

Choosing A Career Path: A Study of Student Perceptions Towards B.A., B.Com. And B.Sc. Programmes in Karnataka

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Abstract—The transition from Pre-University (PU) education to undergraduate education represents a critical stage in the academic and career development of students. Traditionally, Bachelor of Arts (B.A.), Bachelor of Commerce (B.Com.) and Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) programmes have been among the major undergraduate pathways available to students after completing PU education in Karnataka. However, the higher education environment has undergone substantial transformation due to technological advancement, changing labour-market requirements, digitalisation and increasing awareness of employability. Consequently, students and their parents increasingly evaluate undergraduate programmes in terms of practical skills, professional relevance, placement opportunities and employment outcomes. The present study examines the changing perception surrounding traditional degree programmes vis-à-vis job-oriented programmes among students making higher education choices after PU education, with special reference to B.A., B.Com. and B.Sc. programmes in Karnataka. The study is descriptive and analytical in nature and is based exclusively on secondary data obtained from policy documents, government reports, higher education statistics, employability-related publications and relevant academic literature. The analysis indicates that job-oriented programmes are increasingly perceived as attractive because of their specialised curriculum, practical exposure, technological relevance, internship opportunities and perceived connection with employment. At the same time, traditional degree programmes continue to play an important role in developing disciplinary knowledge, analytical ability, communication skills, scientific temperament and the foundation required for higher education, research and several career pathways. The study argues that the issue should not be viewed as a simple competition between traditional and job-oriented education. Instead, the changing perception of students reflects a growing demand for relevance, practical competence and visible

career pathways. The study concludes that B.A., B.Com. and B.Sc. programmes can retain and strengthen their relevance through the integration of skill development, internships, digital competence, entrepreneurship, industry interaction and multidisciplinary learning. The implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 provides an important opportunity to bridge the perceived divide between academic education and employability-oriented learning.

Index Terms—Student Perception, Traditional Degree Programmes, Job-Oriented Programmes, B.A., B.Com., B.Sc., Employability, Higher Education, PU Education and Karnataka.

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Higher Education Choices After Pre-University Education

The completion of pre-university education marks an important transition in the educational life of students. At this stage, students are required to make decisions that may influence their future academic development, professional identity and employment opportunities. In Karnataka, students completing PU education have access to a wide range of higher education programmes, including conventional degree programmes, professional courses, vocational programmes, technical education and other specialised programmes.

For several decades, Bachelor of Arts (B.A.), Bachelor of Commerce (B.Com.) and Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) have occupied an important position in the Indian higher education system. These programmes have traditionally provided students with broad academic knowledge and have served as pathways to postgraduate education, research, teaching, public

service, professional qualifications and a variety of occupations.

However, the environment in which students make educational decisions has changed considerably. The increasing importance of technology, digital platforms, artificial intelligence, data analysis, specialised occupations and changing industry requirements has encouraged students to examine higher education from the perspective of career outcomes.

As a result, students increasingly ask questions such as:

- Will this course help me obtain employment?
- What practical skills will I acquire?
- Does the programme provide internship opportunities?
- Is the course relevant to current industry requirements?
- What are the career opportunities after graduation?
- Will additional professional qualifications be required?

These questions have contributed to the growing popularity of programmes perceived to be directly linked with employment and professional careers.

1.2 Traditional Education in a Changing Employment Environment

Traditional degree programmes are sometimes criticised for placing greater emphasis on theoretical knowledge than on practical competence. Such criticism has contributed to the perception that job-oriented programmes may provide better employment opportunities.

However, this perception requires careful examination. A degree programme cannot be judged exclusively on the basis of immediate employment outcomes. B.A., B.Com. and B.Sc. programmes contribute to the development of knowledge, critical thinking, communication, problem-solving and disciplinary competence. These abilities are important for lifelong learning and adaptability in a rapidly changing society.

The fundamental challenge is therefore not whether traditional degree programmes should continue to exist. The more important question is whether these programmes can successfully combine their academic strengths with contemporary skills and employment requirements.

