

Skill Gap between Fresh Graduates and Industry Expectations: A Study from an HR Recruiter Perspective

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Abstract: This research paper provides an in-depth examination of the skill gap between fresh graduates and industry expectations from the perspective of HR recruiters. In recent years, the employability of graduates has become a growing concern due to the mismatch between academic knowledge and practical industry requirements. This study is based entirely on secondary data sources, including academic literature, industry reports, and institutional publications, to understand the root causes of this issue. The study finds that while graduates have theoretical knowledge, they often don't possess essential workplace skills like communication, adaptability, teamwork and problem-solving ability. The scenario creates a massive roadblock during hiring, from an HR recruiter perspective as organizations key in on candidates that can hit the ground running and make immediate contributions from onboarding. It also looks at trends such as digital transformation, skill based hiring and how the job market is changing fast because of continuous learning. These findings suggest that we require collaborative efforts between educational institutions and the industry to bridge this gap. This research serves as a conceptual bridge by providing a detailed view along with recommendations for actions that can serve to improve graduate employability and educational outcomes that are aligned with industry needs.

Keywords: Skill Gap, Employability, HR Recruitment, Fresh Graduates, Industry Expectations, Soft Skills.

I. INTRODUCTION

The modern day job market is a fast-paced environment with rapid technological advancements, globalization and increased competition. This has led to a much higher expectation of the skill set required as degree no longer value addition. Although universities churn out more and more graduates every year, employers still find it hard to source people who are up to scratch. This gave rise to the term that came to be known as "skill gap".

A skill gap represents the disparity between college abilities and what employers need to offer. This gap is especially pronounced in entry-level jobs where fresh graduates are expected to display not just academic knowledge but also practical skills, professional behaviour and adjust to the work environment.

Looking at this process from an HR recruiters perspective, the whole recruitment process has become more convoluted. The recruiters will need to assess candidates on different parameters like technical abilities, communication skills and culture fit etc. But the reality is that most candidates do not reach these heights, which can cost organizations some money to keep them adequately trained and result in diminishing agility.

The objective of this study is to investigate what an academic skill gap looks like. This research makes a thorough study into the difficulties of graduates as well as recruitment agencies by analysing secondary data. The study also stresses linking the curriculum with industry, and how skill development can improve employability.

The study also flags new emerging trends namely digital skills and fields like artificial intelligence and automation, which are transforming expectations of job roles. Without forgetfulness of education through graduation, students will find themselves needing tools to learn with the lesson plan but adapt endlessly towards getting used to existing set of experiences within learning environments.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Awadhiya (2020) examined employability skill gaps among IT graduates from the perspective of employers. The study found that graduates often lack essential soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving despite possessing adequate technical knowledge. The author emphasized the need for educational institutions to align their curricula with industry requirements to improve graduate employability.

Lisá, Hannelová, and Newman (2019) compared employers' expectations with students' perceptions regarding employability skills. The findings revealed a significant mismatch between the skills valued by employers and those emphasized by students. Employers prioritized communication, teamwork, and critical thinking skills, whereas students focused more on technical competencies. The study highlighted the importance of bridging this expectation gap.

Tee et al. (2024) investigated the demand for digital skills, skill gaps, and graduate employability. The study reported a growing need for digital competencies such as data analytics, digital communication, and emerging technology skills in the labor market. However, many graduates were found to be inadequately prepared to meet these demands, indicating a substantial digital skill gap.

Otu (2025) explored the differences between graduates' self-perceptions and employers' expectations of employability skills. The findings showed that graduates often overestimated their preparedness for the workplace, while employers identified deficiencies in professional, interpersonal, and workplace-readiness skills. The study recommended stronger collaboration between higher education institutions and industry stakeholders.

Singh (2024) examined the impact of skill gaps on graduate employability and discussed strategies for skill development in higher education. The study concluded that inadequate practical and industry-relevant skills negatively affect employment opportunities. It suggested enhancing internship programs, industry partnerships, and skill-based training to improve employability outcomes.

