

# A Study of Job and Work Performance of Higher Education Sector in India

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## Abstract

The moments in which employees attach themselves with their work roles are called as the moments of engagement (Kahn, 1992). The number of higher educational institutions is rapidly growing in India to cater to the increasing demand for advanced studies (KPMG, 2014). As a result, Indian academia is facing the challenge of keeping academics engaged so that academics can happily and efficiently perform a larger role. So, this study examines the influence of job resources on engagement along with how the interaction among job resources and perceived autonomy impacts performance in service delivery. We also examine the mediating role of work engagement between the job resources and service employee performance relationship. Two hundred sixty one academics elected from different Indian universities were asked to rate themselves on the support, autonomy and engagement scales. Further, 261 students were asked to rate the performance of these academics. Structural equation modeling was used to test the formulated hypotheses. The results suggest that work engagement mediates the relationship between supervisory support and service employee performance. Moreover, perceived autonomy moderates relationship between co-worker support and work engagement relationship. These findings extend the theoretical understanding of engagement enhancing the performance in service delivery as reflected in the feedback from students. Results also urge universities to make policies that enhance coworker and supervisory support which can create a culture of co-operation. Certain limitations and future research directions of this study have also been discussed in greater detail.

**Keywords:** Academics, Co-Worker Support, Employee Performance, Higher Education, India, Job Resources, Perceived Autonomy.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

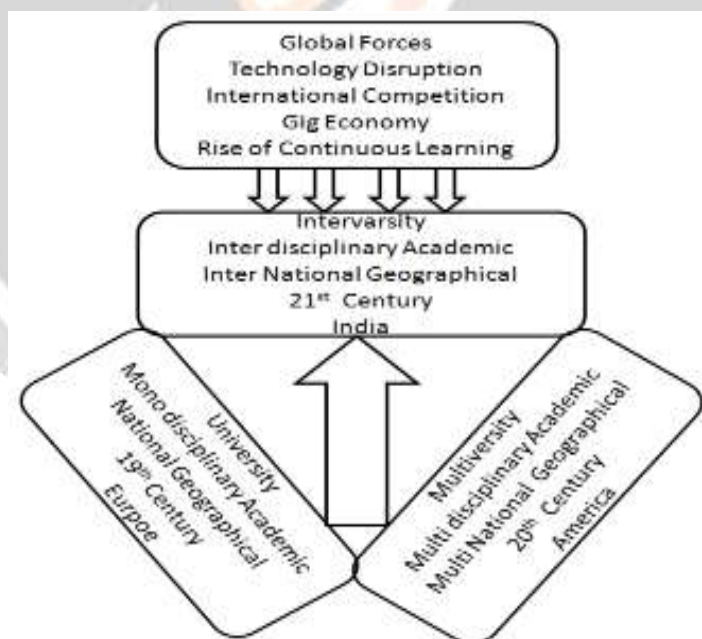
In the era of globalization when going abroad for studies is affordable for many Indians, universities in India are increasingly facing intense competition from the foreign universities. Given the fact that as many as 350,000 is the estimated short fall in the Indian universities' faculty members in 2015 (KPMG, 2014), almost eight lakh Indian students spent more than INR 100billion on studies abroad (ASSOCHAM, 2012) in the year 2012-13 alone. In order to cope-up with such a shortage of supply and competitive environment, the universities are devising new ways and means to attract and retain faculties and are increasingly following the philosophy of "academic capitalism". According to this philosophy, academia functions like a profit-oriented firm in that, students are the customers, employees are academics and the employer is the management of the university (Rhoades & Slaughter, 2004). This trend of academic capitalism in India is new and shocking to its critiques because it can make not so rich non-profit organizations devoid of quality faculty. Nevertheless, researchers argue that the remedy lies in the concept of work engagement as it advocates that motivation is not restricted to monetary benefits only. Employee engagement is the sum of meaningfulness, safety and availability which an engaged employee experiences within a holistic appraisal of their wellbeing en route to bringing their full selves into work (Khan, 1990).

Employee engagement is the steps taken by organizations to manage their workforce, rather than a psychological state experienced by employees in the performance of their work (Truss et al., 2012). Employee engagement is a very powerful factor used to measure the company's vigor and direction towards superior performance (Mokaya&Kipyegon, 2014). Employee engagement is the main focus of both business entrepreneurs and academic researchers (Mokaya&Kipyegon, 2014). If companies want to gain competitive advantage then employee engagement is the most useful tool for achieving it (Baumruk, 2004).

