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Academic Knowledge vs. Market Skills: Understanding Youth Employment Challenges

Tribhuwan Singh Rana[1], Dr Seema Priya[2]

[1]Research Scholar, Department of sociology, Govt Degree College Shitlakhet, Uttarakhand.
[2]Assistant Professor, Department of sociology, Govt Degree College Shitlakhet, Uttarakhand.

Abstract

Educated unemployment has become a serious socio-economic concern in India, especially among students pursuing non-professional university courses. Although India possesses a strong demographic advantage as one of the youngest countries in the world, the widening gap between academic education and labour market expectations has increased employment challenges for graduates. This study explores students' perceptions regarding the alignment between the university curriculum and current job market requirements, focusing on B.A., B.Com., and B.Sc. students at SSJ Campus, Almora. Using a descriptive research design, primary data were collected from 80 respondents through a structured questionnaire addressing curriculum relevance, skill acquisition, practical exposure, and career preparedness.

The results indicate a clear disconnect between academic learning and employability outcomes. A large proportion of students expressed dissatisfaction with both the quality and relevance of their education, pointing out the heavy focus on theoretical instruction rather than practical application. Most participants reported the absence of internships, industry-linked projects, hands-on training, and organized skill development initiatives. Considerable deficiencies were also observed in essential career skills such as CV writing, use of professional networking platforms, and understanding of current job trends. Furthermore, many students lacked confidence about securing employment after graduation and expressed a preference for pursuing higher education due to limited job prospects.

The study concludes that shortcomings in curriculum structure, weak industry-academia linkages, and insufficient emphasis on skill-based education significantly contribute to the problem of educated unemployment. It emphasizes the urgent need for curriculum restructuring, inclusion of experiential learning, promotion of entrepreneurship, enhancement of digital competencies, and stronger institutional career support systems to effectively bridge the divide between higher education and labour market demands.

Keyword: Educated Unemployment, Employability, Curriculum Relevance, University Curriculum, Skill Development, Youth Unemployment.

Introduction

Unemployment is a major issue faced by countries worldwide, regardless of their economic status. It refers to a situation where individuals who are willing and able to work at the prevailing wage rate are unable to find employment. Unemployment affects not only low-skilled workers but also skilled individuals who may remain jobless for long periods. Economists use different criteria to define unemployment, with some considering a person unemployed if they cannot obtain even a short period of work (Unemployment:

Meaning, Causes, Effects and Remedial Measures, 2025). Education and employment are essential factors that influence individual lives and support national growth and development. In India, these areas are especially important because of the country's large population and the ambitions of its youth. However, India faces several challenges in preparing people with the skills and knowledge required for the job market (Mehta, 2023). India, with the world's largest youth population, has strong potential for economic growth, but increasing educated unemployment remains a major concern. Changing job demands and technological advancements have widened the gap between education and industry needs, making it difficult for many graduates to find suitable work. The emphasis on theoretical learning over practical skills has lowered employability and exposed structural weaknesses in the education and employment syste**m** (Chauhan, 2025). Youth unemployment in India remains a serious and widely discussed problem with limited progress toward a solution. Education is often viewed simply as completing school or college, but employment depends more on the quality of learning and skills acquired than on years of study. Much of the education system emphasizes rote learning rather than practical knowledge and skill development. As a result, millions of graduates and postgraduates remain unemployed, and nearly half of graduates are considered unfit for industry roles. Unemployment rates also tend to rise with higher levels of education, being lowest at the primary level and highest among graduates and postgraduate**s** (Shah, 2023).

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), individuals with a graduate degree in India are nearly nine times more likely to be unemployed than those with no formal education. This challenges the traditional belief that education guarantees stable employment (naveenika, 2025). Youth unemployment in India is largely caused by a mismatch between education and labour market needs. Many graduates possess degrees but lack practical and job-relevant skills, and only about half are considered employable. This mismatch includes overqualification, training in low-demand fields, and weak soft skills such as communication and problem-solving. Outdated, theory-based curricula and limited opportunities for internships or practical training further reduce job readiness. In addition, the quality of education varies widely across regions and institutions, with many rural and government schools facing poor infrastructure and teaching standards. Weak foundational learning and an emphasis on rote memorization leave many students academically qualified but lacking the skills required for modern employment (Bose, 2025). Despite producing many graduates each year, the unemployment rate among graduates (29.1% in 2023) is much higher than among uneducated people. This shows a mismatch between the education system and job market needs. Since only a small number of jobs are knowledge-based, many graduates work in low-paying sectors (POLICY, 2025). The workforce is mainly divided into agriculture, industry, and services, with agriculture employing the most people despite contributing the least to GDP. Instead of moving to better industrial jobs, many workers shift from agriculture to low-paid informal employment. A large number of rural and migrant workers depend on seasonal or casual labour, often travelling long distances for work. The informal sector continues to play a crucial role in India's economy (Dyvik, 20225). The **Future of Jobs Report 2025** suggests that while global job opportunities are expected to grow despite technological disruptions, India faces serious challenges due to structural weaknesses (Ramachandran, 2025)**.** While higher education is pursued because it is associated with better job opportunities and income, the economic returns from education have been gradually decreasing. An increasing number of educated young people are working in jobs below their qualification level, reflecting a growing imbalance between the supply of graduates and the availability of high-skilled jobs. In recent years, employment in agriculture and unpaid family work has risen, particularly among women and highly educated youth (Ravi Srivastava, 2024).

