



A study of students' perception on employability skills in higher education in Karnataka

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Abstract

Higher education is the last segment of education system in any society. In the context of the new education policy, higher education is viewed as a form of experiential learning. This means that higher education is designed to equip students with the necessary knowledge, skills, and experience to support themselves financially, often by finding suitable employment. As a result, it is the responsibility of higher education institutions to provide students with the relevant knowledge, experience, and skills necessary to secure suitable jobs in the corporate world. Consequently, universities and other higher education institutions are accountable for developing, designing, and updating the curriculum to align with industry and labour market expectations. Unfortunately, in reality, there tends to be a gap between what graduates learn in higher education and the expectations of their employers in the workplace. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the role of the curriculum in fostering employability skills among students and examine students' perceptions of these skills.

Keywords: employability skills, curriculum, curriculum design, curriculum delivery

Introduction

Almost every student pursuing higher education aspires to obtain a job that matches their qualifications and abilities. While obtaining a certificate of qualification and eligibility may not be very difficult, acquiring the necessary skills, abilities, and competencies needed to secure a job can be more challenging. Despite India's transition into a knowledge economy, unemployment remains a significant challenge that needs to be addressed. The reason for this phenomenon is that in today's dynamic economic conditions, academic knowledge alone is often insufficient for graduates to secure employment. Employers are constantly seeking graduates with a diverse range of skills to gain a competitive advantage in the job market.

Furthermore, India's performance in the areas of employment and higher education has consistently been below the global average, indicating a need for improvement. A recent survey has projected that the Indian economy will require around 600 million skilled employees by the end of 2022, highlighting the urgency of the situation. To address this setback, a holistic approach is needed. Graduate courses should incorporate job-oriented skills in addition to academic knowledge to enhance graduates' employability in the current job market.

Employability skills

Employability refers to an individual's ability to gain and maintain employment. It is often linked to a person's education, skills, and competencies, as these factors can make a candidate more attractive to potential employers. Employability skills can include a range of abilities, such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability, and leadership. These skills are often seen as essential for success in the modern workforce, and employers may look for evidence of them when considering job candidates. By developing and demonstrating employability skills, individuals can increase their chances of finding and keeping a job, as well as advancing their careers over time. Employability skills are transferable skills that individuals use in the workplace and are often sought by employers in addition to academic qualifications. These skills can be

diverse and varied across different industries and job roles. Some examples of employability skills include communication skills, teamwork, problem-solving abilities, critical thinking, time management, adaptability, leadership, and digital literacy. These skills are essential for individuals to succeed in their chosen career paths, as they help them to perform their job effectively, work well with others, and contribute to the overall success of the organization.

The UKCES Report (2009) identified six key employability skills, including a positive approach, self-management, thinking and solving problems, working together and communicating, understanding the business, and recognizing the needs of customers and service users. These skills were seen as essential for individuals to succeed in the workplace and were valued by employers across different industries.

The Confederation of British Industries, on the other hand, focused on three key employability skills, including the application of numeracy, creative thinking, and the application of information technology. These skills were also seen as crucial for individuals to succeed in the workplace, especially in the context of the increasing importance of technology and digital literacy in many industries.

These definitions highlight the importance of a diverse range of skills and competencies for employability, including not only technical and academic qualifications but also transferable skills that are essential for success in the workplace.

The Australian Association of Graduate Employers emphasizes the importance of employability skills for graduates to succeed in the workplace and be competitive in the job market. Employers are looking for candidates who not only have technical expertise but also possess strong employability skills that enable them to work effectively in teams, communicate with clients and stakeholders, and adapt to changing circumstances.

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), U.K., report states that the employers look for 'hard skills' and 'soft skills'. They differentiate these as:

Hard skills

Job searching techniques, providing help with job search, CV writing, contacts with employers, help with finding and securing work placements/internships, career events and fairs, computer skills, research skills, time management, literacy, provision of temporary and vacation work.

