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Need for Empirical Humanities

The English Studies curriculum must explore technology's humanising potential and offer paths toward critical inquiry and progressive human reform

Jehoson Jiresh I

"Is this discipline even relevant any more?" This question from a former student of M.A. English resonates, as universities suspend Humanities programmes due to declining enrolment numbers. In 2013, when I began teaching, English departments flourished, not because of students' passion for Austen or Achebe, but because they ensured government teaching positions. This created a closed system – teaching English so that students could teach English to students who would also teach English – which remained hidden when teaching positions abounded.

But the decline today is predominantly due to the failure to create thought leaders and critics who would positively impact society. English Studies has nurtured a romanticised backward gaze fixated on recovering a 'golden' past rather than envisioning golden futures. Many departments in India still resist the half-a-century-old "cultural turn" that, when enabled, allows scholars to study everyday cultural expressions with academic rigour.

Self-defeating stance

Traditional Humanities disciplines increasingly distance themselves from the "Humanities" label. Media Studies seeks classification under Social Sciences, as to be known as a 'Science' discipline suggests a worthwhile academic contribution. With History and Philosophy programmes sinking, English Studies is left fighting a solitary battle.

The most self-defeating stance has been that of literary scholars taking positions against scientific pursuits. During a recent conference, a medical practitioner expressed frustration with literary scholars making romanticised claims about wellness that ignored empirical evidence. Such anti-scientific attitudes do not preserve disciplinary integrity but will destroy it.

The persistent framing of Humanities versus Sciences damages both fields. Humanities scholars often argue against technological advancements as "dehumanising" while benefiting immensely from them.

This resonates an elitist glorification of a 'simple life' while conveniently ignoring the subtle privileges of technological advancements that are still a distant dream for many.

Investigate and explore

Rather than opposing it, Humanities must explore technology's humanising potential in empowering neurodivergent thinkers, preventing diseases through gene therapy, democratising knowledge and liberating marginalised communities. Instead of unfounded resistance, literary inquiry should address questions of equity and ethics in scientific pursuits. Because the adversities of technology stem not from technology per se but from the human interests driving them. This constructive approach aligns with India's constitutional endorsement of 'scientific temper' and offers paths toward critical inquiry and progressive human reform. We need an empirical Humanities that honours interpretive traditions while embracing evidence. It serves as a counterweight to Digital Humanities while developing techno-textuality that interprets narratives across platforms using frameworks conceptualised by English departments.

Imagine Literature scholars working alongside doctors, scientists, and programmers. In Medicine, they could analyse patient stories to improve doctor-patient communication, exploring how diagnostic language shapes experiences, and how cultural narratives and beliefs influence healthcare decision-making. In climate discourse, rather than demonising technology and romanticising pre-industrial life, they could acknowledge that the universe itself is a "giant killer machine" – as DeGrasse Tyson observes, 'natural' asteroids devastated Earth long before technology intervened – and explore how technology can ensure ethical sustainability.

Instead of resisting AI for its 'artificial' tag by idealising human intelligence as an isolated natural entity, literary scholars could investigate how large language models mirror existing human biases and shape experiences accordingly. This shift involves understanding context engineering and creating rich knowledge for AI systems. While context engineering certainly requires technical skills, literary skills such as linguistic competence, critical thinking skills, interpreting ability, and cultural analysis could be the missing pieces in our AI revolution that can help transcend mere pattern-matching to achieve genuine cultural understanding.

The collaborations can be realised by envisioning a paradigm shift in the English Studies curriculum, including digital literacy, data visualisation, and collaborative practices alongside honing traditional literary skills. Innovative courses like "Narratives Across Media", "Narrative Medicine," "Eco-Tech Sustainability," and "Algorithmic Culture" must become standard.

Indeed, literary discourses help us encounter our fragmented world, but they should do so with a scientific temper. Only then will English Studies forge tomorrow's thought leaders rather than mere analysts of yesterday. Departments envisioning critical perspectives with a scientific spirit will flourish. Those clinging to outdated models will become curious relics. Is it time to pause, reflect, act? Not just to be or not to be but to be relevant or not to be?

Views expressed are personal.

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OFF THE EDGE
Nandini Raman

Build a portfolio

Uncertain about your career options? Low on self-confidence? This column may help

I did a B.Sc. in Life Science and an M.Sc. in Botany. I want to do an MBA but have a speech impediment due to a cleft lip. I am insecure about the way I speak. Can I do an MBA? Usha

Dear Usha,

Your speech impediment does not disqualify you from being a successful MBA student or business professional. Select your specialisation based on your interest. If you prefer less verbal and more analytical process roles, you can consider Business Analytics, Operations and Supply Chain Management, Finance (Corporate Finance, Risk Management) or Sustainability or Environmental Management.