Bhatnagar (2021) conducted a literature review on employability and skill gaps among MBA graduates in India. The review highlighted that employers increasingly seek both technical and soft skills, including leadership, communication, analytical thinking, and adaptability. The study emphasized the necessity for business schools to integrate employability-focused training into their academic programs to meet labor market expectations.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Lack of Practical Exposure Among Graduates

One of the major findings of this study is that fresh graduates possess theoretical knowledge but lack practical exposure required in professional environments. Most academic institutions emphasize examinations, assignments, and textbook learning rather than real-time industrial applications. As a result, graduates often struggle to apply their academic concepts in workplace situations.

Key Issues Identified:

- Limited industrial visits and internship opportunities
- Lack of exposure to real-time projects and business challenges
- Minimal hands-on training in tools and technologies used by industries
- Difficulty in understanding workplace expectations and organizational culture

This gap creates challenges for recruiters because organizations prefer candidates who can contribute effectively with minimal training. Companies are therefore forced to invest additional resources in onboarding and training programs.

B. Communication and Interpersonal Skill Deficiency

Another important finding is the deficiency in communication and interpersonal skills among graduates. HR recruiters often observe that candidates face difficulty expressing ideas clearly during interviews and professional discussions. Poor communication directly affects confidence, teamwork, and workplace collaboration.

Areas Where Graduates Commonly Struggle:

- Verbal communication during interviews
- Professional email writing and formal communication
- Presentation and public speaking skills
- Active listening and workplace interaction
- Negotiation and conflict management abilities

From the recruiter's perspective, communication skills are equally important as technical knowledge because employees are expected to coordinate with teams, clients, and management on a regular basis.

C. Gap Between Academic Curriculum and Industry Requirements

The study also identifies a significant mismatch between academic curricula and current industry requirements. Many educational institutions continue to follow outdated syllabi that fail to reflect modern technological advancements and changing business environments.

Major Curriculum Challenges:

- Limited focus on emerging technologies and digital tools
- Insufficient industry-oriented subjects and practical modules
- Lack of skill-based assessment methods
- Minimal integration of problem-solving and critical thinking activities

Industries today expect graduates to possess updated technical competencies, adaptability, and practical knowledge. However, the existing curriculum in many institutions does not fully prepare students for rapidly evolving job roles.

D. Importance of Soft Skills in Employability

The findings highlight that employers increasingly prioritize soft skills while evaluating fresh graduates. Organizations are no longer focusing solely on academic performance; they also seek candidates who can work efficiently in dynamic team environments.

Essential Soft Skills Expected by Employers:

- Teamwork and collaboration
- Adaptability and flexibility
- Time management
- Leadership qualities
- Problem-solving and decision-making skills
- Professional ethics and workplace discipline

Graduates lacking these competencies often face difficulties adjusting to professional environments, which reduces their employability.

E. Growing Demand for Digital and Technological Skills

The research further reveals that digital transformation has significantly changed industry expectations. Companies increasingly demand candidates who are familiar with digital platforms, data handling, automation, and modern software applications.

In-Demand Digital Skills:

- Basic data analysis and reporting
- Knowledge of digital collaboration tools
- Understanding of AI and automation concepts
- Proficiency in Microsoft Office and business software
- Familiarity with online communication platforms

Graduates without digital competencies are at a disadvantage because modern workplaces rely heavily on technology-driven operations.

F. Challenges Faced by HR Recruiters

From the HR recruiter's perspective, the skill gap creates difficulties throughout the recruitment process. Recruiters often receive a large number of applications, but only a small percentage of candidates meet industry expectations.

