary since students could potentially contribute to the expansion of the economy. The purpose of the current study was to investigate how students perceived and experienced higher education employability in

Western Uttar Pradesh (WUP). It also makes the case that the state's educational system should make the most of its advantages to support structural reforms in the areas of employment and employability.

II. DATABASE AND METHODOLOGY

The present paper focuses on the primary information that was gathered from various universities (03) and colleges (04) comprises of 800 sample in order to distil the most accurate representation of students' experiences and perceptions with regard to future employability. The variables were selected after considering the variables that could have a significant impact on the student's skill. The characteristics that were selected include a range of categories such as campus amenities (both general and connected to employability) and students' perceptions of themselves. Finally, a thorough analysis was conducted; relating the numerous factors to the students' talents, and an employability index was framed for each institute using a variety of statistical methods.

A) Database

The study is based on a primary database and it has been collected from Western Uttar Pradesh (WUP) at the university level as well as the college level through a well-structured questionnaire. For collecting primary data, a stratified random sampling design has been adopted. The selection of sample for the proposed study are given in the following chart:

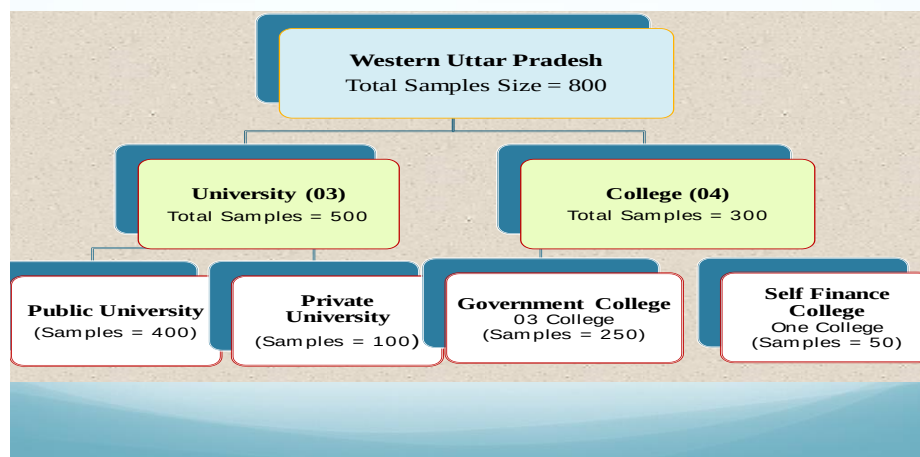


Chart 1: Classifications of selection of Higher Education Institutions for Primary Survey

Sources: Author's Classifications for selection of Higher Education Institutions

In order to analyze the student perception about employability in higher education, a survey was conducted in Uttar Pradesh across four universities viz., 03 public university namely Chaudhary Charan Singh University, Meerut; MJP Rohilkhand University, Bareilly; Bhim Rao Ambedkar University, Agra and 01 private university namely Shobhit University, Meerut and four colleges (public = 03 and private college = 01). A total sample of 800 students was surveyed with the help of a structured questionnaire. The survey has been conducted February-March, 2023. After collecting the primary information, data entry was done on MS-Excel spread sheet. After data cleaning and processing, the perception of students about employability has been analyzed by using SPSS software.

III. RESULTS DISCUSSION

The preference for the public sector, which provides higher job stability and is more suited to women than the private sector, is more pronounced among female students than male students. The same may be said for male students' propensity for working in the private sector. The differences between the study levels are not particularly noticeable.

A) Job Industry Preference

The present characteristic of student's surrounding and skills determines the job industry preference of any student. The Table 2 is a representation of the preferences of the students with respect to the industry they aspire for after their education.

