

## **An Empirical Study on the Perception of Undergraduate Students about the Challenges of the Current Education System and their Relation with the Communication Skills of the Students**

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### **Abstract**

*The performance indicator generally used to determine the value of higher education by the governments and international rankings is the employment rate of the graduates. The India Skills Report (ISR) 2022 explores skill building for the future of work in 2022 and beyond. Exploratory, descriptive and inferential research was conducted to study the perception of undergraduate students about the challenges of the current education system and their relation with the communication skills of the students. Quantitative and qualitative analyses have been used in the study. The primary data was collected from 250 respondents through a structured questionnaire. For hypotheses testing, Kendall's Tau Correlation test and Spearman's Rank correlation test were used in the study. The study concludes that there is a significant positive correlation between communication skills and the four challenges of the education system, viz. Teaching methodology, Educational Framework, Practical Exposure and Access to Resources. The qualitative analysis reveals that the gap between the current state of learning outcomes and what is required must be bridged by undertaking major reforms. The National Education Policy 2020 proposes the revision and heads forward to create a new system that is aligned with the aspirational goals of 21<sup>st</sup>-century education, including Sustainable Development Goal 4, while building upon India's traditions and value systems.*

**Keywords:** *Employability, Sustainable Skilling, National Education Policy 2020, Communication Skills.*

## **Introduction:**

Employability is a vital aspect of human development in career fields. As perceived by most of the youth today, employability is equivalent to getting a job. Employability is the set of competent attributes that help one to get a job, like the ability to accept and learn from criticism, problem-solving skills, communication skills, positive attitude, digital competency, technical know-how and many more.

As per the study, as very few graduates take up entrepreneurship, the majority of the graduates, search for suitable entry-level jobs. The performance indicator generally used to determine the value of higher education by the governments and international rankings is the employment rate of graduates. Teichler (2009).

According to Singh (2022), numerous enterprises have taken to digital workplace environments to sustain their business operations. The pandemic has taught us that remote learning, remote work, and remote evaluation are going to become the new normal for many sectors across IT, Business Consultancy, Financial Services and the Education Industry.

**Objectives:** The objectives of the research conducted are:

1. To decode the skills as presented by Indian Skills Report (ISR) 2022 to make the graduate students from Indian HEIs employable.
2. To conduct an empirical study on the perception of undergraduate students about the challenges of the current education system and their relation with the communication skills of the students.
3. To present the aspirational goals of National Education Policy 2020 which aligns with sustainable development goal 4 which is to ensure and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

## **Hypotheses:**

- **Hypothesis 1**

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant correlation between the Perception of students about challenges in Teaching methodology and their level of Communication skills.

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant correlation between the Perception of students about challenges in Teaching methodology and their level of Communication skills.

- **Hypothesis 2**

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant correlation between the Perception of students about challenges in the educational framework and their level of Communication skills.

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant correlation between the Perception of students about challenges in the educational framework and their level of Communication skills.

- **Hypothesis 3**

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant correlation between the Perception of students about challenges in Practical exposure and their level of Communication skills.

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant correlation between the Perception of students about challenges in Practical exposure and their level of Communication skills.

- **Hypothesis 4**

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant correlation between the Perception of students about challenges in Access to Resources and their level of Communication skills.

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant correlation between the Perception of students about challenges in Access to Resources and their level of Communication skills.

**Problem Statement:**

The existing educational environment and teaching methods used in colleges need to equip the students with the communication skills required to make them employable.

**Methodology:** An exploratory, descriptive and inferential research was conducted to study the perception of undergraduate students about the challenges of the current education system and their relation with the communication skills of the students. The variables in the study are communication skills and challenges faced by students with the current education system which include – teaching methodology, educational framework, practical exposure and access to resources.

**Universe of the study:** College students from Suburban Mumbai.

**Sample size:** 250 College students from Suburban Mumbai.

A stratified random sampling method was used to collect data from the respondents. A 5-point Likert scale was used in the questionnaire to collect data from the respondents. Efforts were made by the researchers to explain every statement to the respondents and a personal interview method and observation method were used to collect data from the respondents. Quantitative and qualitative analyses were used.