Research Methodology

1. Research Design:

The study adopted a descriptive research design to explore the perceived gaps between academic learning and employment demands among university students. This design helps in systematically assessing students' opinions and experiences regarding the relevance of their academic curriculum to job market requirements.

2. Study Area and Population:

The research was conducted at SSJ Campus, Almora, focusing on students enrolled in non-professional courses such as B. Com, B.A., and B.Sc. This population was selected because these courses are traditionally general in nature, and students often perceive a gap between academic knowledge and employability skills.

3. Sampling Technique and Sample Size:

A total of 100 students were selected randomly from the target population to participate in the study. Random sampling ensures that every student had an equal chance of being included, enhancing the representativeness of the data.

4. Data Collection Tool:

The study employed a structured questionnaire as the primary tool for data collection. The questionnaire was designed to capture students' perceptions of:

1. The relevance of academic learning to employment opportunities.
2. Skills acquired through their courses.
3. Challenges faced in meeting job market expectations.

5. Data Collection Procedure:

Data was collected through self-administered questionnaires, with respondents completing them individually under the guidance of the researcher. Adequate instructions were provided to ensure clarity and accuracy in responses.

Objective:

To examine students' perceptions of how well the university curriculum aligns with current job market requirements.

To assess the effectiveness of academic programmes in developing key skills such as subject knowledge, communication, problem-solving, teamwork, and digital literacy.

Are you a first-generation university student?

S No	Response format	No of Students	Percentage
1	Yes	24	30
2	No	56	70
	Total	80	100

Table 1, the data clearly indicates that a majority of the surveyed students are not first-generation university attendees. Out of the 80 respondents, 70% reported that their parents had also accessed higher education, suggesting the presence of educational continuity within families. In contrast, only 30% of the students can be categorized as first-generation university learners, reflecting a relatively smaller proportion of students who are breaking new ground in accessing higher education. This distribution

highlights how parental educational background continues to play a significant role in shaping students' access to and participation in university-level education.

Have you ever worked part time or interned during your studies.

S No	Response format	No of Students	Percentage
1	Yes	13	16.25
2	No	67	83.75
	Total	80	100

Table 2 reveals that, due to the limited availability of part-time employment opportunities in hilly areas, the majority of students are unable to secure such jobs. As a result, 83.75% of the students reported that they are not engaged in any formal part-time work. Among those who do seek alternatives, most are involved in providing private tuitions, which emerges as the primary source of supplementary income for students in the region.

How satisfied are you with the quality of education in your program.

S No	Response format	No of Students	Percentage
1	Very satisfied	0	0
2	Satisfied	4	5
3	Neutral	40	50
4	Dissatisfied	12	15
5	Very dissatisfied	24	30
	Total	80	100

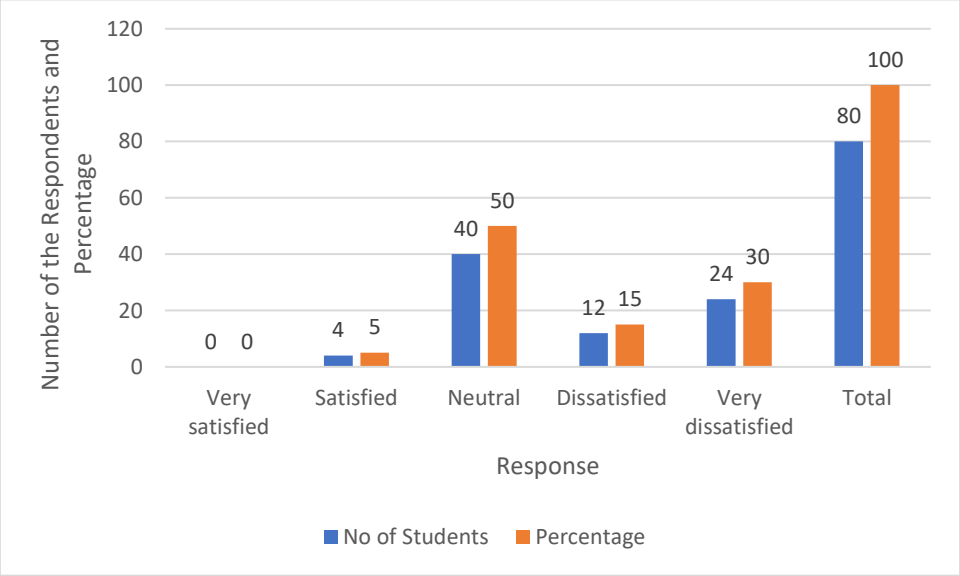


Table 3, the data highlights varied perceptions of the quality of education provided in non-professional universities and colleges. Among the respondents, 50% expressed a neutral stance regarding their level of satisfaction, indicating neither strong approval nor disapproval. Meanwhile, 30% of the students reported being highly dissatisfied with the quality of education, suggesting significant concerns about academic

standards and delivery. A smaller proportion, 15%, described the education as only fair, reflecting moderate dissatisfaction. Notably, only 5% of the students expressed genuine satisfaction with the quality of education they received. This distribution points toward a general lack of confidence in the academic environment of non-professional institutions, with dissatisfaction outweighing satisfaction by a considerable margin.

How relevant is your course content to real-world job requirement.

