

“COMPARING PRE-PLACEMENT EXPECTATIONS VS POST-PLACEMENT REALITIES IN THE CAREER JOURNEY OF FRESH GRADUATES”

Author

Ms. Ilakkiya P

II. M. Com (CS)

*Department of Corporate Secretaryship, PSG College of Arts & Science,
Coimbatore -14*

e-mail: ilakkiyaparamarajan@gmail.com

Co-Author Ms. Indhumathi G Assistant Professor

*Department of Corporate Secretaryship, PSG College of Arts & Science,
Coimbatore -14*

e-mail: indhumathig@psgcas.ac.in

ABSTRACT

The transition from school to the job market is an important milestone in the lives of new graduates. This research intends to investigate the gap between students expectations before they are placed and the real-life experiences upon entering the working world. Based on the analysis of data gathered from recent graduates in different fields, the study highlights the major areas of mismatch, such as job positions, compensation levels, work-life balance, opportunities for career advancement, and organizational culture. The research also investigates how these mismatches affect job satisfaction, motivation, performance. Through qualitative and quantitative approaches, the study sheds light on the determinants of expectation-reality gaps and makes suggestions to educational institutions, employers, and students on how to close this gap. Ultimately, the research aims to facilitate a smoother career transition for new graduates by promoting realistic career planning and closer congruence between academic training and industry needs.

KEY WORDS: Fresh Graduates, Pre-placement Expectations, Post-placement Realities, Career Transition, Job Satisfaction, Expectation-Reality Gap, Workplace Adaptation, Qualitative Research, Quantitative Research, Employment Outcomes

INTRODUCTION

The transition from student life to professional life is a significant period of time for newly graduated students. Students form different expectations regarding their professional lives during their college days on the basis of academic education, internships, career counselling, and peer pressure. High salary scales, good working environments, transparent career development, and fulfilling jobs are some of the typical expectations.

But when they actually join the labour market, graduates encounter challenges different from their first expectations. They include job role mismatches, stress in the workplace, fewer career developments, and salary discontent. Such variations can affect their motivation, satisfaction at work, and career selection.

It is crucial to find out and realize the difference between pre-placement aspirations and actual post-placement realities. This serves the purpose of enhancing career readiness in educational institutions, allows employers to better align job functions, and assists students in developing realistic career prospects. This research aims to investigate such gaps and make recommendations to facilitate the transition of fresh graduates into their careers.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

New graduates join the workforce with expectations about salary, job title, work-life balance, and career advancement. Few are severely disappointed by mismatches between expectations and the workplace, resulting in dissatisfaction with work, stress, and turnover. There is existing literature on either graduate employability or workplace issues, but none investigate how graduates react to expectation-reality mismatches. This study seeks to identify the most important areas of expectation-reality mismatch, to learn about how graduates adapt, and to provide recommendations to employers and educators about how best to prepare students for realistic careers.

OBJECTIVES

- To explore the level of expectation-reality gap in the career journey of fresh graduates and its impact on their job satisfaction and job performance
- To identify and analyse the key factors contributing to these mismatches
- To examine how fresh graduates adapt to unexpected workplace challenges and realities

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology refers to the scientific and systematic method applied to carry out this study. It includes the principles, procedures, and techniques applied to gather, analyse, and interpret data to contrast pre-placement expectations and post-placement realities in the career journey of fresh graduates. This study employs a quantitative research design, where a structured questionnaire-based survey is applied to gather data from fresh graduates with different educational backgrounds. Data gathered is applied to analyse expectation-reality gaps, levels of job satisfaction, and the key factors affecting career changes. The data analysed using the following statistical tools:

- Percentage analysis
- Paired T Test

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

S.NO.	AGE GROUP	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
1	18-25	96	91.4%
2	26-30	9	8.6%
3	Above 30	NIL	NIL
	Total	105	100.0

S.NO.	GENDER	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
1	Male	49	46.7
2	Female	56	53.3
	Total	100.0	100.0

S.NO	EDUCATION QUALIFICATION	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
1	Bachelor's degree	67	63.8
2	Master's degree	36	34.3
3	Diploma	2	1.9
4	Others	NIL	NIL
	Total	105	100.0

