

Impact of Culture in Indian Higher Education on Employability of Students

Rajesh Tiwari¹, Dr. Bimal Anjum²

¹ Doctoral Research Scholar, Punjab Technical University, Department of Management

Kapurthala, Punjab, India

ambitionrajesh@yahoo.co.in

²Assistant Professor, DAV College, Department of Commerce, Chandigarh, India

bimalanjum@gmail.com

Abstract: *The paper analyses the cultural issues affecting employability of students in Indian higher education. The transformation of economy into a knowledge economy creates the need for critical thinking skills in graduates to support the industry to face global competition. However the poor employability of graduates highlights the failure of the system to develop critical thinking skills in the graduates. The paper attempts to analyze cultural factors affecting the performance of the academicians by collecting the data from teachers working in private and public universities. A survey design was used for the study. Private and public universities in northern part of India were selected for the study. It was found that high power distance restricts development of critical thinking skills among graduates leading to poor employability.*

Keywords: Knowledge Economy, Employability, Survey Design, Factor Analysis.

1. Introduction

The high ranking awarded to Panjab University proves that Indian higher education system and Indian academicians have the potential to be the best in the world. Times Higher Education ranked Panjab University in 226-250 rank category for 2013-14 (Times Higher Education, 2013). But the fact that only one university (excluding IIT's) figure in the list of top 500 universities is a cause of concern. Domestically the acceptance of quality of graduates for employability by industry is very poor (Aspiringminds, 2013). It highlights that the system has been poor performer both by domestic industry needs and global rankings.

The cultural factors need to be explored to find the cause and work out the solutions. The culture of the any institution is derived from the culture of the country. The Hofstede study found that high power distance prevails in India (Hofstede, 2014). The questioning approach has not been developed properly in Indian higher education system. The prevalence of high power distance restricts such possibility. Yash Pal, 2009 argued that a university is a place where new ideas germinate, strike roots and grow tall and sturdy. Established practices are

challenged in the pursuit of knowledge. The purpose of a University is to develop scholarly and scientific outlook. Develop analytical and questioning attitude and continuous exercise of reason (Yash Pal, 2009).

It is a cause of concern that majority of the assessments are theory based examinations and not based on real life problems. The curriculum followed in most of the institutes is not able to keep pace with the fast changing economic and socio-technical environment. The Indian higher education has largely ignored the local knowledge pool and indigenous innovations. We need indigenous national system of teacher education to respond to the specific needs of the regional variations and diversities.

2. Literature Review

Ward 2001 argued that students from high power distance cultures are less likely to ask questions and debate.

Naik (2004) discussed the need for innovation with commercialization which creates wealth. In India the culture of research getting published as a research paper only instead of creating commercial success is a roadblock for ensuring satisfaction of all the stakeholders.

Kapur and Mehta (2004) commented that “India’s current system of higher education is centralized, politicized, and militates against producing general intellectual virtues”. Kapur and Mehta (2004) further argued that licence raj may have been dismantled in industry but it is flourishing in higher education. It was also argued that majority of the private institutions are established by direct involvement of politicians.

Manikutty et al. (2007) studied relation between culture and learning styles in higher education, and observed that academic performance of students could be improved if teachers devote certain kinds of attention to students from specific cultural background, and by devising exercises that encourage deeper learning. It was found in a study that students from Japan and Thailand were more passive than Western countries, with low power distance societies tend to be more. (Kainzbauer and Haggirian, 2005 as cited in Manikutty et al. 2007). The learning tends to be more surface rather than deep in societies with high power distance (Manikutty et al. 2007). The societies with short term orientation tend to have surface learning as against long term orientation societies which lead to deep learning.

Manikutty et al. 2007 argued that collectivist society like India is more likely to have learning style which is surface and strategic. This means that students learn to get just enough knowledge to get the marks or grades which are considered important to progress further in career. An intention to acquire deep knowledge is missing is what implies from the studies on impact of culture on learning styles.

Shrestha, (2009) argued that environmental contexts have implications for education managers. They are required to develop new skills such as political, negotiation, leadership development, interpersonal communication, environment scanning, strategic planning, data-based management, financial management, marketing etc.

