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# A STUDY ON BRIDGING THE TELENT GAP: UNDERSTANDING HR EXPECTATIONS AND STUDENT PREPAREDNESS IN THE JOB MARKET

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### ABSTRACT

The growing disconnect between the expectations of Human Resource (HR) professionals and the preparedness of the graduating students poses a significant challenge in today's job market. This study, titled "Bridging the Talent Gap: Understanding HR Expectations and Student Preparedness in the Job Market," explores this issue by collecting primary data from HR professionals and final-year students through structured Google Forms. The research examines critical factors such as communication skills, industry knowledge, technical competence, adaptability, and professional behavior. The analysis reveals a substantial gap in key areas, with HR professionals emphasizing practical experience, soft skills, and workplace readiness, while students often focus more on academic qualifications. These findings highlight the urgent need for higher education institutions to align their curricula with industry needs by incorporating skill-based training, internships, and real-world exposure. The study advocates for stronger collaboration between academia and industry to better equip students for successful career transitions and meet evolving employer demands.

**Keywords:** Talent gap, HR expectations, student preparedness, employability skills, job readiness, industry collaboration, education-to-employment.

### INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

In today's rapidly evolving employment landscape, the alignment between academic education and industry expectations has become a matter of strategic importance. With constant technological innovations, globalized markets, and agile business models, the nature of work is undergoing a profound transformation. As a result, it has become increasingly crucial for educational institutions to revise their curricula and pedagogical approaches to remain relevant. Yet, a persistent disconnect remains between what graduates are equipped with academically and what employers actually seek—a disconnect commonly referred to as the "talent gap."

This talent gap is especially evident during campus recruitment and early-career hiring. Organizations often face challenges in identifying fresh graduates who are not just academically sound, but also equipped with the practical skills, workplace readiness, and adaptability required to contribute effectively from day one. HR professionals, responsible for recruitment and talent development, are at the forefront of this challenge. Simultaneously, Training and Placement Officers (TPOs) play a pivotal role in preparing students for the job market and aligning institutional efforts with corporate demands.

HR departments now place increasing emphasis on soft skills such as communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, and emotional intelligence—competencies that are often insufficiently emphasized within traditional academic frameworks. Meanwhile, TPOs are often constrained by rigid curricula, limited access to real-world training, and a lack of clarity on industry needs. The result is a misalignment that affects not only recruitment success but also long-term employee performance and organizational growth.

This study seeks to investigate this disconnect by engaging directly with two key stakeholders: Human Resource professionals and Training & Placement Officers. Through a structured survey, the research aims to gather insights on:

- The current expectations of employers from fresh graduates
- Observed skill gaps during recruitment and onboarding processes
- The preparedness of students from the viewpoint of TPOs
- Existing institutional and corporate initiatives to address the employability gap
- Suggestions for improving collaboration between academia and industry

By synthesizing the feedback and observations from these professionals, the study aims to identify critical areas of improvement and recommend actionable strategies. These may include curriculum reforms, enhancement of internship and mentorship opportunities, joint training programs, or better communication of industry needs to educational institutions.

Ultimately, this research aspires to serve as a bridge between two critical ends of the talent pipeline—those who prepare students and those who employ them. By fostering greater alignment and understanding, we can work toward building a future-ready workforce that is both educated and employable.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Despite the growing number of graduates entering the job market each year, a persistent gap remains between the skills these graduates possess and the competencies that employers actively seek. While academic qualifications continue to hold value, today's business environment demands more—particularly practical know-how, workplace readiness, and essential behavioral competencies such as communication, adaptability, critical thinking, and problem-solving. However, many educational institutions still fall short in providing students with adequate exposure to real-world work environments, resulting in talent that is often not industry-ready.

