

# EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS: PERCEPTIONS AND FACTS

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**Abstract :** The study has investigated the relationship of the engineering students' demographic variables (gender, medium in school, nativity, number of training programs attended earlier) on the factors of employability skills (stress coping, communication skills, leadership skills, team work and problem-solving skills, time management, and self-efficacy) in Coimbatore District. Most of the skills expected by different employers are communication, team working, leadership, initiative, problem solving, flexibility, attitude and enthusiasm. However, many of these skills overlap one another. Improving one skill will naturally improve other skills. Descriptive research design has been adopted in this study. The sample is final year engineering students of Coimbatore district. The researcher approached 150 students for this study and found only 137 students to have responded authentically. A well-structured questionnaire has been used to collect the primary data. Reviews on previous studies have been done with the help of various research journals. Analysis of variance in the collected data has been performed statistically to arrive at meaningful implications. This study has highlighted the importance of aligning employability with academic values by making explicit links between the demographic variables of engineering students and their employability skills. In addition, it has identified that there is a significant mean difference among the different gender of engineering students on the factor of employability skills namely communication skills where medium of instruction would have a played a significant impact.

**Index Terms - Communication Skills, Leadership Skills, Self-Efficacy, Stress Coping, Time Management.**

## I.INTRODUCTION

Employers across all industries search for candidates who can demonstrate a wide range of employability skills which primarily include communication skills, team work, organizing, analytical skills, problem solving, negotiation skills, leadership skills and commercial awareness.

Employability skills are also commonly known as graduate qualities or transferability skills. Employability skills or graduate capabilities which emphasize on nurturing of non-technical skills are much essential for the engineering candidates at some level.

Enhancement of employability skills in higher engineering education have always been a subject of grave concern as critical need of these elements among graduates are essential to fulfil the modern industry's job expectations. In fact, due to competitive nature of engineering activities, industry is also recognizing the centrality of greater need of contemporary professional attributes, understanding, and capabilities of graduates; which has indirectly created a drastic impact on the employability rate of engineering graduates. In this connection, ample evidence indicates the existence of a significant gap between the students capabilities developed at the university/ higher educational institutions and the expectations of the contemporary employers.

As such, the educational curriculum should be frequently reevaluated and revised to be relevant and to gravitate towards shaping the graduate's attributes that are desirable to the industry. However, there is a growing concern that the higher engineering education responsible for producing graduates with broader skills and attributes that are beyond technical and discipline competencies is not keeping pace with the need of work front. Hence, prioritising improvement in the engineering education system towards a different dimension is crucial in influencing the current trends in the engineering education to address this shortfall.

Integration of employability skills into the curriculum is currently considered to be the major theme in higher engineering education in an effort to align towards the demand of modern industry.

Employability Skills can be defined as the transferable skills needed by an individual to make them 'employable'. Along with good technical understanding and subject knowledge, employers often outline a set of skills that they want from an employee. These skills are what they believe will equip the employee to carry out their role to the best of their ability.

Employability depends on the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the candidates and how they use those assets, and how they present them to employers.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Venetia Saunders et al (2010) evaluated the perspective of sandwich students and graduates in bimolecular science, and their employers. A strong correlation was found between employer and sandwich student/graduate perceptions of the relative priorities amongst employability skills. Skills such as enthusiasm, dependability and team-working scored higher than subject knowledge skills, whilst commercial awareness, negotiation and networking were given lowest priority. Furthermore, the lowest ranked skills were those that sandwich students/graduates were assessed to be least proficient in. Overall skills of new graduate employees were rated less highly by their employers than by the graduates themselves. Implications of this study, including the value of student self-assessment of their skills and utility of the profile to underpin personal development planning and inform graduate recruitment processes, are discussed and recommendations made.

Ching-Yi Tsai (2013) analyzed the relationship between tourism and hospitality education and work in terms of employability development as well as to discuss how higher education can contribute to such a development.

Rajanibala J. Shah et al (2014) identified the factors which are affecting the management graduate employability skills from the city Ahmedabad (Gujarat, India). Four independent Factors have been identified to make a significant impact on employability skills of management graduates. These are Analytical Skills and Self-Understanding, General Management and work Culture, Leadership and Problem-solving Ability and Communication.

Uchendu, C. C. (2015) assessed the level of university students' skill acquisition for employability in Cross River State. Results obtained showed that the level of university students skill acquisition for employability is significantly low. Conventional university students do not differ significantly from those in specialized university in their skill acquisition for employability. It was concluded that university students' skill acquisition for employment is significantly low.

Andrea Pusey-Murray et al (2018) analysed the perceptions of employability skills of undergraduates at a university in Kingston, Jamaica. This study has recognized challenges that need to be addressed in order for the students to be marketable. Emphasis on employability skills cannot be left until the students graduate; it is of great importance that they be developed throughout their course of study.

