

REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS: THE DEMAND OF THE WORKPLACE

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Abstract

India's demographic dividend covering 800 million people below the age group of 35 years is both an opportunity as well as a challenge. We are slated to become the world's youngest nation by 2022. This upsurge in population on one hand accounts for a huge reservoir of human capital and on the other draws unprecedented focus on the employability status. The Government of India is working towards making India a global economic powerhouse through initiatives like Make in India, Smart Cities, Digital India, Start Up India and many others. But the recent report states that only 17.91% engineers were employable for software services sector, 3.67% for software products and 40.57% for IT Services, IT Products and business process outsourcing. An extensive debate is going on the employability skill sets of the youth, whether the institutions are gearing up the potential employees with the skill sets that are desired by the corporate. The answer to this subject has been discussed at various forum and platform yet no specific conclusion has been attained. The paper aims to review the existing literature on employability skills that are imparted to the students by the institutions and the employability skills that the corporate are expecting from their potential employees. The paper examines the gap between the employability skills possessed by the students and the skill sets expected by the corporate. The research also suggests the directions for further research in this field and also highlights the importance of qualitative and longitudinal studies in this area.

Keywords: *Employability skills, Youth, Students, Corporate, Institutions*

Introduction

94% of IT Graduates are not fit for hiring: Tech Mahindra CEO C P Gurnani (Times of India, 04/06/2018)

With globalisation and rapid technological advancements the organisations are seeking employees possessing specific skill sets along with the technical skills. Organisations have to survive in the fierce environment where there is cut throat competition among the prevailing organisations. In order to survive, these organisations invest heavily on the human capital with the expectations that they will withstand the global market. For the same, these organisations rely on the institutions to fabricate graduates with the skill sets desired by the employers. So it is required by the educational institutions to provide the students best faculty, up to date pedagogy, latest and industry specific study material and innovative and market oriented course curriculum

to produce the organisation-fit employee. We are well acquainted of the fact that India is one of the youngest nations in the world with more than 54% of its total population below 25 years of age. This necessitates that the youth in the country are equipped with the skills and knowledge to enter the workforce through education and training. A large proportion of the products of the education system are found to lack employable skills. (MHRD 2016b: 8–9)

Employability Skills

The concept of employability skills have been discussed for a number of years but over the last couple of decade graduate employability has attracted researchers' interest. Numerous studies have introduced the attributes related to employability skills such as core skills, transferable skills, generic skills, functional skills and enterprise skills. Studies on employability skills differed with regards to direct or indirect measurement depend on occupational title, qualification and level of education, years of work experience and numbers of training (Ashton and Green, 1996). The concept of employability is centred on the development of communication, numerical accuracy, information technology and willingness to learn (Mason et al., 2003). Employability was based on interrelated components related to students academic performance, ambitions, confidence, awareness of opportunities (Rothwell and Arnold, 2007).

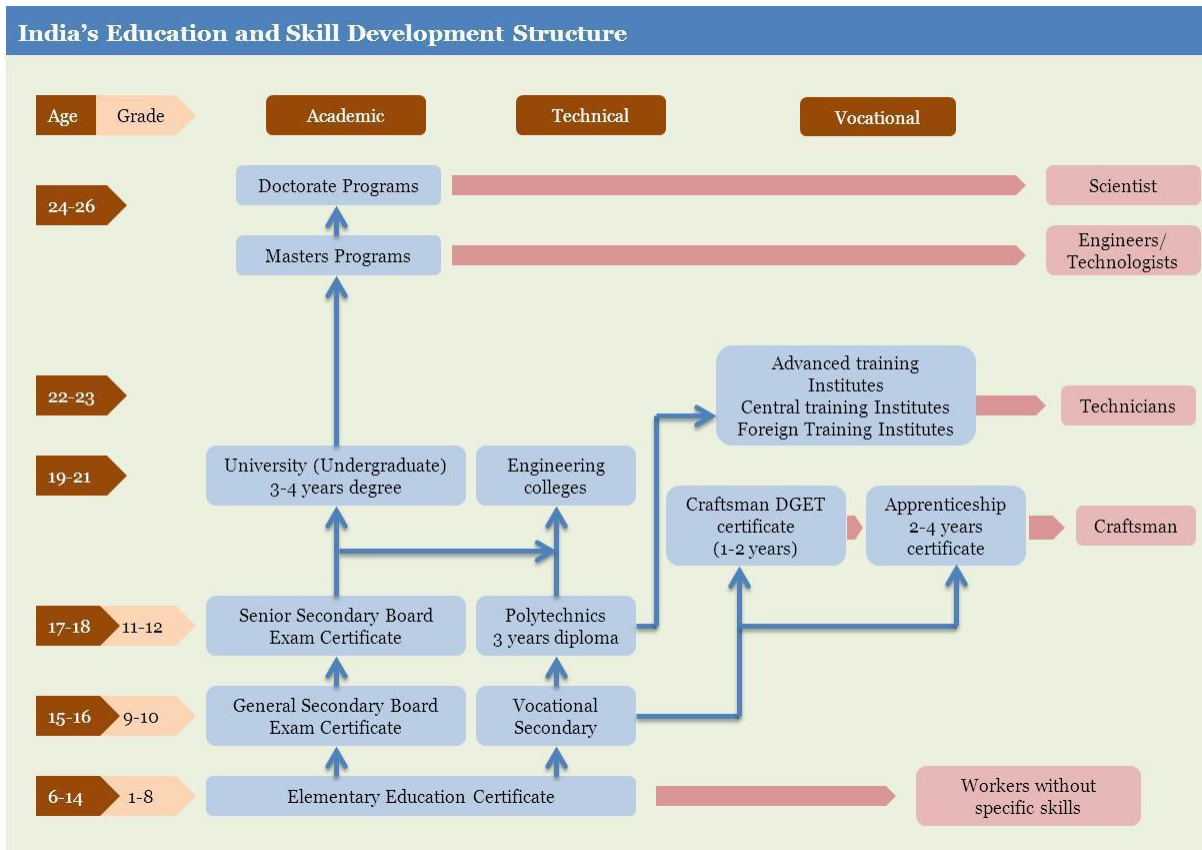
There are various definitions of employability skills as defined by the scholars, such as the basic skills necessary for getting, keeping and doing well in a job, and which cut horizontally across all industries and vertically across all jobs (Singh and Singh, 2008; Robinson, 2000). It is also defined as skills required not only to gain employment, but also to progress within an enterprise so as to achieve one's potential and contribute successfully to enterprise strategic directions

