

Pathways to Crossroads, the Challenges in Formulating Institutional Employability Platforms for Rural Graduates in the Post COVID Era

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Abstract:- This paper discusses issues related to Graduate employability and unemployment or underemployment are the key areas of discussions confronting not only urban higher education Institutions, but also social and political debates in contemporary law makers. Despite the rapid socio-economic developments coming out of the ground-breaking technologies worldwide, the COVID 19 outbreak snowballed into an unemployment crisis that resulted into a serious global economic downturn.

This paper is an attempt to examine the complex issue of graduate employability and employment in the wake of the Poor economic growth across India even before the COVID-19 crisis and then re-examines its impact in the post pandemic era. Some of the key issues related to student transition from education to work is an area of concern for Universities, Campus Recruiters and institutional placement managers. Karnataka's unemployment rate increased to 29.8% according to a survey conducted by CMIE in April 2020. This is done by CMIE frequently to update governments on tracking jobs in India especially in the informal sector. As a result, the high frequency indicators like the CMIE Unemployment Survey trends are generally used as an indicator for evaluating the effectiveness of the labour market. The survey by CMIE had a sample size of 43,600 respondents every month which are distributed geographically across urban and rural areas.

This paper explores graduate employment issues confronting the rural population of rural Karnataka and Regions that are the key contributors to our educational set up in Bidadi. To prepare the students to be adaptive to a rapid new normal and depleting economic resources in households generated from the unprecedented global COVID-19 crisis, higher education institutions must search for far more innovative approaches to prepare these students from a semi agrarian and semi-literate parentage to cope up with uncertain futures. More research can throw light on understanding the graduate employment that now are beyond the conventional pathways established by Colleges as the youth head into cross roads. This paper dwells on the volatility of employment, vulnerabilities of institutions and the need for a holistic approach for understanding the scope of a Placement officers' role who is also may be heading into this deadly mix as we witness an institution's established "campus to corporate" programs at the cross roads in the post COVID era.

Key Words: *Rural graduates, Employment index, strategy, placements, Livelihoods, COVID-19*

1. INTRODUCTION

According to a survey by Azim Premji Foundation, 7 out of 10 employees lost employment during the COVID induced Lockdowns in Just Karnataka, and that is the lowest across the country compared to the national ratio. This translates to 72% of job losses.

In this scenario, the industry outlook for hiring trends for freshers or graduating students was in the spotlight for all Placement Heads of Professional colleges who rely on volume or bulk hiring by companies every year.

In my last survey dating back to November 2019, I researched on Evaluating, Monitoring and recommending optimum programs for Institutions having a placement cell and involved in rolling out Campus to corporate programs. With an unprecedented global pandemic that shook up the world and forced the industry to shut down, new dynamics of Demand and supply of Products, services, Human resources, wages, Labour laws and an entire shift in the economic activity of even the most developed nations.

Governments forayed into spending on relief and containing devastation loss of lives while economic policies had to take a back seat.

The Non-agricultural self-employed workers and wage workers who were still employed, witnessed two thirds of drop in wages. An exploitative, non-negotiable and uncertain workplace emerged.

2.REVISITING EMPLOYABILITY PLATFORMS

Recruiters and campus placement managers had to contend with evolving trends namely;

- 1.Recruitment freeze
2. Retrenchment of existing employees
3. Market correction of wages & salaries
4. Deferred payment of wages
5. New laws on work hours
6. Compensation plans for COVID relief
7. International travel policies
- 8.Campus Hiring freeze

3.USE CASES (GRADUATE & NGO'S ON GROUND)

- Azim Premji Foundation
- Lets Be the Change
- Rotary International

- Kunigal
- Mulbagilu
- Bidadi
- Ramanagara
- Kanakpura
- Maddur
- My Co Authors



Figure 1. Research report on graduate employability

4. THE CHALLENGES: INTUITATIONAL EMPLOYABILITY PLATFORMS

From an Institutional perspective, following trends impacted the Demand – supply cycle;

1. Enrolments
2. Reduced Revenue and fixed overheads
3. Faculty optimization strategies
4. Adoption of Online platforms for service delivery (Education)
5. Placement drives going online and into larger Pools (An Urban-Rural mix)

With a truncated and scattered academic delivery, the first liability was poor reach to the rural graduate. Compared to their urban counterparts these graduating students had to comprehend with:

1. Limited access to online learning platforms
2. Poor health infrastructure in local community
3. No access to Urban locations
4. Prolonged study from home depriving ILT based learning & placement readiness
5. Fear of travelling to work in urban areas even after being employed
6. Social Isolation due to illiteracy and superstitions leading to mental health issues
7. Lack of interaction with Industry Practitioners
8. Missed opportunity of a real time Internship of Summer projects
9. Dwindling finances of elders / breadwinners at home
10. Personal setbacks like loss of a close family member & finances

5. THE CHALLENGE 2: WOMEN GRADUATES ARE BEING LEFT BEHIND

India's economic recovery could be leaving out working women, particularly those in rural areas, new evidence indicates. Research by Ashwini Deshpande, professor of Economics at Ashoka University shows that by August 2020 most of those who had reported being employed pre-pandemic were back in work. But women's economic recovery lagged behind that of men.

