

From academic knowledge to practical skills: What students expect from universities

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- **Practical, job-ready skills: 89% of students identified skills as a key career priority, highlighting the need to connect classroom learning with workplace requirements.**
- **Stronger industry networks: 79% valued industry connections, including opportunities to interact with professionals and potential employers.**
- **Portfolios that demonstrate ability: 68% prioritised building portfolios that showcase their work and practical capabilities.**
- **Early industry exposure: 85% wanted industry engagement by their second year through live projects, internships and masterclasses.**
- **Mentorship and applied AI learning: Students want guidance from industry professionals and entrepreneurs, along with hands-on opportunities to understand and use AI**

A student entering university today has likely already learned a skill online, experimented with artificial intelligence (AI) or built something independently. For much of the last century, universities supplied knowledge, while degrees certified graduates' readiness for work. That relationship is changing. With knowledge more accessible and employers placing greater emphasis on practical capabilities, universities must consider what students should be able to do with what they learn.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recognised this shift, emphasising multidisciplinary study, experiential learning and stronger industry connections. However, a gap remains between these ambitions and classroom practice. Graduates may have a sound theoretical foundation but limited experience of the uncertainty, constraints and accountability of professional life. Understanding students' expectations is an important step towards addressing this gap.

To explore these expectations, we conducted a campus-wide survey of more than 2,100 students across our four schools, covering design, business, technology and law. The findings offer insights into how Generation Z views education, skills and career preparation.

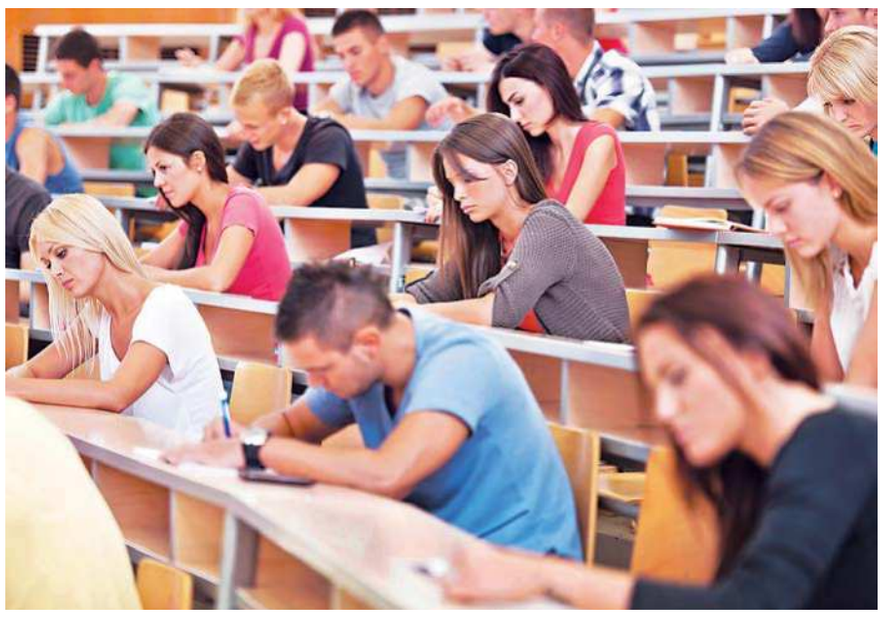
When asked what would matter most for their careers, 89% selected skills, 79% industry networks and 68% portfolios. These priorities are closely connected. Students want to develop capabilities, learn from professionals and build work that demonstrates what they can achieve. They are asking universities to make the link between education and employment more direct.

Practical problem-solving is central to this expectation. Real business challenges rarely come with clearly defined questions or single correct answers. They require students to understand constraints, collaborate and make decisions. Solving real-world business problems ranked first among the skills students considered important for their generation.



The survey found that 70% favoured industry exposure through live projects, internships and masterclasses. One student observed, "Working on industry projects has given me the confidence to apply what I learn in class to actual business problems." Studying a problem and taking responsibility for solving it are different experiences. Universities need to provide opportunities for both. Students also want this exposure early. While 44% wanted industry engagement in their first year, 85% wanted it by their second year. Introducing practical learning throughout a degree gives students time to experiment, learn from mistakes and develop judgement. It should be an integral part of education, not an activity reserved for the final year. The changing nature of work makes this approach particularly relevant to artificial intelligence. Understanding what AI can do is different from knowing when and how to use it effectively. In the survey, 92% identified live industry projects and masterclasses as the best ways to learn AI applications. The same principle applies to multidisciplinary education. Professional challenges increasingly bring together technology, business, design and human behaviour. Students need opportunities to work across disciplines while developing expertise in their chosen fields.

Mentorship is another important consideration. Among aspiring student entrepreneurs, 62% wanted industry mentorship and 61% wanted to learn from entrepreneurs, compared with 30% who prioritised funding. This indicates that students value guidance from people with practical experience as they explore their own ideas.



Implications for the university of the future

These findings have implications for how universities design programmes and engage with industry. Employers should be more than occasional visitors during placement season; they should contribute to shaping learning through projects, internships and professional engagement. Disciplinary boundaries also need to become more flexible, allowing students to understand how different fields intersect in practice.

AI literacy should extend across programmes rather than remain limited to specialist departments. Campuses should also provide students with the resources, mentorship and opportunities to develop ideas, test prototypes and explore entrepreneurship.

Their responses point to a desire for education that combines knowledge with practical experience, professional networks and opportunities to demonstrate capability.

Universities should make student feedback a regular part of academic planning and improvement. By doing so, they can build learning environments that prepare graduates not only for what they know, but for what they can do with it.