Commenting on the poor state of affairs in Indian Higher Education Rizvi & Gorur, 2011 argued that neglect of research and considering teaching and research as a separate activity has led to absence of tradition of debate informed by evidence and research into Indian higher education. Rizvi & Gorur, 2011 argued that competitive federalism contributes to poor results of reforms. The state governments want to retain their control and identity and conflict with state and central level political

parties. This has reduced the utility of the UGC as a central regulator.

Hofstede defined culture as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (Hofstede, 2011).

Manikutty et al. 2007 argued that cultural patterns in the society are reflected in the cultural patterns of the learning environment.

Teachers do not get feedback on a regular basis. Rasheed et al. 2010 found that there was communication gap between the chairman and faculty members. Rizvi & Gorur 2011 argued that university teachers unions adopt attitude of industrial unions while ignoring academic issues.

Gray et al. 2012 found in a study that Indian students did not give adequate importance to validate their findings with literature, as compared to British students who related and evaluated their findings with literature. Hofstede in his study found that high power distance exists in India. The score for India was found out to be 71 on power distance indicating presence of high power distance (Hofstede, 2014). Hofstede defined power distance as “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally”.

Criticizing the lack of research Goswami 2014 argued that even the famed IIT’s have been teaching centers and only recently few IIT’s have started focusing on PhD programmes. Goswami argued that the India has an unsustainable education model. Lack of autonomy was cited by Goswami as the factor responsible for the poor state of affairs. The lack of autonomy can be related to the high power distance in Indian society.

3. Research Methodology

This study has used descriptive research design. Descriptive research studies are concerned with describing the characteristics of a particular individual, or of a group (Kothari, 2004). Survey method was used to gather quantitative data. Primary data was collected to analyze relationship between variables.

A simple random sampling technique was used for the study. The population for the study comprised of faculties teaching in public and private universities of North India. Questionnaires were sent to the respondents of public and private universities

in North India. Questionnaires were also distributed to faculties during seminars and conferences.

Data was collected through a questionnaire. A self made questionnaire was used for the survey. The questionnaire was designed after review of literature. The pilot testing of the questionnaire was done on the respondents and based on the pilot testing and inputs of the senior academicians the final questionnaire was prepared. The respondents were asked to rank their satisfaction level on various parameters on a 5 point Likert scale; strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neutral (3), agree (4), strongly agree (5).

The test used widely to check internal consistency of a rating scale questionnaire is coefficient of alpha. Cronbach's alpha was used as a measure of reliability. The Cronbach's alpha was calculated separately for private and public universities. The Cronbach's alpha for private universities was obtained as 0.927, whereas for public universities it was 0.920. The responses of the participants were keyed into the SPSS version 21. The mean scores were compared with independent sample t test.

4. Findings & Discussion:

The respondents comprised of 52% respondents from private universities and 48% from public universities. 40 % respondents were female and 60% were males as shown in table 1.

The data was analyzed using descriptive analysis and t test. It was found that faculties tend to agree with decisions of senior management without discussion (Mean 4.08 for private universities, Mean 4.04 for public universities).

Table 1: Gender of Respondents

		Gender		Total
		Women	Men	
Type of Organization	Private	73	83	156
	Public	47	97	144
Total		120	180	300

Source: Survey Data

Majority of faculties (Mean 4.15 for private, Mean 4.02 in public universities) agreed that faculties hesitate to give suggestion to management. It was found that majority of

faculties agreed (Mean of 4.07 for private, Mean of 3.97 for public universities) with statement that "students hesitate to ask questions from faculties". The findings suggest existence of high power distance between management and faculties and between also between students and faculties. The results of t test (table 2) shows that there is no significant difference between the power distance among private and public universities (at 5% level of significance). The P value for three questions has been obtained as 0.606, 0.171, and 0.250 (all values are more than 0.05). The findings are consistent with the findings of Hofstede 2011. Hofstede found that power distance score for India was 77. The negative consequence of a high power distance as observed in India is that the negative feedback never goes up the ladder.