Soft skills

Career identification and planning, interview practice, understanding of career and how it works, communication skills, decision-making skills, presentation skills and team-working skills. The employability skills are defined in many ways, but most of them focus on subjects like personal relations, appearance, behaviour, patterns and actions, communication strategies, problem solving ideas and decision-making capacity, and management and organizational processes. A classification of such skills includes the following.

- Individual competence: organizational abilities, knowledge, programming and community
- Human efficiency: personal control, integrity and technical knowledge
- Economic adaptability: troubleshooting, learning, employability and job growth.
- Organizational effectiveness: communications skills, management skills, interpersonal skills, creativity and leadership skills.

In this context employability skill refers to ability and capability of graduates and their potential to obtain a 'job', and should not be confused with the actual acquisition of a 'job'

Review of literature

Unemployment has been a one of the major social evil for human society. Many studies have found that lack of employability is one of the major causes to increase unemployment to the maximum extent. It is been a critical issue for both business world and higher education institutions. Hence, it is the responsibility of higher education institutions to prepare the graduates with a more comprehensive range of skills (Albin and Crockett, 1991; Hall, 1998; Mathews, 2000). Majority of fresh graduates are not fully prepared to begin their professional practices as they show low performance in job interviews. Having good academic qualification is not enough to get good job opportunities (Yorke, 2006). According to the study conducted by Harvey, Locke, & Morey (2002) ^[4], employers seek graduates who were proactive and possessed with skills like analysis, critique, synthesis, and good communication. Further, many studies have proved that employers preferred graduates who could adapt to the workplace culture and use their abilities and skills to add value to the organization. Employers also looked out for critical thinking which is important for innovation and anticipating and leading change (Harvey, Locke & Morey, 2002; Little, 2001) ^[4].

Curriculum and employability skills

Many studies have proven that curriculum has its influence on student's employability skills (Harry *et al.*, 2018; Ahmed *et al.*, 2019; Aguila *et al.*, 2016). Kennedy and Juliet observed that the higher education institutions play an important role in upgrading students' skills, stating that

curriculum must contribute for the special and technical skills of the students and also must be able them to function effectively and efficiently in the workplace by equipping them with proper employability skills. Farahana Misni & Nik Hasnaa Nik Mahmood *et al.*, (2019) states that universities must realize that employability skills go way beyond securing or searching for a job; graduates expected have skillsets, individual techniques, and attributes needed to succeed in jobs. Most importantly, to supply graduates with the right skill sets demanded by the job market, universities should include the demanded skills in the curriculum required by the employers to prevent a mismatch between supply and demand.

Several studies have examined the impact of curriculum on employability skills (Harry *et al.*, 2018; Ahmed *et al.*, 2019; Aguila *et al.*, 2016). In this regard curriculum design is the indispensable component which has critical impact on enhancing employability skills of the graduates (Nixon & Williams, 2014; Nguyen, 2014). Davies (2013) stated that curriculum that emphasize on developing creative and critical skills will create conceptual knowledge on topics and problems associated with the interest and skills development. The curriculum design sets a path for the learning outcome especially when it comes to the employability competencies and skills needed to become successful in the workplace (Anderson and Rogan, 2011). Johnson & Mardones (2014), advocate that while designing the curriculum, factors influencing the labour market must be focused and teaching methods should be prescribed to deliver the course to enable the students to be competent at workplace and fulfil employer expectations. Further to improve the conceptual understanding and inculcating the problem-solving abilities among the students, it seems very essential to assess the students regularly to know about their experiences and learning outcomes as part of curriculum evaluation (Jansen & Suhre, 2015).

Research gap

The literature review of national and international articles indicates that there has been a significant amount of research conducted globally on both conceptual and empirical aspects of employability skills. However, in India, there has been limited research on the topic, particularly regarding the curriculum and employability skills. Furthermore, there is little evidence of effective academic-industry collaborations in higher education institutions to design the curriculum content that is necessary to impart employability skills among graduates. As a result, there is a need for a comprehensive study on the curriculum and employability skills among graduates of higher education institutions in India. The present study aims to address this research gap.