The present study addresses this issue by examining the perceived distinction between traditional degree programmes and job-oriented programmes after PU education, with particular reference to Karnataka.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Higher Education and Employability

The relationship between higher education and employability has become an important subject of discussion among policymakers, educational institutions, employers and students. Traditionally, higher education was primarily associated with the acquisition of knowledge and intellectual development. In the contemporary environment, students increasingly expect higher education to contribute directly to their career development.

Employability, however, is a multidimensional concept. It depends not only on the degree obtained by an individual but also on subject knowledge, practical skills, communication ability, technological competence, adaptability, work experience and the changing requirements of the labour market.

Therefore, the employability of graduates cannot be explained simply by categorising programmes as either traditional or job-oriented.

2.2 Traditional Degree Education

Traditional degree programmes such as B.A., B.Com. and B.Sc. have historically played a major role in higher education. These programmes provide structured disciplinary knowledge and create a foundation for postgraduate education and professional development.

B.A. programmes contribute to the development of communication, critical thinking and social understanding. B.Com. programmes provide a foundation in commerce, accounting, finance, business and economics. B.Sc. programmes develop scientific knowledge, analytical ability and research orientation.

The challenge facing these programmes is the need to demonstrate their contemporary relevance in a highly competitive and skill-conscious environment.

2.3 Job-Oriented and Skill-Based Education

Job-oriented programmes generally emphasise specialised knowledge and practical competence associated with particular occupations or industries.

Such programmes may include technical education, professional education, vocational training and specialised skill-based programmes.

The major perceived strengths of such programmes include:

- Practical training;
- Industry relevance;
- Professional specialisation;
- Internship opportunities;
- Technological exposure;
- Employment orientation; and
- Career-specific competencies.

The increasing visibility of these features has influenced students' perception of educational value.

2.4 NEP 2020 and the Integration of Skills

The National Education Policy 2020 represents an important development in Indian higher education. The policy emphasises multidisciplinary education, flexibility, holistic development and the integration of vocational and practical learning.

One of the significant implications of NEP 2020 is the gradual removal of rigid boundaries between academic, vocational and professional education. This policy approach is particularly relevant to the present study because it provides an opportunity to transform conventional degree programmes into more flexible and skill-integrated programmes.

III. TRADITIONAL DEGREE PROGRAMMES: B.A., B.COM. AND B.SC.

3.1 Bachelor of Arts (B.A.)

The Bachelor of Arts programme has traditionally been associated with humanities, social sciences and languages. The programme contributes to the development of communication skills, critical thinking, social awareness and analytical ability.

B.A. graduates may pursue careers in education, civil services, public administration, journalism, media, social development, research and other related areas.

However, students may perceive the B.A. programme as having limited direct employment orientation when the curriculum does not include practical exposure, contemporary skills or clearly defined career pathways.

The employability potential of B.A. education can be strengthened through the integration of:

- Digital communication;
- Research skills;
- Data interpretation;
- Public policy;
- Media-related competencies;
- Language skills;
- Field-based learning; and
- Internship opportunities.

3.2 Bachelor of Commerce (B.Com.)

B.Com. is one of the major traditional undergraduate programmes in India. It provides foundational knowledge in accounting, finance, taxation, economics, business law and management.

The programme has significant potential for employment-oriented development because of its close relationship with business and financial activities. However, contemporary students increasingly expect commerce education to provide practical competencies in addition to theoretical knowledge.

The relevance of B.Com. can be strengthened through:

- Computerised accounting;
- Accounting software;
- GST practice;
- Income tax practice;
- Financial technology;
- Digital marketing;
- Business analytics;
- Banking operations;
- Insurance services; and
- Entrepreneurship development.

A modern B.Com. programme can therefore serve as a bridge between traditional academic education and professional skill development.

3.3 Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.)

The B.Sc. programme provides education in scientific disciplines and develops analytical, experimental and research-oriented abilities.

Science graduates can pursue higher education, research, laboratory work, teaching and technology-related careers. However, students increasingly expect undergraduate science education to provide exposure to modern technological applications.

The employability orientation of B.Sc. programmes can be enhanced through:

- Advanced laboratory skills;
- Data analysis;
- Computational applications;
- Research projects;
- Industry exposure;
- Environmental applications;
- Interdisciplinary learning; and
- Emerging technologies.