To understand what skills are required by the graduates to make them employable a review of the literature was conducted and the following factors were identified as affecting the overall graduate employability.

**Literature Review:**

A set of emerging skills and job roles should be the prime focus in education so that working professionals can meet the evolving industry's expectations. Rao, et.al (2014) has listed the qualities which employers look out for and that give a direction for change in curriculum. These are practice orientation, teamwork and perspective building. The study has revealed that six rules which are important from the point of view of business, as a model for future curriculum practice are – introduction of the educational modules through training; focus on a complex made up of leadership, team player, innovator, corporate citizen; and apprenticeship before being honoured with a degree. Clarke (2018) has prepared a model of graduate employability and focuses on problem-solving ability, critical thinking and teamwork ability being important and having an influence on the perceived employability of graduates. Arora and Saxena (2018) reviewed various models developed by scholars in different countries and concluded that in different models' equal importance is given to both technical as well personal attributes. The study focuses on sustainability which is achieved by such professionals who can provide practical solutions to society through innovation and best practices. The study claims that communication skills are of utmost importance for employability as perceived by today's youth. Hossain, et.al. (2020) in the empirical research study conducted show that both soft skills and technical skills are positively related to employability and social mobility factors and play a significant role in the employability of graduates. Sajjad, Mohitul and Tania (2021) have attempted to identify the factors that affect the overall graduate employability (OGE) of the private university graduates of Bangladesh. The authors selected six factors: academic performance (AP), technical skills (TS), communication skills (CS), personality (PE), leadership and motivational skills (LMS), and teamwork and problem-solving skills (TPSS). The exploratory research was conducted on 360 employees and the study revealed that AP, PE, CS, and TPSS positively and significantly influence OGE, while LMS and TS had insignificant influence over OGE. Huang X, et.al (2022) the researchers have focused on human development as a vital aspect of the employability, of finance and trade graduates in higher education vocational colleges. The study used descriptive statistical analysis and exploratory

factor analysis to identify the classification of educational practices and employability. The findings of the study reveal that the soft and basic skills of college graduates improved through educational practices in colleges, and the graduates with high motivation for learning could enhance their soft skills and internships provided to students in colleges bring stronger professional skills.

The various research studies point out one thing in common that is, the goal of employment policy is changing from 'employment rate' to 'employability' which means that the shift from quantity to quality has posed an urgent question, that is how to effectively enhance and shape the employability of graduates through training and practising.

### **Significance of the study:**

#### **Skill Gap in the Indian Higher Education System (India Skills Report 2022)**

The India Skills Report (ISR) 2022 is a merger of two distinct studies from the Wheebox National Employability Test (WNET) which analyzed the employability among 3 lakh youth across various educational and professional domains in India and the India Hiring Intent Survey, conducted for 150 corporates across 15+ industries. The WNET, assessed the employability amongst students evaluating the job – readiness for the market in India, while India Hiring Intent Survey 2022 studied the hiring trend and preferences of employers in top industries.

The outcomes of the survey were –

- WNET discovered that in the year 2022, 51.3 percent of Indian youth were unemployable. This percentage increased for the year 2021.
- Institutes struggle to prepare their students to battle the challenges of the business world. The curricula reflected outdated course material, irrelevant to the ongoing happenings in the industry, leading to a severe dearth of employable talent across India.
- Top companies in India are adopting new recruitment strategies centred around specific soft skills like communication, agility, proactiveness and empathy. However, HEIs seldom educate their students on these parameters.
- Among the 150 corporations surveyed across 15+ industries and sectors, 75 percent of corporate leaders expressed that there was a skill gap in their industry. 67 percent of

Banking, Financial Services and Insurance (BFSI) employers also reported a skill gap deficit. The skill gap deficit was 100 percent in the retail industry.