Human Resource (HR) professionals—especially those engaged in recruitment and Learning & Development (L&D)—frequently report difficulties in sourcing entry-level talent that meets both academic and practical criteria. This skill mismatch not only extends onboarding and training durations but also increases recruitment costs and impacts overall organizational productivity. At the same time, Training & Placement Officers (TPOs) face the challenge of preparing students with limited industry input, outdated curricula, and insufficient collaboration with employers.

The disconnect between academic outputs and industry requirements has far-reaching implications—not just for individual careers, but also for organizational growth and national economic development. Although several interventions, such as industry-academia partnerships and government-led skill development initiatives, are underway, these efforts often lack a grounded understanding of the actual expectations held by employers and the institutional constraints faced by academia.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

- To identify the key skills and competencies that HR professionals prioritize when hiring fresh graduates across various industries.
- To understand the perspectives of HR professionals and TPOs regarding the current readiness of graduates in terms of technical, behavioral, and professional skills.
- To analyze the areas of mismatch or misalignment between employer expectations and the outcomes of academic training.
- To explore the role of academic institutions and placement departments in preparing students for real-world job roles through curriculum design, internships, and industry interaction.
- To provide actionable recommendations for HR departments and institutional placement cells to collaborate effectively in bridging the employability gap and enhancing graduate job readiness.

### **SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

- The study gathers insights from **HR professionals** involved in campus recruitment and **Training & Placement Officers (TPOs)** responsible for student-employer engagement.
- It spans across multiple industries and educational institutions to provide a cross-sectional view of hiring expectations and placement challenges.
- Data is collected through **Google Forms** to enable wide digital reach and accessibility across geographies.
- The study emphasizes both **technical competencies** and **soft skills** such as communication, problem-solving, and adaptability to understand the holistic nature of employability.
- While the primary focus is on fresh graduates (undergraduate and postgraduate), the geographic and institutional scope may be limited to the availability and willingness of respondents but aims to reflect broader national trends in employability and recruitment.

### **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

- **Limited Sample Size:** The study's findings are based on responses from a select number of HR professionals and TPOs, which may not fully represent the wider industry or academic ecosystem.
- **Geographical Bias:** The responses may be concentrated in certain regions or types of institutions/companies, limiting the generalizability of results across all geographies and sectors.
- **Subjective Perceptions:** The insights rely on self-reported data from professionals, which may carry inherent bias or reflect personal rather than institutional views.
- **Exclusion of Other Stakeholders:** This study does not include the perspectives of students, faculty members, or industry trainers, which could provide additional layers of insight into employability issues.
- **Time Constraints:** The research was conducted within a limited timeframe, which may restrict deeper exploration, longitudinal analysis, or qualitative follow-ups.

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## INDUSTRY PROFILE

Xebia is a global IT consultancy and software development company specializing in digital transformation, Agile software development, cloud services, data and AI solutions, and low-code/no-code platforms. Founded in 2001 and headquartered in the Netherlands, Xebia has expanded its presence across multiple continents, delivering cutting-edge technology solutions to enterprises worldwide. The company is known for its deep expertise, innovative approach, and commitment to helping businesses accelerate digital transformation.

### *Global Presence and Industry Recognition*

Xebia's international footprint allows it to serve clients across multiple industries, including banking, finance, healthcare, retail, telecommunications, and manufacturing. Its commitment to excellence has earned it recognition in the IT consulting space, making it a preferred partner for enterprises looking to leverage technology for business growth.

### **Key Partnerships & Collaborations**

Xebia collaborates with leading technology providers, including:

- Microsoft Azure
- Amazon Web Services (AWS)
- Google Cloud Platform (GCP)
- Salesforce
- Atlassian
- HashiCorp

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## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature reveals consistent themes:

- **Skill Mismatch:** Technological advancements outpace curriculum updates, leading to outdated knowledge (Cappelli, 2015).
- **Lack of Soft Skills:** Communication, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence are frequently missing in new graduates (Andrews & Higson, 2008).
- **Limited Practical Exposure:** There is a dearth of hands-on learning opportunities during academic programs (Singh & Singh, 2017).
- **Employers' Perspective:** Recruitment challenges stem from a lack of work readiness and increased need for induction training (FICCI-EY, 2019).
- **L&D Interventions:** Strategic Learning & Development practices have shown positive impacts on fresh graduate integration (Mehta & Mehta, 2021).