S No	Response format	No of Students	Percentage
1	Highly Relevant	0	0
2	Somewhat Relevant	12	15
3	Neutral	04	05
4	Not very Relevant	16	20
5	Not at all Relevant	48	60
	Total	80	100

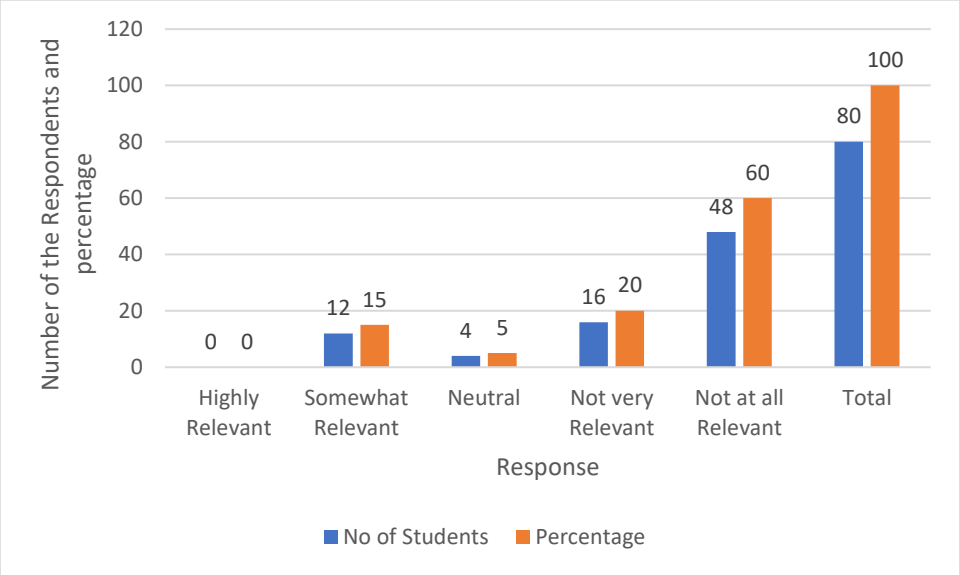
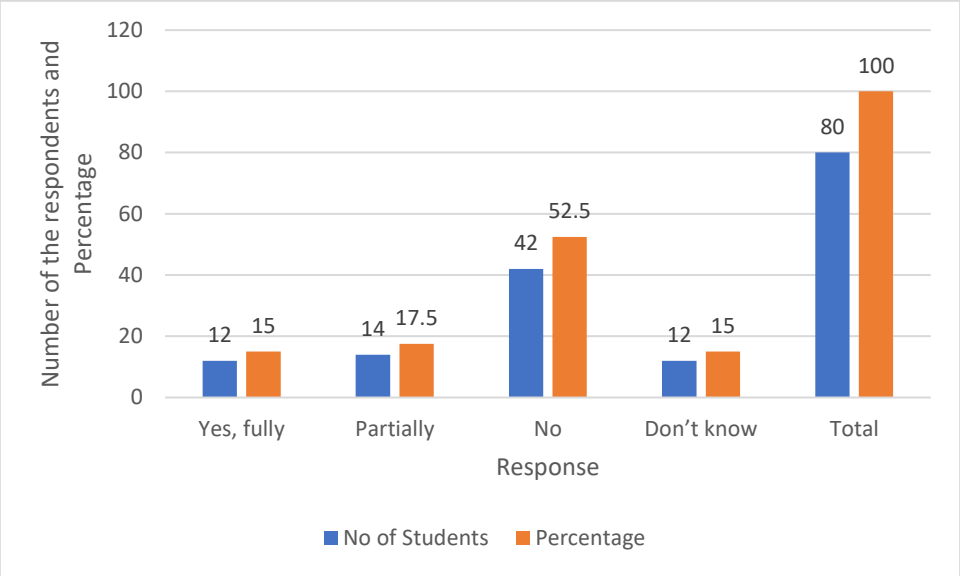


Table 4, which examines the relevance of course content in relation to real-world requirements, reveals a significant gap between academic curricula and practical applicability. A majority of students (60%) reported that the courses were "not at all relevant" to real-world demands, while 20% considered them "not very relevant." Only 15% found the content to be "somewhat relevant." These findings suggest that the courses offered by the university are largely oriented toward fulfilling degree requirements rather than equipping students with practical skills and competencies necessary for employment. This disconnect highlights a critical weakness in curriculum design, pointing toward the urgent need for reforms that integrate skill-based and industry-relevant learning.

Does your syllabus include updated topics aligned with industry trends?

S No	Response format	No of Students	Percentage
1	Yes, fully	12	15
2	Partially	14	17.5

3	No	42	52.5
4	Don't know	12	15
	Total	80	100



How often are teaching methods interactive (e.g. Projects, group work, debates)

S No	Response format	No of Students	Percentage
1	Very often	0	0
2	Sometimes	32	40
3	Rarely	36	45
4	Never	12	15
	Total	80	100