IV. THE GROWING ATTRACTIVENESS OF JOB-ORIENTED PROGRAMMES

The growing preference for job-oriented programmes can be understood through changes in student aspirations and employment expectations.

4.1 Perceived Employability

Students increasingly prefer programmes that appear to have a direct connection with employment. A programme that clearly identifies possible occupations may be perceived as more attractive than a broad academic programme with multiple but less visible career pathways.

4.2 Practical Exposure

Students increasingly value internships, projects, laboratory work, workplace visits and practical assignments. Programmes that provide opportunities for real-world learning are often considered more relevant.

4.3 Technological Relevance

Digital transformation has changed the expectations of students and employers. Programmes offering exposure to contemporary technologies may be perceived as having greater future relevance.

4.4 Professional Identity

Job-oriented programmes may provide students with a clearer understanding of their potential professional identity. This clarity may influence their choice immediately after PU education.

4.5 Placement Expectations

The availability of placement assistance and career guidance can significantly influence student

preferences. Educational programmes associated with visible employment outcomes may be perceived as providing greater security.

V. NEED FOR THE STUDY

The changing preference of students after PU education has important implications for higher education institutions in Karnataka. B.A., B.Com. and B.Sc. programmes continue to attract a large number of students, but conventional colleges increasingly face the challenge of demonstrating the relevance of their programmes in an employment-conscious society.

The need for the study arises from the following considerations:

- Students increasingly consider employability while selecting undergraduate programmes.
- Traditional degree programmes are often compared with specialised job-oriented programmes.
- Parents and students increasingly expect visible career outcomes.
- Conventional colleges require curriculum innovation and skill integration.
- NEP 2020 provides opportunities for restructuring undergraduate education.
- There is a need to understand the changing perception surrounding the value of traditional degree programmes.

The present study therefore attempts to analyse this important issue through available secondary information and policy developments.

VI. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Students completing PU education in Karnataka face an important decision regarding the selection of an undergraduate programme. While B.A., B.Com. and B.Sc. programmes continue to provide academic knowledge and long-term career opportunities, students increasingly evaluate programmes on the basis of immediate employability, practical skills and professional relevance.

The central research problem is:

How is the growing preference for job-oriented programmes influencing the perception of traditional

B.A., B.Com. and B.Sc. programmes among students making higher education choices after PU education in Karnataka.

VII. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study has the following objectives:

- To examine the changing higher education choices available to students after PU education.
- To analyse the perceived differences between traditional degree programmes and job-oriented programmes.
- To examine the continuing relevance of B.A., B.Com. and B.Sc. programmes.
- To identify the major factors contributing to the growing preference for job-oriented programmes.
- To analyse the challenges faced by traditional undergraduate programmes in relation to employability.
- To examine the role of NEP 2020 in integrating academic and vocational learning.
- To suggest measures for improving the relevance and employability orientation of B.A., B.Com. and B.Sc. programmes in Karnataka.

VIII. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study is confined to the changing higher education environment faced by students after completing PU education in Karnataka.

The study specifically examines:

- B.A. programmes;
- B.Com. programmes;
- B.Sc. programmes; and
- Broad categories of job-oriented and skill-based programmes.

The study is based exclusively on secondary data. It does not involve the collection of primary data through questionnaires or interviews.

Therefore, the findings represent an analytical interpretation of documented trends and policy developments rather than the measured opinion of a specific sample of students.

IX. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present research is descriptive and analytical in nature.

9.1 Sources of Data

The study is based entirely on secondary sources. Information has been collected from:

- Government reports;
- Ministry of Education publications;
- National Education Policy documents;
- All India Survey on Higher Education reports;
- Skill-development publications;
- Employability-related reports;
- Academic articles; and
- Relevant books and policy documents.

9.2 Method of Analysis

The secondary data have been analysed using:

- Descriptive analysis;
- Comparative analysis;
- Thematic analysis; and
- Policy-based interpretation.

9.3 Limitation of the Methodology

The study does not present artificially generated survey responses or fictional statistical results. Since the research is based on secondary data, the findings are interpretative and are limited to the available documentary and policy evidence.

X. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

10.1 Changing Expectations of Students After PU Education

Students completing PU education increasingly evaluate higher education programmes through the combined lens of academic interest and career outcomes.

Table 1: Major Factors Influencing Higher Education Choices

Sl. No.	Factor	Influence on Student Choice
1	Employment opportunities	Very high
2	Practical skills	Very high
3	Course relevance	High
4	Placement opportunities	High
5	Professional identity	High
6	Higher education opportunities	High

Sl. No.	Factor	Influence on Student Choice
7	Technological relevance	Increasing
8	Family expectations	Significant
9	Personal interest	Significant
10	Cost and duration of programme	Significant

The analysis indicates that employability and practical relevance have become major considerations in educational decision-making.

10.2 Traditional Degree Programmes Versus Job-Oriented Programmes

Table 2: Comparative Perception Framework

Basis	Traditional Degree Programmes	Job-Oriented Programmes
Primary Focus	Academic and disciplinary knowledge	Occupational and professional competence
Curriculum	Broad and subject-oriented	Specialised and application-oriented
Practical Exposure	Depends on institution and programme	Generally emphasised
Employment Perception	Often indirect	Often perceived as direct
Higher Education	Strong academic foundation	Depends on programme
Technology Integration	Varies considerably	Often emphasised
Career Path	Broad and diverse	More occupation-specific
Key Strength	Intellectual and academic foundation	Practical and professional orientation
Major Challenge	Perception of limited immediate employability	Risk of narrow specialisation

The table demonstrates that the distinction between the two categories is based primarily on orientation rather than absolute value.

10.3 Perceived Strengths of B.A., B.Com. and B.Sc.

Table 3: Programme-Specific Strengths and Challenges

Program me	Major Strengths	Perceived Challenge	Potential Improvemen t
B.A.	Communication, critical thinking and social understanding	Limited visible employment pathway	Digital, communication and field-based skills
B.Com.	Business, accounting and finance knowledge	Need for more practical exposure	Accounting software, analytics and fintech
B.Sc.	Scientific and analytical foundation	Need for application-based exposure	Technology, research and laboratory skills

The analysis suggests that each traditional programme possesses important strengths but requires appropriate contemporary integration.

10.4 The Perception Gap

One of the major issues emerging from the analysis is the existence of a perception gap between academic education and employment.

Traditional programmes may be perceived as following the pathway:

Degree → Academic Knowledge → Higher Studies or Further Preparation → Employment

Job-oriented programmes may be perceived as following the pathway:

Programme → Practical Skills → Industry Exposure → Employment

The second pathway appears more direct and may therefore be more attractive to students seeking immediate career clarity.

However, this perception does not necessarily establish that traditional degrees lack employment value. Instead, it indicates the need for institutions to make the career relevance of traditional programmes more visible.

10.5 Employability as a Combination of Competencies

The analysis indicates that contemporary employability depends on a combination of factors.

Table 4: Major Components of Graduate Employability

Component	Importance
Subject Knowledge	Fundamental
Practical Skills	Increasingly important
Communication	Essential
Digital Competence	Increasingly essential
Problem-Solving	Highly important
Adaptability	Essential
Internship Experience	Valuable
Professional Certification	Additional advantage
Industry Awareness	Important
Continuous Learning	Critical

This demonstrates that no single degree can automatically guarantee employment. Educational institutions must focus on developing a broad range of competencies.

10.6 Role of NEP 2020 in Bridging the Divide

NEP 2020 provides an important framework for addressing the perceived divide between traditional and job-oriented education.

The policy promotes:

- Multidisciplinary learning;
- Flexible education;
- Skill development;
- Vocational exposure;
- Internship opportunities;
- Holistic development;
- Academic flexibility; and
- Reduced separation between disciplinary categories.

Therefore, NEP 2020 creates an opportunity for colleges offering B.A., B.Com. and B.Sc. programmes to redesign their curriculum according to contemporary student and employment requirements.