## III. NEED FOR THE STUDY

The degree acquired could be a pre-requisite to apply for a job. However, it is not an automatic door to get the job. There will be a number of similar graduates, who will be equally well qualified, competing for the given job profile. The applicant who has the right blend of skills, abilities, values and personal qualities as required by the employer could only perform the job perfectly.

The job description is subject to continual changes as the employee has to move between a number of different job functions and employers and those jobs and employers are likely to diversity themselves during the time of employment. Employers are therefore interested in persons who are enterprising, resourceful, and adaptable with good attitude/range of

possessing required skills. In other words, one can call it employability skills. These skills will reflect the employee's abilities, interests and personality as sought by different employers throughout one's career.

Most of the skills expected by different employers are communication, team working, leadership, initiative, problem solving, flexibility, attitude and enthusiasm. However, many of these skills overlap one another. Improving one skill will naturally improve other skills.

Employability skills can't be acquired overnight. The applicant has to find out the important skill sets as required by the prospective employers from the various advertisements released by them from time to time. This process is being looked in to only during the final year by many students and colleges. Now, this process has to be started from first year itself. Students thinking about this in the final year shall be greatly disadvantageous.

This study will bring out the shortfalls of the students with respect to employability skills required and the educational institutions can train the forth coming batch of students accordingly to mould them into better employable engineers.

#### **IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

To study the variance between the engineering students' demographic variables (gender, medium in school, nativity, number of training programs attended earlier) and the factors of employability skills (stress coping, communication skills, leadership skills, team work and problem-solving skills, time management, and self-efficacy) in Coimbatore district.

#### **V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

A descriptive research design has been adopted in this study. Final year engineering students of various colleges in Coimbatore district were the sample respondents of the study. The researcher approached 150 students for this study and found 137 students to have responded authentically. The data obtained from these 137 students have only been taken into consideration. A well-structured questionnaire has been used to collect the primary data. Statistical tools have been used to analyse the variance between the independent variables with respect to the dependent variables identified in the study.

#### **VI. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

##### **Gender and Employability Skills**

Hypothesis:

H0: There is no significant mean difference among the different gender of engineering students on the factor of employability skills (stress coping, communication skills, leadership skills, team work and problem-solving skills, time management, and self-efficacy).

H1: There is a significant mean difference among the different gender of engineering students on the factor of employability skills (stress coping, communication skills, leadership skills, team work and problem-solving skills, time management, and self-efficacy).

The table 1 shows that there is no significant mean difference among the different gender of engineering students on the factor of employability skills (stress coping, leadership skills, team work and problem-solving skills, time management, and self-efficacy) because the p-values (0.129, 0.146, 0.090, 0.108, and 0.559) are greater than the level of significance of 5%. Therefore, we accept the null hypothesis and reject the alternative hypothesis.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b>Stress Coping</b>	Between Groups	1.009	1	1.009	2.328	0.129
	Within Groups	58.495	135	0.433		
	Total	59.504	136			
<b>Communication Skills</b>	Between Groups	2.126	1	2.126	5.736	0.018
	Within Groups	50.035	135	0.371		
	Total	52.161	136			
<b>Leadership Skills</b>	Between Groups	0.908	1	0.908	2.140	0.146
	Within Groups	57.253	135	0.424		
	Total	58.161	136			
<b>Team Work and Problem Solving</b>	Between Groups	0.613	1	0.613	2.911	0.090
	Within Groups	28.438	135	0.211		
	Total	29.051	136			
<b>Time Management</b>	Between Groups	0.951	1	0.951	2.618	0.108
	Within Groups	49.063	135	0.363		
	Total	50.015	136			
<b>Self-Efficacy</b>	Between Groups	0.100	1	0.100	0.343	0.559
	Within Groups	39.491	135	0.293		
	Total	39.591	136			

**Table 1: ANOVA for Gender and Employability Skills**

Also, there is a significant mean difference among the different gender of engineering students on the factor of employability skills (communication skills) because the p-value (0.018) is less than the level of significance of 5%. Hence, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis.

#### Medium of study in School and Employability Skills

##### Hypothesis:

H0: There is no significant mean difference among the different medium of study in school of engineering students on the factor of employability skills (stress coping, communication skills, leadership skills, team work and problem-solving skills, time management, and self-efficacy).

H1: There is a significant mean difference among the different medium of study in school of engineering students on the factor of employability skills (stress coping, communication skills, leadership skills, team work and problem-solving skills, time management, and self-efficacy).

