



## AN EXAMINATION ON STUDENTS PERCEPTION OF EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS: VOICE FROM NON ENGINEERING GRADUATES IN COIMBATORE REGION, TAMIL NADU

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### Abstract

The study examines the perceptions, attitudes and orientations of under graduate students to their future work, career and employability. The employability of graduates has dominated much educational and economic policy over the past decade. The development of mass higher education has intersected with the shift towards a so called knowledge-driven or post-industrial economy. The knowledge-driven economy is said to require individuals with the types of knowledge, skill and creative potential who can meet the challenges of a global economy characterized by rapid change. Increasingly, individuals can no longer expect a 'job for life', whereby their careers are anchored around single job and organization. Employees instead have to take a more flexible and proactive approach to their working lives, involving the management of their own employability. The major objectives of the study is to find the pre-requisites for the student employability in current market scenario, factors like personality traits and subject knowledge would be assessed to know which would be the area of focus and understanding the student perceptions on employability.

**Keywords:** Core Skills, Subject Knowledge and Perceived Skills .

### Introduction

In recent years, a number of models of employability has been proposed. While these models go some way towards capturing the meaning of this elusive concept of employability, they are either too elaborate to be practically useable or too simple to do justice to this multifaceted issue. For many people, employability is just about getting a job and the term is increasingly used inaccurately and interchangeably with 'enterprise' which in turn is confused with 'entrepreneurship'. The aim of this study is to present a practical, coherent model that is firmly based on existing research findings in employability and on the various individual elements that make up the framework. Employability is an issue of concern in many areas of the economy, but in this context the focus is on students and graduates in Coimbatore.

Current interpretations of employability range from the use of simple measures, such as whether or not a graduate has secured a job, to in depth scholarly books on the subject. If employability is measured in the simplistic terms of whether or not a graduate has managed to secure a job within six months of graduating, it only provides a very vague and imprecise indication of what the student has gained. Questions need to be asked about whether or not the graduate is using the skills, knowledge and understanding gained in their degree studies in a 'graduate level job', which in turn opens up a whole new debate about what exactly a 'graduate level job' entails. There is so much more to employability than gaining employment and first destination statistics do not take into account the fact that some graduates may have taken lower level jobs in order to deal with financial pressures, particularly after incurring debts through their studies.

### Review of Literature

In recent years a number of models of employability have been proposed. Whilst these models go some way towards capturing the meaning of this elusive concept of employability, they are either too elaborate to be practically useable or too simple to do justice to this multifaceted issue.

Antonios Panagiotakopoulos, (2012) It is revealed that HEIs in Greece have failed, so far, to integrate key skills into their curriculum and as a result graduates are not equipped with a range of skills designed to be of practical value in the world of work. The paper argues that there is an immediate need for policy makers to develop a national policy on key skills in HE, in order to help students secure employment, as well as help domestic firms meet their skill needs.

Beverly Jackling , Riccardo Natoli , (2015) The results indicate that from the internship providers' perspective the most highly developed skill of interns is team skills. However, over 40 percent of respondents indicated that interns had failed to demonstrate the capacity to be "work ready" with respect to business acculturation, capacity to handle unfamiliar problems and communication skills. One-third of respondents had ongoing concerns with the PYP as a means of preparing Australian educated international graduates for work in the accounting profession.

Lorraine Dacre Pool, Peter Sewell, (2007) The model can be used to explain the concept of employability to those new to the subject, and particularly to students and their parents. It will be a useful tool for lecturers, personal tutors, careers advisors

and any other practitioners involved in employability activities. It will also be used to develop a measurement tool for employability.

Naureen Durrani, Vicki N. Tariq, (2012) The results reveal the importance that employers attach to graduates' numeracy skills and the extent to which employers use numeracy tests in graduate recruitment. They thus highlight the potential for poor numeracy skills to limit any graduate's acquisition of employment, irrespective of their degree subject; especially since numeracy tests are used predominantly in recruitment to the types of jobs commensurate with graduates' career aspirations and within sectors that attract graduates from across the diversity of academic disciplines, including the arts and humanities.