- We need to prepare the students for the age of digital acceleration. They need to be trained in soft skills to tackle global changes and to be able to impart knowledge collaboratively are the requisites of a modern workplace. Problem-solving, critical thinking, presentation skills, corporate agility, time management and problem-solving abilities are other soft skills which paired with the domain knowledge and experience of the candidate become an invaluable asset for an organization.
- IT skills in particular are shaping up the job ecosystem with a focus on the latest technologies. Employers want adaptable individuals who can learn, relearn and unlearn as the demands of the job continue to dictate new trends. To contend in the modern economy, it is important to upskill one's knowledge with the latest technology tools, that is from basic HTML knowledge to advanced Python coding.
- 10 million students are occupying the higher education space but 95 percent of these students don't have access to education that can help them build a well-rounded career. Most educational institutions, struggle to keep up with the requirements of the industry, failing which they continue to teach students concepts that are no longer relevant to the industry's needs in current times. The need of the hour is to recognize the importance of upskilling and this can be achieved by updating course content and curriculum as per industry needs.

ISR 2022 concludes by stating that although the technology-driven infrastructure is the foundation of modern enterprises, the core catalyst of digital age skilling is a human-first approach. Nowadays, companies expect individual ownership over a hierarchy culture, because the adoption of technologies and tools available can function when everybody in the organization is involved. They should focus on the value-added contribution of employees and their unique skill sets. The key skills required as per ISR 2022 to excel in the digital age are – communication skills, social media, data analytics and interpretation, critical thinking skills, knowledge management, strategy planning, teamwork and adaptability, ethics and responsibility, creativity and social intelligence, in particular, are likely to be essential skills for most new jobs created between now and 2030; because these skills give humans a clear advantage over machines and software, and offer protection against developments in automation.

**Data Analysis:**

The data analysis has been divided into two sections, quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis.

Following is the quantitative analysis which includes results from the reliability test, normality test and correlation test.

**Table No. 1: Reliability Test Results**

Sr. No.	Variables	No. of Items	Cronbach Alpha Value
1	Communication Skills	5	.823
2	Perception of students about Teaching methodology	8	.866
3	Perception of students about Educational Framework	6	.897
4	Perception of students about Practical exposure	7	.898
5	Perception of students about Access to Resources	8	.870

*Source: Researchers compilation through SPSS*

**Interpretation**

From the above Table No. 1, it is observed that:

The result of Cronbach's alpha test values for all the variables as shown in Table No. 1 is greater than 0.7. Therefore, it is interpreted that all the parameters or statements are consistent for measuring the respective variables.

**NORMALITY OF DATA**

One of the important conditions to be tested before hypothesis testing is to test the normality of data. The distribution of data further decides the test to be selected for inferential analysis. The normality of data, in this study, was tested by applying Shapiro-Wilk Test as mentioned in Table No. 2.

**Table No 2: Test of Normality**

Variable	Five-Point Rating Scale with Code	Null Hypothesis for Normality Test	Normality Test	p Value	Result of Normality
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Communication Skills		The distribution of Communication Skills is normal with a Mean of 3.211 and S.D. .952	Shapiro-Wilk Test	.000	Reject Null Hypothesis
Perception of students about Teaching methodology		The distribution of Perceptions of students about Teaching methodology is normal with a Mean of 3.455 and S.D. .896	Shapiro-Wilk Test	.000	Reject Null Hypothesis
Perception of students about Educational Framework		The distribution of Perceptions of students about Educational Framework is normal with a Mean of 2.799 and S.D. 1.072	Shapiro-Wilk Test	.000	Reject Null Hypothesis
Perception of students about Practical exposure	1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree	The distribution of Perceptions of students about Practical exposure is normal with a Mean of 2.914 and S.D. 1.049	Shapiro-Wilk Test	.000	Reject Null Hypothesis
Perception of students about Access to Resources		The distribution of Perceptions of students about Access to Resources is normal with a Mean of 2.676 and S.D. .932	Shapiro-Wilk Test	.002	Reject Null Hypothesis

Source: Researchers compilation through SPSS

From the above table, it is observed that the 'p' values for all the variables are less than the critical 'p-value' of 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected and it can be stated that the data is not normally distributed in all the above cases.

### Correlation Analysis:

Since data is not normally distributed for all the variables, non-parametric Kendall's Tau Correlation test and Spearman's Rank correlation test was used for testing the significance of the correlation between two variables.



The following conclusions are derived based on the test applied. The results of the Correlation test are presented in Table No. 3.