Employability is a set of achievements, skills, understandings and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy (Yorke, 2004).

Employability comprised certain levels of cognitive skills, generic competencies, personal capabilities, technical ability, business/organisation awareness, and critical evaluation, reflection and review abilities (Kubler and Forbes, 2005).

Employability is derived from complex learning, and is a concept of wider range than those of 'core' and 'key' skills. It also states that employability is as a collection of capacities or achievements which constitute a necessary but not sufficient condition for gaining employment (which is dependent, inter alia, on the contemporary state of the economy) and considerably more complex than some proponents of 'core', 'key' and 'transferable' skills have suggested, and is strongly aligned with the academic valuing of good learning (Yorke, 2006).

In India, the skill development framework is fairly large and diverse and it can be represented in Figure. 1.



Source: World Bank

The skills set of engineers can be characterized by three overall skills factors:

- (i) Core Employability Skills (which cover generic attitudinal and affective skills, such as reliability and team-work);
- (ii) Communication Skills (such as English skills, written and verbal communication), and
- (iii) Professional Skills (which generally covers cognitive skills related to the engineering professions, such as ability to apply engineering knowledge; as well as design and conduct experiments and related data analyze and interpretation) (Blom and Saeki, 2010)

Thus, employability skills are the skills that everyone needs to possess in order to ascertain a specific job. They are the skills that must be present to enable an individual to use the more specific knowledge and technical skills required at the workplace. The requirement of these skill sets varies from organisation to organisation and also among the job requirements. The current changing business environment emphasizes the importance of education for employability, focusing on the development of key skills and work experience. Development of undergraduates from theoretical background to the practice is a contemporary need, because the practice will enhance the employability of graduates. Participation of undergraduates in the training process

and obtaining the feedback from the stakeholders are more important for understanding the trainee undergraduates future skills development areas (Weligamage and Munasingha , 2006).

Review of Literature

The literature signifies that employers want graduates who can adapt to the workplace culture, use their abilities and skills to evolve the organisation and participate in innovative team work.

Eighteen skills were reduced to four major factors namely specific skills (database knowledge; spreadsheet knowledge; word processing knowledge; ability to adapt to changing technology; technical skills; mathematical skills), core skills (self confidence; critical thinking; creative thinking; interpersonal skills; leadership skills; experience with real world problems), personal characteristics (business ethics; professionalism) and communication skills (listening skills; verbal skills and written communication) were used to study employer's satisfaction with job skills of business college graduates in a regional university in the United States (Paranto and Kelkar, 1999). The study recommended business schools that they should improve effectiveness of business programs by emphasising more on the core skills. A similar study was conducted and it was concluded that school curriculum should address the four factors (namely interpersonal skills; initiatives; being dependable and reversed items on instrument) to make student skills more relevant to the workplace (Hill and Petty, 1995)

Employers also value critical thinking as it is required for innovation and anticipation for leading change (Harvey et al, 1997; Little, 2001; Lees, 2002). Most employers are looking for proactive graduates, who can use higher level skills that include analysis, critique, synthesis and multi layered communication to facilitate innovative teamwork in catalysing transformation of their organisation (Harvey et al, 1997 cited in Holden and Jameson, 2002).

Employability skills constitute a combination of positive attitude, self-management, team work, business and customer awareness, problem solving, communication and literacy, application of numeracy and sound knowledge of information technology (CBI, 2007). It suggests that employers value graduates who can demonstrate an entrepreneurial and innovative approach, and creative thinking which brings fresh perspectives and challenges.