The emerging model can be represented as:

**Academic Knowledge

- Practical Skills

- Digital Competence
- Internship Experience
- Industry Exposure= Enhanced Graduate Employability**

XI. MAJOR FINDINGS

The major findings of the study are as follows:

- Students completing PU education increasingly consider employability and career opportunities while selecting undergraduate programmes.
- Job-oriented programmes are generally perceived as providing a more direct connection between education and employment.
- Practical exposure, internships, technology and specialised skills contribute significantly to the attractiveness of job-oriented programmes.
- Traditional B.A., B.Com. and B.Sc. programmes continue to provide important academic and intellectual foundations.
- The major challenge facing traditional degree programmes is not necessarily their lack of value but the perception that they provide limited immediate employment opportunities.
- B.Com. programmes possess significant potential for skill integration because of their relationship with accounting, finance, business and entrepreneurship.
- B.A. programmes can improve their contemporary relevance through communication, digital competence, research and field-based learning.
- B.Sc. programmes can strengthen their employment orientation through technological applications, research exposure and practical scientific training.
- Employability increasingly depends on a combination of academic knowledge and transferable skills.
- NEP 2020 provides an important policy opportunity to integrate academic, vocational and practical learning.
- The future of traditional undergraduate education depends upon the ability of institutions to combine disciplinary knowledge with practical relevance.
- Students may increasingly prefer programmes that offer both a recognised university degree and demonstrable professional competencies.

XII. SUGGESTIONS

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

12.1 Integration of Employability Skills

Traditional undergraduate programmes should integrate relevant practical and professional skills into their curriculum.

12.2 Strengthening Internship Opportunities

Students should receive meaningful opportunities for internships, fieldwork, projects and workplace exposure.

12.3 Career Guidance at the PU Level

PU colleges should provide systematic career guidance to help students understand the long-term potential of different higher education programmes.

12.4 Industry-Academia Collaboration

Higher education institutions should establish partnerships with industries, businesses, professional bodies and service organisations.

12.5 Digital Competence

Students in B.A., B.Com. and B.Sc. programmes should receive appropriate exposure to digital tools relevant to their disciplines.

12.6 Modernisation of B.Com. Education

Commerce education should incorporate computerised accounting, business analytics, financial technology, taxation practice and other contemporary business skills.

12.7 Strengthening B.A. Programmes

B.A. programmes should focus on transferable competencies such as communication, research, data interpretation, media awareness and public engagement.

12.8 Application-Based B.Sc. Education

Science programmes should strengthen laboratory practice, technology applications, research projects and interdisciplinary learning.

12.9 Professional Certification

Institutions should encourage students to pursue suitable value-added and professional certification programmes alongside their undergraduate degrees.

12.10 Avoiding the Traditional Versus Job-Oriented Divide

Higher education should not force students to choose between academic knowledge and employability. The objective should be to integrate both dimensions within a quality undergraduate programme.

XIII. CONCLUSION

The choice of an undergraduate programme after PU education has become increasingly influenced by perceptions of employability, practical skills and career opportunities. This has contributed to the growing attractiveness of programmes considered to be job-oriented and professionally specialised.

However, the present study demonstrates that the issue should not be understood as a competition between traditional degrees and job-oriented programmes. B.A., B.Com. and B.Sc. programmes continue to provide valuable foundations in disciplinary knowledge, analytical ability, communication, scientific thinking and lifelong learning.

The growing preference for job-oriented education should instead be understood as an indication that students increasingly expect education to provide visible relevance to the world of work. The challenge for traditional degree programmes is therefore to combine their academic strengths with practical skills, technological competence, industry exposure and career guidance.

For Karnataka, the future of conventional undergraduate education depends upon curricular innovation and institutional responsiveness. B.A., B.Com. and B.Sc. programmes must evolve according to changing student aspirations without sacrificing academic depth and intellectual development.

NEP 2020 provides an important opportunity for such transformation. By integrating multidisciplinary education, skill development, vocational exposure, internships and flexible learning, higher education institutions can reduce the perceived divide between traditional and job-oriented programmes.

The ideal future model of undergraduate education should therefore not be traditional education versus job-oriented education. It should be:

Traditional Academic Foundation + Contemporary Skills + Practical Exposure + Digital Competence + Career Guidance = Holistic and Employable Graduates

Such an approach can help students make informed educational choices and ensure that B.A., B.Com. and B.Sc. programmes continue to remain relevant in Karnataka's changing higher education environment.

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