If you are comfortable with communication in smaller settings, consider fields such as Digital Marketing, Brand Management, Product Management, Healthcare and Pharmaceutical Management, or Agri-Business Management or Environmental Consulting.

Have you considered working with a speech therapist or psychologist to feel more confident? Over time, you will also grow and become comfortable with yourself. Your speech is just one part of who you are; it is not all of you! Aim for an MBA, which is more important than how you pronounce or cannot pronounce certain words.

I finished BDS, but was pushed into it. So I chose to do a Master's in Public Health in the U.K. to change to a non-clinical sector. I came back to India for personal reasons, but am struggling to find a job here. I was drawn to writing and journalism before doing BDS. What can I do now? Bhagya

Dear Bhagya,

Unfortunately, this is a common experience for many in India who end up in a field due to family pressures. Have you considered a role as a health writer, public health communicator, policy communication specialist, or technical writer for healthcare? Consider NGOs, health-focused think tanks, research organisations, media houses, CSR arms of companies, or health startups. There is a growing demand for science communicators, medical writers, and health journalists post-pandemic. Look at roles as Public Health Programme Manager, Policy Analyst, Research Associate, and Monitoring and Evaluation.

Have your considered freelance journalism focused on health, science or environment? If you enjoy that, you could do a short diploma or certificate in Journalism from a regular institute or an online one.

Other options include roles in corporate health, CSR, ESG compliance, and workplace wellness.

I'm doing M.Sc. in Maths, and have completed my B.Ed. What are my career options? Rajarajaeshwari

Dear Rajarajaeshwari,

You can be a Post Graduate Teacher (PGT) in a CBSE, ICSE, State Board schools or in those following international syllabi. If you take the UGC-NET in Mathematical Sciences, you can also teach at colleges. If you want to move to being a professor or a researcher, then consider doing a Ph.D., which will involve taking the CSIR-NET (Mathematical Sciences).

Another option could bet to move into the corporate sector into Data Science and Analytics.

You can look at government organisations such as ISRO, DRDO, BARC, NPL and so on for Research Scientist roles. To join the Indian Statistical Service (ISS) or the RBI or other government jobs, you will have to take the relevant exams.

You can also consider Actuarial Sciences, which need Maths-intensive skills. You will need to pass actuarial exams from IFoA (UK) or IAI (India). The work is Maths heavy and there is a high demand with excellent salaries. Quantitative Finance is yet another possibility with roles in quant research, algorithmic trading, and risk modelling.

You could also explore being a Maths content developer or curriculum designer or online educator for ed-tech platforms.

I have done PG in Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery and want a fellowship in cleft and craniofacial courses abroad. Which universities offer this? Also, in which foreign country can I practise with just a licensing exam and no further studying? Gayatri

