

## **A Study on Employability Skills For Graduate Students in Tamilnadu**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Employability is a set of skills, knowledge and personal attributes that make an individual more employable. Enhancing graduate employability skills is considered as an important task for every educational institution. Institutions of higher education are examining the methods they use to enhance student employability and are exercising various measures to grow and strengthen this. Employers are demanding skills from graduates which are outside the subject area of study in higher education. Indeed, some employers have placed less importance on graduates' actual degree discipline in favour of the more generic skills which they have acquired. Employers generally see a graduate's achievements related to the subject discipline as necessary but not sufficient for them to be recruited. Achievements outside the boundaries of the discipline extracurricular activities such as work experience, volunteering, and involvement in clubs and societies are seen as having equal importance in this context as the knowledge and experience acquired through academic study. This study is conducted with the objectives of identifying the employability skills, expectations of employers, matching employer needs, the nature of employability and international perspective on employability. The study is based on secondary data collected from educational reports, magazines and theoretical research papers. Review findings revealed that graduates' skills requirement, employer expectation and requirement differ according to different countries. Employer' needs and also the graduates' skill enhancement capabilities should be taken into account in formulating future skills assessments. This study concludes that educational institutions should identify skill sets that will best serve the future employment and align programs to meet those needs.

**KEYWORDS:** GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY - EMPLOYERS' EXPECTATIONS - INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The labour market needs and the employers' requirements for skills from graduates vary by employer and also from one country to another country. The current changing business environment emphasizes the importance of education for employability, focusing on the development of not only skills but also practical experience. Then, in order to enhance competitive advantage for graduate employment, students need to develop employability skills in addition to the acquisition of subject-specific knowledge. Higher educational institutes need to identify ways of incorporate this requirement. Employability as a set of achievements, skills, understandings and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy. It is the establishment of clear mechanisms by which students can develop their abilities to use and deploy a wide range of skills and opportunities to enhance their own academic learning and enable them to become more employable. Employment and employability is not the same thing and should be differentiated. Being employed means having a job, being employable means having the qualities needed to maintain employment and progress in the workplace.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To identify the graduate employability skills which are expected by the employers.
- To know the international perspective on employability.

## **EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS**

Enhancing employability skills of the graduates is not a new topic and policy makers are still making plans to increase graduates' skills to meet the need of the current workforce. Higher education institutions are one of key player in enhancing employability and their responsibility to identify how they can enhance skills of their future employees.

## **EMPLOYER NEEDS**

An employer's perspective defines employability skills as skills required not only to gain employment, but also to progress within an enterprise so as to achieve one's potential and contribute successfully to enterprise strategic directions. Enhancing graduate employability skills is considered as an important mission within the higher education institutions in any country. In order to identify employer requirement, most of the educational institutions regularly conduct employers' needs surveys. Employers normally give their comments on the skills they are looking for in new employees.

## **EMPLOYERS' EXPECTATIONS FROM EMPLOYEES**

Some of the most common skills expected from their new employees according to employers' needs are listed below:

- Time Management: The ability to manage several tasks at once, to set priorities and allocate time effectively in order to meet multiple deadlines.
- Self-Understanding: The ability to know about strengths and personal characteristics.
- Learning Skills: The ability to learn effectively from a wide range of sources including competencies such as learning what matters, organizing information and critical thinking.
- Teamwork Skills: The ability to work effectively as a member of a team and to understand the dynamics that make teams successful.
- Leadership Quality: The ability to lead, influence and motivate others.
- Problem Solving: The ability to identify, prioritize and solve problems. The ability to ask the right questions, sort out the many facets of the problem and determine possible solutions.
- Working with Diversity: The ability to respect and tolerate different points of view, values and philosophies of life and deal constructively with people who differ from others.
- Career Planning: The ability to manage career in a constantly changing world of work.
- Understanding Workplace: The ability to grasp the underlying values of the workplace, its dynamics and expectations.
- Risk Assessment Management: The ability to assess alternative courses of action in terms of their consequences and associated risks and to identify alternative ways to reduce inherent risk.

Higher education institutions should conduct employers' skills requirement surveys to identify real needs, in order to strengthening their graduates' skills. In most of the countries government organizations give attention on identifying this skills requirement. The Australian Chamber of

Commerce and Industry and the Business Council of Australia (2002) had taken pioneer attempt to discover what employers really looking from their workers. According to the Employability Skills Framework presented by the organization, employers have mainly given attention on personal attributes which will mainly contribute to overall employability. Personal attributes maintained in this framework are loyalty, commitment, honesty and integrity, enthusiasm, reliability, personal presentation, common sense, positive self esteem, a sense of humour, a balanced attitude to work and home life, an ability to deal with pressure, motivation and adaptability. Main skills requirement mentioned in this framework are communication, teamwork, problem solving, planning and organizing, technology, learning, self management, initiative and enterprise skills. Many of the businesses had suggested that educators should review and redevelop their curriculum and change delivery methodology to support the development of these skills and attributes.

