

EVALUATING POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS' EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify the employability skills that students to be important for postgraduates and the skill set required for sustainable employability of graduates in India. In most Indian colleges and universities, students from different academic backgrounds come from different places and have different mother tongues. So, there is a need to provide them with a common platform to make them competent enough to face the real challenges of today's corporate world. Students are often looking for skills that go beyond qualifications and experience. Each student has different observations and expectations toward postgraduate skills. According to many research findings students with skills like positive attitude, effective communication, problem-solving, time management, team spirit, self-confidence, handling criticism, and flexibility which are also known as soft skills as a whole, have much better chances of survival in the tough corporate world compared to the students who are lacking in the soft skills. Employability skills are very essential in the current global job market. Skill shortage remains one of the constraints to the continued growth of the Indian economy. This study was conducted to explore enhancing the employability skills of postgraduate students in India. The respondents consisted of 1110 postgraduates in various fields of education in universities. The instruments used in this study were developed by the investigator. The result shows that the level of enhancing employability skills of postgraduate students is moderate and is accepted. The study also showed there is no significant difference between the dimension's personal management skills and resilience among postgraduate students with regard to educational qualifications.

Keywords: Education, employability skills, enhance, postgraduate, university

1. Introduction

Human capital development is an effort to achieve charge savings and improve the performance of the university. Schultz (1963) defined human capital as an important element for upgrading company performance and improving the productivity of employees and sustainability to be more competitive. Human capital is referred to as a process involving training, education, and professional initiatives to improve the knowledge, skills, abilities, values, and social assets that will lead to employee job satisfaction and performance while improving the performance of the company (Marimuthu, Arokiasamy & Ismail 2009). In order to achieve that, students spend a lot of skills to develop the human capital of workers to master the skills needed in the arena of globalization. However, the cost of developing human capital is increasing; with this, students expect educational institutions to produce postgraduates with employability skills required by the market without additional training from the university.

Postgraduate employability skills have become one of the most important topics on the higher education agenda in this current era in India. increasingly focusing on hiring post-graduates who possess a broader skill set than in the past and also the workforce is characterized by change and increasing competition for jobs. So, it is important for educational programs, to be aware of the qualities that are valued by students in the university and provide the same for postgraduates. Universities have the responsibility to design and implement programs that are appropriate to the missions and goals to supply the workforce that are relevant to the needs of employers. It becomes the responsibility of universities to provide postgraduates with knowledge in the professional field intellectual skills and the ability to apply theory to practical situations. Other generic university skills as identified by the qualification frameworks such as the ability to communicate, possession of attitudes, and values of responsible citizen are other areas that are expected to be developed during the course of study (Vanitha.P & Jaganathan.A. T, 2018).

2. What are employability skills?

Employability skills are 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 the enterprise's strategic directions. The concept of employability has been defined as the ability of an individual to secure and sustain employment and progress within the workplace, recognizing that different types of employment have different 'employability' requirements (Belt et al.2010:1-5, UKCES 2010:2-3). The definition of employability that underpins the work of the Higher

education academy and ESECT is a set of skills, knowledge, and personal attributes that make an individual more likely to secure and be successful in their chosen occupation to the benefit of themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy (Vanitha.P & Jaganathan. A. T, 2018). Employability skills are those skills, attributes, and behaviors, e.g., communication skills, problem-solving, organization, and planning, that bridge most disciplines, industries, and employing organizations. They have the greatest impact on the sustained, productive, successful employment of graduates (Cranmer, 2006; Gedye, Fender & Chalkey, 2004).

3. Importance of Employability Skills

The insufficient supply of quality skills is one of the main impediments to further economic growth in India. The skill shortage is still one of the major constraints in most industries in India, (World Bank, 2009). As higher education has expanded, there has been increased emphasis on the skills that students learn during their time in higher education, beyond the knowledge, technical and academic skills related to their subject or indicated by their achieved class of degree (Mason, Williams, and Cranmer 2006:2). Each employer has different perceptions and expectations toward graduate skills. One of the key reasons why many students invest in university education is to improve their employment prospects. However, whilst the achievement of good academic qualifications is highly valued, it no longer appears sufficient to secure employment (Yorke, 2006). Additionally, employers expect students to have well-developed employability skills, so that they can make an immediate contribution to the workplace when recruited (e.g. Confederation of British Industry, 2008, Vanitha.P & Jaganathan. A.T, 2018)

The current trend of placing increased emphasis on graduate key skills, therefore, dictates that the higher education curriculum incorporates opportunities to develop such skills in conjunction with subject-specific skills and knowledge. This should enhance applicants' potential for success in the recruitment process by producing business-ready graduates, able to make a dynamic start, and rapidly adapting to change. Making the transition from higher education to the workforce is important (Crebert, Bates, Bell, CarolJoy, and Cragolini (2004), who stated that the transition from university to employment often brings insecurity and unease.

