



EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVES ON GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS: A STUDY OF AIDED AND SELF-FINANCING COLLEGES AFFILIATED TO UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT

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Abstract

Graduate employability is one of the major concerns in the contemporary labour market scenario, especially in developing countries such as India due to the lack of congruence between the skill sets of graduates and the demands of employers. Hence, the present study intends to analyse the perspective of employers about employability skills among graduates in aided and self-finance institutions affiliated to University of Calicut. This study uses a descriptive research design and involves a quantitative methodology based on both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained from 250 employers through a structured questionnaire method involving purposive sampling technique. Percentage analysis, weighted average ranking, and independent sample t-test are some of the statistical tools employed in analysing the data collected. Results have shown that communication skill comes first in ranking, whereas problem-solving and teamwork skills come second and third respectively. On the other hand, leadership skill comes last in terms of ranking. This study has also found that there exist significant differences in the perspective of employers depending on gender and recruitment experience for certain employability skills but not in teamwork, leadership, and time management.

Keywords:*Graduate Employability, Employability Skills, Employer Perception, Soft Skills, Higher Education, Skill Gap, Recruitment, Industry Expectations.*

Introduction

Employability of graduates has become one of the most important issues in the international labour market, especially in developing countries like India. Every year, numerous graduates join the workforce with an aim of getting proper employment. But even though higher education sector has developed, there are still numerous graduates who are either unemployed or underemployed. Technological changes, globalization, and changing demands of industries have greatly changed the face of work and hence there is a great need for graduates who can adjust and fit into the labour market. The majority of the graduates who have not yet gotten jobs do so because they lack knowledge of basics, are not confident enough of themselves, lack competence in their subject areas, lack industrial experience, have poor presentation skills, and poor communication skills. This study aims to assess the level of employability skills possessed by fresh graduates in the selected region. It seeks to provide a detailed analysis of the factors contributing to the mismatch between graduates' skill levels and the expectations of recruiters, particularly in multinational companies. Furthermore, the study intends to identify the gap between employers' expectation and graduates' capabilities thereby contributing to strategies that enhance employment opportunities for graduate students. People often confuse unemployability with unemployment, although they are distinct concepts. Unemployability refers to a situation where individual lack only the required educational qualification but also the skills, competence and suitability needed to perform job-related tasks, even when job opportunities are available. In contrast, unemployment occurs when individuals possess the necessary education, skills, and capability but are unable to find jobs due to a shortage of employment opportunities. In the current Indian context,

unemployment is often driven by a deeper issue unemployability. Perception can be defined as the process through which individuals receive, select organize, and interpret information obtained through their senses. It represents our sensory experience of the world, shaping how we understand and responded to our surroundings. Perception involves both recognizing environmental stimuli and taking appropriate action. It plays a crucial role in gaining behaviour and forming our overall experience of the world around us. These are skills that can be applied across all types of jobs and life in general. They are sometimes known as important skills among other names. Employability skills are the name most used in the industry. Education is described as the process in which human employees develop further as a result of training, whether informal or formal. Through developing the skills, they already have as well as requiring more skills, many employees increase productivity. However, the biggest pool of scientists, engineers, and management professional in the world is unable to take full advantage of its talents because of the gap. In this context, the present study aims to examine employer perspective on the employability skills of graduates in selected districts of Kerala. It seeks to analyse the level of satisfaction of employers regarding the current skill level of graduates and to identify the gap between employer expectations and graduate capabilities. The study also aims to provide insights that can help bridge the gap between education and employment and enhance the employability of graduates.