Statement of the problem

The main research problem addressed in this study is to assess the perceptions of both graduates and their teachers regarding the effectiveness of the curriculum in integrating employability skills. Specifically, the study aims to analyze the level of understanding of both students and teachers regarding employability skills in higher education. Moreover, the study seeks to investigate the extent to which teachers perceive the core objectives of higher education curricula as essential in developing the employability skills of graduates.

Methodology

This paper attempts to study the relevance of higher education curriculum in present situation in inculcating employability skills among graduates. So, it is imperative to study students’ perception about higher education curriculum in contributing employability skills. Further, an attempt is also made to study their views and perspectives about the curriculum they learn. A combination of both views forms a relevant basis to draw inputs for curriculum improvement. Therefore, a questionnaire is prepared to achieve the objectives of the study. Final year degree students of the First-grade colleges were the respondents.

Survey Instrument

Survey method was employed for data collection through questionnaires which were distributed among the respondents. The questionnaire focuses on the curriculum design, delivery and evaluation methods which would improve student’s employability skills.

Data collection procedure

The primary data was collected from students by involving them with a structured questionnaire model. Data collection has been done extensively using online method. The Questionnaire has been framed, and the responses were collected. The collected responses were analysed as per the study objectives using descriptive statistical tools.

Research questions

1. Does curriculum have positive effect on employability skills
2. Does curriculum design have impact on employability skills
3. Does curriculum delivery has influence on employability skills
4. Does employability skill have affected by evaluation methods

Objectives of the study

1. To explore the current situation of employability of the under graduate students.
2. To understand the perception of the students about the skills required by them to get a job.
3. To provide the suitable recommendations to fill the skill gap.

Hypotheses of the study

H1: There is no impact of curriculum on employability skills.

H2: there is no effect of curriculum design on employability skills.

H3: There is no influence of curriculum delivery methods on employability skills

H4: employability skills are not affected by the evaluation methods.

Data analysis

As the design of the study is descriptive, the data collected was analysed using SPSS. The questionnaire consists of three sections; Part A is demographic information and about the employability skills, Part B curriculum design, Part C Curriculum delivery and Part D Curriculum evaluation.

Demographic information

The demographic information of the study is shown in table 1. The majority respondents of the study are male with 60% (n=66) while the female respondents were 40% (n=44). 56% (n=62) of the respondents are from colleges affiliated to Mysore university and 44% (n=48) of them from the college affiliated to other universities like Davanagere university, Kuvempu university etc.

Table 1: Demographic information (N=110)

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	66	60
Female	44	40
Total	110	100

Affiliated University	Frequency	Percentage
Mysore university	62	56
Other university	48	44
Total	110	100

About the employability skills

Table 2 shows that 63% (n=69) of the respondents were interested in getting Government jobs, 17% (n=19) are interested in Self-employment, 18% (n=20) are interested to join corporate sector and only 2% (n=4) are willing to join other than these sectors. 42% (n=46) of the respondents were in opinion that Communication skill is very important to get a job and 23% (n=25) of them were agreed that problem solving skill is essential to get a job followed by 14% (n=15) of them who think Technology and data analysis skills is essential

Table 2: Employment interested in

Type of the employment you are interested in	Frequency	Percentage
Government	69	63
Self-Employment	19	17
Corporate Sector	20	18
Others	2	2
Total	110	100
Which of these skills are important to get the job?	Frequency	Percentage
Communication Skills	46	42
Communication Skills, Learning Skills and Leadership Skills	3	3
Communication Skills and Problem-Solving Skills	3	3
Inter Personal Skills	3	3
Leadership Skills	2	2
Problem-Solving Skills	25	23
Self-Management Skills	9	8
Technology and Data Analysis Skills	15	14
All the above	4	4
Total	110	100

Curriculum Design

Table 3 shows the distribution of curriculum design. The analysis shows that the students are in opinion that they can learn employability skills from their curriculum and the curriculum provides enough opportunities to learn the new technological tools and techniques.