Employee engagement is concerned with creating expectation for employees to attach with their superiors, coworkers and the company in which they are working (Mokaya&Kipyegon, 2014). Employee engagement is associated positively with customer loyalty, productivity, profitability and customer satisfaction, and associated negatively to employee turnover (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). A study conducted by Perrin (2008) showed that companies that hired highly engaged employees had a better spread in their operating and net margin compared to companies that hired highly disengaged employees. In spite of its theoretical and managerial consequences, engagement of service employee has received very less empirical examination in the literature of work engagement. In the current study, we have used the Job Demand-Resources model (Ashill& Rod, 2011; Babakus, Yavas, & Ashill, 2009) to establish and test a conceptual model that explains how employees who get support from management provide better performance.

## 2. INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

The Indian higher education system is huge and complex with the presence of different types of universities and colleges. As per the annual All India survey of higher education (AISHE, 2018), there are totally 49964 institutions categorized as 903 universities, 10011 stand alone institutions and 39050 colleges. The total Enrollment of higher education is 36.6 million students with Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) of 25.8 %. The undergraduate programme (29.06 million) has high intake with distributed enrollment in each faculty of discipline as arts & humanities (36.4%), science (17.1%) followed by equal share in Engineering & Commerce (14.1%). The GER of higher secondary schools is 62.5 % with approximate enrollment of 13.5 million students per year. The country is expected to meet higher education GER as 30% by 2020, with the accounted growth of 7% in the last decade. Still there will be a huge qualified higher secondary school student, will find difficulty in higher education access (Sharma, 2018). The current tertiary education enrollment will get expanded five times in the coming years and expect the expansion of institutional capacity with three times (—India's Education Policy, 2018). The expectations are to minimize the present challenges and divert them as opportunities during such multifold expansion.



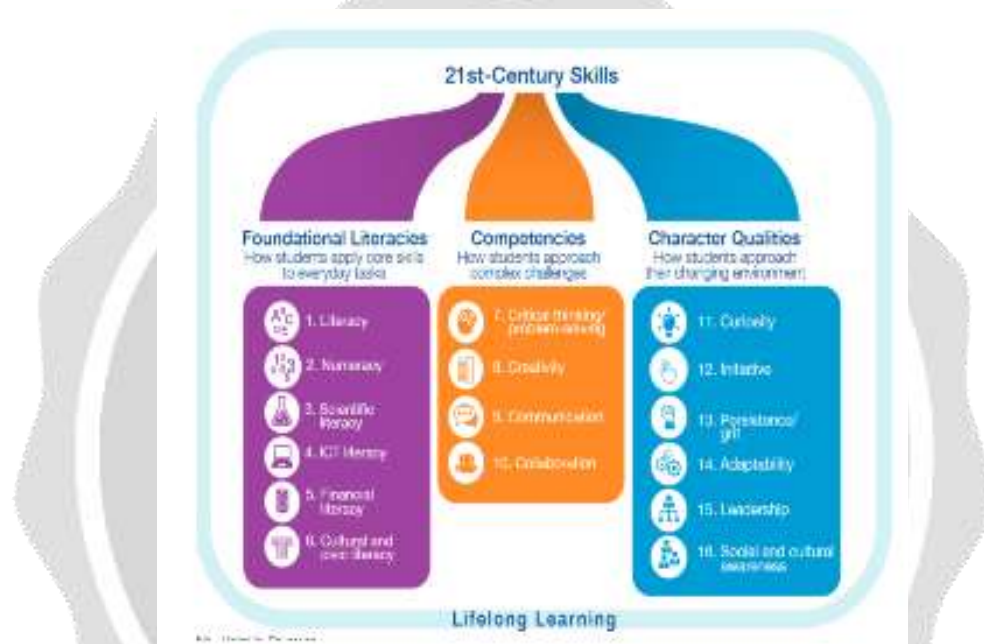
**Fig 1 The predicted peak of Indian Higher education in 21st century (Source: Indo Genius, 2012)**

The number of colleges and universities in rural area is 60.48 % and 47 % respectively. However, there is a large disparity in enrollment ratio between rural and urban population. The dropouts are high in rural population due to family circumstances and lack of support. Most of the rural institutions are also failed to impart quality higher education due to faculty shortage, poor infrastructure and limited funding. There is also a wide disparity in gender and community distribution of rural and urban. As per the human development index

report (2018), the country move upward towards education. However, the women empowerment to be highly concentrated as there is a sluggish improvement in gender development index. Also, there is a need of improving public expenditure on socioeconomic development including education sector. The reservation policies improve the community participation; still it requires additional attention to achieve inclusive growth.