Recruitment Challenges Identified:

- Difficulty finding job-ready candidates
- Increased time spent on candidate screening
- Higher training and development costs
- Reduced organizational productivity during onboarding
- Frequent mismatch between candidate expectations and company requirements

This situation affects both organizations and graduates, making the hiring process more complex and resource-intensive.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Strengthening Industry-Academia Collaboration

One of the most effective ways to reduce the skill gap is through stronger collaboration between educational institutions and industries. Academic institutions should work closely with companies to understand changing workforce requirements and update their teaching methodologies accordingly.

Suggested Initiatives:

- Industry-sponsored workshops and seminars
- Guest lectures by industry professionals
- Collaborative certification programs
- Industry-oriented curriculum design
- Internship and apprenticeship partnerships

Such collaborations will help students gain practical exposure and improve job readiness before graduation.

B. Integration of Practical Learning Methods

Educational institutions should move beyond traditional classroom teaching and adopt practical learning approaches that simulate real workplace environments.

Practical Learning Approaches:

- Case study analysis
- Live industrial projects
- Simulation-based learning
- Group discussions and role plays
- Mandatory internship programs
- Project-based assessments

These methods can improve analytical thinking, creativity, and application-oriented learning among students.

C. Focus on Soft Skill Development

Institutions should provide dedicated training programs for communication and personality development. Soft skills play a major role in interview performance and workplace success.

Recommended Soft Skill Training Areas:

- Business communication
- Public speaking and presentations
- Team collaboration exercises
- Leadership development programs
- Workplace etiquette and professionalism
- Interview preparation and confidence building

Regular soft skill workshops can significantly improve graduate employability.

D. Promotion of Continuous Learning and Upskilling

Graduates should understand that learning does not end with academic qualifications. Continuous learning is essential in today's competitive and technology-driven environment.

Areas for Continuous Skill Development:

- Online certification courses
- Digital and technical skill training
- Participation in webinars and workshops
- Learning emerging technologies
- Self-development and career planning activities

Students who actively upgrade their skills are more adaptable and better prepared for changing industry demands.

E. Adoption of Skill-Based Hiring Practices

Organizations and HR recruiters should increasingly adopt skill-based recruitment methods rather than depending only on academic scores and degrees.

Effective Recruitment Practices:

- Skill assessment tests
- Practical task-based evaluations
- Behavioral interviews
- Internship performance evaluation
- Communication and aptitude assessments

This approach allows companies to identify candidates with strong potential and practical capabilities.

F. Government and Policy-Level Support

Policymakers also play a crucial role in improving graduate employability and workforce readiness.

Recommended Policy Measures:

- Funding for skill development initiatives
- Support for industry-academia partnerships
- National employability enhancement programs
- Promotion of vocational and technical education
- Digital literacy and technology training initiatives

Government support can help create a stronger educational ecosystem that aligns with modern industry requirements.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the skill gap between fresh graduates and industry expectations continues to be a major challenge in the modern employment market. This study highlights that although graduates possess academic qualifications and theoretical understanding, many lack the practical knowledge, communication abilities, soft skills, and digital competencies required by industries. From an HR recruiter's perspective, this mismatch creates difficulties in identifying job-ready candidates and increases the need for additional organizational training and development. The research further emphasizes that rapid technological advancements, digital transformation, and changing workplace expectations have significantly altered the skills demanded by employers. Industries today seek candidates who are adaptable, technologically aware, and capable of continuous learning. However, outdated curricula and limited practical exposure in educational institutions often prevent graduates from meeting these expectations effectively. The findings clearly indicate that bridging the skill gap requires collective efforts from educational institutions, industries, students, HR professionals, and policymakers. Educational institutions must focus on industry-oriented learning, practical training, and soft skill development, while industries should actively collaborate with academia through internships, workshops, and skill-based programs. At the same time, graduates must take personal responsibility for continuous learning and self-development to remain competitive in the evolving job market. Ultimately, reducing the skill gap will not only improve graduate employability but will also contribute to organizational productivity, workforce

efficiency, and overall economic growth. A strong partnership between academia and industry can create a future-ready workforce capable of meeting the demands of the modern professional environment.

Conflicts of Interest

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