Table 2: Student's Response of Uttar Pradesh about Job Industry Preference in Future

Industry	1st Preference		2nd Preference		3rd Preference	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Agriculture and Allied Activities	6.85	2.59	2.38	0.65	0.60	2.37
Manufacturing and Production	13.99	5.82	10.71	5.82	5.95	4.09

Social Services (Health and Sanitation)	10.12	15.09	5.06	6.03	6.25	6.90
Financial Services	24.70	27.59	12.20	13.79	3.27	6.90
IT/ IELTS	11.01	5.39	5.95	8.19	9.82	4.74
Education/ Training/ Research	21.73	34.91	9.82	10.78	8.33	6.03
Travel/ Tourism/ Entertainment	5.06	4.31	2.38	2.37	2.98	5.39
Any Other	6.55	4.31	51.49	52.37	62.80	63.58
Total Response (per cent)	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Sources: Author's calculations based on primary survey database

Table 2 shows the three job industry preferences among the students interviewed during the study period. It reveals the industries preferred by the students for pursuing a job in the future.

In terms of preferred job industries, financial services were preferred by more male students than female students (24.70% against 34.91%), who prioritized education and research. Financial services were chosen as second top priority by 27.59% of female students and 21.73% of male students chose education, training, and research as their second top priority. More than half of the students selected not to provide a response, hence the percentages showing preferences dwindled along the second preference. Similar results were seen for the third priority, demonstrating the students' strong level of commitment to the future they had in mind.

Table 3: UG and PG Student's Response about Job Industry Preference in Future

Options/ Student's Opinion	1st preference		2nd preference		3rd preference	
	PG	UG	PG	UG	PG	UG
Agriculture and Allied Activities	2.08	1.41	1.25	0.63	1.67	0.63
Manufacturing and Production	12.50	5.32	2.92	1.25	1.67	2.35
Social Services (Health and Sanitation)	10.00	18.78	1.25	0.94	2.50	1.88
Financial Services	33.75	33.96	6.25	7.20	1.25	1.72
IT/ITES	7.92	5.95	3.33	3.44	1.67	1.72
Education/Training/Research	23.33	24.26	7.08	5.16	3.75	2.03
Travel/Tourism/Entertainment	6.25	4.38	0.83	0.78	5.42	0.47
Any Other	4.17	5.95	0.42	0.63	0.42	0.47
No Response Given	0.00	0.00	76.67	79.97	81.67	88.73

Sources: Author's calculations based on primary survey database

The responses from UG/PG students at the chosen universities and institutions regarding their preferred field of employment in the future are shown in Table 3. A similar pattern in the preferred job industries was observed across levels of study as well as across gender. While the financial services industry was the first choice for 33.75 percent of PG students, it was the first choice for 33.96 percent of UG students. The second preference, however, saw a decline in industry preferences as most graduates at both the UG and PG levels opted to respond "no." According to the primary survey's findings, students' at all academic levels favour the financial services sector as a potential field of employment in the future.

