



# Upskilling for Employability: A Study of Student Perceptions in Higher Education

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## Abstract

The modern job market is continuously evolving due to rapid technological advancements, globalisation, and increased competition among professionals. In this changing environment, academic qualifications alone are often not sufficient to meet industry expectations. As a result, the concept of upskilling has become increasingly important for students preparing to enter the workforce. Upskilling is the process of acquiring new skills or enhancing existing ones to improve employability and support career advancement. The present study aims to examine undergraduate students' perceptions of upskilling and to understand how they view its importance for their academic and professional development. The study focuses on identifying students' awareness of upskilling, their interest in learning new skills, and the factors that influence their participation in skill development activities. The research is descriptive and based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to 167 undergraduate students. The collected data were analysed using statistical tools, including simple descriptive analysis. The study's findings indicate that the majority of students recognise the importance of upskilling for improving employability and career opportunities. Many respondents believe that developing both technical and soft skills is essential to succeed in the modern workplace. However, some students face challenges such as a lack of guidance, time constraints, and limited awareness regarding skill development opportunities. The

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study concludes that continuous learning and skill development are essential for students to remain competitive in the evolving job market. Educational institutions, industries, and policymakers should collaborate to promote skill development programs that help students acquire industry-relevant competencies and prepare them for future career challenges.

**Keywords:** upskilling, professional development, employability, industry expectations

## 1. Introduction

In the present era of rapid technological development and global competition, the importance of continuous learning has increased significantly. Education plays a vital role in shaping an individual's career, but academic qualifications alone are often not sufficient to meet the demands of the modern job market. Employers today expect graduates to possess not only theoretical knowledge but also practical skills, technical expertise, and soft skills that enable them to perform effectively in professional environments. As a result, the concept of upskilling has become increasingly important for students pursuing higher education.

Upskilling has become crucial in the modern workforce due to rapid technological advancements and shifting industry demands. The process of acquiring new skills or refining existing ones to improve one's knowledge, aptitudes, and overall competence is known as upskilling. It increases individuals' chances of finding better job opportunities and keeps them informed about the latest developments in their profession. Developing skills, including communication, leadership, digital literacy, technical knowledge, critical thinking, and problem-solving ability, can be part of upskilling for degree students. As studies show, students now need more than just academic qualifications to be employable. Tomlinson (2017), for instance, found that technology use played an important role in the perception of students' employability and emphasised on the need for developing digital skills through higher education.

Similarly, Barzizza et al. (2024) stressed that students' discoveries of labour market trends and their thoughts on career planning are intertwined with developing skills for success in the job market, especially those soft and technical skills employers seek. This implies that upskilling is key to aligning academic learning with the requirements of real-world jobs. Additionally, Jackson (2015) investigated students' perceptions of employability training and found that structured training programs significantly enhance students' career preparedness, reinforcing

continuous skill development. Supporting this, students' perceptions of curriculum relevance and skill development are strongly associated with career readiness and employability outcomes (Finch et al., 2013).

Upskilling requirements in terms of closing the gap between what academia provides and industry needs are also apparent. According to Andrews and Higson (2008), organisations place a high value on soft skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication, which are often lacking in traditional educational systems. Similarly, students with stronger skills tend to exhibit greater confidence in their ability to secure employment, highlighting the relationship between skill development and perceived employability (Rothwell et al., 2008).

The need for sophisticated talents has increased in the digital age. In the context of rapid technological advancement, students must continuously enhance their skill sets to remain relevant in a workforce shaped by emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and data analytics (Laar et al., 2020). Further emphasising the need for comprehensive upskilling, both employers and students recognise soft skills as critical components of employability, alongside technical competencies (Andrews & Higson, 2008; Succi & Canovi, 2020).

Thus, the literature strongly indicates that upskilling is not optional but a necessity for degree students to achieve career success. In the Indian context, skill-building activities such as internships and industry engagement are crucial for bridging the gap between education and employment (Reddy & Sharma, 2020; Nair & Joseph, 2019). Continuous learning, integration of practical skills, and alignment with industry demands are critical to improving employability and ensuring long-term professional growth.

Recent years have seen the introduction of several programs and courses by training organisations, educational institutions, and online learning platforms that encourage students to acquire supplementary skills in addition to their academic studies. Online learning programs, workshops, certification courses, and internships are becoming standard ways for students to develop their abilities and get ready for the working world.

Students' understanding and attitude toward skill development affect their willingness to engage in such activities, and hence, it's critical to understand how they view upskilling. While some students might actively seek out opportunities to improve their skills, others might not fully understand their significance. Thus, the purpose of this study is to analyse

undergraduate students' perceptions of upskilling and its potential to improve their employability and career prospects.

## **2. Research Problems & Study Objectives**

A significant challenge for graduates today is the disconnect between what is taught in academic institutions and the skills industry demands. Many students complete their degree programs with strong theoretical knowledge but lack the practical skills and competencies employers require. This skill gap often makes it difficult for graduates to secure suitable employment.