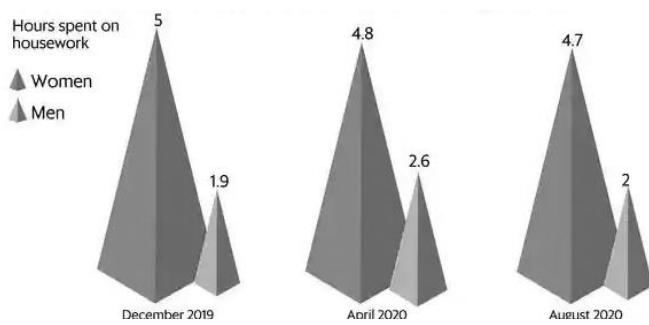


Figure 2. Women pushed to housework rather than exploring employment opportunities in the post covid era.

This was particularly true of rural women, research shows.

Women are also taking longer to re-enter the workforce after the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic last year, the study found, says a report

Women with no family household works appear to have had the best rebound in terms of employment while women with these commitments seem to have been the worst hit. Women with young children had the lowest employment levels immediately pre-covid, and they have been further hit by the pandemic.



Project “Every Student Counts”

Figure 3. An initiative of the Author to enable women graduates to pursue Higher education & Job opportunities.

While not representative of the working Indian woman on account of being well-off and in a white-collar job, Savitha A. is one such woman who quit her job at the end of July 2020 on account of the lack of childcare for her two-year-old twins. An engineer with a Bengaluru-based furniture website, Savitha and her husband relied on a live-in nanny, who returned to her native village in Tamil Nadu in May. "I was given a lot of time and leeway and work-from-home opportunities, but I just haven't been able to find reliable childcare, and I cannot work effectively with the twins around," she said.

Pandemic Hit Indian Women Harder With Higher Job Loss, Blurred Home Boundaries and Pay Cuts: an oxfam Report.

The Indian supplement of the report titled 'the Inequality Virus' said this was mostly because of women's work "being invisible".

Eighty-three per cent out of the women who could keep their jobs also faced a severe income drop, the report said, citing a survey by the Institute of Social Studies Trust.- The Mint

According to its report, 17 million women lost their job in April 2020. Therefore, unemployment for women rose by 15 per cent from a pre-lockdown level of 18 per cent. "This increase in unemployment of women can result in a loss to India's GDP of about 8 per cent or \$ 218 billion," it said, adding that women who were employed before the lockdown were also 23.5 percentage points less likely to be re-employed compared to men in the post-lockdown phase.

It mentions that since the pandemic, women's total time spent in both paid and unpaid activities had risen with the increase in the workload as a result of being stuck at homes. Before Covid-19, rural and urban women spent 373 minutes and 333 minutes per day respectively in paid and unpaid activities combined, the report said.

For men, relatively little has changed on this count. Both pre- and post-lockdowns, men with very young children remained the most likely to be employed. When the lockdown first hit in April 2020, their employment rates saw the biggest decline, Deshpande's panel data shows. But their employment rates have recovered since.- Bloomberg

To summarize, Karnataka's economy & labor market is enormous and the disruptions devastated livelihoods in rural populace while the focus of the state infrastructure was on the urban regions.

While large organizations had the resources to cope up by using new technologies, MSME's found it difficult to implement thus directly impacting recruitment of graduating students from campuses who were predominantly from the rural sectors.

As the world gradually grapples with the pandemic and perceived solace in the vaccinations rolled out, the emergence of Internet technologies have given these very MSME's a ray of hope to adapt and deliver global services paving the way to even out with their Large, Urban counter parts.

Professional institutions can be proactive in formulating innovative Employability platforms for the Rural Graduates in the Post COVID Era at their institutions. These can be;

1. Capitalize on the WFH policy of large MNC's for a few more years to come
2. Train these graduates on Online platforms used in a workplace environment
3. Partner / Collaborate with CSR teams and formulate strategies to educate & empower them
4. Formulate a hybrid teaching – Learning methodology to reduce overheads
5. Connect Financially weak students with Industry CSR teams / Government schemes
6. Train & employ graduates in Job roles suiting Local economies

7. Train Graduating students on the Gig economy and the new norms of work.

key design principles for highly goal-driven mobile applications, and also discuss the measurement of mobile usability (section 4).

6. CONCLUSION

It is with great pleasure I wish to put on record the valuable inputs of the Co Author PG Scholars here – Sandesh Kumar, Abhishek, Ajitha B and Chandana SG who brought me face to face with the graduate students from rural communities, their struggles aspirations and the will to make it big in life despite the worlds and India's in general biggest lockdown in history. Their anecdotes and real-life examples bring out a new inspiration in me to expand my knowledge of challenging our conventional placement programs so stereotyped to urban mentality in a city that never sleeps.

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