Dear Gayatri,

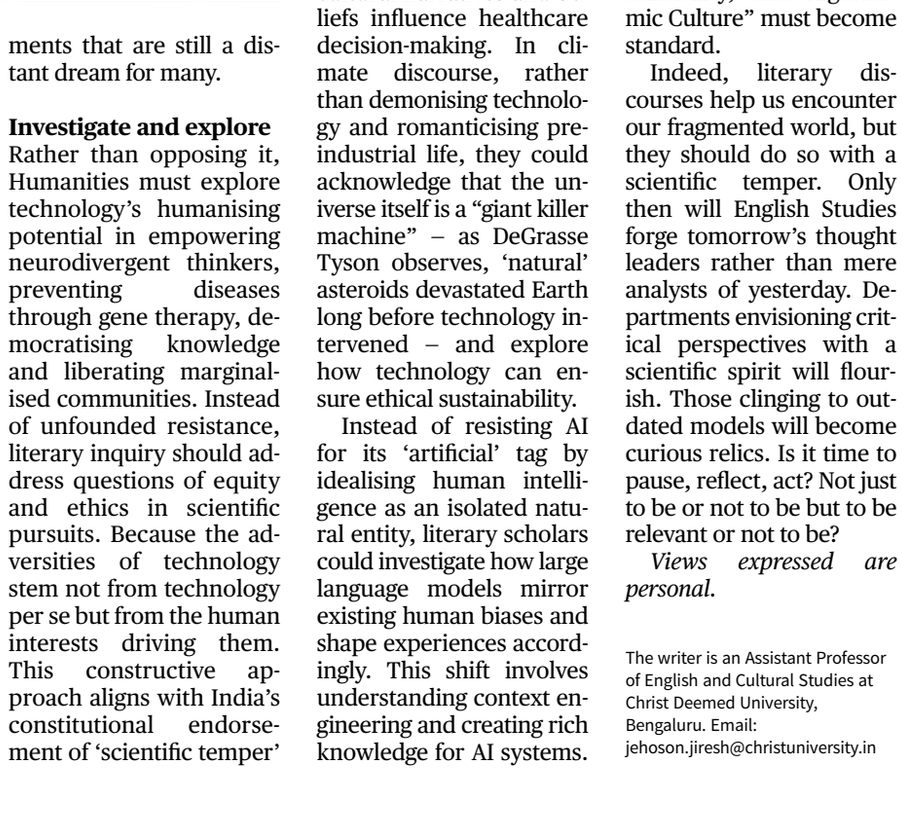
Global NGOs that offer fellowships are Smile Train and Operation Smile. Some renowned institutes that also fellowships are Smile Train-affiliated centres across the US; University of California, San Francisco (UCSF); Children's Hospital Los Angeles (CHLA; Craniofacial Centre at UT Southwestern Medical Centre, Dallas, Langone-Hansjörg Wyss Department of Plastic Surgery in New York University in the U.S. In the U.K., options are Great Ormond Street Hospital, London; Alder Hey Children's Hospital, Liverpool; and The Royal London Hospital. In Australia, look up Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne; Sydney Children's Hospital Network; and Adelaide Craniofacial Unit. Other institutes include Heidelberg University Hospital and Universitätsklinikum Freiburg in Germany and KK Women's and Children's Hospital and National University Hospital in Singapore.

Many fellowships are multidisciplinary and open to OMFS, Plastic Surgeons, and ENT Surgeons. Most require surgical experience (post-PG), good standing with your medical or dental council, IELTS/TOEFL (for English-speaking countries) and recommendation letters and surgical logs.

As far as practice goes, UAE, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia offer high salaries and requiring minimal additional study. Australia and New Zealand will require one or two years of study and taking exams. Singapore and South Africa have a case-by-case assessment with exams and supervised practice. The U.K., the U.S. and Canada are most challenging for clinical practice unless you are open to further degrees or non-clinical roles.

Disclaimer: This column is merely a guiding voice and provides advice and suggestions on education and careers.

The writer is a practising counsellor and a trainer. Send your questions to eduplus.thehindu@gmail.com with the subject line Off the Edge



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Classroom to career

Embedding apprenticeships into the curriculum can help close the gap between theory and practical skills

Shantanu Rooj

An engineering graduate, who has a degree, project reports, portfolio and theoretical understanding of machines, has not yet found a job. This is because he lacks practical experience and exposure. This is not the story of one person but of various people across cities and industries every day. One report estimates that nearly 83% of engineering graduates struggle to secure their first break in the corporate world because credentials but often do not translate into capabilities.

Proven model

This gap can be filled by apprentice-shaped learning, which will be a practical response to the pressing challenge of matching talent with the right opportunity. Apprenticeship is a proven model to build skilled talent. For instance, Germany's dual education system demonstrates the effectiveness of combining academic instruction with hands-on learning and delivers measurable employment outcomes and builds accountability.

While India has frameworks for apprenticeships in place, they remain significantly underutilised. Reforms to the Apprenticeship Act and initiatives like National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS) and National Apprenticeship Training Scheme (NATS) have created a policy base for expansion. However, implementation and visibility continue to fall short.

Apprenticeship is a structured form of on-the-job training that provides individuals the opportunity to learn through doing and employers the chance to assess talent in a productive setting. It contributes to higher productivity, better employee retention and reduced time-to-performance for new entrants. For years, apprenticeship has been seen as suited only for factory or technical jobs. This narrow view has kept many companies and sectors from exploring the real potential of apprenticeships. But with the government rolling out supportive schemes, easing compliance processes, and using digital platforms to increase access and awareness, such beliefs are being challenged.

By combining academic learning with hands-on training, companies can close the gap between theory and practical skills. Apprenticeships should be part of the workforce strategy and viewed as an investment. Employers who have implemented structured apprenticeship programmes report gains in both output and engagement.