The table 2 indicates that there is no significant mean difference among the different medium in school of engineering students on the factor of employability skills (stress coping, communication skills, leadership skills, team work and problem-solving skills, time management, and self-efficacy) because the p-values (0.718, 0.965, 0.317, 0.388, 0.737, and 0.057) are greater than the level of significance of 5%. Thus, we accept the null hypothesis and reject the alternative hypothesis.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b>Stress Coping</b>	Between Groups	0.057	1	0.057	0.131	0.718
	Within Groups	59.446	135	0.440		
	Total	59.504	136			
<b>Communication Skills</b>	Between Groups	0.001	1	0.001	0.002	0.965
	Within Groups	52.160	135	0.386		
	Total	52.161	136			
<b>Leadership Skills</b>	Between Groups	0.432	1	0.432	1.009	0.317
	Within Groups	57.729	135	0.428		
	Total	58.161	136			
<b>Team Work and Problem Solving</b>	Between Groups	0.161	1	0.161	0.751	0.388
	Within Groups	28.890	135	0.214		
	Total	29.051	136			
<b>Time Management</b>	Between Groups	0.042	1	0.042	0.113	0.737
	Within Groups	49.973	135	0.370		
	Total	50.015	136			
<b>Self-Efficacy</b>	Between Groups	1.051	1	1.051	3.682	0.057
	Within Groups	38.540	135	0.285		
	Total	39.591	136			

**Table 2: ANOVA for Medium in School and Employability Skills**

#### Nativity and Employability Skills

##### Hypothesis:

H0: There is no significant mean difference among the different nativity of engineering students on the factor of employability skills (stress coping, communication skills, leadership skills, team work and problem-solving skills, time management, and self-efficacy).

H1: There is a significant mean difference among the different nativity of engineering students on the factor of employability skills (stress coping, communication skills, leadership skills, team work and problem-solving skills, time management, and self-efficacy).

The table 3 gives that there is no significant mean difference among the different nativity of engineering students on the factor of employability skills (stress coping, communication skills, leadership skills, team work and problem-solving skills, time management, and self-efficacy) because the p-values (0.130, 0.830, 0.378, 0.064, 0.066, and 0.307) are greater than the level of significance of 5%. Accordingly, we accept the null hypothesis and reject the alternative hypothesis.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b>Stress Coping</b>	Between Groups	1.004	1	1.004	2.316	0.130
	Within Groups	58.500	135	0.433		
	Total	59.504	136			

<b>Communication Skills</b>	Between Groups	0.018	1	0.018	0.046	0.830
	Within Groups	52.143	135	0.386		
	Total	52.161	136			
<b>Leadership Skills</b>	Between Groups	0.335	1	0.335	0.783	0.378
	Within Groups	57.825	135	0.428		
	Total	58.161	136			
<b>Team Work and Problem Solving</b>	Between Groups	0.733	1	0.733	3.494	0.064
	Within Groups	28.318	135	0.210		
	Total	29.051	136			
<b>Time Management</b>	Between Groups	1.237	1	1.237	3.425	0.066
	Within Groups	48.777	135	0.361		
	Total	50.015	136			
<b>Self-Efficacy</b>	Between Groups	0.306	1	0.306	1.051	0.307
	Within Groups	39.285	135	0.291		
	Total	39.591	136			

**Table 3: ANOVA for Nativity and Employability Skills**

#### Number of Training Programs Attended Earlier and Employability Skills

##### Hypothesis:

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant mean difference among the number of training programs attended earlier by the engineering students on the factor of employability skills (stress coping, communication skills, leadership skills, team work and problem-solving skills, time management, and self-efficacy).

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant mean difference among the number of training programs attended earlier by the engineering students on the factor of employability skills (stress coping, communication skills, leadership skills, team work and problem-solving skills, time management, and self-efficacy).

The table 4 reveals that there is no significant mean difference among the number of training programs attended earlier by the engineering students on the factor of employability skills (stress coping, communication skills, leadership skills, team work and problem-solving skills, time management, and self-efficacy) because the p-values (0.455, 0.082, 0.717, 0.392, 0.828, and 0.625) are greater than the level of significance of 5%. Consequently, we accept the null hypothesis and reject the alternative hypothesis.

		<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
<b>Stress Coping</b>	Between Groups	1.612	4	0.403	0.919	0.455
	Within Groups	57.892	132	0.439		
	Total	59.504	136			
<b>Communication Skills</b>	Between Groups	3.150	4	0.788	2.121	0.082
	Within Groups	49.010	132	0.371		
	Total	52.161	136			
<b>Leadership Skills</b>	Between Groups	0.912	4	0.228	0.526	0.717
	Within Groups	57.249	132	0.434		

	Total	58.161	136			
<b>Team Work and Problem Solving</b>	Between Groups	0.882	4	0.221	1.034	0.392
	Within Groups	28.169	132	0.213		
	Total	29.051	136			
<b>Time Management</b>	Between Groups	0.557	4	0.139	0.372	0.828
	Within Groups	49.458	132	0.375		
	Total	50.015	136			
<b>Self-Efficacy</b>	Between Groups	0.770	4	0.192	0.654	0.625
	Within Groups	38.821	132	0.294		
	Total	39.591	136			

**Table 4: ANOVA for Number of Training Programs Attended Earlier and Employability Skills**

## VII. CONCLUSION

This study has highlighted the importance of aligning employability with academic values by making explicit links between the demographic variables of engineering students and their employability skills. In addition, it has identified that there is a significant mean difference among the different gender of engineering students on the factor of employability skills namely communication skills.

## VIII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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