

FACTORS AFFECTING EMPLOYMENT PREDICAMENT AMONG COLLEGE GRADUATES IN JHARKHAND: A STUDY IN THE POST-PANDEMIC ERA

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ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 pandemic is regarded as the most unthinkable, biggest, and the worst-affecting challenge that economies and societies all over the world have faced till date. It would be remembered as a period when everything came to a standstill. It impacted all the activities: daily-life, professional lives, leisure and travel, etc. (Vyas, & Butakhieo, 2021). The present study aims to examine the employment predicament among university/ college graduates in Jharkhand in the post-pandemic era and main factors for the same. The study is a mixed methods study, involving questionnaire survey, discussions, and personal interviews. The findings of the in-depth study suggest that the major issues faced by the graduates are related to access to employment information, conditions of employment search, occupational competency, professional advancement, employability, and social awareness and skills. Therefore, there's an urgent need to improve the professional skills among the students so that their suitability to be included in the workforce is enhanced. This study puts forward six action plans which the colleges can take for fulfilment of the above-mentioned needs among their students.

Keywords: pandemic, graduates, employment challenges, Jharkhand, Covid-19

1.0 INTRODUCTION

During the pandemic, all the industries in the world experienced a massive setback. Even though, Job market had been unpredictable even before the pandemic (Etehad, & Karatepe, 2019) either because of political instability, or technological advancement, or economic uncertainties; Covid-19 had turned it into a grave crisis. Organisations were forced to lay-off their employees in order to keep themselves afloat (Lei, & Xuemei, 2021). The levels of unemployment in India went spiraling post the pandemic (Ali, & Kamraju, 2020) because of organisational shut-downs, mergers, decrease in cross border trade, etc. The critical situation in the labour market further aggravated the challenge of job security for the university graduates (Pravat, 2020). The state of affairs revealed the issues that university graduates were already dealing with, viz. problems in obtaining employment information, conditions of employment search, improving their occupational competency, planning professional growth, employability, and becoming socially aware, and gaining social skills.

The challenges faced by the university graduates in Jharkhand have become more severe post the pandemic with rising university enrolments across the state and an even higher students to workforce ratio (Bhandari, 2021; Thomas, 2023). The challenge requires an effective and

immediate intervention since rise in unemployment among the qualified youth is detrimental to the overall sustainable growth of the region (Nayak, & Alam, 2022).

The present study is a thorough examination of the severity of the employment situation among the university students of Jharkhand post the pandemic; and based on the findings, proposes a few interventions with an objective to handle the same. The study adopts quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection, like survey and personal interview. Qualitative analysis has been conducted on the collected data to explore the issue. It is expected that this study contributes to the field of university teaching by adding to the ongoing educational reforms post the pandemic; and hence, is useful for the students as well as the educators.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Professional Challenges among University/ College graduates

In the past, numerous research has been done on the challenges of career growth among the college graduates. Most of these studies have focused on the student - job ratio, i.e. the rise in number of students graduating from college in comparison to the availability of jobs to them (Khare, 2014). Many studies have dealt with the factor of dip in employability among them, i.e. although the number of college graduates has increased, they are becoming less and less employable: lacking in the required professionals' skills, communicativeness, and people skills (Bhandari, 2021; Gautam, 2016; Sengupta, 2018). Some of the studies have found the unpredictable market conditions as a cause of decrease in employment opportunities for the college graduates (Das, & Barman, 2021; Dhar, 2019). At times, fresh graduates also change their choice of profession depending on how industry demands change (Kumar, et al., 2023). The fresh graduates also tend to get confused about their career choices if they pay too much attention to what people think about the organisations. This attitude is not advisable for fresh college graduates (Bagchi, & Reddy, 2023; Mini, Christopher, & Janetius, 2020).

2.2 The Covid-19 pandemic and Employment Predicament among the University/ College graduates

The job market in the post pandemic era is quite demanding for the young college graduates.

Covid-19 put the whole world into a phase of drastic decline. Recently, there have been studies globally, related to how the pandemic has affected the employment predicament of young, college graduates.

Some of the major findings are listed below:

- i. The sudden emergence of the deadly disease led to several changes in the functioning of businesses, even suspension of all activities by some companies. This led to an overall rise in joblessness around the world (Belle, et al., 2022; Nwokeji, & Ebirim, 2021).
- ii. The pandemic was a global health emergency. This was scary and distressing to many people. There were voluntary turnovers around the world (Poonyaporn, 2022).

- iii. Most of organisational work shifted to teleworking or remote work. This required immediate upskilling in areas of information and communication technology among the workforce (Hien, & Khanh, 2021; Jaiswal, Gupta, & Prasanna, 2022).