Employability

However, societal perception remains a major roadblock. Many consider it a lesser option, especially compared to full-time academic programmes. This discourages participation. To move forward, apprenticeships must be seen through the lens of employability, income stability and long-term career growth. Educational institutions have an important role to play by integrating apprenticeships into mainstream learning pathways. Blending theory with real-world exposure increases both the relevance of education and the employability of students.

The National Education Policy already encourages more flexible and modular learning formats. This opens up the opportunity to embed apprenticeships into formal academic journeys. If employers, educators and policymakers can work in coordination, apprenticeships can become a widely accepted and productive choice for young professionals.

India's employment challenge is rooted in the lack of applied skills. Addressing this requires more than incremental adjustments to curricula. It calls for a structured, scalable model that links learning to labour market realities. Apprenticeship offers such a model. The infrastructure exists. The need of the hour is consistent execution and shared commitment across sectors.

The writer is Founder and CEO of TeamLease Edtech

Research news

Researchers from IIT-Guwahati, led by Veeranki Venkata Dasu, Professor and former Head, Department of Biosciences and Bioengineering, and research scholars Ansuman Sahoo, Prabir Kumar Das, M.S.R.C. Murthy, and Prof. Sanjukta Patra, have developed a new method to produce human insulin by using a safe bacterial system called *Pseudomonas fluorescens*., which can produce higher yields of insulin at lower costs. The technology has been granted two Indian patents and the findings were published in the *International Journal of Biological Macromolecules*, and *Journal of Biotechnology.*

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Test-drive your skills

Should students opt for internships or independent projects?

Srividya Raghavan
Abhilash Ponnam

Seneca, a renowned Stoic philosopher, once said, "Fire tests gold; suffering tests brave men." Outstanding grades in the marksheet are a robust testimony to a student's dedication to academics. However, they also need an opportunity to apply their learning in the real world to test their academic knowledge.

Many companies today look tangible evidence of students' capabilities and competencies and no longer consider Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) and academic pedigree as guideposts to recruit. Instead, they consider prior industry immersion, innovative thinking, adaptability, and people skills as relevant criteria to assess a candidate. These are difficult to showcase in structured academic programmes that focus on knowledge dissemination and testing. Hence, both industry internships and industry-bound projects are gaining currency in evaluating candidates' potential employability beyond an understanding of subject matter.

While progressive educational institutions can equip fresh graduates with cutting edge skills and knowledge, knowing when and how to deploy these capabilities can come only from real-life exposure to routine activities at the workplace. Capabilities such as working with incomplete information, navigating corporate hierarchies, understanding the project requirements by asking a few but incisive questions, making pithy yet impactful presentations, and putting the team above one's self are on-ground realities of that cannot be simulated in classroom settings.

Corporate exposure

Academic institutions must, therefore, ensure that the academic curriculum integrates corporate exposure at various levels. Some business schools go an extra mile by facilitating students to work on live industry projects while simultaneously pursuing their academics. Such projects are generally time-bound, scope-bound, and align closely with curricular goals, giving students a preview of real-world business operations and being an effective bridge between academia and industry. Industry projects are symbiotic, as they also offer corporates a fresh pair of eyes and brains to look at their problems and get novel solutions.

While projects are relatively new phenomenon, industry immersion through mandatory (summer/winter) internships have been in existence for some time. Internships differ from projects in many ways. Generally, long-duration internships that range from two to four months require the student to assume the role of employee, work on more than one challenging assignment at once, and report to work like a regular employee. As interns, they have the flexibility and privilege to get familiar with the organisation, its protocols, and work culture. During this extended engagement, the company can not only to observe the student's work ethic, but also assess the culture fit. This also serves as an avenue to identify and recruit talented students.

While live projects provide the students with an opportunity to test-drive specific skills like coding, report writing, testing, selling and research capabilities for short periods, an internship is akin to test-driving an employee's capabilities. While both are useful tools for students and corporates to engage with each other, internships are a better value proposition to those corporates who have an added recruitment focus while projects are better for those looking for expedient workforce for short term assignments.

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GREEN CAREERS HUB

Batting for Nature

Bat researcher Rohit Chakravarty on the experiences that shaped his career

The next in the monthly series by WWF-India that highlights niche and unconventional green careers through the stories of well-known personalities from the field of environment and conservation

My journey into wildlife began on World Environment Day in 2005, when my mother took my brother and me to Nagzira Wildlife Sanctuary near Nagpur. I was 14 and the memory of seeing a tigress cooling herself in a waterhole on that sweltering day remains vivid. That moment sparked my curiosity about the natural world. Birdwatching soon became an obsession and, before long, I was certain that wildlife was going to be a central part of my life.