S.NO	FIELD OF STUDY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
1	Arts	18	17.1
2	Science	15	14.3
3	Commerce	48	45.7
4	Engineering	24	22.9
	TOTAL	100	100.0

S.NO.	YEAR OF GRADUATION	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
1	2024	56	53.3
2	2023	33	31.4
3	2022	16	15.2
	Total	105	100.0

ANALYSIS

1) PRE-PLACEMENT EXPECTATIONS VS. POST-PLACEMENT REALITIES TABLE

Paired Samples Statistics

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Pair 1 I expected my job roles and responsibilities to be clearly defined	3.8952	105	.80770	.07882
My job role and responsibilities were clearly defined in reality	2.7619	105	.99541	.09714
Pair 2 I expected the salary and benefits to be competitive	4.0190	105	.87685	.08557
The salary and benefits I received were competitive in reality	2.5524	105	1.01887	.09943
Pair 3 I expected to have a good work-life balance	3.9333	105	.85784	.08372
I had a good work-life balance in reality	2.6857	105	.93350	.09110
Pair 4 I anticipated opportunities for growth and development in the company	3.9429	105	.85292	.08324
There were opportunities for growth and development in reality	2.7429	105	1.08334	.10572
Pair 5 I expected a positive company culture and work environment	3.8381	105	.96201	.09388
The company culture and work environment were positive in reality	2.7714	105	1.06750	.10418

Paired Samples Correlations

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1 I expected my job roles and responsibilities to be clearly defined & My job role and responsibilities were clearly defined in reality	105	.160	.103
Pair 2 I expected the salary and benefits to be competitive & The salary and benefits I received were competitive in reality	105	-.206	.035
Pair 3 I expected to have a good work-life balance & I had a good work- life balance in reality	105	.046	.644
Pair 4 I anticipated opportunities for growth and development in the company & There were opportunities for growth and development in reality	105	.005	.962
Pair 5 I expected a positive company culture and work environment & The company culture and work environment were positive in reality	105	-.093	.348

Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 I expected my job roles and responsibilities to be clearly defined - My job role and responsibilities were clearly defined in reality	1.13333	1.17724	.11489	.90551	1.36116	9.865	104	.000
Pair 2 I expected the salary and benefits to be competitive - The salary and benefits I received were competitive in reality	1.46667	1.47457	.14390	1.18130	1.75203	10.192	104	.000
Pair 3 I expected to have a good work-life balance - I had a good work-life balance in reality	1.24762	1.23865	.12088	1.00791	1.48733	10.321	104	.000
Pair 4 I anticipated opportunities for growth and development in the company - There were opportunities for growth and development in reality	1.20000	1.37561	.13425	.93379	1.46621	8.939	104	.000
Pair 5 I expected a positive company culture and work environment - The company culture and work environment were positive in reality	1.06667	1.50171	.14655	.77605	1.35728	7.278	104	.000

INTERPRETATION

Employees had significantly higher expectations than what they experienced in reality, across all aspects measured (roles, salary, work-life balance, growth, and culture). The gap is especially strong in salary/benefits and work-life balance.

2) THE GAP BETWEEN MY EXPECTATIONS AND REALITIES HAS NEGATIVELY IMPACTED MY JOB SATISFACTION AND JOB PERFORMANCE TABLE

PARTICULAR	NO. OF 'YES' RESPONDENT	PERCENT	NO. OF 'NO' RESPONDENT	PERCENT
The gap between my expectations and realities has negatively impacted my job satisfaction and job performance	78	74.3	27	25.7

INTERPRETATION

It shows that 74.3% of respondents feel the gap between their expectations and reality has negatively impacted their job satisfaction and performance, while 25.7% disagree. This suggests that unmet expectations are a major concern affecting workplace experience.

3) REFLECT ON THE KEY FACTORS BEHIND THE EXPECTATION-REALITY GAP?