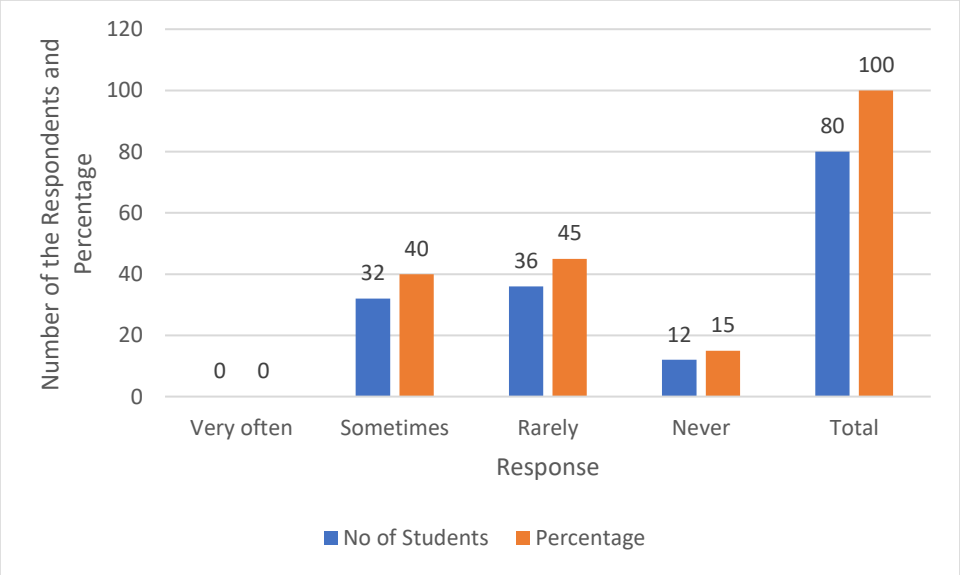


Table 6 focuses on teaching methods and the extent to which interactive approaches—such as project wo-

rk, group activities, seminars, and debates—are incorporated into classroom practices. The responses reveal that only 45% of students reported that such interactive sessions are regularly conducted in their colleges. A smaller proportion of students indicated that these activities occur only occasionally, while the remaining respondents stated that their colleges rarely or never engage in such interactive pedagogical methods. This distribution suggests that, although interactive teaching strategies are recognized as effective in enhancing student engagement and critical thinking, their actual implementation in college's remains inconsistent and limited.

To what extent are practical lab components emphasized in your course.

S No	Response format	No of Students	Percentage
1	Very high	0	0
2	Moderate	17	21.25
3	Low	44	55
4	None	19	23.75
	Total	80	100

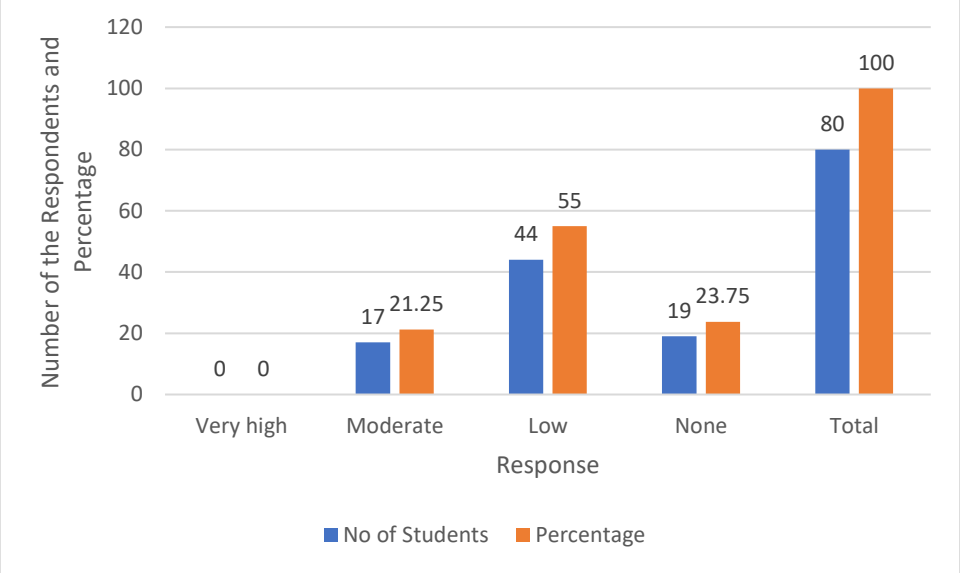


Table 7 examines the emphasis placed on practical or laboratory components within the courses. The findings indicate that 55% of students felt that the practical/lab component in their courses was very low, suggesting limited hands-on exposure. A further 21.25% of students acknowledged that the lab component was present but only to a moderate extent. Meanwhile, 23.75% of students reported that their courses had no practical or lab involvement at all. These responses highlight a significant gap between theoretical instruction and practical application, underscoring the inadequate integration of experiential learning in the curriculum. The lack of sufficient practical training may hinder students' ability to develop essential skills required for professional and real-world contexts.

Does your course include opportunities for hands on training or field exposure?

S No	Response format	No of Students	Percentage
1	Yes	0	0

2	No	44	55
3	Limited	36	45
	Total	80	100

Table 8 provides insights into the extent of hands-on training and field exposure offered by colleges. The data shows that 55% of students reported having no access to training or field-based learning opportunities, while 45% indicated that they had only limited exposure. These findings suggest that the curriculum in many colleges remains predominantly theoretical, with minimal provisions for experiential learning. The lack of adequate field training restricts students from acquiring practical skills and real-world experience, thereby widening the gap between academic learning and professional requirements

Does your course include mandatory internships or industry projects?