(The author is Co-Founder & Executive President, ATLAS SkillTech University)

TODAY IS WORLD QUALITY DAY

How data and AI are reshaping quality management

Quality management is evolving beyond routine inspections, audits and compliance checklists. As industries and institutions face increasingly complex demands, the focus is shifting towards strategic quality practices that use data analysis, technology and artificial intelligence (AI) to improve decision-making and process control.



Traditionally, quality systems have focused on identifying errors, meeting prescribed standards and ensuring that processes comply with established requirements. While these practices remain important, they may not be sufficient to address emerging challenges. Organisations increasingly need systems that can identify potential problems early, understand patterns in performance and support continuous improvement.

Data-driven quality management offers an approach to achieving this shift. By collecting and analysing information from different stages of a process, organisations can identify recurring issues, measure performance and make decisions based on evidence rather than assumptions. This can help reduce inefficiencies, improve consistency and strengthen accountability.

AI and machine learning are adding another dimension to quality practices. These technologies can analyse large volumes of data, identify patterns and detect deviations that may not be immediately visible through conventional monitoring. In manufacturing, for instance, predictive analytics can help identify equipment-related risks before they lead to production interruptions. In service sectors, data analysis can help monitor performance and identify areas requiring improvement. However, adopting technology alone does not guarantee better quality outcomes. Organisations need clear quality objectives, reliable data, trained professionals and well-defined processes. Human oversight also remains essential, particularly when interpreting AI-generated insights and making decisions that affect people, safety or institutional performance.

Ultimately, quality should be treated as an ongoing organisational responsibility rather than a periodic exercise undertaken to satisfy audit requirements. Combining strategic planning, data analysis and emerging technologies can help organisations move from detecting problems to anticipating and preventing them, creating a stronger foundation for continuous improvement.

IHM hosts culinary masterclass, students get to meet industry experts

The Institute of Hotel Management (IHM), Hyderabad, organised a culinary masterclass titled 'Power of Pecans' in association with the American Pecans Council, giving students an opportunity to interact with chefs and professionals from the hospitality and food industry.



The session brought together five culinary and nutrition experts, who demonstrated the use of pecans in sweet and savoury preparations. Students observed different cooking techniques, explored ingredient combinations and learnt about contemporary culinary practices through live demonstrations and discussions.

The masterclass featured celebrity chef and restaurateur Chef Ajay Chopra; Chef Anil Rohira, corporate pastry chef for Felchlin Switzerland and co-founder of the School for European Pastry; Dr Chef Parvinder Singh Bali, director of the School for European Pastry and Culinary Arts; and Chef Vicky Ratnani, known for his work in global cuisine. Dr Aditi Govitrikar, a medical doctor and psychologist, spoke about the nutritional properties and health aspects of pecans. The chefs shared their professional experiences, cooking methods and insights into ingredient innovation. Their demonstrations helped students understand how a single ingredient can be incorporated into different culinary preparations. The interactive format also provided opportunities for students to engage with the experts and learn about evolving trends in the food and hospitality sector.

The session offered practical exposure beyond classroom instruction, allowing students to observe professional approaches to food preparation, presentation and menu development. Interactions with industry practitioners also provided insights into the skills and creative thinking required in professional kitchens.

During the event, the institute's official newsletter, 'Referral Point', was formally unveiled by the guests. The publication will feature the institute's activities, academic initiatives and contributions to the hospitality sector.

The programme also included an introduction to Hyderabad's culinary heritage through a traditional Hyderabadi lunch. Students and guests witnessed musical performances by the institute's band, 'Flute'. Chef Ajay Chopra joined the performers in a song, while Dr Chef Parvinder Singh Bali presented a flute recital.

The event formed part of IHM Hyderabad's efforts to connect academic learning with industry practices through expert interactions and demonstrations. Such engagements provide hospitality students with opportunities to understand professional expectations, explore new techniques and gain exposure to developments in the culinary field.

EFLU student figures among 50 delegates for Yuva Sangam phase VII

Hans News Service

E. MATHIVANAN, a student of the English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU), Hyderabad, represented the university and Tamil Nadu at the seventh phase of the Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat – Yuva Sangam programme held in New Delhi.

Mathivanan was selected as one of 50 delegates from more than 4,700 applicants across the country for the national youth exchange initiative. The programme aims to promote cultural integration, experiential learning and national unity by providing young people with opportunities to explore India's diversity and engage with participants from different regions.

During the programme, Mathivanan had the opportunity to interact with Vice President of India C. P. Radhakrishnan and Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta.

The exchange was coordinated by the Central University of Tamil Nadu and the University of Delhi. It included visits to prominent historical and national landmarks, including Uparashtrapati Bhavan, the Red Fort, India Gate, the National War Memorial and the Dr B. R. Ambedkar National Memorial. These visits offered participants an opportunity to learn about India's history, cultural heritage and national institutions.

The programme also provided exposure to educational institutions and technological developments, while enabling delegates to interact with academics, officials and fellow participants from different parts of the country.

Reflecting on his participation, Mathivanan described meeting the Vice President and the Delhi Chief Minister as among the proudest moments of his experience. He said the interactions and exchanges with delegates from across India helped him develop a deeper appreciation of the country's cultural diversity and the importance of national integration.

EFLU Vice-Chancellor Prof. N. Nagaraju congratulated Mathivanan on his selection and participation. He commended the student for representing both the university and Tamil Nadu at the national-level programme.

The university noted that Mathivanan's participation reflected the objectives of the Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat initiative, which seeks to strengthen cultural understanding and promote the idea of unity in diversity among young people.