The real turning point came two years later when a friend found an injured bat. Neither of us knew what to do, so we kept it in a dark garage and fed it mangoes and bananas. I was struck by its gentleness and its inquisitive eyes; so different from the sinister portrayals I had grown up hearing. That bat changed everything for me.

As I went birding more often, I noticed that I wasn't able to hear bird calls as well as my friends. A visit to the audiologist confirmed that I suffer from 'high frequency hearing loss', which prevents me from hearing many species of songbirds. I realised that I wasn't going to be a successful ornithologist. Quite fortuitously, this 'disability' turned my attention to bats and I haven't looked back.

Finding my way

After completing my Bachelor's degree in Zoology from St. Xavier's College, Mumbai, I pursued a Master's in Wildlife Biology at the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS) in Bengaluru. For my thesis, I studied bats in the Andaman Islands. That experience shaped the early years of my career, which included short stints with research institutes and independent fundraising to study bats in Uttarakhand. Eventually, I received a scholarship for a Ph.D. at the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research in Germany, where I continued my work on Uttarakhand's bats. After my doctorate, I returned to India and now work with the Nature Conservation Foundation and Bat Conservation International.

A typical workday for me doesn't quite fit the romanticised image of wildlife research. My time is split between the office in Bengaluru, where I write proposals, raise funds, and mentor students, and field sites across the country where we conduct research and implement conservation projects. Fieldwork, however, remains the most exciting part of the job. Studying bats has taken me everywhere; from uninhabited islands in the Andamans, caves in Meghalaya, rhododendron forests in Uttarakhand, and even monuments in Delhi. The joy of discovery never fades. In June 2025, I was part of the team that described a new species: the Himalayan Long-tailed Myotis from Uttarakhand!

Of course, this journey hasn't been without challenges. Balancing diverse roles – scientist, manager, mentor, even accountant – can sometimes feel overwhelming. There are days when I'm filled with self-doubt and others when I feel completely inadequate. I cope by allowing myself to sulk or take a break, sometimes watching a movie, before refocusing with the help of my supportive partner and mentors.

If there's one skill that has helped me, it's the willingness to avoid competition and carve my own path. Few people study bats, which has allowed me to shine in a relatively less crowded space. I also genuinely enjoy public speaking, and I use that to spread awareness about bats. The positive feedback I receive after talks reassures me that I'm on the right path.

To students considering a green career, my advice is simple: follow your passion, but plan carefully. Conservation is rarely a well-paid job, and financial management is as important as scientific skills. Remember, there is no single way into this field. You don't have to be a biologist. You could be a technologist, an artist, a musician, or a journalist. With passion and planning, any green career could be yours!

WIDE ANGLE

English is essential

Rather than viewing it as an either-or choice, a multilingual model that includes both English and regional languages seems more pragmatic

Albert P' Rayan

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In a recent article, "English need not be the medium of instruction in higher education institutions", published in *Sunday Guardian Live*, Jagadesh Kumar, former Chairman of the UGC and former Vice-Chancellor of JNU, argues that the belief that English is essential for global communication and better job prospects has marginalised Indian languages in education.

Citing the NEP 2020, which emphasises teaching in Indian languages as a key step toward greater inclusivity, Kumar calls for reducing English's dominance and highlights the challenges rural students face in coping with English. He argues that they should be allowed to take exams in their native language. His core point is that students ought to be evaluated on their subject knowledge, not their English proficiency.

Factors to consider

The provocative title raises important questions. While it is true to an extent that using English as the medium of instruction can hinder students' understanding of key concepts – especially for those with limited English skills – is it wise to argue that English should not be the medium in higher education institutions? Is it practically feasible to offer instruction in multiple regional languages at the tertiary level? What unintended consequences might arise if English is phased out as the primary medium of instruction? Does the dominance of English in higher education undermine the quality of education in India?

I have come across numerous engineering students who initially struggled to understand and communicate in English. However, with the right motivation, many overcame these challenges, developed their language skills, and now hold top positions in their careers. They often credit their success to their determination to learn English and prepare for the job market.