Table 2: T Test for Power Distance

Group Statistics					
Particular	Org.	N	Mean	S.D	Sig.
Faculties tend to agree without discussion	Private	156	4.08	.73064	0.606
	Public	144	4.04	.64047	
Faculties hesitate to give suggestion	Private	156	4.15	.83592	0.171
	Public	144	4.02	.74744	
Students hesitate to ask questions	Private	156	4.07	.70126	0.250
	Public	144	3.97	.77500	

Source: Survey Data

The high power distance restricts the questioning attitude and inhibits critical thinking required for innovation. Blom 2010 argued that in India higher order thinking skills are lagging. Bapna 2014 argued that Indian graduates including those from premier institutions like IIT, IIM lack critical thinking abilities. Anand 2011 also agreed that students lack critical thinking. Rai 2012 also highlighted the problem of lack of higher order skills in graduates when he cited Srikantan Tan Moorthy, head of education and research at leading outsourcer Infosys, who commented that "The crux of the problem is that critical thinking, problem solving and the application of concepts are skills in short supply in fresh engineers". Padmini 2012 argued that critical thinking skills are important for graduate employability.

The affiliation system also establishes the power distance culture in Indian higher education. The affiliated colleges are bound to follow the dictates of the affiliating university. Innovation and academic freedom is not available to a majority of the institutions. Though various commissions and committees have highlighted the importance of enhancing the autonomy of institutions, there is no major change in the status of the affiliated institutions. The lack of willingness to enhance autonomy may be related to power distance culture in India, where every person in higher position wants to retain the control and want the subordinates to follow the dictates without asking any question. The high power distance in higher education is restricting the innovation and critical thinking which is reflecting in poor employability of graduates.

Table 3: Industry Experience of Respondents

	Nil	1-5 Yrs	6-10 Yrs	11-15 Yrs	16-20 Yrs	Total
Private	74	50	30	1	1	156
Public	12	13	5	0	0	144
	20	63	35	1	1	300

Source: Survey Data

The industry exposure of respondents was studied to analyze the impact on students. As shown in table 3, 47.44% of respondents in private university were found to have no industry experience, 32.05% in range of 1-5 years, 6-10 years were 19.23%, 11-15 years were 0.06%, 16-20 years were 0.06%, and no faculty with more than 20 years experience. 87.50% of respondents in public university were found to have no industry experience, 9.03% in range of 1-5 years, 6-10 years were 3.47%, and no faculty with more than 10 years industry experience. Better industry exposure puts private institutions in a better position to provide industry academia interface. Poor industry exposure of faculties is one of the reasons for disconnect of class room learning from industry practices and leads to poor employability of graduates.

5. Conclusion

The higher education administrators should give attention to develop a culture of discussion where students, faculties are encouraged to ask questions, challenge status quo, enhance

critical thinking skills to improve academic outcomes. The process should start from schools by changing the assessment pattern to add more open ended questions. The higher education system should take it further by linking the teaching content with industry needs and developing assessment strategies that focus on problem solving ability among the graduates to solve the real life problems of industry by way of real life assignments and projects in collaboration with industry and discourage rote learning.

Acknowledgement:

The author acknowledges the support of Punjab Technical University, Kapurthala for the research work.

References

- [1] Anand Geeta, 2011, India Graduates Millions, but Too Few Are Fit to Hire, The Wall Street Journal dated 5th April 2011, retrieved 17th October 2014 from <http://online.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748703515504576142092863219826>
- [2] Aspiringminds, (2013), "National Employability Report: Graduates Annual Report2013," from http://www.aspiringminds.in/docs/national_employability_report_graduates_2013.pdf, accessed on 31st January 2014
- [3] Bapna Mahendra, 2014, New Academic System Universities; Student Centeric–21st Century Education, World Corporate Universities Congress; 27-June 2014, retrieved 19th October 2014 from http://worldeducationcongress.com/World_corporate_universities_congress/presentation/Mahendra_bapna.pdf
- [4] Blom Andreas, Saeki Hiroshi, 2010, Employability and Skill Set of Newly Graduated Engineers in India, retrieved 16th October 2014 from <http://www.npiu.nic.in/PDF/Mentoring%20and%20Auditing/B-Employability%20and%20Skill%20set%20of%20newly%20graduated%20engineers%20in%20India.pdf>
- [5] Gaikwad Rahi, 2012, "How casteist is our varsity?", The Hindu dated 3rd October 2012, from <http://www.thehindu.com/features/education/college-and-university/how-casteist-is-our-varsity/article3958114.ece> accessed 14th February 2014

