

Good University or Good Education

by Nadeem Rizvi

As a student, what matters most when it comes to getting a job is a debate as old as higher education itself. Does that higher degree get your foot in the door, or does your past work experience count for more, and beyond simply obtaining a job, will your experience or your education serve you better in terms of staying employed, growing in your career, and making a good living for decades to come? Does the degree with skills allow one to be self-employed or to be an entrepreneur?

All researches show that it's less about which college you go-to when it comes to professional success and personal happiness. Well-known universities can get upwards of 25,000 applicants for fewer than 3,000 spots. Many of these applicants have stellar SAT, GRE, and IELTS scores, are at the top of their high school classes and have taken honors, AP, and even college-level courses.

The value of work experience of any type is a great asset. If you're a recent graduate, your new degree may serve as evidence that you've acquired the skills necessary for an entry-level job in your chosen field. Prospective employers are likely to see you as someone who can get up to speed quickly, requiring little on-the-job training, which costs employers both time and money.

Any work experience that you've acquired along the way can help, too, whether it came in the form of an internship in your field or simply a job to pay the bills. As George D. Kuh noted in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, "research suggests that working during college is related to acquiring such employer-preferred skills as teamwork and time management." Such work, Kuh added, also "helps students see firsthand the practical value of their classroom learning by applying it in real-life settings-which, additionally, often helps to clarify their career aspirations.

On the other hand, if you obtained your degree 15 or 20 years ago, especially in a technological field, it is almost irrelevant now - at least as evidence of what you have to offer an employer today. You'll need to show potential employers that you've continued learning, kept up with industry trends, and acquired whatever new skills are required by the employer. Further education, such as participating in a relevant certificate program, can help as well.

It is being observed that in some cases employers prefer experience over education and that depends on the type of job and the hiring person's preferences. Surveys over the years point to most employers valuing higher education. However, the experience can also play a critical role in deciding who to give a job or promotion to while some professions demand a certain level of higher education as an entry requirement. Others, such as a job in sales, tend to value results and work experience more. The completion of a relevant course could be viewed by employers as the equivalent of actual work experience. If that course was highly regarded, it may even be valued higher than time spent in the field.

From country to country the academic culture and student preferences differ. For example, academically ahead, countries students do not prefer to study MBA in a university where the most preferred degrees are Post Graduate Diploma in Management (PGDM) and they are offered in Business schools. Millions seat for the Common Admission Test (CAT) and only a few thousands of students get admission.

Typical thinking of many youths of the subcontinent is “if you don’t have connections, you can’t get a job” or “approach anybody for referring to a job” or “when you get an interview call seeking someone who knows someone in that company” ... these are all wrong attitude and wrong approach.

Employers do not offer jobs to candidates because your uncle knows someone in the organization unless you are referred by a Minister or VVIP. Such fanatic efforts to search for connections are mostly suicidal as organizations reject candidates coming through referrals.

Employers will either interview you just as a formality if they have a VVIP referred candidate ready for employment or they, will recruit or reject you for what you are. A degree on your CV is not enough to get hired as in today’s world there are thousands of candidates applying for every single vacancy at any level and in any country.

Another mythical blunder as most create a CV or resume without a photograph. Each CV or resume must have a good photograph shot against a plain background in formalwear. Most graduates write in their CV that their Career Objective is to get a job where they can use their knowledge and skills while they either have no experience or little experience. They must understand that when the employer is looking for entry-level candidates, they expect them to learn first, get experienced, and then develop knowledge and skills for at least 5 years before they can aspire to contribute to the organization with their knowledge and skills. Most graduates have a CV or resume but they do not understand the difference, and most importantly they do not have a Cover Letter.

Universities and Professors do not teach them these basics as they are not part of the curriculum. The other fact is that most of them do not know these as they did not work in the corporate sector or the industry in a competitive and demanding environment.

Universities can improve graduate employability but there are strong discrepancies between the stakeholder groups (students, graduates, employers, higher education career development professionals, and educators) as to which strategies are the most important and effective to impart employability that is not rocket science but due to ignorance and not being serious they land up establishing a western type Success Center that can hardly help students.

Good education and a good Mentor will guide you through to get your first job offer and if you are already employed you will be coached and mentored to get a higher position on a higher salary package. In many countries, if your university or Business school does not offer you job placement students do not opt for admission to those institutions. That should be the norm in

every country because handing over a degree against a lot of money without a placement is neither mark of good university nor evidence of good education unless like some institutions who prepare the graduates in such a manner, they can easily get a job or can become self-employed or can be entrepreneurs. In other words, employability goes beyond job prospects. Employability also involves: Preparing students for lifelong career success. Teaching students the interpersonal and professional skills they need to succeed in their occupation. Ensuring students are “work-ready” as soon as they graduate.

Check if your university, its program, and your faculty members are offering you the required Knowledge and Understanding consisting of basic knowledge and understanding of the key program areas, concepts, principles, and theories, good critical knowledge and understanding of the complexity of specific areas of study, detailed knowledge and understanding of the specific area of study, and awareness of various conflicts, security and political risk and understanding of their impacts on the specific area of study?

Are your university, its program, and your faculty members offering you Subject-specific Skills so that you can select and use the different environmental factors needed for the success of the specific area of study, are you getting familiar with the specific area of study in existing cultures and political and economic systems in the country and internationally as well as the use of their elements for minimizing risks, are you able to develop the ability to minimize economic and systematic risks and develop appropriate global solutions to solve the specific area of study, and are you able to create a local and international strategy while taking into account the existing technical, economic and social context of the specific area of study?

Are your university, its program, and your faculty members offering you Thinking Skills consisting of the ability to apply their knowledge and understanding to the use of appropriate strategy for reaching the specific area of study which meets specified requirements, are you developing the ability to select and use relevant the specific area of study and to describe a solution at an abstract level, are you able to combine theory and practice to attend to the concerns in the specific area of study, and did you develop the ability to formulate an acceptable solution after an in-depth analysis of the problem, using ideas from different application areas in a cost-effective and time-efficient way?

Are your university, its program, and your faculty members offering you General and Transferable Skills (other skills relevant to employability and personal development), did you develop the ability to undertake literature searches and to use databases and other sources of information in the specific area of study, are you able to function effectively as an individual and as a member of a team in the specific area of study, did you develop the ability to communicate effectively with colleagues(potential) users and the general public about substantive issues and problems related to their chosen specialization; communication competence to present ideas and suggested solutions convincingly in written and verbal form, and do you recognize of the need for, engagement in life- long learning? If your answer on any of these is No then your university is not doing its job.

The six basic factors that lead to the foundation of developing employability skills are academic performance (AP), technical skills (TS), communication skills (CS), personality (PE), leadership & motivational skills (LMS); and teamwork & problem-solving skills (TPSS).

Employability skills are also often referred to as employment skills, soft skills, work-readiness skills, or foundational skills. They often improve your performance, minimize errors and promote collaboration with your coworkers, enabling you to perform your role more effectively.

So, every student and prospective graduate needs to focus on employability skills because you will learn in the classroom and will earn a degree anyway but without being equipped with the right attitude and employability skills it is not possible to have a successful professional career and a happy personal life.