English is the global lingua franca. Proficiency in English has empowered millions of Indians to acquire knowledge and skills, succeed in higher education and their careers, compete with professionals worldwide, demonstrate expertise across diverse fields, and actively participate in the global economy. Today, most higher education resources – textbooks, journals, and digital materials – are in English, giving students studying in English easier access to the latest information and research. Moreover, strong English skills are a key requirement in the workplace. An English-medium education at the tertiary level significantly improves chances of securing better job opportunities.

While the idea of using the mother tongue as the medium of instruction in higher education may sound appealing, it is important to consider its practical feasibility. English is not a foreign language in India; it is also one of our official languages. The fact that many people in rural areas lack access to quality English education does not justify replacing English as the medium of instruction in higher education. It is the government's social responsibility to create opportunities that enable disadvantaged students to learn English.

In the article, Kumar states that "the best-performing education systems in the world, from Germany to Japan and France to South Korea, conduct their higher education entirely in their native languages." Each of these countries has a single national language. But in a multilingual nation like India, is it practically feasible for each state to use its first or regional language as the medium of instruction in HEIs? Even if such an option were available, what percentage of students would choose their first or regional language as the medium of instruction?

Embrace it

Rather than viewing it as an either-or choice, a multilingual model that includes both English and regional languages seems more pragmatic, as it promotes inclusivity, cultural pride, and global competence. While English need not be the medium of instruction in primary education, it should serve as the primary medium in higher education. In the era of AI, students who struggle to grasp complex concepts in any field can easily access resources in the language they are most comfortable with, while English remains essential for academic and professional advancement.

English, as a global language, will continue to serve as the lingua franca in higher education. Rather than viewing its role in India as a form of dominance, we should embrace it as an opportunity to equip students for a globalised world. Any attempt to reduce English's presence risks depriving students – especially those from rural and disadvantaged backgrounds – of a crucial tool for success.

In a society where English is seen as the language of the rich and privileged, those who command it often use it to dominate those who do not. It is, therefore, unwise to allow the elite "Angloknows" to shape education policies that systematically disadvantage the "Angloknownots." Social justice demands that we empower the linguistically disadvantaged by providing access to English, enabling them to rise in society.

The writer is an ELT resource person and education columnist. Email rayanal@yahoo.co.uk

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Degree of success

Tips for students to pick the right online degree

Rohit Gupta

In recent years, online education has opened doors for learners, especially those in smaller towns and cities, and allowed many to continue their studies without having to move to a big city or spend large amounts of money. According to the 2024 All India Survey on Higher Education by the Ministry of Education, over 47% of students in India's universities are now enrolled through online or distance learning.

But one question remains: How do you choose the right one? How do you know if the time, money, and effort will help you build a better future? The answer lies in studying which one gives value in the form of knowledge, skills, and job opportunities.

Before joining any course, it is important to ask: What will I get out of this? Will I get a job after this degree? Will it teach me skills that companies are looking for? Here are the four broad areas to focus on to pick the right online degree:

Accreditation and government approval: Before joining any online course, always check if the university or institute is approved by the right authorities. If a course or university is not approved by authorities such as University Grants Commission (UGC) and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), your degree may not be accepted. So, even if you complete the course, it may not help you in job interviews or when applying for further studies. To avoid this, visit official websites and check whether your chosen university and course are on the approved list.

Matching industry needs: With rapid changes in the Indian economy, the job-market is also changing. So, choose programmes that teach current and in-demand skills. A degree in a subject that is no longer in demand will not help secure jobs. The curriculum should also include practical learning such as case studies, real-life projects, or hands-on assignments to make you job-ready. Also check if the course is updated regularly. Those that are more than five years old may not be up-to-date with today's needs.

Placement and career support: Besides knowledge, does the university also help you prepare for jobs? Do they offer career counselling, resume-building help, or interview practice? Ask what percentage of students got placed the previous year or which companies hired from the programme and the the average salary offered? Speak to former students or attend free information sessions or webinars. This will give you a clearer idea of the university's career support.

Look beyond the marketing: Many advertisements and websites show only the good side of a course. But look deeper and find reliable information from neutral sources. Government portals such as the UGC and AICTE websites regularly publish lists of approved universities. The NSDC also shares data on which sectors have job shortages, which can help you decide which courses are most useful. Check websites that help you compare these courses and provide support to online learners. Take time to understand a course rather than rush into it.

Learners especially from smaller towns face pressure to choose courses that sound impressive or are popular on social media. But education is about building a solid future, not about following trends. Think long-term. Keep these checkpoints in mind and think like careful investors and pick courses that truly deliver value.

The writer is co-founder and COO, College Vidya.