S No	Response format	No of Students	Percentage
1	Yes	0	0
2	No	80	100
3	Optional	0	0
4	Planned but not implemented	0	0
	Total	80	100

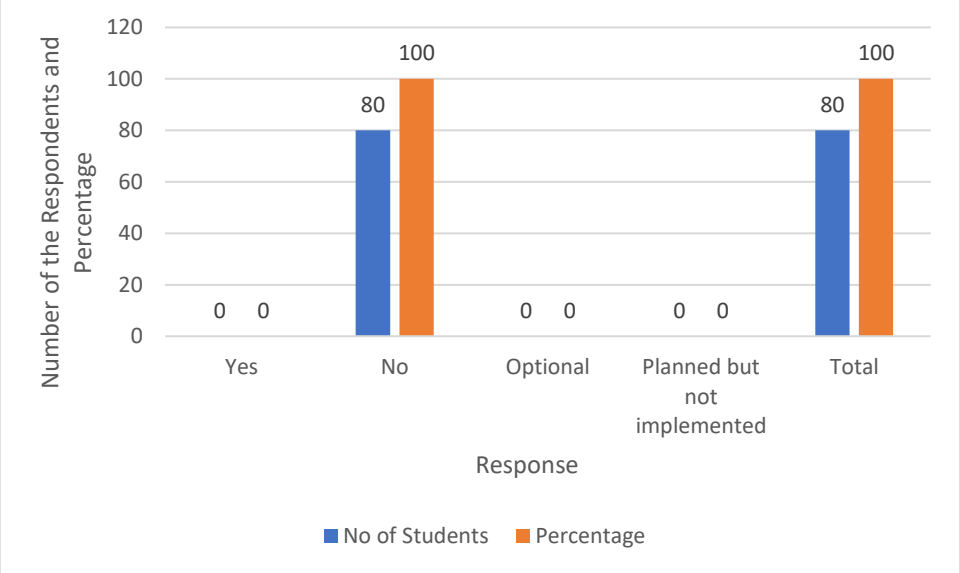


Table 9 clearly indicates that none of the courses offered by the university or colleges include mandatory internships or industry-linked projects. All respondents (100%) confirmed the absence of such practical components in their academic programs. This finding highlights a major shortcoming in the curriculum design, as internships and industry projects are crucial for bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and workplace requirements. The complete lack of structured exposure to professional environments suggests that students are being prepared primarily for degree completion rather than for employability or skill development, thereby limiting their readiness for the job market.

What skill areas do you feed need more emphasis in your course.

S No	Response format	No of Students	Percentage
1	Soft skills	4	5
2	Technical skills	16	20
3	Practical training	4	5
4	Industry exposure	8	10
5	Entrepreneurship	48	60
	Total	80	100

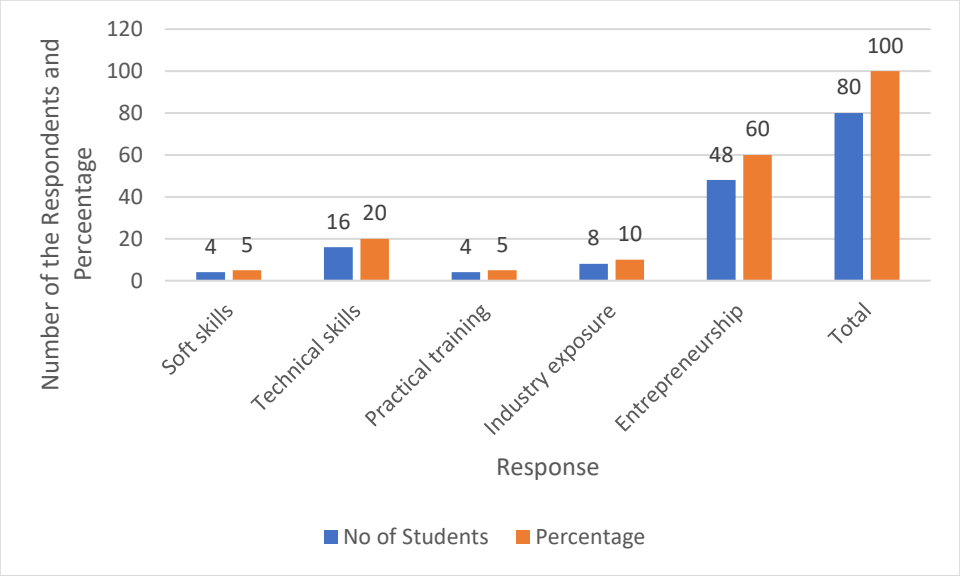


Table 10 highlights the areas where students believe greater emphasis is required in their academic programs. A majority of respondents (60%) identified the need for stronger focus on entrepreneurship and innovation programs, reflecting a demand for skills that encourage self-employment and creative problem-solving. Additionally, 20% of students emphasized the importance of technical skills, while 10% stressed the need for broader industrial exposure. A smaller proportion, 5%, pointed to gaps in practical training and software skills. These findings suggest that students perceive a significant misalignment between the current curriculum and the skill sets required for employability and professional growth, underscoring the urgent need for curriculum reform oriented toward skill development and industry relevance.

Have you participated in any skill development workshops [seminars organized by your institution?]