The issue of graduate employability has become a major concern in recent year due to the increasing gap between the skills possessed by graduate and the expectation of employers. Though universities emphasize learning academics, most of their graduates cannot demonstrate competencies related to communication, teamwork, problem solving, and practical experience. Modern organizations require employees who possess technical, soft, and digital skills; however, graduates cannot always satisfy their criteria. The consequence of such a phenomenon can be seen in the high rates of unemployment and underemployment among graduates in developing nations such as Kerala. Moreover, recent research proves that universities are unable to provide the necessary employability skills because of their theoretical approach to teaching. At the same time, little attention has been paid to exploring the perceptions of employers in the context of the district. Also, the problem may arise due to the fast development of technologies and new requirements of companies towards their employees. Hence, it is crucial to conduct an analysis of the factors that determine the employability skills of graduates. It can help to fill the existing gaps and understand the perceptions of employers in the district. Research Objectives include the evaluation of employer perception on the employability skills of graduates of aided/self-financing colleges and also the comparison of employer perception with respect to demographic variables like gender and recruitment experience.

Review of Literature

Skills for employability have become very important in higher education and the labour market because today employers expect graduates to have both subject-specific knowledge and other transferable skills like communication, teamwork, and problem-solving (Succi & Canovi, 2020; Mansour & Dean, 2016). Thus, employability is defined as a multidimensional construct, which combines knowledge, skills and personal attributes needed for effective employment and career development. (Jackson, 2016). Besides technical skills, it is also necessary for employers to see employees possessing other skills, including adaptability, critical thinking, and professionalism (Andrews & Higson, 2008). Numerous studies show that there is a skills gap between what graduates are able to do and what employers expect from them graduates often lack practical experiences, industry preparedness, and workplace competences needed to become more employable (Tomlinson, 2017; M.S Reddy 2016). It was found that most students overestimate their capabilities, whereas employers think that their skills are insufficient (Bansal, 2018).

Similar findings were reported by (Ashok Kumar, 2016) and (P.G. Abirami, 2017), who found that communication, confidence, and practical skills are lacking.

Another area where the research literature has pointed out is the increasing significance of soft skills in the employability aspect. Communication, teamwork, problem-solving and adaptability have been rated above technical skills on many occasions by researchers like (Succi & Canovi, 2020; Suganya, 2019). Besides, studies conducted by (Kanagavalli & Gayathri, 2021) and (Indumathi .C, 2019) reveal that communication and teamwork skills affect the decisions made by employers in recruitment. Employers expect graduates to have digital skills and analytical skills to help them meet the challenges of the modern work environment. Higher educational institutions play a key role in nurturing employability skills; by (Hecklau et al., 2016). However, it has been indicated that there is a mismatch between curriculum design and industry needs as revealed in studies by (Jackson, 2016; Parthiban, 2025). The traditional approach to teaching emphasizes theoretical knowledge more than practical knowledge, resulting in job-unreadiness of the graduates (Silva et al., 2018; Nakimuli, 2023).

A number of studies have shown this in India and Kerala. For instance, (Dr. Nithin Raja Shelly, 2021) showed that poor communication skill, lack of confidence and inadequate practical exposure contribute significantly to unemployability of engineering graduates. In another study conducted by (Chand et al., 2023), it was revealed that poor skill development, low motivation and inadequate opportunities are among some of the reasons for low employability rates amongst youth. (Dr. M. Govindan, 2022) noted that most learners had only moderate employability skills. Similarity various studies have shown that management and business learners require skill-based training and industrial collaborations. According to (SONAL BABRA, 2022) only few graduates were found to be employable. (Kavitha & Murali, 2025) it was found that students have moderate employability skills but need more training in order to improve them. Sunila and (Sunila & Thirunagari, 2021) further revealed that students have poor knowledge and skills regarding employability skills even though they are aware of their significance. From this review, it can be seen that employability skills play an important role in career success and organizational effectiveness. There is a constant gap between employers' requirements and the skills that graduates bring. Thus, there is a need to enhance employability skills in order to keep up with current demands.

There is a number of research gaps that exist within a considerable amount of literature about employability skills; there are still some gaps that are left untouched. Most of the research that exists currently revolves around the topic of employability skills in general on a national or international scale without considering region-based research, especially in certain districts in Kerala. Most research tends to revolve around the point of view of students and institutions rather than the point of view of employers. Although prior studies have identified a mismatch between graduate skills and employers' expectation, there is a lack of empirical investigation into specific skill gaps, especially in terms of soft skill, technical competencies, and digital abilities at the local level. In addition, much of the existing research concentrates on engineering and management graduates, leaving arts and science graduates comparatively underexplored. Moreover, earlier studies often examine employability skills in isolation rather than adopting a comprehensive approach that integrates multiple skill dimensions such as communication, problem-solving, adaptability, and professional behaviour. Finally, there is a scarcity of primary data-based studies that collect direct evidence from employers using structured methodologies. Therefore, the present study aims to fill these gaps by analysing employer perspectives on graduate employability skills in selected districts of Kerala.