### 3. SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The detailed study on —Skilling India, No time to Loss! (2018) estimated that from year 2022, every month nearly 1.25 million Indian workers (Age 15-29) will newly join the workforce. The automation of industry using artificial intelligence and robotics make many jobs as vulnerable and redundant. The global gig economy will require a sophisticated workers and innovators to meet short duration jobs with technologically advanced skill sets (Wadhawan, 2018). The lack of stability in career progression will have deep implication on higher education, where the large number of manpower to be trained with 21st century economy skill (see Figure 2).



**Fig 2. Twenty First century economy skill (source : World Economic Forum, 2015)**

As the Indian economy needs much more skilled workforce than ever, it is crucial to connect skills and higher education that are relevant to aspirations of the society (Future of Jobs, 2016). The boom in information technology increased the demand for technical courses in the last few decades. However, the trend is changing, leaving unfilled vacancies in technical education due to supply-demand ratio and poor employability of qualifying students. The gig economy industry expects blend of domain knowledge in science, technology, social science, analytics and finance as no discipline is self-contained (—New Vision for Education, 2015). The renowned institutions around the world offer flexible choice based interdisciplinary courses. The Indian institutions are also gearing towards inter-disciplinary experiential active learning (IDEAL), where candidates can design their own curriculum of choice with majors, minors and specialization as shown in Fig 3. The graduates are provided with bundle of industry ready skills through industry and university collaborations. The adoption of interdisciplinary approach in SRMIST as given in Fig. 4.



Fig 3. The inter-disciplinary curriculum to face gig economy challenges

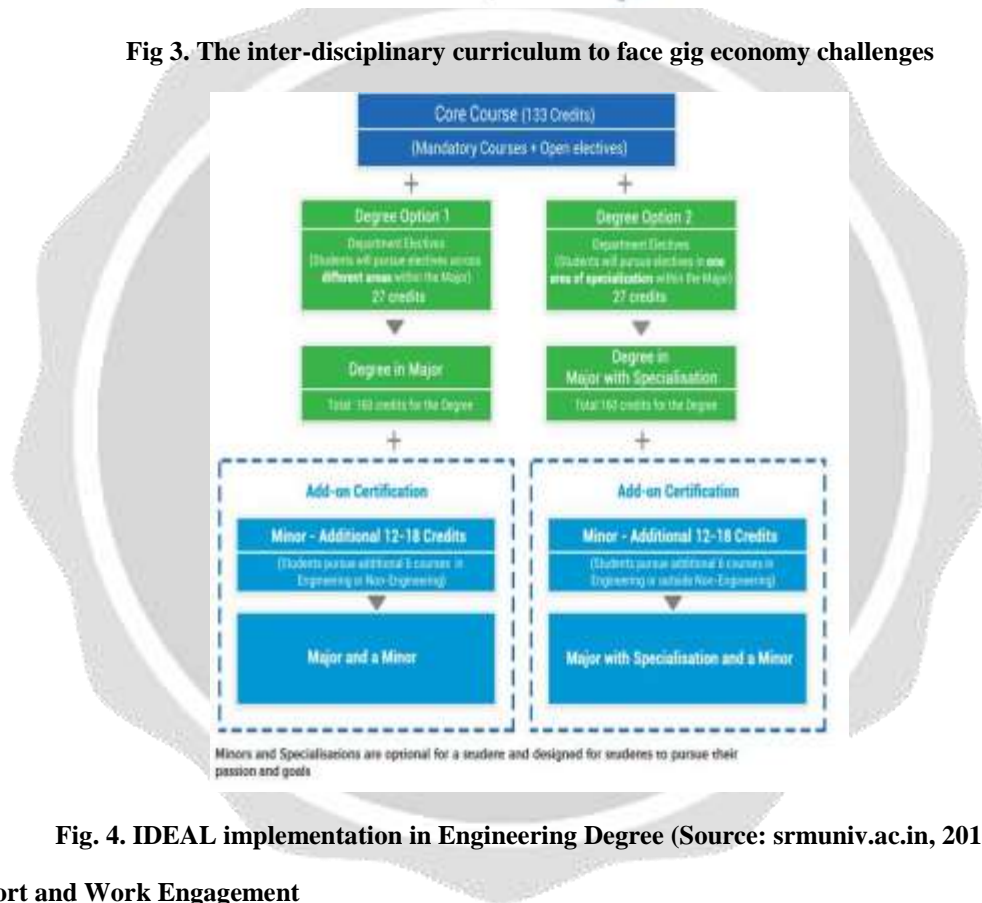


Fig. 4. IDEAL implementation in Engineering Degree (Source: srmuniv.ac.in, 2018)