S No	Response format	No of Students	Percentage
1	Yes, frequently	0	0
2	Occasionally	0	0
3	Rarely	38	47.5
4	Never	42	52.5
	Total	80	100

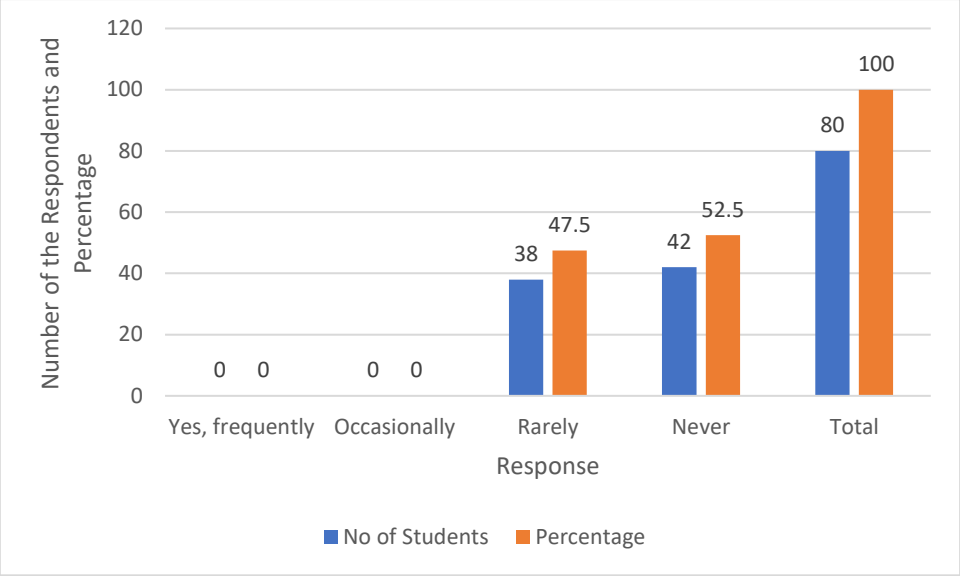


Table 11 examines students' participation in skill development workshops and seminars. The data reveals that 47.5% of students reported having participated in such programs, while a slightly higher proportion, 52.5%, stated that they had never attended or engaged in any skill development workshops or seminars during their academic tenure. This distribution indicates that opportunities for structured skill enhancement remain limited or unevenly accessed, leaving a significant share of students without exposure to activities that could strengthen their employability and practical competencies.

Do you know how to build an effective CV or Resume?

S No	Response format	No of Students	Percentage
1	Yes	24	30
2	Somewhat	8	10
3	No	48	60
	Total	80	100

Table 12 focuses on students' awareness and knowledge regarding the preparation of an effective CV or résumé. The findings reveal that 60% of students admitted having no idea about how to build a professional CV, while 30% stated that they possessed the necessary knowledge and skills for CV preparation. A further 10% reported having only limited knowledge in this area. This data highlights a critical gap in career readiness training, as the ability to create an effective CV is a fundamental step in securing employment opportunities. The lack of adequate guidance and institutional support in this regard suggests that many students may face difficulties in successfully navigating the transition from education to the job market.

Have you been taught how to use tools like Linked In, Job Portals, or Professionals networks?

S No	Response format	No of Students	Percentage
1	Yes	0	0
2	No	80	100
	Total	80	100

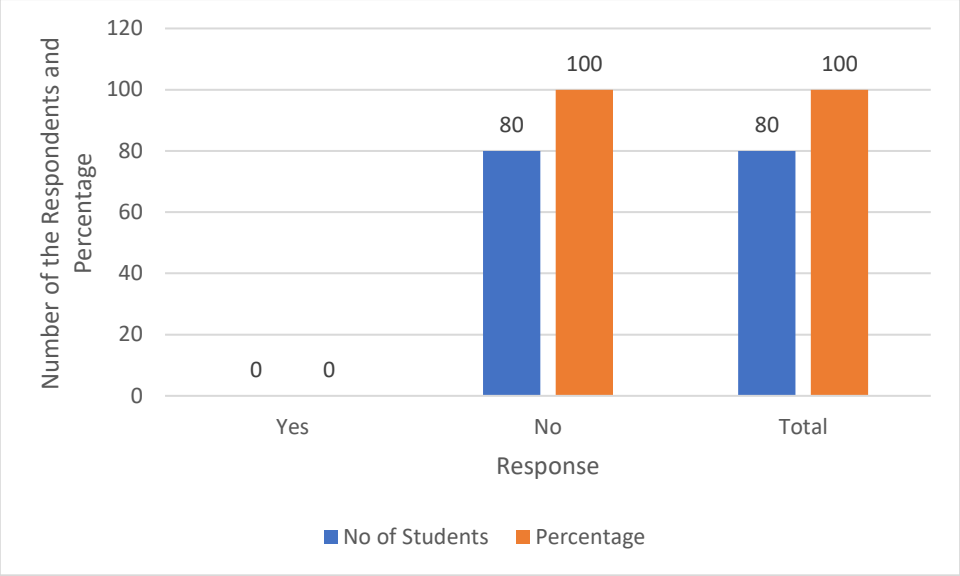


Table 13 makes it evident that none of the students reported having been taught how to use professional networking platforms or related digital tools. All respondents answered negatively when asked whether their institutions had provided training in this area. This finding clearly reflects a major shortfall in the curriculum, as students are not being exposed to updated technological competencies and digital skills that are increasingly essential for career advancement. The absence of guidance in using professional networks not only restricts students' ability to build industry connections but also underscores the broader gap between higher education practices and the evolving demands of the global knowledge economy.

How confident are you about finding a jobs after your graduation-courses.