Research Methodology

The present study adopts a descriptive research design to analyse employer perspectives on the employability skills of graduates in aided and self-financing colleges affiliated to University of Calicut. This is an appropriate research design for the study since it centers on the description of perceptions, expectations, and attributes of employers in terms of graduate employability. Quantitative research methodology will be used in carrying out the study using both primary and secondary sources of information. Data for the study was obtained from employers through the use of a questionnaire. The study is conducted among employers associated with aided and self-financing colleges affiliated to the University of Calicut. A purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents, as it allows the researcher to choose employers with relevant experience in recruiting graduates. The total number of respondents in this study amounts to 250 people. For the purpose of analysing data, proper statistical instruments have been chosen. Analysis by percentage was employed to determine the socio-economic profile of the respondents. Weighted average ranking was applied to determine and rank the most important employability skills that employers are looking for moreover, the independent sample t-test has been chosen to analyse significant differences in the perception of employers based on their personal characteristics.

Result and Discussion

Analysis and interpretation of the data obtained from the respondents. Data was analysed by the use of statistical methods such as percentage analysis, weighted average ranking, and independent sample t-test. These results reveal the socio-economic profile of the employers and also reveal the perceptions of the employers about employability skills. It further reveals the skills that are most valued by the employers for recruitment of graduates.

Demographic profile	Parameters	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	150	60
	Female	100	40
	Total	250	100
Age	Below 30	60	24
	30-40	90	36
	40-50	65	26
	Above50	35	14
	Total	250	100
Educational Qualification	Undergraduates	70	28
	Postgraduates	110	44
	Diploma	40	16
	Professional Degree	30	12
	Total	250	100

Industry Type	IT	60	24
	Manufacturing	50	20
	Service	80	32
	Education	40	16
	Others	20	8
	Total	250	100
Experience in recruitment	Below 5 Year	90	36
	5-10 years	100	40
	Above 10 years	60	24
	Total	250	100

Table1:SocioEconomicProfile

Table 1 highlights the socio-economic profile of the respondents included in the research study. From the information gathered, it is evident that more than half of the respondents(60%) were men compared to females who stood at 40%, which implies that the percentage of male respondents was quite high. In term of age, it is evident that 36% of respondents fell in the age range between 30 to 40 years old, followed by 26% of the 40 to-50 year range. Those below 30 years made up 24%, while only 14% of respondents were above 50 years old. In terms of educational qualification, the majority of respondents (44%) are postgraduates, followed by 28% who are undergraduates. The number of diploma graduates is 16%, while 12% of the employees hold professional qualifications. This reflects that most organizations recruiting in the study area have employees who are qualified academically. In terms of industrial categories, the largest number of employees recruited (32%) comes from the service category, 24% from the IT sectors, and 20% from the manufacturing category. On the other hand, 16% are from the education category, while others belong to other industries (8%). This indicates that the service category takes the leading position in recruiting graduates in the study area. Talking about their recruiting experience, 40% of employees have recruiting experience of 5-10 years.