B) Student's Opinion on Foresee Job Market

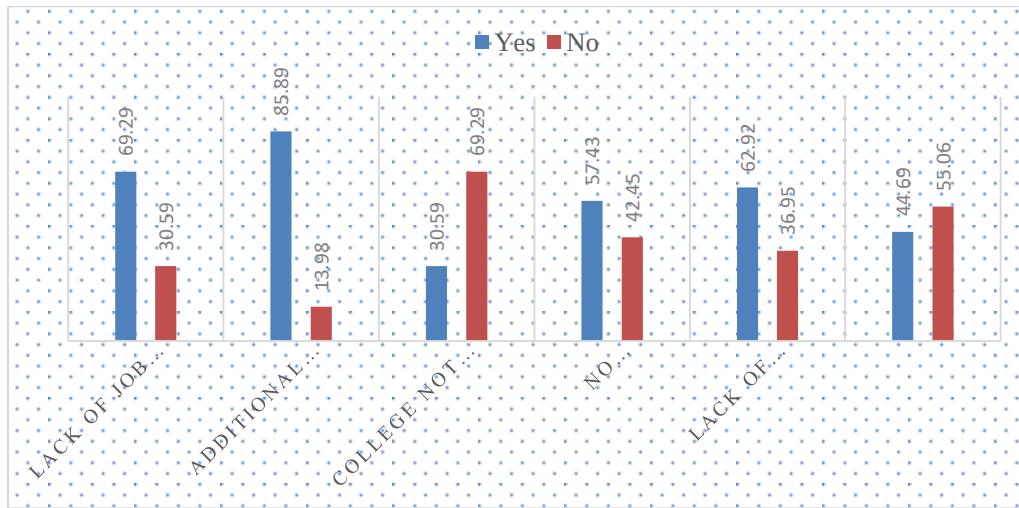
One key psychological factor that affects the student's current career and academic choices is how they view the job market. It also demonstrates the student's level of knowledge regarding the demands of the professional world and the reality of the labour market. The responses of students for Foresee job market are shown in Table 4 By asking questions about the specified job market features, the table aims to ascertain students' perceptions about the conditions of the job market in the future. Table 3 shows that students believe the employment market is rewarding and competitive, with 61.55 percent and 85.77 percent, respectively, agreeing (with varying degrees of intensity). They have mixed feelings about the idea of a fair labour market, with up to 30.84 percent preferring a neutral response and the remaining respondents being evenly split between those who agree and those who disagree. When one joins the labour market, 43.07 percent believe a UG degree is insufficient, while 34.21 percent disagree. They claim that having a higher education is essential for finding employment quickly as 86.02 percent of respondents share this opinion.

Table 4: Student's Opinion on Foresee Job Market (in per cent)

Opinions	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total (%)
Rewarding	23.85	37.70	28.84	8.49	1.00	100.00
Competitive	44.82	40.95	10.86	3.12	0.12	100.00
Easy to Find Employment	9.86	19.60	25.22	37.58	7.62	100.00
Fair Job Market	12.61	28.21	30.84	25.59	2.62	100.00
UG degree Sufficient	10.99	23.22	22.60	33.21	9.86	100.00
Higher Qualification	47.57	38.45	10.36	3.00	0.50	100.00
Any other	6.37	12.86	77.78	1.62	1.25	100.00

Sources: Author's calculations based on primary survey database

Thus, we see that students feel that the future job market is fair, rewarding and competitive but they also feel that it is demanding in terms of its preference towards higher and advanced qualifications.

**Figure 1: Fears Faced by the Students about their Future (in per cent)**

Sources: Author's calculations based on primary survey database

The most challenging task for the student during the survey was self-rating skills, which made up a significant portion of the student survey. Table 5 displays the outcomes of the self-rating of employable abilities.

Table 5: Student's Response about Self Rating Skills for Employability (in per cent)

Variables	Excellent	Very Good	Average/ Neutral	Good	Poor
Academic Excellence	20.02	33.11	27.53	19.34	0.00
Technical	11.38	35.95	33.22	17.41	2.05
Communication	18.43	36.18	25.82	17.18	2.39
Computer	11.60	29.92	33.45	18.89	6.14
People Related	16.61	38.57	22.30	18.32	4.21
Managerial	16.04	36.41	24.80	19.80	2.96
Conceptualizing	18.20	36.75	22.98	19.45	2.62
Personal	37.32	36.06	14.56	11.60	0.46
Citizenship	20.36	41.18	22.30	14.56	1.59
Numeric	13.42	26.28	30.49	23.66	6.14
Foreign Language	7.74	17.86	35.27	22.64	16.50
Sector Specific	8.53	17.63	38.79	21.62	13.42
Ability Adapt Situation	17.52	34.24	23.55	19.80	4.89

Sources: Author's calculations based on primary survey database

According to Table 5, which shows the average means of the talents that the students self-rated throughout the survey, the students' comments regarding judging their own employability skills are from the survey. When compared to other skills, it has been discovered that abilities including academic, technical, communication, people-related, management, conceptualizing, citizenship, and the capacity for situational adaptation have had a "very good" reaction. Although other criteria, such as proficiency in computers, math, foreign languages, and industry-specific abilities, have produced ordinary or neutral results.