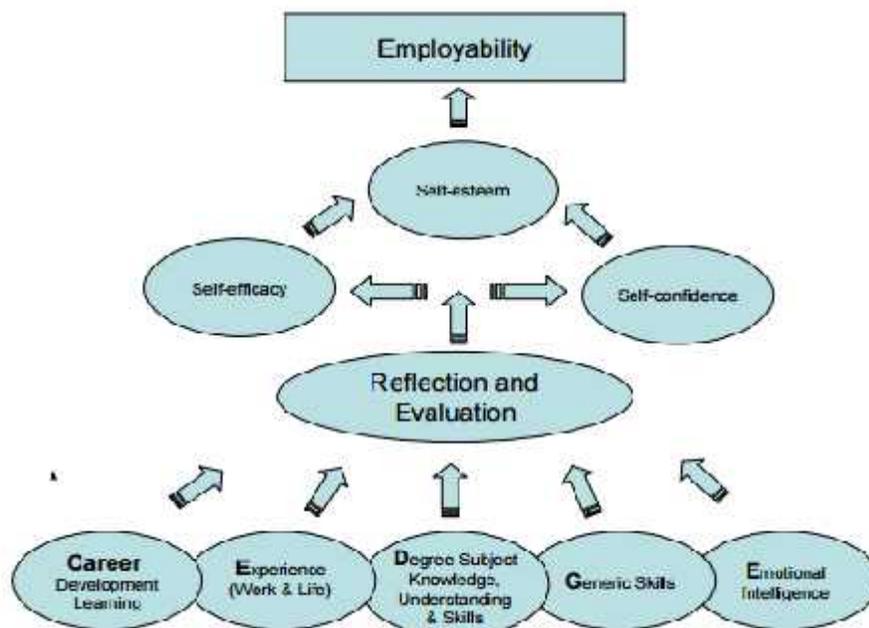
Rao M.S. , (2014) The study found that there must be effective coordination among faculty, students, industry and directors of educational institutions for enhancing employability skills among students. It places emphasis on the role of Training and Placement Officer (TPO) in the educational institutions for better employability and calls for promotion of finishing schools to enhance employability.

Simon Cassidy, (2006) Results suggest that, whilst students would accept peer assessment as an element of their course, its introduction at least should focus on the development of evaluative skills (i.e. emphasising learning rather than assessment) and provide support to alleviate an onerous sense of responsibility. It is concluded that, if the value of peer assessment – in terms of employability skill development – is accepted, then it should be adopted as regular practice on undergraduate programmes wishing to equip students with a complete repertoire of employment-relevant skills.

Sue Spence , Denis Hyams-Ssekasi , (2015) Overall both mentors and mentees reported positive responses to the mentoring scheme. From the mentees point of view self-confidence, employability skills and networks were enhanced. Mentors reported satisfaction in contributing to the local community. Challenges were found in matching mentors with appropriate mentees. A perceived poor match negatively affected the relationship. Mentors reported that mentees lacked career direction and seemed to have limited understanding of what was expected in the mentoring process.

### A practical Model on employability

The design of the model reflects an assertion that each component is absolutely essential and one missing element will considerably reduce a graduate's employability. A degree of overlap between some of the components is acknowledged and this is reflected in the visual presentation of the model. .



**Figure 1. The essential components of employability**

The model depicted in Figure 1 illustrates the essential components of employability and also suggests the direction of interaction between the various elements. The mnemonic **Career EDGE** is used as an aid to remember the five components on the lower tier of the model. It is suggested that providing students with opportunities to access and develop everything on

this lower tier, essentially for reflecting on and evaluating these experiences will result in development of higher levels of self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem – the crucial links to employability.

The original model detailed in Figure 1 clearly shows all the components and suggests the direction of interaction. Figure 2 is evolved, from this with the metaphorical image of a ‘key’. This pictorial version of the model is a useful, practical way of explaining the concept of employability and indicates that it is the ‘key’ to choosing and securing occupations in which the graduate has the opportunity to achieve satisfaction and success.