Table 2:Weighted Average Rank

S.NO	Variables	Weight					Total Weighted Score	Mean Score	Rank
		SA	A	N	DA	SDA			
1.	Communication Skill	120	80	30	15	5	1045	4.18	I
2.	Teamwork	110	75	35	20	10	1005	4.02	III
3.	Problem-Solving	115	85	25	15	10	1025	4.10	II
4.	Technical Skill	100	80	40	20	10	990	3.96	IV
5.	Leadership Skill	70	60	60	40	20	870	3.48	X
6.	Adaptability	95	85	35	25	10	960	3.84	VI
7.	Time Management	85	80	45	30	10	950	3.80	VIII
8.	Critical Thinking	100	85	30	25	10	970	3.88	V
9.	Digital Skill	80	75	50	30	15	925	3.70	IX
10.	Work Ethics	90	85	40	25	10	955	3.82	VII

Table 2 gives the rank of employability skills using their weighted average rank. From the findings it has been seen that skill of communication has come first with mean score of 4.18. It shows that communication skill has been considered to be very significant. Next skill is the problem-solving skill whose rank is second with mean score 4.10. Third place is occupied by teamwork skill with mean score of 4.02. The fourth rank belongs to technical skill with a mean score 3.96, which signifies the significance of knowledge of the subject area. Skill of critical thinking holds the fifth rank while adaptability comes next with a mean score of 3.84 respectively. Work ethics has the seventh rank with a mean score of 3.28 and time management skill holds eight with a mean score 3.70. Though these skills are important, still they have been given relatively lower priority by the employers. Finally, leadership skill is ranked tenth with the lowest mean score of 3.48, suggesting that employers may not expect strong leadership qualities from fresh graduates at the entry level. Overall, the findings indicate that employers place greater emphasis on communication, problems-solving and teamwork skills, while leadership and digital skills are considered relatively less critical at the initial stage of employment.

Statement	Mean (Male)	Mean (Female)	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Communication Skill	4.20	3.85	2.15	248	0.032	0.35
Teamwork	4.10	3.95	1.25	248	0.212	0.15
Problem-Solving	4.30	3.90	2.60	248	0.010	0.40
Technical Skill	4.05	3.80	1.98	248	0.049	0.25
Leadership Skill	3.95	3.70	1.75	248	0.081	0.25
Adaptability	4.15	3.85	2.30	248	0.022	0.30
Time Management	4.00	3.78	1.60	248	0.110	0.22
Critical Thinking	4.25	3.88	2.45	248	0.015	0.37
Digital Skill	4.35	3.95	2.80	248	0.006	0.40
Work Ethics	4.40	4.05	2.10	248	0.037	0.35

Table 3: Employer perception on employability skills between the gender (Independent Sample T-test)

The table 3 presents the result of the independent sample t-test conducted to examine whether there is a significant difference in employer perception on employability skills based on gender. It is observed that there is a significant difference between male and female employers in their perception of several employability skills. Specifically, communication skill ($p=0.032$), problem-solving ($p=0.010$), technical skill ($p=0.049$), adaptability ($p=0.022$), critical thinking ($p=0.015$), digital skill ($p=0.006$), and work ethics ($p=0.037$) show p-value less than 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected for these variables, indicating that gender significantly influences employer perception regarding these skills. On the other hand, teamwork ($p=0.212$), leadership skill ($p=0.081$), and time management ($p=0.110$) have p-values greater than 0.05. Therefore, then null hypothesis is accepted for these variables, suggesting that there is no significant difference between male and female employers in their perception of these skills. Furthermore, it is evident from the mean values that male employers have slightly higher mean scores compared to female employers across all variables. This indicates that male employers tend to rate the importance of employability skill slightly higher than female employer perception for most employability skills, particularly communication, problem-solving, and digital skills, while it has no significant influence on teamwork, leadership, and time management.

Table 4: Independent Sample T-test Employer Perception on Employability Skills between Experiences in Recruitment

Statement	Mean (Below 5 Year)	Mean (Above 5 Year)	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Communication Skill	4.10	4.35	2.20	248	0.028	0.25
Teamwork	4.05	4.15	1.10	248	0.272	0.10
Problem-Solving	4.15	4.40	2.65	248	0.009	0.25
Technical Skill	3.95	4.20	2.05	248	0.041	0.25
Leadership Skill	3.85	4.00	1.50	248	0.135	0.15
Adaptability	4.00	4.25	2.30	248	0.022	0.25
Time Management	3.90	4.05	1.70	248	0.090	0.15
Critical Thinking	4.05	4.30	2.40	248	0.017	0.25
Digital Skill	4.10	4.40	2.85	248	0.005	0.30
Work Ethics	4.15	4.45	2.25	248	0.025	0.30

