

## CAREER

# Are fresh graduates prepared for THE JOB MARKET?

NUZHAT HASSAN CHOWDHURY

*Who cares if you went to a public or private university? We are all going to be unemployed in the end anyway.*

All graduates-to-be have laughed at this statement at some point of their student lives. However, the joke loses its humour once their academic career comes to an end.

According to UNICEF, the quality of education in Bangladesh and its relevance for the labour market is sub-optimal. The employability of fresh graduates remains a pressing concern for both students and employers alike. The only party that does not seem particularly concerned are the universities responsible for preparing their students for the job market.

Skills considered essential for most corporate jobs, such as proficiency in MS Office Suite, or visualisation software like Tableau and Power BI are left out of the curriculum by most institutions. However, rote memorisation of facts in general education courses has somehow found its place on the syllabus.

Although there is no harm in taking courses that are not directly relevant to one's major for the sake of broadening horizons, we cannot justify doing so at the expense of learning crucial skills required for favourable career prospects.

Moreover, timely updates in the curriculum are essential considering the competition is now more cut-throat than ever before due to the rising number of graduates and the consistent lack of job opportunities.

"I had to take a lot of courses that did not really need to be a part of the curriculum.

This includes a beginner level

English course, the contents of which I had already covered back when I was eleven. I personally don't think my university prepared me for the job market. I learned all the important skills required for a corporate job after I graduated," says Shoaib Rahman\*, a business analyst at a renowned software development company.

"During my very first job assessment, they gave me a basic Excel test to evaluate my skills. I was only able to complete it as I had done an Excel course on Coursera. Upon speaking to the other candidates, I realised many of them were unable to complete it as they never learned this in university. It would be helpful if my university would omit irrelevant lab courses like Environmental Science and Psychology, and add Excel and PowerPoint labs to the curriculum," he added.

Learning theories in class is important as it can build the foundation required for a deep understanding of relevant concepts. However, there will always be a gap between classroom learning and real-world practice. The answer does not lie in ignoring key practical skills and only focusing on the theory, or vice-versa, since earning a high CGPA without being considered employable by recruiters does not serve the purpose for most graduates.

There needs to be a balance between the two so that students can utilise their knowledge and skills to adapt effectively in real-world scenarios. The integration of theory and practice not only enhances students' ability to grasp new concepts, but also prepares them to tackle the complex demands of the current job market.

This is not to say that students hold no responsibility in this and should solely rely on their universities to gain a competitive edge in the job market. However, involvement of higher education institutions in ensuring the employability of their students by timely updating the curriculum and offering opportunities to gain experience plays an integral role in their career trajectory.

Although employers look for talented candidates, they are often not willing to invest in new talent that may need to overcome a learning curve. Looking for fresh graduates with a couple years of relevant experience is unrealistic.

"I worked hard as a student and secured a good CGPA as I naively thought this will help me land a good job. I was extremely disappointed when I realised a lot of companies were asking for one to two years of experience or a Master's degree for entry level jobs. I am glad to have joined a company that does train fresh graduates without experience, but most Bangladeshi companies are not willing to do so," says Samira Hanif\*, a product analyst at a fin-tech company.

Ultimately, addressing the disconnect between academic training and job market requirements is essential for improving employability among graduates. Universities must prioritise curriculum updates and practical skill development to prepare students for real-world challenges. The commitment of educational institutions to provide relevant and timely education is vital for our youths' successful career outcomes.

*\*Names have been changed for privacy upon request*

*Nuzhat Hassan Chowdhury is an associate business analyst and a writer.*



ILLUSTRATION: ORCHID CHAKMA