## **MATCHING EMPLOYER NEEDS**

Current business environment is dynamic. Graduates from universities should compete with professional qualification holders in a job market where employers prefer to recruit professional qualification holders which can be taken evidence from job advertisement. Therefore there is a need to match the skills of graduates with the needs of the industry if they are to be successful in the job market. Hence, there is an urgent need of identifying the employers' perspective on the skills and attributes of potentially employable graduates and their opinion regarding comparability of graduates with professional qualification holders. Employers reported work related experience as an important consideration in recruitment. Non-technical skills sought include, presenting technical findings to a diverse audience and teamwork, personality, self-confidence and attitudes towards work are considered as preferred attributes (Weligamage, 2006). Employers consider graduates' problem solving and creative thinking skills are not always adequate to perform the tasks required on the job. It is recommended that undergraduate curricular in management should include more opportunities to integrate class-room instructions with actual working environment. While this will reduce the gap between theory and experience, potential employers should be made aware of the nature of opportunities available to the students as a part of their curriculum to enhance team work and presentation skills and other personal development activities.

Frye et.al (2000), investigated the methods through which employers and learners' needs can be taken into account in formulating future skills assessments. This model helps existing systems to promote a framework for all learners to gain the skills they need important and to maintain purposeful employment. The group used a supply and demand model comprising three main components as employers demand for skills, providers' supply of education and training opportunities and learners demand for skills. This model identified following matches and mistakes; i) Employer demand-provider supply: the mismatch between employers demand for particular skills and the flow of skilled people arising from provider supply, ii) Learner aspirations-employer demand: the mismatches between what learners aim to achieve through education and training and the skills need of employer and iii) Provider supply-Learner aspirations: the mismatch between courses offered by providers and the expectations and needs of learners.

## **EMPLOYABILITY AS KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

The current changing business environment emphasizes the importance of education for employability, focusing on the development of key skills and work experience. Development of undergraduates from theoretical background to the practice is a contemporary need, because the practice will enhance the employability of graduates. Participation of undergraduates in the training process and obtaining the feedback from the stakeholders are more important for understanding the trainee undergraduates' future skills development areas (Weligamage and Munasingha, 2006). This

study was conducted with the objectives of identifying stakeholders' satisfaction on competencies and identified skills of their trainee undergraduates. Findings reveal that the trainers were highly satisfied with the punctuality, responsibility, commitment and attitudes towards work of their trainees. Also they were fairly satisfied with oral and written communication skills and decision making abilities. However, they have emphasized on several areas that need improvement, such as advanced writing skills, ability to use of e-mail and internet facilities, decision making and analytical skills. In recent years, there has been a strong emphasis on providing on work related training for undergraduates as a part of their degree program. Completion of industrial training of a specific duration by undergraduates is an important expectation of employers. During the training, undergraduates get their first experience of real working environment and, an understanding on working patterns within an organization. Training satisfaction is a measure of the attitude that individuals develop about the training undergone and is based on individuals' perceptions. This is an indicator of the outcome of training on individual trainees. Understanding of the factors affecting on trainees' satisfaction helps trainers to improve the quality of training.

Employability or employment of graduates is taken as key performance indicators in many countries to measure the programme performance. These indicators are called employment indicators. Performance measures of graduate labour market outcomes are likely to feature as an important element in the prospective student's information set (Smith, McKnight and Naylor, 2000). In United Kingdom first destination survey to measure the employment performance was conducted (HEFCE, 2003). They calculated two types of indicators using the survey information as percentage of graduates who are employed or in further study, among all those who are employed, unemployed or studying; and the second showing the percentage employed among those who are employed or unemployed. The Graduate Careers Council of Australia in association with Australian higher education institutions administers the Graduate Destination Survey and the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) to gather information from graduates. Performance indicators used as Graduate full-time employment, Graduate full-time study, graduate salary, overall satisfaction, Good Teaching and Generic skills (Report of AEPL, 2003).

## **DISCUSSION**

This Paper discussed existing research findings on studies and practices of employability skills on the following aspects as, definitions of employability, employability skills and employer needs, expectations of employers, matching employer needs, the nature of employability, international perspective on employability and employability as key performance indicator. The current changing business environment emphasizes the importance of education for employability, focusing on the development of not only skills but also practical experience. Then, in order to enhance competitive advantage for graduate employment, students need to develop employability skills in addition to the acquisition of subject-specific knowledge and study programmes need to identifying the way of improving that requirement. Personal attributes mostly required by the employers are loyalty, commitment, honesty and integrity, enthusiasm, reliability, personal presentation, common sense, positive self esteem, a sense of humour, a balanced attitude to work and home life, an ability to deal with pressure, motivation and adaptability.

Main skills requirement mentioned in studies are communication, teamwork, problem solving, planning and organizing, technology, self management and initiative and enterprise skills. Many of the businesses suggested that educators should review and redevelop their curriculum and change delivery methodology to support the development of these skills and attributes. Employers reported that work related experience is an important consideration in recruitment. Most of the countries

Universities, government organization and employers have given attention on identifying this skills requirement and educational institutions should conduct employers' skills requirement surveys to identify real needs, in order to strengthening their graduates' skills. All stakeholders: the government, the university system administrators, employers and graduates themselves must be actively involved in this process should find the way to enhancing this skill.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that many research studies have revealed a consistent core set of desirable attributes, such as communication skills, interpersonal skills and team working, problem solving, analytic, critical and reflective ability, willingness to learn and continue learning, flexibility and adaptability, risk-taking and self-skills and these attributes are often independent of the degree subject. Educational institutions are incorporating extracurricular activities into their study programme and changing their subject to develop specific skills through specialist modules. We also need to identify the skill set that will best serve the future labour market.

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