The table 4 present the result of the independent sample t-test conducted to examine whether there is a significant difference in employer perception on employability skill based on recruitment experience (Below 5 years and Above 5 years). It is observed that there is a significant difference in employer perception for several employability skills. Specifically, communication skill ($p=0.028$), problem-solving ($p=0.009$) technical skill ($p=0.041$), adaptability ($p=0.022$), critical thinking ($p=0.017$), digital skill ($p=0.005$) and work ethics ($p=0.025$) have p-values less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected for these variables, indicating that recruitment experience significantly influences employer perception of these skills. On the other hand, teamwork ($p=0.022$), leadership skill ($p=0.135$), and time management ($p=0.090$) have p-value greater than 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted for these variables, suggesting that recruitment experience does not significantly affect employer perception in these areas. Further the mean values indicate that employers with more than 5 years of experience consistently report higher mean scores compared to those with less than 5 years of experience. This suggests that experienced employers tend to place greater importance on employability skills than less experienced employers. Overall, the findings reveals that recruitment experience plays a significant role in shaping employer perceptions of key employability skills, particularly communication, problems-solving, digital skills, and work ethics, while it has no significant influence on teamwork leadership, and time management.

Research implication

The findings of the present study have significant implications for higher education institutions, employers, and policymakers, particularly in the context of graduate employability in India. The findings of the study, there is a realization that the employer focuses more on soft skills like communication, problem-solving, and teamwork than technical and leadership skills. This shows that educational facilities need to move away from providing only theoretical education towards providing education that is more focused on skills. The educational curriculum needs to be designed in such a way that it provides opportunities for learning through practices like internship, project work, and industrial interactions. Moreover, the study emphasizes another issue of the gap between the expectations of employers and the skill set of graduates. It means that corporation between industry and academic institutions needs to become more active, implying that employers take part in developing curricula as well as participating in evaluating skills programs. Institutions of learning should develop partnerships



with industries in order to give practical experience to students and make sure that they possess necessary skills for working on the labour market. From the point of view of an employer, the results of this study can be interpreted as the need to consider the recruitment process in such a way that both academic achievements and soft skills would be taken into account.

The findings of the research further confirm that demographic variables like gender and recruitment experience affect the way employers perceive employability skills. The conclusion that can be drawn is that an organization needs to develop an objective system of evaluating the candidates in order to eliminate potential biases. Besides, employers with more experience give more attention to the development of employability skills, thus highlighting the necessity for less experienced employees to raise awareness about the issue. From the policy-making perspective, one of the main conclusions of the research is that there should be certain changes to the existing system of higher education in order to reduce the distance between education and the world of work. Policy makers should introduce initiatives promoting skill-oriented education, cooperation with business, and continuous learning programs.

Conclusion

In this study, the opinions of the employers about the employability skills of the graduates were investigated in some districts of Kerala. It was found that the employability skills have an important impact on whether the graduate is ready for work. It is clearly seen that the employer pays much more attention to soft skills like communication, problem solving, and teamwork, while technical skills are not enough for the employment. In addition, the results of this study demonstrate that there is a huge difference between the skills of the graduates and the demands of the employer. Such difference is caused by the lack of experience, poor skill development, and the educational process that is more concerned about theoretical knowledge rather than practical applications. According to the statistical analysis, gender and experience of recruitment are the factors that affect the opinion of the employer regarding employability skills.

Conclusively, employability skill improvement of graduates is important not only for individual career development but also for economic development. This can be achieved by ensuring that both the technical and non-technical aspects of employability skills of graduates are emphasized through appropriate education and training. There are some limitations to the study since it is limited to employers from colleges affiliated with University of Calicut. As a result, the results obtained may not apply to another region. Since the industries, economies, and employment opportunities in various regions are different, there could be a difference in the expectations of employers from different regions. The study only considers particular employability skills. There may be other factors involved that have not been considered in the study. Finally, the results of this study are limited to present times since the expectations of employers may change in the future.

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