

Soft Skills Perceived by the Students as Relevant for Employment

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ABSTRACT

Present day employment market needs highly skilled employees. Human resource managers and employers find some skills gaps in the graduates or mismatch in the required soft skills for the job requirements. Perception is inner feeling of one's on anything based on belief and experience. The high education institutions in the state design their curriculum addressing only on technical skills. Many of the graduates who are graduated from the state believe and perceive that the employability skills are all about technical subjects, without understanding the reality of employability skills. So the academicians have greater role to change the perception of graduates towards the employability skills. So the universities/ Institutes should take the responsibilities, in shaping up the perception level of graduates on the skills needed by the employers to perform their job in effective way. This paper is about the student's perception on soft skills which are relevant for employment.

Keywords; Skill, Skill Gaps, Employability Skills, Technical Skills, Curriculum, Perception, Graduation

1. INTRODUCTION

A better education system plays a significant role in building of a nation. In our country, there are large number of educational institutions, engaged in imparting education in our country. To match with the international educational pattern, majority of the institutions have made some changes in their academic system. However Our present higher education system produces graduates with technical skills, but they lack some kind of soft skills like self confidence, better communication ability, decision making capability, problem solving ability etc. This is because of lack of relationship between academia and industry. But to meet the industry requirements, there should be some redesigning of our educational system. The curriculum should be based on learner centric to meet graduates professional and personal objectives. When an education system focuses on the learner, learners should be benefitted with the system by acquiring some skills to get employment. A graduate becomes knowledgeable with our conventional system, but not skilled enough to do a job. But the society needs graduates with skills to do a job, not knowledgeable persons.

Employers recruit new employees on the basis of competencies in technical and nontechnical or soft skills. However, potential employees lack the required composite soft skills relevant for the particular work culture. The aim of this research paper is to conduct a study on the perceptions of students regarding the nature of soft skills that are relevant employment in the present technological scenario. The term soft skills, also known as nontechnical skills, are defined as the "interpersonal, human, people or behavioural skills needed to apply the technical skills and knowledge in the workplace" Soft skills are categorized as being related to human issues, such

as communication, teamwork, leadership, conflict management, negotiation, professionalism, and ethics. However, technical skills, which are also referred to as hard skills, are defined as “those skills acquired through training and education or learned on the job and are specific to each type of jobs”. Food preparation skills are an example of a technical skill in the field of hotel industry.

Even though Technical skills and soft skills are on the opposite sides of the skills spectrum, both are relevant for employment. It is noted that soft skills are different from technical skills, although both sets of skills are complementary. The complement of soft and technical skills is known as employability skills. Job readiness skills are known as employability skills. Identifying prospective employees who are competent in both soft and technical skills, particularly soft skills, creates a challenge for employers, and it is with this background, this study is conducted by analyzing the students perception towards the employment skills which are relevant to jobs.

One of the outcomes of education is to satisfy the employment needs of employers and graduates. Graduates seek to obtain better employment opportunities and employers pursue suitable new recruits from the pool of graduates to fill job offerings. Higher education institutions include Professional/Vocational/Community colleges which offers graduation in our country. As part of the education system in our country, it enhances national development through the provision of higher level training in Technical, Professional, and Managerial skills. These colleges foster the employment opportunities of their students by integrating theoretical and practical training. The practical training component involves collaborating with employers to provide work experience for students. The work experience program aims at providing hands-on training in technical skills and helps students integrate other personal and professional skills relevant for employment. Even with the work experience component, the training opportunities provided by the colleges prove inadequate for some employers. Soft skills’ training is a hidden curriculum.

Soft skills training approach has the potential to foster students’ acquisition and transference of relevant employability skills (Adams, 2007; Westray, 2008). It is the college’s responsibility to identify and implement the appropriate soft skills training approach to help students with this transition.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To compare the soft skills required by the industry and acquired by the graduates from the classrooms
- To identify the soft skills needed by the industries to perform their jobs.
- To study the competencies provided in the graduate classrooms .
- To identify the gap between the industry requirements and graduate’s capability to perform.
- To enhance the graduates by equipping with necessary competencies to meet the industry requirements.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research technique was emphasized to identify the competencies required by the graduates to meet the industry requirements. This study will provide a view into how the education system in our area operates its curriculum or to equip the curriculum to meet the

industry demands. By this study the researcher hopes that the differences between the education output and the industry expectations will be revealed and educators will incorporate the industry expectations in the academic curriculum for the graduates.

4. SAMPLING AND DATA COLLECTION

Total number of sample size was 40. Out of this, 20 teaching faculties from graduate colleges and 20 professionals from the industry working in administrative and technical sessions. were selected as sample to conduct this study.

The personal semi-structured interviews were conducted among the teachers and professionals in the industries. The sampling was done in convenience sampling method as the researcher interviewed the experts from the industry and institutions, personally. The industry professionals who held in the highest positions to recruit and hire the people for their firms and the teachers, who have immense experiences with student's in graduate education, were interviewed.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

When generally speaking, the soft skills needed by managers to manage the organisations can be categorised into two. They are Conceptual and Human Relations. But its style of operation and intensity of application may vary organisations to organisations.

S. NO	COMPETENCIES - IN BROAD CONCEPT	INDUSTRIES' PERCEPTION	EDUCATOR'S PERCEPTION
1	Conceptual skills	Managerial Competencies Decision Making Problem solving abilities	Critical Thinking Analytical skills Operational skills
2	Interpersonal skills	Time management Employee management Communication skills Motivational skills Leadership qualities	Customer service skills Communication skills Cultural awareness Multiple language skills Leadership skills

TABLE NO 1

20 teaching faculties from the educational institutions and 20 experts from the industry were interviewed. 70 % of the participants were male. The majority respondents were between the age of 30- 45. The interview which were conducted through telephone, has taken around 10-15 minutes.

From the Interviews and Discussions, Some Assumptions have been made. They are given below

- There is significant difference between the industry requirements and the educator's on the expectations of the industry. Educational institutions believe that the students, after acquiring his graduation, he /she is well equipped with necessary technical and soft skills which are expected by the industry. The industry professionals believe that conceptual skills are more expected from graduate. Though the technical skills are important, the basics are necessary. But the advancement of technical skills has been automatically happened during the job. The industry professional expect from the

students to think themselves, understanding, analysing, problem solving and other managerial abilities.

- Educators and professionals agree with the financial management skills which are acquired by the students from the classrooms. Industry professionals believe that these skills will help the industry for financial planning, analysis and revenue management etc
- Industry professionals and educators suggest that using of the project management tools enable the students to apply their skills in investment or projects analysis which improves the performance of the industry highly.
- Interpersonal skills are important for an employee who works in a service industry. Both the parties, educators and professionals strongly believe that it is most important skills needed for a candidate who wish to work in managerial position of the industry. But the importance given to interpersonal skills varies in it degrees.

6. CONCLUSION

Soft skills of students are not meeting the expectations of the employers. The employers in the state are disappointed with the poor levels or lack of certain soft skills those students' shows in their organizations. Based on the employers' responses, there are some common soft skills that employers expect employees should possess. These are very relevant skills to perform in their jobs. Not only to the lack of soft skills but also the unawareness of soft skill is the major concern of employers in the state. Lack of major employability skills such as Critical thinking, problem solving, Creativity and Initiative exists with university graduates in the state. It can be concluded that employers value to the communication skills and relevant work experience are must to meet the global challenges of the market. As a major social issue, to meet the industry requirements, for better employment and for college students better experiences the discussion on this problem should be included in the professional researches and literature.

7. REFERENCES

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