Therefore, according to the studies conducted so far, the struggle for employment has become more severe for the college graduates in the post-pandemic era; and this situation needs an urgent solution.

3.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study adopted quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. Quantitative method involved questionnaire survey, and qualitative method involved personal interviews. The data so collected was analysed qualitatively to come to a conclusion for providing measures aimed at improving the employment predicament among the fresh college graduates in Jharkhand.

3.1 Study Objectives

- i. To Examine the Current Employment Predicament Situation Among University/ College Graduates in Jharkhand In the Post-Pandemic Era
- ii. To Study Factors Affecting the Employment Predicament Among University / College Graduates in Jharkhand in the Post-Pandemic Era
- iii. To Suggest Action Plan for Overcoming the Current Employment Predicament Situation Among University / College Graduates In Jharkhand in the Post-pandemic Era

3.2. Data Collection

3.2.1 Questionnaire Design

More than 2 Lakh students have graduated from various colleges of the state in the years between 2020 and 2023. The study sample consisted of 390 graduates who had passed out from various colleges of Jharkhand within this period. A self-made survey questionnaire consisting of 40 items related to employment environment, vocational skills, professional growth, social skills, employment choices, etc. was shared with the participants in both online and offline modes wherever possible. Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert Scale. The questionnaire validity was established through Cronbach Alpha test, which came to be 0.80. Its content validity was confirmed through discussion with experts in the area. There were two sections; Section I consisted of questions recording demographic data, and Section II consisted with items measuring unemployment predicament among the college graduates.

A pilot study was conducted beforehand to ensure the appropriateness of the scale for the current study.

The questionnaire response rate in the final survey was 95%, where 370 filled up questionnaires were found to be valid and rest were unusable.

3.2.2 Personal Interviews (PIs)

Apart from quantitative survey, data was also collected through PIs. Interviews are expected to reveal a more extensive information from varied perspectives on the topic under research.

The aim of this qualitative research was to gain insights about college curriculum, company expectations from the fresh graduates and current conditions of the labour market. The participants included career counsellors, faculty members, organisation heads, and academic counsellors of the institutes. They responded in detail to the questions which related to academic performance of the graduates, their vocational and social skills, and company expectations from them.

3.3 Qualitative Analysis

Collected data through questionnaire survey and PIs were passed through thematic analysis to recognise key disguised themes in the collected data. The qualitative data gathered from interviews were systematically categorised and coded, and then assimilated into overlapping themes; which was integrated with the quantitative data that were collected during the questionnaire survey. This way the study arrived at its main conclusions. The combined methods helped in understanding the issue of employment predicament among university graduates from different perspectives. The analysis simplified the problem so that solutions to overcome those could be suggested.

4.0 DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Following table provides the characteristics of the studied population:

Characteristics	Category	N	%
Gender	Male	170	45.94
	Female	200	54.06
Age	< 21	51	13.8
	21-24	304	82.2
	>24	15	4
Course	B. Tech	43	11.6
	BBA	45	12.2
	BCA	45	12.2
	MBBS	25	6.7
	B.Sc.	55	14.8
	B.A.	53	14.3
	B.Ed.	47	12.7
	B.A L.L.B.	22	6
B. Pharm.	35	9.5	

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the study sample

4.2 Discussion

The following major themes were generated after thematic analysis of the responses received from questionnaire survey and PIs:-

4.2.1 Access to employment information

40.5 % of the survey sample opined that they are unable to get relevant and timely job-related information. They are still dependent on the conventional channels of job search: online job openings on company websites and employment websites, government websites, career fairs, etc. They find participating in campus employment drives, and special recruitment drives by companies as more productive. Therefore, it becomes necessary for colleges to make their students and graduates aware of upcoming employment channels. Very small percentage (less than 20%, here) keep themselves abreast with knowledge on recent trends in the job market and industries; that is why, they are unable to deal with current questions being asked in their job interviews.

4.2.2 Employability

60.36 % of survey respondents accepted that they were unable to crack job interviews due to low overall employable skills or absence of work experience in their field of study. They did not consider themselves worthy enough, and had a feeling of inferiority because of the above-mentioned reasons. 55.86 % of the survey respondents cited their being unaware of the commercial job positions as detrimental to work opportunities available to them. Therefore, this reveals a need to make them aware and ready of the various job roles in the corporate world during their course of study itself.

4.2.3 Conditions of employment search

60.78% of the survey respondents answered their annual salary expectation as around 3 lakh to 5 Lakh per annum. This is way above the average annual salary of a new graduate in India, which is Rs 2,50,149, as reported by a study on new graduate salaries in India, shared on indeed.com (“New graduate.”, 2024). When asked about their job location preferences, 52.94 % of the survey respondents were inclined towards opting for a home posting. More than 70% would not prefer to be posted in an economically backward location. These factors further lowered the chances of employment for them.