These studies emphasize the importance of collaboration between academia and industry to ensure graduates are equipped with both theoretical knowledge and practical skills.

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## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology serves as a structured framework guiding researchers through the various stages of their study, from inception to conclusion. It encompasses a range of methods, techniques, and tools employed to investigate a specific research problem, ensuring the integrity and credibility of the results.

The methodology chosen depends on factors such as the research question, objectives, available resources, and disciplinary norms.

The overarching goal of data collection is to document and inform decision-making on critical matters, facilitating the dissemination of information to stake holders. In this study, secondary data needs are fulfilled by extracting information from the company's audited reports.

Data in study are of two types:

- Primary data
- Secondary data

### *Primary data*

Primary data was collected through structured questionnaires distributed via Google Forms. Two distinct questionnaires were designed—one tailored for HR professionals involved in recruitment and Learning & Development (L&D), and another for TPOs responsible for institutional placement efforts.

### *Secondary data*

Secondary data for this study was obtained from previously published research articles, academic journals, industry reports, and government publications.

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## ANALYTICAL TOOLS AND METHODS

- Simple Percentage Analysis
- Chi square
- Correlation
- Anova

## DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

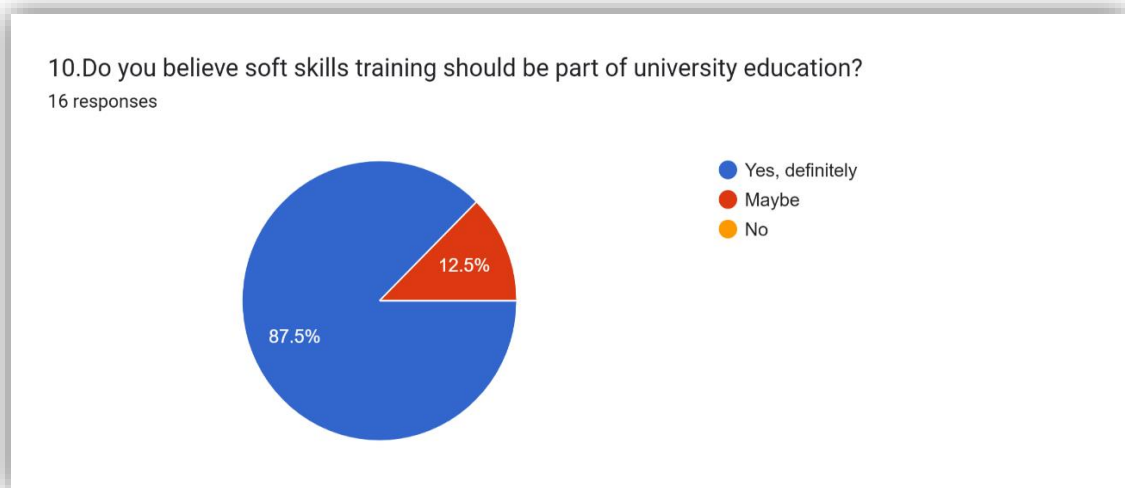
### 1. SOFT SKILLS TRAINING SHOULD BE PART OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

SOFT SKILLS TRAINING SHOULD BE PART OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION	RESPONDENT	PERCENTAGE
Yes, definitely	14	87.5%
May be	2	12.5%
No	0	0.0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Primary data

#### INTERPRETATION

Out of 16 respondents, 14 (87.5%) strongly agreed (“Yes, definitely”) that soft skills training should be part of university education, while 2 respondents (12.5%) said “Maybe.” None disagreed, indicating an overwhelming consensus that integrating soft skills into academic curricula is essential for enhancing student employability and workplace readiness.