4. Enhancing Employability Skills

Enhancing the employability skills of university graduates is an area that is receiving much attention at present. Although there is much debate on what constitutes graduate employability skills, they are generally accepted as the knowledge, skills, and attributes that

graduates should have developed to be effective in the workplace, to the benefit of themselves, their employer, and the wider economy (Vanitha.P & Jaganathan. A. T, 2018). The most fundamental element of any effort to enhance the employability of graduates is to understand what makes the graduates employable. The universities and higher education institutions have to take responsibility to identify the essential skill set needed for the graduates to be employable. So that the graduates can be trained according to the student's needs.

5. The purpose of this study

The purpose of this study was to explore the enhancement of employability skills that are postgraduate students in India. While the research objectives to be achieved in this study were:

- ❖ To identify the enhancement of employability skills from postgraduate students.
- ❖ To determine differences in the enhancement of employability skills among postgraduate students based on educational qualifications.

6. Research Methodology

This study used a descriptive research design with a quantitative approach. This study aims to identify the enhancement of employability skills in postgraduate students. The study sample is universities that have taken postgraduate students from different universities. A total of 1110 were distributed to students and a total of 40 questionnaires were collected back from students from various backgrounds.

7. Research Instruments

The employability skills tool was developed by the investigator. It contains 40 test items and measures the employability skills of the university postgraduate students with five alternatives to respond as (5=Always, 4=Often, 3=Sometimes, 2=Rarely, 1=Never) marks were given accordingly. employability skills tool consisted of statements with five dimensions such as personal management skills, teamwork skills, positive attitude, fundamental skills, resilience, and ICT skills. The maximum value is 200 and the Minimum value is 40. The estimated reliability of the scale in the present study is very high (Cronbach's alpha 0.874).

8. Reliability

In order to determine the reliability of the instrument, the reliability test was used. Table 1 shows the reliability (Cronbach Alpha) of seven items in the employability skills domain which has been tested. The reliability value is personal management skills (0.849), followed by the system and teamwork skills (0.873), positive attitude (0.834), fundamental skills (0.828), resilience

(0.827), and ICT skills (0.876). All the variables used in this study showed Cronbach Alpha values of more than 0.6 indicating that the chosen item is consistent and reliable.

Table -1 Showing the Dimension Wise Reliability Value of the Cognitive Ability Scale

Dimensions	Reliability Value (α)
Personal management skills	0.849
Teamwork skills	0.873
Positive attitude	0.834
Fundamental skills	0.828
Resilience	0.827
ICT skills	0.876

9. Findings

9.1 Level of enhancing employability skills of postgraduate students

Table -2 Shows the enhancing employability skills of postgraduate students

Variable	LOW		MODERATE		HIGH	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Personal management skills	162	14.59	705	63.51	243	21.89
Teamwork skills	154	13.87	709	63.87	247	22.25
Positive attitude	166	14.95	704	63.42	240	21.62
Fundamental skills	162	14.59	686	61.80	262	23.60
Resilience	175	15.76	694	62.52	241	21.71
ICT skills	161	14.50	714	64.32	235	21.17
Employability skills	172	15.49	707	63.69	231	20.81

It is inferred from the above table that showing 162 [14.59%] of postgraduate students have low, 705 [63.51%] of them have moderate and 243 [21.89 %] of them have a high level of personal management skills. 154 [13.87%] postgraduate students have a Low Level while 247 [22.25%] postgraduate students are a High Level in the dimension of teamwork skills whereas 162 [14.59%] postgraduate students have a Low Level 704 [63.42%] of them moderate while 240 [21.62%] postgraduate students are High Level in the dimension of positive attitude. 262 [23.60%] postgraduate students have a High Level in the dimension of fundamental skills while 235 [21.71%] postgraduate students are a High Level in the dimension of resilience. 161 [14.50%]

postgraduate students have a Low Level in the dimension of ICT skills while 235 [21.17%] postgraduate students are a High Level in the dimension of ICT skills. 172 [15.49%] postgraduate students have a Low Level, 707 [63.69%] have a moderate level and 231 [20.81%] have a high level of employability skills. Hence the null hypothesis the level of enhancing employability skills of postgraduate students is moderate is accepted.