S No	Response format	No of Students	Percentage
1	Very confident	0	0
2	Confident	0	0
3	Unsure	32	40
4	Not confident	0	0
5	Not at all confident	48	60
	Total	80	100

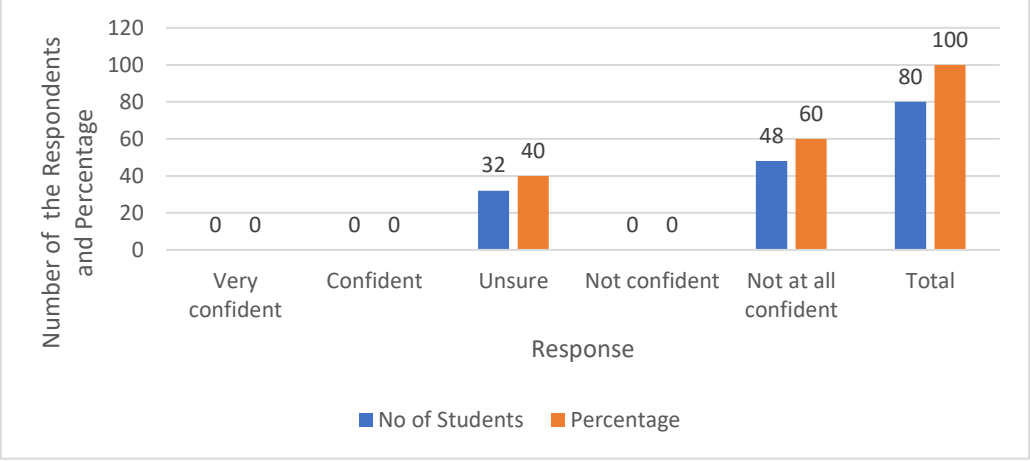


Table 14 highlights students' confidence regarding job opportunities after completing their degree courses. The data reveals that 60% of students reported having no confidence at all about securing employment following graduation. In contrast, 40% of the respondents stated that they felt only somewhat confident about their prospects in the job market. This distribution underscores the deep sense of uncertainty among students concerning employability after college. The lack of strong confidence reflects not only the limited alignment between academic programs and labour market needs but also the inadequate institutional support in career guidance, skill-building, and industry linkages.

Are you aware of the current job trends or demands in your field of study?

S No	Response format	No of Students	Percentage
1	Yes	32	40
2	To some extent	40	50
3	No	8	10
	Total	80	100

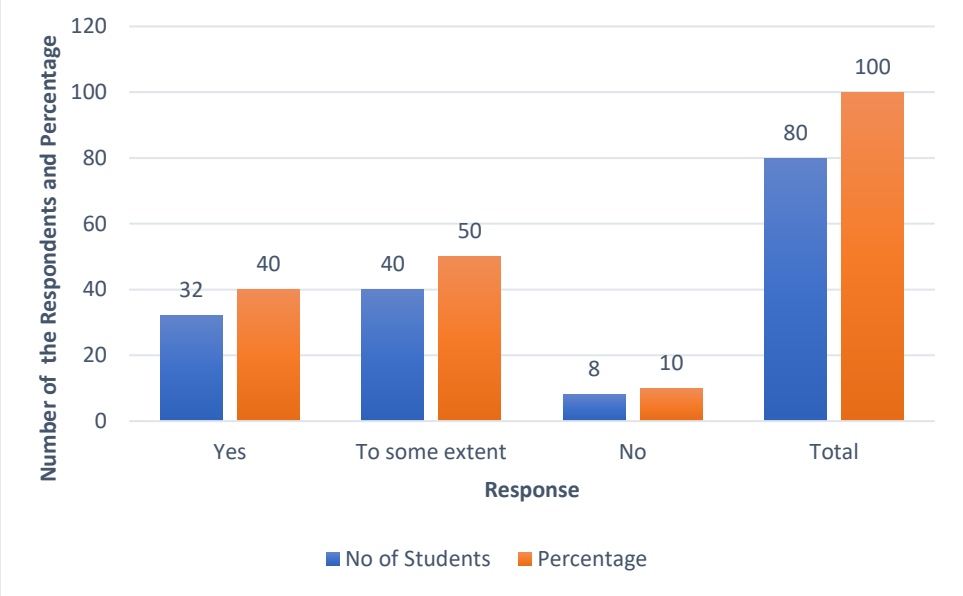


Table 15 examines students' awareness of current job trends and demands in their respective fields of study. The findings indicate that 50% of students reported having only *some idea* about existing employment trends, while 40% stated that they were *unaware* of such developments. Only 10% of the respondents claimed to have a clear understanding of job market demands. This suggests that a large proportion of students lack adequate exposure to industry insights and evolving labour market requirements. The limited awareness not only restricts their ability to make informed career choices but also highlights the absence of effective career counselling and industry-academia engagement within higher education institutions.

Do you believe a degree alone is enough to secure a good job in your field?