### Support and Work Engagement

Coworker support is the help which the employees believe they will get from their fellow workers so that they are able to perform their job in an efficient way (Susskind, Kacmar, & Borchgrevink, 2003). The help which the coworkers provide to the employees is very important since they not only help in performing the job but also they activate their self-esteem, and boost their moral (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). The support which they receive has the motivational potential and enhances employees' feelings of, absorption, dedication, and vigor (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2008). Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis: Hypothesis 1 (H1): Coworkers support is positively related to engagement. Engagement has been defined as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002, p. 74). A service employee who is spirited, keen and excited is termed as a person who is engaged to his or her work and disengaged person is one who is indifferent, mechanical, alienated and withdrawn from his or her job (Gupta & Kumar, in press; Salanova, Agut, & Peiro, 2005). Vigor



refers to eagerness to expend effort and energy in one's work and to be buoyant and perpetual when faced with difficulties. Dedication means a sense of devotion, dignity, motivation and daring (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Absorption refers to being fully engrossed and satisfied with one's work in such a way that time passes quickly and finding it difficult to detach oneself from work (Salanova et al., 2005). Previous research has envisioned the notion of engagement from job satisfaction and job. In fact, Rich et al. (2010) have shown that engagement affects task performance positively even after controlling for job involvement, job satisfaction, and intrinsic motivation.

### **Work Engagement and Service Employee Performance**

When employees are more engaged in their work, they will find their work to be easier and interesting rather than challenging and will be more committed, robust and absorbed in their jobs (Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010). This will lead employees to think in a positive manner and will help them in serving their customers well (Harter et al., 2002). In a study by Sonnentag (2003), it was found that engagement influences in-role behavior, proactive behavior and also organizational citizen behavior. This shows that employees who are engaged will have a broader perspective of their role and will reach out to broader set of activities in their jobs. This implies that, engagement will have a positive effect on how employees perform their duties, including offering superior assistance to customers. Engagement is positively related to important business performance consequences like customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, positive word of mouth, profitability, and increased market share (Schneider, Macey, Lee, & Young, 2009). We expect engaged employees to be helpful, observant to customer problems, timely delivery and will recommend products which best meets customer requirements. Hypothesis 3 (H3): Work engagement is positively related to customers' evaluation of service employee performance

### **Mediating Role of Engagement**

As observed in the previous discussion, H1, H2 and H3 indicate that engagement should mediate the relationship between (a) supervisor support and employee performance and (b) coworker support and employee performance (Menguc et al., 2012). Thus, we explore engagement as a mediator because resources like coworker support and supervisor support are important concepts from the point of view of the customer. That is, customers will not be able to appraise how the service employees are treating them based on the resources that employees receive from their managers. The resources which they receive are too distant from employee-customer interactions to be predictors of performance by service employee. Hence concluding performance based on resources will be inefficient unless the resource provides impetus for greater levels of employee engagement. Hence, we state that engagement is a proximal construct that reflects how employees feel about the resources they receive, and influences employee performance.

## **4. RECENT GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES**

Government policies have a direct and broad effect on institutions. Many of the recent initiatives in policy and implementation mark a transition in the field, though there is a long way to go.

- The annual web based AISHE covers data collection on domestic/ international enrollment, programmes offered, teacher qualification / ratio, infrastructure and budget & finance. The survey helps to find out several educational indicators including GER and gender parity and institution density and serve as base for educational reforms.
- The Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) focuses un-served areas to promote access, equity and quality mass education.
- UGC has initiated to offer online courses leading to the award of degree and diploma to improve the country's GER. The institutions are recommended to introduce skill based curriculum, entrepreneurship training and startup initiatives.
- The Unnath bharathabhiyan focuses on transforming higher education innovations in rural development and to help inclusive growth.

- The mandate of Ph.D qualification, compulsory one month induction of newly recruited faculty, annual refresher programme using MOOC platform, career advancement scheme using academic performance indicators, international collaborations through global initiative of academic networks (GYAN) and several other schemes are expected to improve the teachers and teaching quality.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The presence of India in the global map has a reasonable visibility; however, the country is in the transit state to meet the target and expectations of everyone. The recent government initiatives are welcomed but to be geared at accelerated rate in implementation. There has been a significant and consistent worldwide reform in higher education. India's ability to emerge as a globally competitive country will substantially depend on its knowledge human capital. The presence of vast challenges insists to carefully choose the proven strategies that lead to real and lasting results for success pathway. The study of rapid change in global requirements, issues and opportunities of higher education in India would help us to take necessary steps to face modern, competitive economy. This shall ensure a strong hold of Indians in the global market and make our country to be a developed nation in a short span of time. With strong foundations from government, public, private and international (GPPI) supports, the five pillars supporting the youth empowerment – Education, Excellence, Employment, Entrepreneurship and Export- shall be constructed upon leading to strong nation building in the decades to come.

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