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Soft Skills and Career Readiness: An Empirical Study on Employability among College Students

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Abstract

This study examines the importance of soft skills in enhancing employability and career readiness among college students. A descriptive research design and quantitative approach were used with a sample of 108 students. The findings revealed that communication, teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving are highly important for future employment. Students who received formal soft skills training showed higher confidence levels compared to others. The study concludes that soft skills significantly influence employability and should be integrated into academic curricula through practical training and industry-oriented activities.

Keywords: Soft Skills, Employability, Career Readiness, Communication Skills, Higher Education, Professional Development.

Introduction

In an Era characterized by rapid technological destruction Globalization and evolving workplace dynamics the definition of a 'career-ready' graduate has undergone a profound transformation. Traditional academic metrics, great Point Average and Technical certifications while still relevant, no longer suffice as sole indicator of professional competence. organisations today seek individuals who can communicate effectively, collaborate across multi-disciplinary teams, navigate ambiguity, demonstrate resilience and exhibit the emotional intelligence necessary to thrive in a complex human environment. These capabilities, collectively termed soft skills or interpersonal competencies have emerged as decisive differentiators in hiring, performance evaluation and career advancement.

The World Economic Forums' future of jobs report (2023) identifies critical thinking, creativity, emotional intelligence, and leadership as among the most sought-after skills in the Global workforce over the next decade. Milli, a LinkedIn work force report found 92% of talent professionals and hiring managers regard soft skills as equally important if not more so than hard skills, with 89% citing a lack of soft skills

as a primary reason for Poor hiring outcomes. Despite this documented employer demand, educational institutions have historically prioritized technical knowledge delivery to informal experience, extracurricular activities or post-employment training.

This miss alignment between academic output and industrial expectation contributes to a persistent and widening employee ability gap. Graduates enter the work force equipped with subject matter expertise but frequently under prepared for interpersonal communication and collaborate to demands of the professional environment. unemployment or under employment organisation individual career satisfaction.

Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to empirically assess the significance of short skills for career readiness among students. The research aims to identify which shop skills are most valued by employers, evaluate the current level of soft skill Pro efficiency among students and examine the extent to which academic curriculum supports the systematic development of these competencies. By providing a comprehensive analysis of the shop scale landscape in higher education, study aspires to inform policy decisions, pedagogical strategies, and institutional factories that can more effectively prepare students for the demands of the modern professional world.

Research Gap

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of soft skills for employability and career readiness. However, limited research has focused on students' awareness, familiarity, confidence levels, and the impact of formal soft skills training simultaneously. Additionally, there is insufficient evidence regarding the relationship between demographic factors and students' perception of soft skills in the Indian higher education context. Therefore, the present study attempts to address these gaps.

Need / Significance of the Study

The study is important because soft skills have become essential for employability and professional success in the modern workplace. It helps educational institutions understand students' awareness and preparedness regarding soft skills. The findings of the study may assist educators, policymakers, and institutions in designing curriculum, training programs, and industry-oriented activities that enhance students' employability and career readiness.

Literature Review

Previous studies have emphasized the growing importance of soft skills in enhancing employability and career readiness among students and graduates. Andrews and Higson (2018) found that communication and teamwork were considered more important than academic performance for long-term career success. Azeem et al. (2020) highlighted that communication skills significantly influence

employability and identified a gap between academic curriculum and industry expectations. Balcar (2016) reported that soft skills positively affect employability, wage outcomes, and career advancement.

Chamorro-Premuzic et al. (2019) identified emotional intelligence, adaptability, and learning agility as essential future-oriented skills. Deepa and Seth (2019) revealed deficiencies in confidence and communication skills among Indian graduates, while Kumar and Sharma (2021) emphasized the importance of adaptability, communication, and digital skills in the modern employment environment.

Mwita et al. (2024) concluded that soft skills have a stronger impact on employability than technical skills and academic performance. Patel and Trivedi (2022) identified communication and leadership as critical employability competencies. Similarly, Rao and Abraham (2019) highlighted leadership, interpersonal skills, and emotional intelligence as important dimensions influencing career readiness.

Robles (2017) recognized integrity, teamwork, and communication as highly valued employability skills. Singh and Jaykumar (2020) found a positive relationship between soft skills and career readiness, while Suarta et al. (2017) stressed the importance of communication, teamwork, and lifelong learning for the future workforce. Succi and Canovi (2020) reported that employers value soft skills more than students perceive them to be.

Villegas (2024) identified communication, teamwork, and problem-solving as the most researched employability skills and emphasized stronger industry-academia collaboration. Yorke and Knight (2018) concluded that soft skills enhance students' confidence and employability through holistic learning approaches.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the awareness and familiarity of students regarding soft skills.
- To analyze whether formal soft skills training influences students' confidence in their soft skills.
- To study the relationship between demographic variables and perception of the importance of soft skills for future employment.

Hypotheses of the Study

Hypotheses 1

- **H0₁ (Null Hypothesis)**

There is no significant relationship between students' familiarity with soft skills and their perception of the importance of soft skills.

- **H1₁ (Alternative Hypothesis)**

There is a significant relationship between students' familiarity with soft skills and their perception of the importance of soft skills.

Hypotheses 2

- **H0₂ (Null Hypothesis)**

There is no significant difference in confidence levels of students who received formal soft skills training and those who did not.

- **H1₂ (Alternative Hypothesis)**

There is a significant difference in confidence levels of students who received formal soft skills training and those who did not.