**Table No. 3: Result from Correlation Analysis**

Hypothesis No.	Variables	Test	Correlation Coefficient	Sig. (2-tailed)	Accept/Reject Null Hypothesis
1	Perception of students about Teaching methodology & Communication Skills	Kendall's tau_b	.245	.000	Reject
		Spearman's rho	.329	.000	Reject
2	Perception of students about Educational Framework & Communication Skills	Kendall's tau_b	.208	.000	Reject
		Spearman's rho	.275	.000	Reject
3	Perception of students about Practical Exposure & Communication Skills	Kendall's tau_b	.156	.000	Reject
		Spearman's rho	.207	.001	Reject
4	Perception of students about Access to Resources & Communication Skills	Kendall's tau_b	.213	.000	Reject
		Spearman's rho	.284	.000	Reject

*Source: Researchers compilation through SPSS*

From Table No. 3, it is observed that,

- i. Kendall's Tau Correlation coefficient value between variables 'Perception of students about Teaching methodology' and 'Communication skills' is .245 ( $p = 0.00 < 0.01$ ) and Spearman's rank Correlation coefficient value between variables 'Perception of students about Teaching methodology' and 'Communication skills' is .329 ( $p = 0.00 < 0.01$ ). This indicates that there exists a positive and significant correlation between these variables.
- ii. Kendall's Tau Correlation coefficient value between the variable's Perception of students about Educational Framework & Communication Skills is .208 ( $p = 0.00 < 0.01$ ) and Spearman's rank Correlation coefficient value between the variable's Perception of students about Educational Framework & Communication Skills is .275 ( $p = 0.00 < 0.01$ ). This indicates that there exists a positive and significant correlation between these variables.

- iii. Kendall's Tau Correlation coefficient value between the variable's Perception of students about Practical Exposure & Communication Skills is .156 ( $p = 0.00 < 0.01$ ) and Spearman's rank Correlation coefficient value between the variable's Perception of students about Practical Exposure & Communication Skills is .207 ( $p = 0.00 < 0.01$ ). This indicates that there exists a positive and significant correlation between these variables.
- iv. Kendall's Tau Correlation coefficient value between variables Perception of students about Access to Resources & Communication Skills is .213 ( $p = 0.00 < 0.01$ ) and Spearman's rank Correlation coefficient value between variables Perception of students about Access to Resources & Communication Skills is .284 ( $p = 0.00 < 0.01$ ). This indicates that there exists a positive and significant correlation between these variables.

Hence, we reject all the null hypotheses and state that there is a significant positive correlation between variables. Since the correlation coefficient falls in the range of 0.10 to 0.29, there is a small correlation between the variables (Cohen et al., 2003).

The qualitative analysis is summarised as a New and Forward-looking Vision for India's Higher Education System – NEP 2020:

The National Education Policy 2020 vision includes the following key changes to the current system.

1. **Institutional Restructuring and Consolidation:** The main thrust of the policy regarding higher education is to end the fragmentation of higher education by transforming HEIs into large multidisciplinary universities, colleges, and HEI clusters or knowledge Hubs, which aim to have more than 3,000 students. This will help to build vibrant communities of scholars and peers, enable students to become well-rounded across disciplines including artistic, creative and analytic subjects as well as develop active research communities across disciplines including cross-disciplinary research, and increase resource efficiency, both material and human across higher education. NEP aims to increase Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) from 26.3 percent (2018) to 50 percent by 2035.
2. **Moving towards Multidisciplinary Undergraduate Education:** Integration of humanities and arts with science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) for positive learning outcomes, which will include creativity and innovation, critical thinking and higher-order thinking capacities, problem-solving abilities, communication skills, teamwork, in-depth learning and mastery of curricula across fields, increase in social and moral awareness etc., besides general engagement and enjoyment of learning. Research is also improved through a multidisciplinary education approach. Credit-based courses for all curricula of HEIs. Academic Bank of Credit (ABC) is established to digitally store the academic credits earned from various recognized HEIs.
3. **Engaging and Supportive Learning Environment and adequate student support:** Effective learning requires a comprehensive approach that involves an appropriate curriculum, engaging pedagogy, continuous assessment and adequate student support. The Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) will be revised for instilling innovation and flexibility and the examination shall move from high-stakes examinations towards more continuous and comprehensive evaluation. Each institution will integrate its academic plans ranging from curricular improvement to quality of classroom transaction – into its Institutional Developmental Plan (IDP). Online education provides natural access to quality higher

education. The various initiatives will help in having a larger number of international students studying in India and provide greater mobility to students in India who may wish to carry credits abroad.