A study considering the perspectives of employers on graduate employability provides a contrast between what some universities are promoting and what is required by industry. Employers were in agreement about what were considered to be the most important skills that they look for in graduates. It was found that regardless of the size of the organisation, 'soft skills' (like communication skills and team-work) were perceived to have more weight than technical or 'hard skills' (like a good qualification and IT skills) (Archer and Davidson, 2008).

It was concluded that a minority of employers recruit individuals from universities specifically for the technical skills that they anticipate they will fetch to the organisation (Glass et al., 2008). Rather, most employers see a degree as a substitute for achieving a certain level of competence that represents the minimum standard that they are seeking in a new recruit.

The findings convey a significant message to the higher education institutions and illustrate strongly on the fact that universities need to equip graduates with 'deep' intellectual capabilities and a battery of applied practical skills which make them more 'work-ready' (Archer and Davison, 2008).

Employability skills focus on graduates' abilities to adapt and use their personal and academic skills to create more tangible educational outcomes that associate graduate employability with employment. It also refers the readiness of new graduates to contribute to their organisations in terms of skills, knowledge and attitude, as well as pragmatic industry understanding (Mason et al., 2006). Subsequently, it also relates to the ability of the graduates to be competent in soft skills (Ahmad et al., 2010), which could contribute to the graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy (Knight and Yorke, 2006). Not only that, the graduates are also required to be adaptable and flexible where they can easily learn, relearn and unlearn current and new knowledge to be able to make changes as required by the economic and technological environment at the time (Saad et al., 2013). Thus, the concept of employability can be observed in situations where new graduates are able to make themselves valuable to the organisations by possessing skills, knowledge and attitude relevant to the requirement of the organisations. Engineering graduates need to realise that having a good degree is no longer sets them apart from other candidates in today's job hunting. Graduates must be able to market themselves by performing good employability skills especially technical skills (Yusoff et al., 2012).

What Corporate Look for?

Organisations need different skill set for different job descriptions and the requirement of skills varies from one organisation to other. But despite it, they need an employee with in hand analytical and introspective qualities along with the basic qualification. Since the advent of globalisation, these organisations have spread their offices in different states and have also grown globally and with this there is intense need of the employers to recruit graduates with the desired skill sets to work in such competitive environment. Initially the organisation ensured that the required skills must be present in the recruit to respond to the requirement of more specific skills in the workplace. But in recent times, it is visible that few organisations are organising a week long or so orientation programs (varying among organisations) as well as training sessions.

It reflects that these organisations either no longer depend on the higher education or may be just expect to instil the basic employability skill sets among their graduates. Few organisations also hire soft skill consultants to polish their new recruits.

Table 1 comprehends the skills according to their demand by the industry.

Skills	Description	Demand (in percentage)
Generic Skills		
English Comprehension	Ability to understand written text and communicate effectively through written documents	100
Deductive Reasoning	Ability to make inferences and decide actions based on data containing multiple textual instructions and simple symbolic rules	62.31
Inductive Reasoning	Ability to learn and derive objective rules based on specific instances of a rule's application	45.75
Quantitative Ability	Ability to understand basic number system	15.14
Information Gathering and Synthesis	Ability to locate information, order and classify data to make rule based deductions	33.74
Personality Traits		
Agreeableness	Social conformity, cooperativeness, friendliness and helpfulness	34.30
Openness to Experience	Attribute of open-mindedness and a knack for unconventional thinking alongwith rich artistic sensibilities and imagination	8.25
Extraversion	Inclination towards the outer world	28.21
Emotional Stability	Ability to stay even tempered and face stressful situations without getting upset	22.88
Polychronicity	Ability of a person to work on multiple activities at the same time	2.61

(Source: Skill Map India 2017, Aspiring Minds)

The literature reveals that where employers and HEIs are working together to promote and sustain employability measures and other forms of collaboration, they are moving towards a strategy led, rather than project-led, approach sustained by a central support service that supports educational developments in the whole curriculum. Studies on the impact of HEI programmes to improve employability have found a positive impact on employers and their employees which extends beyond enhancing an individual's skills to 'the exchange or generation of new knowledge' (Nixon, 2008).

Conclusion

Higher education institutions should take into account students employment needs ‘including the generic skills and abilities needed in the workplace’ and reflect this in the curriculum and course design, tensions remain because of academics’ concerns that engaging with the employability agenda will lead to a diminution of academic standards and objectives (Gunn et al 2010). Tech Mahindra CEO C P Gurnani is laying the foundation for the next level of growth at his company by opening up technical and learning centers (Times of India, 2018)

In view of that, higher education institutions needs to ensure that all graduates are qualified to succeed in work and life in this new era of the global economy (Zaharim et al. 2010).It is strongly recommended that higher education institutions need to work together with the sector specific organisations and modify their curriculum accordingly, more interactive session are required to be conducted, the course should not be only theoretical but the graduates need to be given more practical exposure through live projects, interactive sessions, field visits and others.

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