4.2.4 Occupational competency

Responses received in PIs showed that the graduates are lacking in basic professional competency in their respective fields. The students these days do not have patience for learning new skills, lack integrity and resilience, are inconsiderate of authority, and are self-obsessed. Because of these characteristics they have low readiness for learning and are unable to absorb company culture. Consequently, the organisations find them difficult to train and unattractive as employees. This is detrimental for their chances of getting a gainful employment.

4.2.5 Social Awareness and Skills

As per the responses received in the questionnaire survey, it was seen that the participants are not updated about the current corporate requirements, job openings, company expectations, current average salary, etc, and sometimes do not trust their employment counsellors' advice too. Because of these misconceptions and attitude, the chances of students rejecting a job proposal become high.

4.2.6 Professional advancement

The questionnaire survey also affirmed that many graduates take up regular higher studies after graduation but do not spend more time in additional vocational courses. After graduate studies, a student benefits more from practical courses or experience instead of a simple theoretical course. This confusion is also creating roadblocks in the employment opportunities for them.

Therefore, the analysis identified that post the Covid-19 pandemic, employment predicament among university graduates in Jharkhand has become more complex; which demands a speedy and immediate intervention for overcoming the challenging situation.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Factors affecting the employment predicament among the university graduates in Jharkhand, as per the analysis conducted in the present study, can be summarised as below, along with the respective recommendations for overcoming those:

A. Improve occupational competencies-

The institute curriculum should be designed in such a way that sufficient attention is given to practical learning, on-the-job training, and professional skills. More internship opportunities in the corporate would help in improving students' occupational competencies.

B. Reinforce Power skills through training-

Soft skills are also called as power skills. These include courteousness, integrity, patience, Emotional Intelligence, communication and interpersonal skills, etc. Colleges must include training programmes targeted at improving these skills among the students.

C. Provide guidance for accessing relevant employment information-

Career counsellors at colleges should take up the responsibility of advising students about the concurrent channels from where relevant employment opportunity information can be reached; and make such channels accessible to them wherever possible. In addition to this, students should also be guided on how to keep themselves updated about emerging industry trends and work towards self-improvement accordingly.

D. Enhance Social awareness-

Institutes should include special training sessions for students where industry experts and coaches teach the pupils about how to be more mindful of one's surroundings for improving their reaction towards the same. With enhanced mindfulness, students can prevent themselves from getting misguided about social realities and contribute in a better manner to resolution of the same.

E. Motivation for taking up regular employment-

Choosing active employment over another theory-based course should be encouraged among college graduates. This is a responsibility of the institutes as well as the society.

F. Building more institute-organisation partnerships-

Colleges should forge collaborations with organisations wherein the students get an opportunity to get field experience and learn about their roles in and expectations held by the employers.

G. Provide realistic career information-

Students have the right to avail realistic information about the existing employment conditions in the job market. Colleges are instrumental in providing the same. If the students are armed with this information, they can make better decisions about the available work opportunities and set realistic goals for themselves; thereby keeping themselves motivated and stress-free.

Thus, looking at the points mentioned above, it is affirmed that resolving employment predicament among the college graduates does not have a one-stop solution. It, in fact, requires co-ordination between the colleges, graduate students and the society.

7.0 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The present study is an in-depth examination of the current factors affecting the employment predicament among the university/ college graduates of Jharkhand, and attempts to provide measures for overcoming the same. However, there are some limitations which can be dealt with in future studies dealing with the subject area.

a) Data collection instruments-

Both the questionnaire survey and personal interview methods are subject to self-reporting errors. Future studies involving official secondary information about the employment status among the college graduates can provide more verifiable data.

b) Sample size and range-

Jharkhand has more than 600 colleges. A bigger sample size can be utilised to provide more effective solutions. Exclusive, institution-based studies in future can help in dealing with employment issues in a college at individual level.

c) Time period-

The study takes into account participant reactions in the immediate time period post the pandemic. The employment condition and workforce attitude undergoes frequent changes. Therefore, studies involving longer time period can help in documenting the employment and workforce attitude changes in a better manner.

8.0 FUTURE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Research studies in the subject area can utilise several upcoming artificial intelligence tools for data analysis. The effect of government policies over the employment predicament can be a separate area of study. Comparative studies from diverse geographical locations will reveal generalisable findings. Interdisciplinary studies in the subject area can be helpful in providing holistic solutions for solving the employment predicament among university graduates.

It is a known fact that the youth of a country are the flag bearers of its development. Therefore, it can be concluded that the field of employment predicament among fresh college graduates is of utmost importance. The present study looks into the challenge and tries to provide practical solutions for the same. Future studies are expected to improve the employment confusion among the youth all over the world.

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