C) Student Skill Development Index for Employability

To determine the performance of selected sample institutes in terms of employability-determining facets, we have created five elaborate indexes from the primary data collected during our survey. These indexes have a scale ranging from 1 to 5, with 1 being the most satisfactory and 5 being the most dissatisfactory. Having said that, colleges and universities that have an average index score less than 2.5 are considered satisfactory in their respective categories, and those that have a score higher than 2.5 need to improve in their respective efforts. The various dimensions of student skill development index are given in Table 6.

Table 6: Various Dimensions of Student Skill Development Index for Employability

Higher Education Institutions	Career Development Index (CDI)	General Infrastructure Index (GII)	Curriculum-Employability Index (CEI)	Job Market Perception Index (JMPI)	Students Skill Index (SSI)
Bareilly College,	2.93	2.64	2.52	2.47	2.82
CCS University,	1.70	2.17	2.43	2.26	2.36
Government PG	2.71	2.81	2.58	2.49	2.71
INMPG, Meerut	2.63	2.76	1.93	2.81	2.44
MJPRU, Bareilly	2.26	2.63	2.45	2.30	2.39
MSM, Meerut	2.65	2.56	2.53	2.51	2.67
SIET Deemed	2.02	2.43	2.59	2.42	2.59
Cumulative Average	2.41	2.57	2.43	2.47	2.57

Sources: Author's calculations based on primary survey database

The explanations of various dimensions represented by average index score and their respective result are as follows:

- **Career Development Index (CDI):** The CDI is a statistical compilation of the efforts that colleges and universities put in to improve the employability of their respective students. The data was collected from the perspective of the students during a sample survey. Responses were taken about factors such as career counseling, expert lectures, workshops, and several others. In this category, CCS University, Meerut excels with a CDI average score of 1.70, followed by SIET Deemed University, Meerut, with a 2.02 average score.
- **General Infrastructure Index (GII):** represents the performance of sample educational institutes in terms of general infrastructure like classrooms, libraries, ICT center, labs, hostels, various clubs, and several others. In this category, all the institutes have non-satisfactory performance except CCS University, with a GII average score of 2.17, and SIET Deemed University, Meerut, with a GII average score of 2.43.
- **Curriculum-Employability Index (CEI):** This index summarizes the efforts made by institutes to synchronize their respective curricula with the employability needs of students and the labor market. It consists of the student's responses to factors like mismatches between curriculum and job market requirements, classroom interaction, personal guidance by teachers, and others. In this category, Meerut has the most satisfactory score of 1.93, followed by CCS University, Meerut, with a CEI average score of 2.43.
- **Job Market Perception Index (JMPI):** This index summarizes the student's perception of their respective future job market, subjective to facets like competitiveness, incentives, fairness, and many others. In this category, CCS University, Meerut, is the highest performing with a JMPI average score of 2.26, followed by MJPRU, Bareilly, with a JMPI average score of 2.30.
- **Students Skill Index (SSI):** To quantify the student's perception of their own skills, we prepared this index. This index represents student confidence in their inherent abilities and their future contribution to the job market. The best-performing higher educational institute in this category is CCS University, Meerut, with an SSI average score of 2.36.

IV. CONCLUSION

The present research paper analysing the students' perceptions and campus experiences about graduate employability in WUP higher education institutions through primary data taken from various universities and colleges. This analysis shows that changes to Uttar Pradesh's higher education system have been slow. Higher education institutions are now competing with private higher education institutions, and the focus has now shifted towards the employability of students rather than just imparting knowledge. Results also show a shift away from the traditional education system and towards courses that focus on skill development, value addition, and employability. According to the current study, the state's educational system should

make the most of its advantages to support structural changes in the areas of employment and employability as well as the growth of its higher education system. According to the primary level evidence, higher education institutions should offer career counselling, a placement cell, work experience training, training in new skill development programmes, etc. to students in order to increase their employability. Youth empowerment ultimately revolves around finding the productive jobs through skill development programmes. A nation of unemployed youth not only imposes the burden on the economy but also becomes a threat to the society.

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