9.2 Mean and SD of enhancing employability skills of postgraduate students

The findings in Table 3 showed the mean of the seven variables of employability skills. The analysis showed that personal management skills (M = 31.84) is the mean value followed by teamwork skills (M = 23.73), positive attitude (M = 20.17), fundamental skills (M = 35.42), resilience (M = 19.09), ICT skills (M = 28.64). fundamental skills emphasized by the students have the highest value indicating the item is one of the most important enhance of employability skills

Table –3 shows the Mean and SD of enhancing employability skills of postgraduate students

Dimensions	Mean	S.D.
Personal management skills	31.84	4.076
Teamwork skills	23.73	3.700
Positive attitude	20.17	3.096
Fundamental skills	35.42	5.369
Resilience	19.09	3.762
ICT skills	28.64	4.802

9.3 The importance of employability skills of postgraduate students

A one-way ANOVA test result shown in Table 4 shows no significant difference between the employability skills (personal management skills, teamwork skills, positive attitude, fundamental skills, resilience, ICT skills.) of postgraduate students with respect to educational qualifications.

Table 4 One-way ANOVA to determine the enhancement of employability skills of postgraduate students with respect to educational qualifications

Dimensions		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P	Sig.
PMS	Between Groups	139.552	4	34.888	2.109	0.078	NS
	Within Groups	18332.617	1105	16.546			

	Total	18472.169	1109				
TS	Between Groups	224.994	4	56.248	4.155	0.002	S
	Within Groups	14999.062	1105	13.537			
	Total	15224.056	1109				
PA	Between Groups	113.961	4	28.490	2.993	0.018	S
	Within Groups	10546.224	1105	9.518			
	Total	10660.185	1109				
FS	Between Groups	402.433	4	100.608	3.522	0.007	S
	Within Groups	31654.780	1105	28.569			
	Total	32057.213	1109				
R	Between Groups	68.490	4	17.123	1.211	0.304	NS
	Within Groups	15670.162	1105	14.143			
	Total	15738.652	1109				
ICT	Between Groups	336.130	4	84.033	3.679	0.006	S
	Within Groups	25308.975	1105	22.842			
	Total	25645.105	1109				
ES	Between Groups	5442.060	4	1360.515	3.626	0.006	S
	Within Groups	415707.069	1105	375.187			
	Total	421149.128	1109				

PMS-Personal management skills, TS-Teamwork skills, PA-Positive attitude, FS-Fundamental skills, R-Resilience, ICT-ICT skills, ES-Employability skills

From the results of the above table, it is found that the calculated P values (0.078, 0.304 $P > 0.05$) are greater than 0.05 and are not significant at the 5% level. Hence, the formulated null hypothesis is accepted. But the calculated P values (0.002, 0.018, 0.007, 0.006, 0.006 $P < 0.05$) are less than 0.05 and are significant at the 5% level. Hence, the formulated null hypothesis is not accepted.

Interpretation

- ❖ There is no significant difference between the dimension's personal management skills and resilience among postgraduate students with regard to educational qualifications.
- ❖ There is a significant difference between the dimension's teamwork skills, positive attitude, fundamental skills, ICT skills, and total score of employability skills among postgraduate students with regard to educational qualifications.

10. Conclusion

In this study, the result showed that students rated the importance of employability skills at a moderate level. This shows that all students, especially Tamil, English, Maths, and science employability skills must be owned by all postgraduates to enable them to compete in the examination. The authorities of educational institutions should enhance the employability skills of

the students either through the professional development of lecturers, curriculum, and co-curriculum.

Human resources, in terms of quality and quantity, are India's biggest assets. Employability skills are very vital for the success of postgraduate students in universities. Along with the good methodological understanding and subject knowledge, students often outline a set of skills that they want from a student. These skills are what they believe will equip the student to carry out their role to the best of their ability. However, to capitalize fully on this opportunity and not face the possibility of a skills shortage, it is essential to gear up the education system through innovative initiatives. This study provided areas where students perceived the areas that needed to be improved. The feedback can improve and increase the standard of education to create a better curriculum to fulfill the needs of students, society, and the whole nation.

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