

India's education system has expanded dramatically in recent years, democratising access across geographies and social groups. But while degrees have become more accessible, employability has not. Each year, over 10 million students graduate, yet, fewer than half meet industry-defined benchmarks for job-readiness. This gap is not a reflection of low aspiration or poor intent. It is a systemic issue rooted in how we define, deliver, and measure education.

Disconnect

There is a dangerous illusion that completing a degree is the same as building a career. For many young people in India, especially in smaller towns, higher education is treated as an automatic gateway to employment. However, only 8.25% of graduates find jobs related to their field of study. Most are either left underemployed or pushed into unrelated roles, not due to lack of intelligence, but due to lack of direction.

Our education system remains syllabus-driven and exam-oriented, rarely aligned with actual market needs. The result is a generation of graduates, confident in theory but under-prepared in application. In sectors like engineering, the disconnect is even sharper, with over 80% of graduates deemed unfit for core roles.

The graduate dilemma

We need to rethink education not as a product but as a full-stack system that drives employment

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A critical gap in India's education-to-employment journey is the absence of hands-on exposure. With limited industry touch-points, especially in non-metros, students graduate without workplace awareness, communication skills, or portfolios that re-

cruiters expect as a baseline. This is further widened by an ecosystem that rewards course completion and enrollment numbers, not placement outcomes. Institutions have little incentive to build employer networks, integrate applied learning,

or support structured mentorship. Students are left navigating the most critical phase of their lives – career launch – largely on their own.

Looking ahead

The way forward lies in rethinking education not

as a product but as a full-stack system that drives employment. This means introducing students early to the landscape of career possibilities through localised, relatable role models and vernacular resources. Skilling must follow, but in industry-aligned formats

that are accessible and affordable. Mentorship should no longer be optional. It must be embedded through digital coaches, alumni engagement, and structured guidance that helps students match their strengths to the right opportunities.

Finally, placement support must go beyond urban job portals. We need regional placement ecosystems that reflect local economic realities, connecting graduates to jobs in BFSI, digital services, logistics, healthcare, and beyond. Job creation isn't a peripheral goal; it is the test of whether our education system works. If education is reimagined as a system, it must be wired into demand, employer partnerships, local enterprise incubation, and clear employment pathways. This means creating jobs and not just churning out graduates.

India's ed-tech sector has a critical role to play in enabling this transformation. But the entire focus needs to shift from enrollments to measurable, long-term outcomes. We can no longer measure progress by scores or degrees alone. The real metric is 'how many young Indians find jobs that align with their skills?' It is time we stopped asking, "How many graduated?" and start asking, "How many progressed?" It is not the certificate that secures the future; it is the pathway.

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