Hypotheses 3

- **H0₃ (Null Hypothesis)**

There is no significant association between gender and students' perception regarding the importance of soft skills for future employment.

- **H1₃ (Alternative Hypothesis)**

There is a significant association between gender and students' perception regarding the importance of soft skills for future employment.

Research Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive research design to analyze students' awareness, perception, and importance of soft skills for employability. Quantitative research methods were used for data collection and statistical analysis. Structured questionnaires were administered to respondents, and the collected data was analyzed using statistical tools such as correlation, t-test, and chi-square test in SPSS format.

- **Sources of Data Collection**

- Primary Data: Primary data was collected directly from respondents through a structured questionnaire using survey methods.
- Secondary data was collected from:
 - Research journals
 - Books
 - Articles
 - Websites
 - Previous research studies
 - Academic publications related to soft skills and employability

- **Sampling Technique**
 - The study used a Convenience Sampling Technique, where respondents were selected based on accessibility and willingness to participate in the survey.
- **Sample Size:**
 - Total Sample Size = 108 Respondents
- **Population of the Study:**
 - The population of the study consisted of college students pursuing undergraduate and postgraduate programs who were aware of or exposed to soft skills training and employability-related activities.

Component	Details
Research Design	Descriptive research design to analyze students' awareness, perception, and importance of soft skills for employability.
Research Method	Quantitative research methods used for data collection and statistical analysis.
Data Collection Tool	Structured questionnaires administered to respondents.
Statistical Tools Used	Analyzed using SPSS, including: Spearman Correlation, Independent Sample t-Test and Chi-square test
Primary Data Source	Collected directly from respondents through a structured questionnaire using survey methods.
Secondary Data Sources	Research journals, Books, Articles, Websites, Previous research studies and Academic publications related to soft skills and employability
Sampling Technique	Convenience Sampling Technique, respondents selected based on accessibility and willingness to participate in the survey.
Sample Size	108 respondents
Study Population	College students pursuing undergraduate and postgraduate programs who were aware of or exposed to soft skills training and employability-related activities.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

- **Correlation Analysis**

Correlation between Familiarity with Soft Skills and Perception of Importance

Correlation Table

Variables	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Sig. (p-value)	Result
Familiarity with Soft Skills & Perception of Importance	-0.252	0.009	Significant

Interpretation

Since the p-value (0.009) is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between familiarity with soft skills and students' perception of their importance.

- **Independent Sample t-Test**

Comparison of Confidence Levels based on Formal Training

Group Statistics

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Received Formal Training	76	3.7	0.88
No Formal Training	32	3.28	0.9

Independent Samples Test

Test	t-value	Sig. (2-tailed)	Result
Confidence Level Comparison	2.281	0.026	Significant

Interpretation

Since the p-value (0.026) is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. Students who received formal soft skills training showed significantly higher confidence levels compared to students without formal training.

- **Chi-Square Test**

Association between Gender and Perception of Importance of Soft Skills

Chi-Square Table

Test	Chi-Square Value	df	Sig. (p-value)	Result
Pearson Chi-Square	1.372	1	0.241	Not Significant

Interpretation

Since the p-value (0.241) is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, there is no significant association between gender and perception regarding the importance of soft skills for future employment.

Major Findings

- Most respondents were aware of the concept of soft skills and considered them important for future employment.
- Students who received formal training in soft skills demonstrated higher confidence levels compared to those without training.
- Familiarity with soft skills significantly influenced students' perception regarding the importance of soft skills.

- Communication, teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving were identified as the most important soft skills.
- A majority of students believed that soft skills should be included as part of the academic curriculum.
- Gender did not significantly affect students' perception regarding the importance of soft skills.

Suggestions / Recommendations

- Educational institutions should integrate soft skills training into the regular curriculum.
- Workshops, seminars, role plays, and practical communication activities should be conducted frequently.
- Institutions should collaborate with industries to provide employability-oriented soft skills programs.
- Students should be encouraged to participate in group discussions, presentations, and team activities to improve interpersonal skills.
- Special training programs focusing on communication, leadership, adaptability, and problem-solving should be organized.
- Career guidance and personality development sessions should be arranged regularly.

Conclusions

The study concludes that soft skills play a significant role in employability and career success. Students are increasingly aware of the importance of communication, teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving skills. Formal training positively impacts students' confidence and understanding of soft skills. Therefore, educational institutions must emphasize structured soft skills development programs to enhance students' employability and professional growth.

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited to a specific group of respondents and may not represent the views of all students. The sample size was restricted, which may affect the generalization of the findings. The study relied on self-reported responses, which may include personal bias. Time and resource constraints limited the scope of data collection. The study focused only on selected soft skills and did not cover all employability-related competencies.

Scope for Future Research

- Future studies may include a larger and more diverse sample from different universities, disciplines, and geographical regions to improve the generalizability of the findings.

- Comparative studies can be conducted between undergraduate and postgraduate students, as well as between students from different academic streams such as management, engineering, commerce, and science.
- Longitudinal research may be undertaken to examine how soft skills develop over time and influence career success after graduation.
- Future studies can explore the effectiveness of specific soft skill training programs, workshops, internships, and industry collaborations in enhancing employability.
- Additional soft skills such as emotional intelligence, adaptability, resilience, digital communication, and leadership can be examined in greater detail.
- Research may also incorporate employers' perspectives to identify the gap between students' competencies and industry expectations more comprehensively.

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