4. **A motivated energized and capable faculty:** The policy recommends initiatives to achieve the best, motivated and capable faculty in HEIs, teaching duties will not be excessive, the student-teacher ratio will not be too high, faculty will be given the freedom to design their curriculum and pedagogical approach and excellence will be further incentivized through appropriate rewards, promotions, recognitions and movement into institutional leadership.
5. **Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education:** The policy envisions ensuring equitable access to quality education for all students with a special emphasis on socio-economically disadvantaged groups (SEDG). Various steps to be taken by the Government include measures like, earmarking government funds for the education of SEDGs, enhancing access by establishing more high-quality HEIs in special education zones containing a large number of SEDGs, provide more financial assistance and scholarships to SEDGs.
6. **Teacher Education:** Teacher preparation is an activity which requires a multidisciplinary perspective and knowledge. A regulatory system shall be set up to take stringent action against substandard Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) that did not meet basic educational criteria, and by 2030, only educationally sound, which are multidisciplinary and integrated teacher education programmes will be valid. All standalone TEIs will be required to convert to multidisciplinary institutions by 2030, as they will have to offer 4 years integrated teacher preparation programme which will be a dual major holistic Bachelor's degree in education as well as a specialized subject such as language, history etc.
7. **Reimagining Vocational Education:** The policy requires the integration of vocational education programmes into mainstream education in all educational institutions in a phased manner. By 2025, at least 50 percent of learners of HEIs shall have exposure to vocational education. This is in alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 4 and will help to realize the full potential of India's demographic dividend. The HEIs will offer vocational education either in partnership with industry and NGOs or on their own. HEIs will also be allowed to conduct short-term certificate courses in various skill areas.
8. **Catalyzing Quality Academic Research in all fields through a new national foundation:** To make India lead research and innovation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and to grow quality research in the nation, this policy envisions the establishment of a National Research Foundation (NRF), and its primary objective will be – fund competitive and peer-reviewed proposals across all disciplines, facilitate research at academic institutions, particularly universities and colleges, recognize outstanding research and progress and act as a liaison between researchers, government and industry.
9. **Transforming the Regulatory System of Higher Education:** Regulation of higher education has been too heavy-headed for decades. To re-energize the higher education sector, the regulatory system of higher education will ensure that the distinct functions of regulation, accreditation, funding and academic standard setting will be performed by distinct, independent and empowered bodies. Setting up of four independent verticals within one umbrella institution, The Higher Education Commission of India (HECI); the first vertical of HECI will be the National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC),

second, the National Accreditation Council (NAC), the third, the Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC), and the fourth vertical will be the General Education Council (GEC). The functioning of all the independent verticals will be based on transparent public disclosure and the use of technology to reduce human interface.

10. **Effective Governance and Leadership for HEIs:** All HEIs levels will take measures to ensure leadership of highest quality and will promote institutions with a culture of excellence. Upon receiving the appropriately graded accreditations that deem the institution ready for such a move. A Board of Governors (BoG) of an institution will be empowered to govern the institution which would be free of any external interference, make appointments and take governance decisions. The HEIs would aim to become autonomous so that they have an empowered BoG by 2035. The BoG would be responsible for meeting all regulatory guidelines mandated by HECI.

### Conclusion:

A positive significant relationship was identified between communication skills and the four challenges. The research strongly recommends that higher education institutions need a transformation to bridge the gap between the current state of learning outcomes through undertaking major reforms that bring the highest quality, equity and integrity into the system of higher education. The National Education Policy 2020 proposes the revision and revamping of all aspects of the education structure and to create of a new system that is aligned with the aspirational goals of 21<sup>st</sup>-century education, including Sustainable Development Goal 4, which will also contribute to building India's traditions, culture and value systems.

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