S No	Response format	No of Students	Percentage
1	Yes	0	0

2	No	64	80
3	Not sure	16	20
	Total	80	100

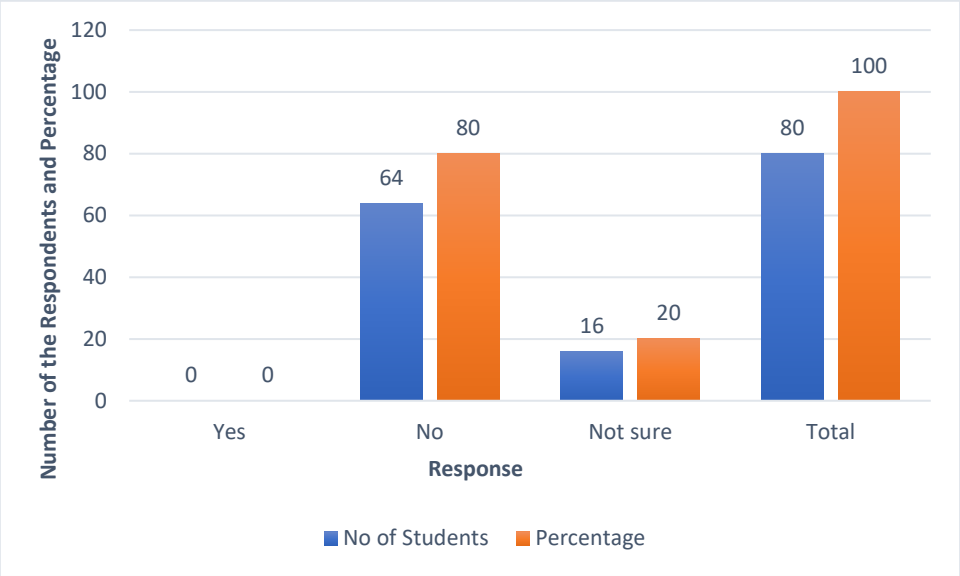


Table 16 conclude that 64% student say that they feel that a degree enough is not to secure a job where 16% students are not sure about it.

Are you considering pursuing further studies due to limited job prospects?

S No	Response format	No of Students	Percentage
1	Yes	64	80
2	No	0	0
3	May be	16	20
	Total	80	100

Table 17 reflects students' perspectives on career opportunities following graduation. The data reveals that the majority of students perceive limited job prospects within their fields of study. Specifically, 80% of respondents indicated that they would consider pursuing higher education as a means to improve their future career opportunities, while 20% stated that they might pursue further studies. This trend highlights the perceived inadequacy of undergraduate programs in providing direct employability and suggests that students view additional qualifications as necessary to enhance their competitiveness in the job market. The findings underscore the need for curriculum reforms, industry engagement, and skill-oriented initiatives to bridge the gap between academic learning and professional opportunities.

Are your professor/lectures aware of the latest industry treads?

S No	Response format	No of Students	Percentage
1	Yes	12	15
2	Somewhat	48	60
3	No	20	25

	Total	80	100

Table 18 examines students' perceptions of their professors' or teachers' awareness of the latest industry trends. According to the data, 60% of students responded that their instructors were somewhat aware of current industry developments, 25% indicated that their teachers were not aware, and only 15% believed that their professors were fully informed about the latest trends. These findings suggest a gap between academic instruction and the evolving demands of the professional environment, highlighting the need for faculty development programs, industry engagement, and regular updating of course content to ensure that students receive education aligned with contemporary workplace requirement.

Key Findings (Consolidated)

Low Satisfaction with Educational Quality

- Nearly half of the respondents (45%) were dissatisfied with the quality of education, while 50% maintained a neutral opinion.
- Only a small fraction (5%) expressed satisfaction.

Limited Curriculum Relevance

- A majority (60%) felt that their course content was completely irrelevant to real-world job requirements.
- No respondent considered the curriculum to be highly relevant.

Insufficient Practical Exposure

- All respondents confirmed the absence of compulsory internships or industry-based projects.
- More than half (55%) reported no hands-on training opportunities.
- A similar proportion indicated that practical or laboratory components were minimal.

Inadequate Interactive Teaching Methods

- Most students stated that interactive activities such as projects, group discussions, and debates are conducted infrequently.

Poor Career Preparation Skills

- A majority (60%) lacked knowledge about preparing an effective CV.
- None of the students had received training in using LinkedIn or online job portals.
- Over half had never attended skill development workshops.

Low Confidence in Employment Prospects

- Around 60% felt completely unconfident about obtaining a job after graduation.
- 80% believed that holding a degree alone does not ensure employment.

Inclination Toward Further Education

- A large majority (80%) planned to pursue higher studies due to inadequate job opportunities.

Demand for Entrepreneurship Education

- 60% highlighted the need for greater emphasis on entrepreneurship and innovation within their courses.

Moderate Faculty Awareness

- Most students (60%) believed that their teachers were only partially aware of current industry developments.

Conclusion

The study reveals a considerable gap between academic instruction and employment expectations among students enrolled in non-professional programs at SSJ Campus, Almora. While higher education is commonly perceived as a reliable pathway to employment stability, the findings demonstrate that a degree by itself is insufficient in today's competitive labour market. An overemphasis on theoretical teaching, absence of internships, limited practical exposure, and inadequate career guidance have collectively weakened students' employability and self-confidence.

The lack of structured engagement with industry and insufficient digital and professional skill development further deepen the divide between academic institutions and the workplace. The strong preference for continuing higher studies indicates that students feel unprepared for immediate employment upon completing their undergraduate degrees. This tendency not only postpones entry into the workforce but also contributes to the growing problem of educated unemployment.

To overcome these challenges, higher education institutions must implement meaningful reforms that prioritize experiential learning, skill enhancement, entrepreneurship development, digital literacy, and compulsory internships. Strengthening collaboration between academia and industry, investing in faculty upskilling, and establishing effective career counselling systems are equally vital. Closing the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application is essential to improving employability, rebuilding student confidence, and utilizing India's demographic potential for long-term economic development.

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