TABLE

S.no	Expectation-reality gap	Strongly disagree	%	Disagree	%	Neutral	%	Agree	%	Strongly agree	%
1	Lack of practical exposure during studies	4	5.12	3	3.84	16	20.51	52	66.66	3	3.84
2	Inaccurate job descriptions	1	1.28	6	7.69	14	17.94	40	51.28	17	21.79
3	Unrealistic salary expectations	1	1.28	2	2.56	21	26.92	47	60.25	7	8.97
4	Poor Work-Life balance	1	1.28	5	6.41	19	24.35	45	57.69	8	10.25
5	Unrealistic promises made by the company	2	2.56	6	7.69	20	25.64	43	55.12	7	8.97
6	Insufficient understanding of the industry/role	1	1.28	11	14.10	20	25.64	42	53.84	4	5.12

INTERPRETATION

The most significant gaps are notifiable in inadequate practical experience and inaccurate job descriptions, followed by unrealistic salary expectations and poor work-life balance. While false company promises and insufficient role understanding show smaller gaps

4) WHAT SPECIFIC SKILLS OR KNOWLEDGE WERE YOU LACKING THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE MISMATCH?

TABLE

S.NO.	PARTICULARS	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
1	Technical skills	41	52.6
2	Soft skills	18	23.1
3	Industry-specific knowledge	58	74.4
4	Practical experience	43	55.1
5	Professional Networking Skills	36	46.2
6	Others	1	1.3

INTERPRETATION

It shows that most commonly lacking skill contributing to mismatch was industry-specific knowledge (74.4%), followed by practical experience (55.1%) and technical skills (52.6%). Professional networking skills (46.2%) and soft skills (23.1%) and others (1.3%).

FINDINGS

Age of respondents – The study reveals that majority 91.4% of the respondents belonged to the age group between 18-25 years

Gender of respondents – The study reveals that 53.3% of female respondents and 46.7% of male respondents

Educational qualification – The study reveals that majority 63.8% of the respondents belonged to educational qualification of UG level

Field of study – The study reveals that majority 45.7% of the respondents belonged to commerce background

Year of graduation – The study reveals that majority 53.3% of the respondents graduated in the year 2024

Percentage analysis:

- High guidance in resume writing (93.33%) and internships (87.61%), moderate in skill training (59.05%) and entrepreneurship (68.57%), low in workplace culture (32.38%) and salary negotiation (37.14%).
- The study reveals that the majority of 74.3% of the respondents felt the gap between their expectation and reality has negatively impacted.

- The study reveals that 74% of respondents who felt an expectation-reality gap negatively impacted on their job satisfaction and performance are due to Inaccurate job descriptions (51.28% agree, 21.79% strongly agree)
- The study reveals that 26% of respondents who expectations and reality gap not negatively impacted on their job satisfaction and performance are due to Adequate practical exposure (55.55%)

Paired T – Test:

Employees had significantly higher expectations than what they experienced in reality, across all aspects measured (roles, salary, work-life balance, growth, and culture). The gap is especially strong in salary/benefits and work-life balance.

Frequency Analysis:

- The study reveals that a majority of respondents (74.4%) experienced reduced job satisfaction and performance primarily due to a lack of industry-specific knowledge.
- The study reveals that a majority of respondents (85.2%) believed that having strong technical skills in their field positively contributed to aligning their job expectations with reality, leading to better performance and satisfaction
- The study reveals majority of the respondents took time to adjust (52.4%) when facing unexpected job challenge initial phase of their career journey
- The study reveals that majority of the respondents learnt new skills (72.4%) to adapt to the workplace challenges
- The study reveals that majority of respondents (81.9%) took any of the addition courses or training to cope with workplace demands
- The study reveals that majority of the respondents (94.3%) believes that workplace provides enough support for fresh graduates to adapt
- The study reveals that majority of respondents (75.2%) advised the future graduate to be open to continuous learning and skill improvement to handle workplace challenges better
- The study reveals that majority of respondents (52.4%) believe that giving candidates more chances to ask questions during recruitment process would align expectations with reality

CONCLUSION

The study highlights a clear gap between the pre-placement expectations and post-placement realities faced by fresh graduates. While many expected supportive work environments, clear roles, and competitive salaries, the reality often fell short - especially in areas like salary and work-life balance. The mismatch was largely due to inadequate industry knowledge and inaccurate job descriptions. However, those with strong technical skills and practical exposure were better able to cope. Most graduates adapted by learning new skills and taking additional training, and many felt supported by their workplaces. The findings stress the importance of continuous learning, career readiness programs, and more transparent recruitment practices to bridge this expectation-reality gap effectively.