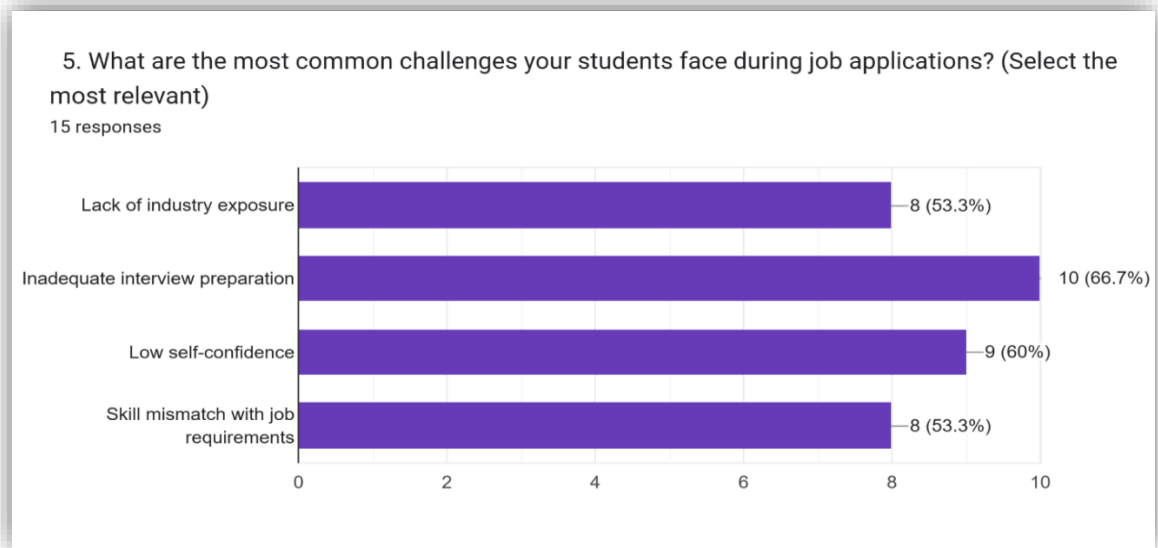
### 2. CHALLENGES STUDENTS FACE DURING JOB APPLICATIONS

CHALLENGES STUDENTS FACE DURING JOB APPLICATIONS	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
Lack of industry exposure	8	53.3%
Inadequate interview preparation	10	66.7%
Low self-confidence	9	60.0%
Skill mismatch with job requirements	8	53.3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Primary data

#### INTERPRETATION

66.7% of TPOs identified inadequate interview preparation as a major challenge students face during job applications, followed by low self-confidence at 60.0%. Both lack of industry exposure and skill mismatch with job requirements were reported by 53.3% of respondents.



## CORRELATION

Case Processing Summary

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
INTERNSHIPSAREINENHANCINGSTUDENTS EMPLOYABILITY * CHALLENGESSTUDENTS FACED DURING JOB APPLICATIONS	31	100.0%	0	0.0%	31	100.0%

Internshipsareinenhancingstudentemployability\*Challengesstudentsfaceduringjob applications Crosstabulation

Count		CHALLENGESSTUDENTS FACED DURING JOB APPLICATIONS					Total
		N/A	Lack of industry exposure	Inadequate interview preparation	Low self-confidence	Skill mismatch with job requirements	
INTERNSHIPSAREINENHANCINGSTUDENTSEMPLOYABILITY	N/A	16	0	0	0	0	16
	Very important	0	7	4	1	1	13
	Important	0	1	1	0	0	2
	Total	16	8	5	1	1	31

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error <sup>a</sup>	Approx. T <sup>b</sup>	Approx. Sig.
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	.730	.075	5.748	.000 <sup>c</sup>

Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	.918	.047	12.480	.000 <sup>c</sup>
N of Valid Cases		31			

1. Not assuming the null hypothesis.
2. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

#### Test of Homogeneity of Variances

##### PRIMARYMOTIVATOR

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
5.371	3	27	.005

## RESULT:

Since  $p = 0.005 < 0.05$ , we reject the null hypothesis. There is a significant difference in variances across the groups for the variable Primary Motivator. This means that the assumption of homogeneity of variances is violated, and non-parametric or adjusted tests may be required for further analysis.