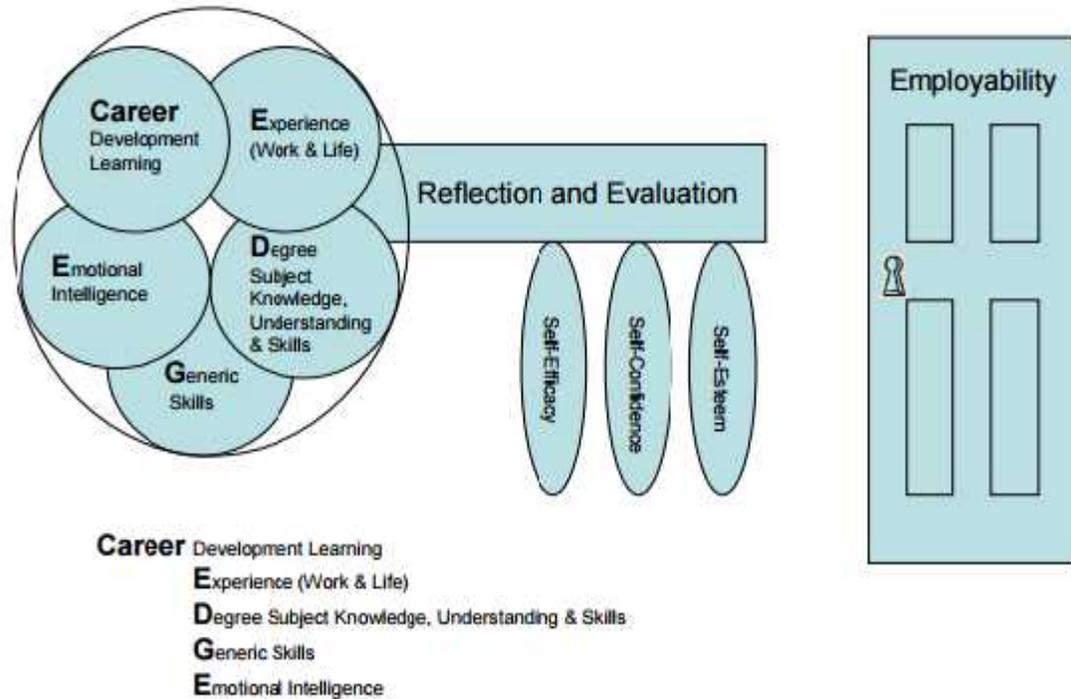


Figure 2.A metaphorical model of employability

SKILLS					
Personal Qualities	Adaptability	Core Skills	Oral communication	Subject Knowledge	Understanding concepts
	Attention to detail		Commercial awareness		Application of knowledge
	Commitment		Ethical issues		Breadth of knowledge
	Cooperation		Information retrieval		Up-to-date
	Creativity		Interpersonal		
	Decisiveness		IT		
	Dependability		Leadership		
	Enthusiasm		Negotiation		
	Initiative		Networking		
	Integrity		Numeracy		
	Self-awareness		Planning/Organization		
	Timekeeping/Punctuality		Problem-solving		
	Tolerance to stress		Professional Development		
	Work ethics		Questioning/Listening		
			Self-management		
	Team-working				
	Technical				
	Written communication				

### Data Analyses

Model Summary <sup>b</sup>										
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.586 <sup>a</sup>	.343	.343	.42092	.343	514.160	1	983	.000	1.016
a. Predictors: (Constant), core skills										
b. Dependent Variable: Perceived Skills										

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	91.095	1	91.095	514.160	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	174.160	983	.177		
	Total	265.255	984			
a. Dependent Variable: Perceived Skills						
b. Predictors: (Constant), core skills						

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	1.679	.089		18.915	.000	1.505	1.853
	Core Skills	.510	.022	.586	22.675	.000	.466	.554
a. Dependent Variable: Perceived Skills								

### Findings

- The current study was conducted to increase our understanding of factors that influence the employability of university graduates. Through the use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches, the paper explores the relative importance of 15 factors that influence new graduate employability. Employability factor of prospective employees to the organization is assessed
- Gender analysis-employability parameters is assessed
- Perception of students in joining the corporate sector is thoroughly analyzed.
- Based on statistical analysis, female community has better interpersonal and desirable attributes in joining the corporate sector.
- Generally, higher level of education and longer tenure are expected to have positive impact on employability.
- Out of the candidates participated in the survey, there were no group which met 100% expected options. This gives focus areas to be the parameters which the students need to prioritize on.
- On the other hand side, the institutions also need to focus on how and what best could be done to improve these qualities of the students to perform and showcase better in the labor market.
- Results from both the qualitative and quantitative phases of the current study demonstrated that 15 employability factors can be clustered into five higher-order composite categories. In addition, findings illustrate that, when hiring new graduates, employers place the highest importance on soft-skills and the lowest importance on academic reputation.
- Factors such as type of institution and subject of study act as intervening variables with a differential effect upon the employment prospects of graduates from different types of background.

## Conclusion

The analysis of student attitudes and orientations also highlights the differences amongst students in their approaches to future work and career. Students' orientations to the employability not only reflected the way they were beginning to understand and manage their employability, but also their attempts to manage their expectations and aspirations. For some, this also involved the management of disappointment. It highlights not only the differences in attitudes between these students, but also some of the tensions and pressures which many are experiencing in the pursuit of future employment. It appears that students now no longer anticipate a clear link between their merit in education and its reward in the labor market. Many students, particularly those whose future aspirations are strongly geared around their future employment, now perceive the need to develop more proactive and aggressive labor market strategies. This goes far beyond what they achieve in the formal education setting. In the closing of this study, it is very important to state that students are very serious about their employability and hence are investing time to get them accustomed and adopt to meet the current market demand.

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