Where-as they are not aware about teaching employability skills are one of the learning objectives of the curriculum.

Table 3: Curriculum Design

	Curriculum Design	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
1	Employability skills are very much needed to get a job?	3.1	1.0
2	The employability skills needed by students can be taught in colleges	2.9	0.9
3	The syllabus and subject you study will get you a job opportunity.	3.6	0.7
4	You can learn employability skills from curriculum.	3.7	0.8
5	You think that the curriculum provides enough opportunities to practice and demonstrate skills.	3.4	1.0
6	I am aware that developing skills is one of the learning objectives of the curriculum.	3.3	0.9
7	The curriculum is design to support developing employability skills.	3.3	0.9
8	The study materials and contents of the curriculum are designed to achieve its learning objectives.	3.3	0.8
9	Curriculum provides opportunity to learn latest technological tools and techniques.	3.7	0.9
	Total	3.36	0.9

Curriculum Delivery

Table 4 exhibits the distribution of curriculum delivery. It shows that students think that teachers use an interactive

teaching method and they provide enough chances to learn the communication and presentation skills.

Table 4: Curriculum Delivery

	Curriculum Delivery	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
1	The teaching methods are attractive and motivates to learn new skills.	3.0	0.8
2	The teaching styles helps me to understand the content of the curriculum very clearly.	3.4	0.7
3	The practical exercise and assignments help me to understand how to apply the learned things.	3.4	0.8
4	The teacher provides enough opportunities to learn the communication and presentation skills.	3.6	0.8
5	The peer interaction provides opportunities to learn interpersonal skills.	3.0	0.9
6	The teachers use interactive teaching techniques to teach the curriculum.	3.6	1.0
	Total	3.3	0.8

Curriculum Evaluation

The following table 5 reveals the distribution of curriculum evaluation. The table tells that students are in opinion that the teachers employ appropriate methods of evaluation to

enhance the employability skills among them. The item ‘The marks allotment for different components of curriculum is appropriate’ has lower Mean value compared to other items.

Table 5: Curriculum Evaluation

		Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
1	The marks allotment for different components of curriculum is appropriate.	3.2	0.7
2	The evaluation methods followed by the teachers are adequate.	3.3	0.8
3	The feedback provided by the teachers are helpful to improve the scoring in the subject.	3.5	0.9
4	The evaluation criteria are non-biased and transparent.	3.4	1.0
5	The active teaching and assessment methods helps to enhance employability skills among students.	3.7	0.9
6	The Teacher take required steps to improve slow learners and also fast learners.	3.3	1.0
	Total	3.4	0.9

Finding identified that students are aware of the importance skills required, as it is evident from Table 2 that the three highest indicators which would contribute towards employability skills are communication skills (42%), problem solving skills (23%) and Technology and Data Analysis Skills (14%). 63% of respondents are interested to get government job, 18% are interested to work in corporate sector and 17% are interested to build their career in self-employment.

Conclusion

Students are increasingly recognizing the importance of employability skills in their education and future careers. They understand that engaging with their studies and developing these skills will enhance their employability and make them more competitive in the job market. As the job market becomes more competitive, learners need to equip themselves with relevant skills and competencies to stand out and succeed in their careers. This highlights the importance of higher education institutions to provide a curriculum that not only provides academic knowledge but

also emphasizes the development of employability skills that prepare students for the workforce.

The perception of the respondents in this study reflects their awareness of the changes in the labour market and the evolving nature of higher education. Furthermore, their attitudes towards work and career also shape their understanding of the significance of employability skills.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the respondents in this study acknowledge the importance of employability skills and believe that they can acquire these skills through their curriculum. Additionally, they feel that the curriculum provides sufficient opportunities to learn new technological tools and techniques, which are crucial in enhancing their employability in the rapidly changing job market.

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