Although opportunities for skill development are widely available, not all students actively engage in upskilling activities. Some students may not fully understand the importance of developing additional skills, while others may face barriers such as lack of time, resources, or guidance. Therefore, it is important to examine degree students' perceptions of upskilling and determine whether they recognise its significance for career development. Understanding students' attitudes and opinions about upskilling can help educational institutions and policymakers design more effective programs that encourage students' skill development. Thus, the main objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To examine the level of awareness of upskilling among degree students.
2. To analyse the perception of students regarding the importance of upskilling in the modern job market.
3. To identify the types of skills that students are interested in developing.
4. To understand whether students believe that upskilling improves employability and career opportunities.
5. To identify the factors that motivate or discourage students from participating in upskilling activities.

## **3. Methodology**

The study focuses on identifying students' awareness of upskilling, their interest in learning new skills, and the factors that influence their participation in skill development activities. The research design is descriptive and is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to 167 undergraduate students. Purposive sampling was used to gather data from students across four disciplines. Secondary data were mainly collected from

previous articles in this research area and from other reports on skilling initiatives at the government and private levels. The collected data were analysed using statistical tools such as simple descriptive analysis.

#### 4. Limitations of the Study

The present study has certain limitations that may affect the scope or generalisation of the results.

1. The study was conducted only among a limited number of degree students.
2. The results are based on the opinions and perceptions of the respondents.
3. Time constraints limited the depth of the study.
4. The study may not represent the views of all students in different regions or institutions.

#### 5. Results

**Table 1:** Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Gender	Male	53.3%
	Female	46.7%
Year of Study	I	7.8%
	II	29.3%
	III	62.9%
Discipline	Science	23.4%
	Commerce	58.7%
	Management	15.0%
	Language	3.0%

Source: Primary data

#### 6. Discussions

Based on the analysis and interpretation of the data collected from the respondents, the following findings were observed:

1. The majority of degree students are aware of the concept of upskilling and understand its importance in the present job market.
2. Most respondents believe that upskilling is essential for improving employability and career opportunities.

3. The study shows that many students are interested in developing technical and digital skills such as computer applications, digital marketing, and data analysis.
4. Students also recognise the importance of soft skills such as communication, teamwork, leadership, and time management for career success.
5. A significant number of respondents believe that upskilling helps individuals remain competitive in the rapidly changing job environment.
6. Online learning platforms, certification courses, workshops, and internships are commonly preferred by students for acquiring additional skills.
7. Some students face challenges such as lack of awareness, limited guidance, and time constraints, which affect their participation in upskilling activities.
8. Educational institutions play an important role in encouraging students to participate in skill development programs and training activities.
9. Peer influence and career aspirations motivate students to actively engage in learning new skills.
10. Overall, the study reveals that students have a positive perception toward upskilling and consider it important for their future career development.

## **7. Conclusion**

In the modern knowledge-driven economy, upskilling has become an essential component of career development and professional success. Rapid technological advancements, globalisation, and increasing competition in the job market have significantly changed the skills required by employers. As a result, academic qualifications alone are no longer sufficient for securing long-term employment opportunities.

The present study examined degree students' perceptions of upskilling and highlighted the importance of continuous skill development. The study's findings reveal that most students are aware of the importance of upskilling and believe that developing additional skills can improve their employability and career prospects. Students also recognise the value of acquiring both technical and soft skills to succeed in the modern workplace.

However, the study also indicates that some students face challenges such as lack of awareness, limited guidance, and time constraints, which may prevent them from actively participating in skill development activities. Therefore, educational institutions must play a significant role in encouraging students to engage in training programs, workshops, internships, and certification courses.

Upskilling is crucial for equipping students to meet the changing demands of the job market. By promoting continuous learning and providing opportunities for skill development, educational institutions can help students build successful careers and contribute effectively to the growth of the economy.

## **8. Suggestions**

Based on the findings of the study, the following suggestions are recommended:

1. Educational institutions should integrate skill development programs into the academic curriculum to help students gain practical knowledge.
2. Colleges should organise regular workshops, seminars, and training programs to enhance students' technical and soft skills.
3. Institutions should encourage students to participate in internships and industry training programs to gain practical experience.
4. Career guidance and counselling services should be provided to increase students' awareness about the importance of upskilling.
5. Students should be encouraged to make use of online learning platforms and certification courses to develop new skills.
6. Educational institutions should strengthen collaboration with industries to ensure students acquire industry-relevant skills.
7. Students should develop the habit of continuous learning and self-improvement to remain competitive in the job market.
8. Government and educational institutions should promote skill development initiatives and training programs to bridge the gap between academic education and industry requirements.

## **9. Scope for Future Study**

The present study focuses only on the perception of degree students toward upskilling within a limited sample. Future studies can be conducted with a

larger sample size covering students from different colleges, universities, and academic disciplines. Further research can also examine the impact of specific skill development programs, internships, and training initiatives on students' employability and career success. Additionally, comparative studies can be conducted to analyse differences in perceptions among students from different fields, such as commerce, science, and arts.

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