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# NEXT STEP

## EDUCATION VS. EXPERIENCE

What should you value more?

Slowly but surely, as I approach the end of my undergraduate life, one thought occupies most of my time. What do I do once I graduate from university? Do I enter the job market immediately and focus on gathering as much experience as I can or do I go for higher education? Will further pursuance of higher education give me an edge in the job market or is that unnecessary? Then again, even if I choose to pursue higher education, should I just go for master's within the country or apply to foreign universities?



ILLUSTRATION: EHSANUR RAZA RONNY

The answers to all these questions are not easy to find, especially when there are many variables in play. Higher education and job experience can be compared to two tips of a scale. Comparing these two tips weighs more can be very tricky as there is no absolute metric to calculate the better option.

This debate of whether one should go for higher education or job experience after graduating is as old as higher education itself. Besides, there are so many prevalent arguments regarding this topic, which doesn't exactly make the decision-making any easier. Some of the main arguments are:

Argument 1: A higher degree guarantees a particular skill set which can be translated into work skills.

Argument 2: Success in hands-on work is more valuable than success in higher education.

Argument 3: Work experience doesn't necessarily provide the exact set of skills needed for the future jobs that you will have.

Argument 4: Higher education only enables success in academia and not necessarily in the real job environment.

The actual reality of the education vs. experience debate is that no single argu-

ment can cover all the potential situations of a fresh graduate who is weighing his/her options of choosing one over the other.

In an ideal scenario without the either/or dilemma, a candidate would be able to show both tertiary degree and work experience which would equip him/her to perform better in the sought-after job. This optimal combination would require taking a slower route through the journey of tertiary education, in order to have time available for employment. This will help people to see the firsthand value of their educational applications in the real-life scenario. But to what extent are people successful in implementing this ideal case in their practical lives?

On one hand, a lot of focus graduates want to jump right into the job market and climb up the career ladder as fast as they can because this is when they have a lot of energy to gather up practical work skills. In the highly growing and competitive job market, where everything moves at a fast pace, they don't want to be left behind. On the other hand, another group of graduates believes that higher education will give them better knowledge regarding relevant jobs before they actually enter the job market, which will

improve their performance through better understanding.

In reality, there are a lot of variables at work.

The timing matters. The time needed to obtain the degree and for certain disciplines, the time during which the degree is being pursued should be taken into account. A degree obtained in the technological field might become obsolete without accumulation of relevant work experience. Things change rapidly in this field and it is necessary to keep up with the trends.

The field of work matters. Someone who is planning to acquire a higher degree should take into account the actual line of work they are going to work in. Some lines of work might demand higher education, whereas others may demand a level of job expertise that a degree won't suffice.

There is another way one can decide which to choose and that is to look at the numbers. According to the National Bureau of Labor Statistics, tertiary education pays in higher earnings but up to a certain point. A master's degree gets you more money than a bachelor's degree but a doctoral degree, which is the highest point of education attainment gets you less money than a professional degree.

Abreshmee Haque, brand manager at

a multinational FMCG company said, "For a global career, a degree from abroad is helpful. However, in most companies of the country, on-the-job learning opportunities are great where you get to learn everything that's needed specific to your role." Rashed Kabir, who is doing his undergrad in Pharmacology at the University of Manchester said he had to do a placement year at a pharmaceutical company in Germany last year and he preferred it more than studying. Arshia Haque, studying in DevLAB at Oulu University of Applied Sciences said, "People should go for higher education if they want to have extensive research based knowledge on a particular field. Reasons to have a job right away would be to build up the career profile which brings a lot of stability as well."

In the end, the choice between job experience and higher education is very subjective and seems to be exclusive to the individual's circumstances. The final decision should be taken after proper consideration of all relevant variables and trade-offs.

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### THE BOSSMAN

BY E. RAZA RONNY



## Focus group discussions

And how to ace them

Most people know focus group discussions (FGDs) as research tools, but they've become an integral step in assessment centers, recruitment tests, as well as business competitions. During FGDs, the participants are given a brief, and then asked to come up with a feasible solution to the highlighted issue by having a discussion amongst each other.

FGDs give you a glimpse of both the participant's knowledge and how they are likely to fare in a discussion with diverse individuals.

According to Rawnak Zaheen Wasi, Global Graduate-Human Resource at BAT, "These sort of discussions are frequent in everyday corporate environment, where you have to deal with a wide variety of stakeholders. FGDs try to gauge how you would behave in such an environment by identifying your key personality traits, negotiation approach and technical acumen, among other things. Most importantly it looks at whether you can drive decision-making within a time bound environment and persuade others logically and rationally to accept your viewpoint."

So rather than testing some specific technical knowledge, these discussions are aimed at looking at your ability to team up with others who wouldn't typically or easily agree with you. It's a good measure of your actual ability, since it's hard to fake or specifically prepare for, allowing authenticity in results.

**DO'S**

Understand the brief  
It's crucial that you read the brief carefully, and understand what is required. Diligently note down important details, because it will come in handy when you're trying

to persuade the group to agree with your opinions and combat opposing ones.

**Be attentive**

Talk about and defend your statements, but also listen to what the others have to say. Engage with them, and use your own reasoning to show how you agree or disagree with their points.

**Be bold**

A lot of brilliant people don't do well in FGDs because they are afraid of being wrong or being judged by the others, and thus don't speak out. So, don't waste the opportu-

the team towards that central purpose or goal.

**DON'TS**

**Be rude**

Don't shout, don't be unnecessarily aggressive. Be politely assertive. Don't interrupt or cut off others while they are speaking. Keep adequate space and opportunity for everyone to feel connected and included in the decision making. A lot of people try to impress the judges by staying fixed on their opinion, without really listening to others. This is a big no-no.



nity, express your views, and defend them.

**Collaborate**

FGDs aren't just about loudly expressing why you're right, it also shows your leadership and teamwork abilities. So, try to find out who is great at doing what within the team, and make sure people are playing to their strengths. Use the creative person to push in disruptive ideas, use the numbers guy to see if the solutions are financially feasible. Try and identify what the team must achieve, and try to align

Stand out negatively:

Don't try to play smart by repeating previously uttered smart ideas using different synonyms or loudly exclaiming buzzwords or directional statements. People who are judging your FGD have judged hundreds before. They know exactly what you are doing.

TASHFIA MAMUN

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## Making a DIFFERENCE

Bangladesh is rapidly moving towards middle income status by 2021. Our businesses definitely offer immense opportunities for the growing economy and this diversity needs a stage for the stories untold. See Bangladesh make its mark on the global map as Making a Difference brings you our proudest success stories from across the country.

### WHY THE MASTER'S DEGREE IS THRIVING

#### IT'S THE NEW ENTRY CREDENTIAL

Many jobs that previously required the bachelor degree as minimum credentials, now require a master's degree instead. Hence, even if credentials are unnecessarily inflated, it practically makes sense to pursue a master's degree.

#### IT CONVEYS A WAGE PREMIUM

In the US, there exists a wage premium of roughly \$12,000 for those with a master's degree over those who only have a bachelor's degree. The size of the premium depends on the nature of the job. Jobs with more premium feature higher enrolment.

#### IT APPEALS TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Local communities almost always prefer employees with master's degrees. As such, they are willing to fund the employees' education costs or at least subsidise parts of it. Reputed master's programs are considered to be assets to the company.

#### IT'S A CASH COW

Universities are usually constrained by limits placed on fees for bachelor's programs. However, these limits often don't exist for master's programs. This explains the scale at which these programs are expanding from the institutions' perspectives.

Source: Forbes

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