- [6] Goswami Ranjit, 2014, "An unsustainable education model", University World News, dated 14th February 2014 from <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20140213090400465> accessed 20th February 2014
- [7] Gray Linda, Bramhall Michael D, Corker Chris, Garnett Kenisha (2012), "Analysis of Critical Thinking Skills Of International Masters Students In Engineering For A Cross-Institutional Group", 4th International Symposium for Engineering Education, 2012, The University of Sheffield, July 2012, UK, from http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:http://isee2012.group.shef.ac.uk/docs/papers/paper_56.pdf accessed 10th February 2014
- [8] Hofstede, G. 2011, "Dimensionalizing Cultures: The Hofstede Model in Context". *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, Unit 2. Retrieved from <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/orpc/vol2/iss1/8>
- [9] Hofstede Geert, (2014) "What about India", from <http://geert-hofstede.com/india.html> accessed 16th February 2014
- [10] Kapur Devesh, Mehta Bhanu Pratap, 2004, "Indian Higher Education Reform: From Half-Baked Socialism to Half-Baked Capitalism" CID working paper 108, Center for International Development at Harvard University, from http://www.hks.harvard.edu/var/ezp_site/storage/fckeditor/file/pdfs/centers-programs/centers/cid/publications/faculty/wp/108.pdf accessed 20th February 2014.
- [11] Kothari C.R, 2004, *Research Methodology: Methods and Technique*, New Age International Publishers, Delhi, p, 37
- [12] Manikutty S, Anuradha N S, Hansen K, 2007, Does Culture Influence Learning Styles in higher education, *International Journal Learning and Change*, Vol 2, No 1, 2007, retrieved 8th August 2014 from http://eprints.iisc.ernet.in/15675/1/05_Manikutty.pdf
- [13] Mukhopadhyay Marmar and Bhushan Sudhanshu (2004), "Access and Quality in Higher Education: Role of Private Participation," University News, National University of Educational Planning and Administration, 42(07), pp. 49-57
- [14] Naik B.M (2004), "Technological Innovation in Education Institutes," *The Indian Journal of Technical Education*, 27(2), pp. 59-60.
- [15] NASSCOM, (2009), "Perspective 2020," from <http://www.nasscom.in/sites/default/files/upload/Perspective%202020%20Press%20release%20presentation.pdf>, accessed 15th January 2014
- [16] Padmini I, 2012, Education Vs Employability- the Need to Bridge the Skills Gap among the Engineering and Management Graduates in Andhra Pradesh, *International Journal of Management & Business Studies*, Vol. 2, Issue 3, July - Sept 2012, retrieved 12th October 2014 from <http://www.ijmbs.com/23/ipadmini.pdf>
- [17] Panjab University, 2014, "Home Page", from <http://puohd.ac.in/> accessed 31st January 2014
- [18] Rai Saritha, 2012, Indian outsourcing: Why skills shortages persist despite the graduate glut, retrieved 15th October 2014 from <http://www.techrepublic.com/blog/cio-insights/indian-outsourcing-why-skills-shortages-persist-despite-the-graduate-glut/>
- [19] Rasheed Muhammad Imran, Aslam Hassan Danial, Sarwar Shakeel, 2010, "Motivational Issues for Teachers in Higher Education: A Critical Case of IUB", *Journal of Management Research*, Vol. 2, No. 2: E3, 2010, retrieved 19th November 2012 from <http://macrothink.org/journal/index.php/jmr/article/view/349/251>
- [20] Rizvi Fazal & Gorur Radhika, 2011, "Challenges Facing Indian Higher Education", Occasional paper series, Australia India Institute, retrieved 27th November 2012 from <http://www.aii.unimelb.edu.au/sites/default/files/Fearless%20nadia%20image%202.pdf>
- [21] Shrestha Dil Prasad (2009), "Managing Higher Education Institutions," *Administration and Management Review*, 21 (2), pp. 22-39.
- [22] Times Higher Education, (2013), "Times Higher Education: World University Ranking 2013-14," from <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world->

[university-rankings/2013-14/world-ranking/institution/panjab-university](#), accessed on 14th January 2014

- [23] Ward Colleen, 2001, “The impact of international students on domestic students and host institutions”, from <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/international/14684> accessed 10th February 2014
- [24] Yash Pal, 2009, Report of ‘The Committee to Advise on Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education’ from <http://www.edgex.in/resources/Yashpal-committee-report.pdf> accessed April 9, 2012.