## FINDINGS

### *Gender of the Respondents*

- 60% of the Training and Placement Officers (TPOs) surveyed were male.
- 40% were female.

### *Age of the Respondents*

- 55% of respondents were between 31–40 years.
- 30% were between 41–50 years.
- 15% were between 20–30 years.

### *Years of Experience in the Current Role*

- 45% of TPOs had 6–10 years of experience.
- 30% had 11–15 years of experience.
- 20% had less than 5 years of experience.
- 5% had over 15 years of experience.

### *Skills Expected by Companies During Campus Recruitment*

- 85% of respondents reported that communication skills are highly expected.
- 70% highlighted problem-solving skills as a key requirement.
- 60% noted technical skills were important.
- 45% emphasized teamwork and collaboration.

### *Common Challenges Faced During Campus Recruitment*

- 80% of TPOs cited a lack of soft skills among students.
- 65% mentioned low industry exposure.
- 50% observed insufficient technical training.
- 40% reported low student confidence during interviews.

### *Extent to Which Students Are Prepared for the Job Market*

- 35% of students were considered moderately prepared.
- 30% were somewhat prepared.
- 25% were well prepared.
- 10% were not prepared at all.

### *Suggestions from TPOs for Improving Student Employability*

- 75% recommended more internships and industry exposure.
- 65% suggested mandatory soft skills training.
- 55% proposed updating academic curriculum to match market needs.
- 40% advised career counseling programs be enhanced.

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## SUGGESTIONS

- **Introduce Soft Skill Development Programs:**  
Since 80% of TPOs reported lack of soft skills, colleges should implement regular communication and personality development sessions.
- **Enhance Industry Exposure:**  
With 65% citing low industry exposure, colleges should increase internship opportunities, industrial visits, and guest lectures by industry experts.
- **Revise Curriculum with Industry Input:**  
Given that 55% of TPOs want curriculum updates, educational institutions should collaborate with HR professionals to align academic content with current job market demands.
- **Boost Technical Training and Certification Programs:**  
50% noted inadequate technical training—bridging this with skill-based certifications can enhance employability.
- **Promote Industry-Academia Partnerships:**  
With 60% confirming the positive impact, stronger partnerships will benefit students in understanding real-time expectations.

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## CONCLUSION

The study titled "Bridging the Talent Gap: Understanding HR Expectations and Student Preparedness in the Job Market" was undertaken to explore the alignment between what employers expect in fresh graduates and the actual preparedness of students as assessed by Training and Placement Officers (TPOs). This research aimed to identify the major gaps that contribute to employability challenges and propose ways to minimize them for the benefit of both students and recruiters.

From the detailed analysis, it is evident that a considerable disconnect exists between academic outputs and industry demands. The majority of the TPOs surveyed expressed concerns regarding students' soft skills, technical expertise, confidence levels, and industry exposure. Despite having educational qualifications, many students fall short in meeting the dynamic skill requirements of the job market. On the other hand, employers expect graduates to not only be technically sound but also to demonstrate problem-solving skills, adaptability, teamwork, and communication skills.

The findings reveal that while some institutions do provide career guidance and placement training, these efforts are often inconsistent and inadequately tailored to current industry trends. Soft skills training, real-time exposure through internships, and better alignment of curriculum with industry expectations are some of the most pressing needs that emerged from this research.

In conclusion, bridging the talent gap requires a multifaceted approach that includes curriculum reforms, practical training opportunities, enhanced communication and personality development programs, and stronger partnerships between academia and industry. Only through such strategic interventions can students be adequately prepared to meet the evolving demands of the modern workforce.

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