

**“IMPACT OF SOFT SKILLS TRAINING ON EMPLOYABILITY COMPETENCY IN SIMS,
BANGALORE: A STUDY WITH REFERENCE TO B-SCHOOL GRADUATES”**

Theme: Human Resource Management

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ABSTRACT

Soft skills characterize certain career attributes that individuals may possess like the ability to work on a team, communication skills, leadership skills, customer service and problem solving skills. Effective integration of soft skills into the business curriculum can help students obtain and retain employment in the twenty-first century workforce. It is critical to explore the employability skills required for management graduates in India. It is also useful to determine the importance of integration of soft skills into the Indian business education curriculum along with the concepts, techniques and activities used to incorporate specific soft skills by business educators. To enhance the soft skill traits among students training modules have to be designed at college at the under graduate level itself. With these training programs students have a smooth transition from potential employees to young successful managers. In the era of fast emerging changes, there is a need for future global managers with qualities and competencies with global perspective. Quality is the only currency, which is accepted universally and it is also true with education. Educators have to rethink about management education and efforts should be made to create a dynamic environment which can provide quality management education in India. The main purpose of this study was to analyze the impact of soft skills training on the employability competency of B-School graduates and to identify the important skill groups (core soft skills) required for students to enhance employability.

Key words: Employability, Management Education, Soft Skills Training

INTRODUCTION

Management education has a long history in India dating back to the 19th century. Early B-Schools were focused on the commercial side of business, seeking to fulfill the needs of the then British government. The early 1990's showed a boom of new management schools in India. Currently, Management education in India is in the phase of transition. Liberalization and globalization have paved the way for the mushrooming of management courses and institutes but the very attitude, quality, ethics, standards, openness, creativity etc. essential for professional courses are missing in most of these institutions of management education. In the era of fast emerging changes, there is a need for future global managers with qualities and competencies with global perspective. Quality is the only currency, which is accepted universally and it is also true with education. Educators have to rethink about management education and efforts should be made to create a dynamic environment which can provide quality management education in India. The common complaint of Industry is that B- School graduates are considerably short of the demands of executive positions in the corporate world.

Soft skills are personal qualities, attributes or the level of commitment of a person that set him or her apart from other individuals who may have similar skills and experience. Soft skills are a new way to describe a set of abilities or talents that an individual can bring to the workplace. Soft skills characterize certain career attributes that individuals may possess like the ability to work on a team, communication skills, leadership skills, customer service and problem solving skills. Effective integration of soft skills into the business curriculum can help students obtain and retain employment in the twenty-first century workforce. It is critical to explore the employability skills required for management graduates in India. Management education has a vital role to play in today's dynamic global arena, where the challenges to be met are increasing at a faster pace. But there is a huge gap between what industry needs and what is available in terms of skills in students. The following employability competencies were most often deemed to be important: verbal communication, teamwork, analytical skills, initiative, written communication and time management. The development of employability skills and attributes in higher educational institutions (HEIs) should be integrated within the curriculum. Academic institutions are facing a big challenge in enhancement of soft skills in their young graduates. HR managers are under pressure to get the right skilled graduates who can take ahead the firm to growth and success. Employability skill enhancement programs must ensure both employment opportunity and ability enhancement modules in the academic curriculum. The ability enhancement program which includes both hard and soft skills has to be induced through integrated curriculum, especially, in B-Schools in India. It is useful to determine the importance of the integration of soft skills into the Indian business education curriculum along with the concepts, techniques and activities used to incorporate specific soft skills by business educators.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Literature to be reviewed encompasses all the material available in this field of study. For this study various sources such as books, articles, journals, research papers, e-resources, newspapers and magazines were reviewed.

R Venkatesan Iyengar (2015) examined employers' expectations in recent business school graduates considered for a position in their companies and what is required of the aspirants and business schools to live up to these expectations. Companies, when they recruit people for administrative/management positions usually prefer those with an MBA degree. An ideal MBA program, unlike many other graduate and postgraduate courses, focuses on developing the students' critical thinking skills and on training them in finding creative solutions to complex

problems (Right mix of hard & soft skills). Employers indicated that the following soft skills that they would require of a recent business school graduate being considered for a mid-level position in their companies, were oral communication, listening skills, written communication and presentation skills, in that order.

Tejbir Kaur, Dr. Jaskaran Singh Dhillon, Dr. Rubeena Bajwa (2015) in their study attempted to find out the perception of Industry, Faculty and Management Students about employability skills. A survey was done with respondents of 150 management students, 50 Faculty members and 30 employers in Punjab, India. It was found that students, faculty and industry have similar perception for communication skills, teamwork skills, planning and organising skills, ICT skills, self management skills, Time management skills which showed that these skills are the most important for management students to become employable. Students (67.6%) chose role playing method as the most preferred teaching method, Group Discussion, as the second most important teaching method (65 %).

Ediagbonya Kennedy & Oyadongha Diseye Juliet (2013) investigated the concept of employability of business education graduates. The case study research design was adopted in this study. The population consisted of 130 post graduate students of Business Education in Edo State. A systematic random sampling technique was used in selecting a sample of 60 students drawn from two academic sessions (2009/10 and 2010/11). It was found that employability skills are high in these business education graduates. A significant difference between employability skills with demographic characteristics (gender) was observed and also in the aspects of employability skills such as basic skills, interpersonal, system/technology and personal quality.

Goutam G Saha (2011) investigated major issues affecting management education in India. Western B-Schools were making radical changes in their curricula as per the demand of industry. It was equally imperative for Indian B-Schools to make management education industry specific. Some of the issues that ails management education in India were lack of quality faculty, research culture, study material which lacked relevancy, lack of interaction with industry, unsystematic process of accreditation and narrow specialization.

Geana Watson Mitchell (2008) conducted a study to determine the extent to which Alabama business/marketing educators perceived the importance of specific soft skills for success in the twenty-first century workforce and the integration of soft skills into the business/marketing education curriculum. A survey was developed and distributed to Alabama business/marketing educators. The majority of respondents taught grades 9 – 12 grades (87.9%), held a master's degree (68.5%) and held a class A (master's level) certification (47.7%). The majority of the respondents (75.2%) reported general ethics as an extremely important skill that students need for success in the twenty-first century workforce. Many respondents (73.2%) reported general communication skills as extremely important, while 57.0% reported written communication as extremely important and 56.4% reported time management/organization skills as extremely important. Overall, Alabama business/marketing educators have endorsed soft skills at a very high frequency; however, there is a low correlation between the perceived importance of soft skills and the integration of soft skills into courses.

Dr. Ashutosh Priya (2007), in his research paper examined the current management education system to inculcate total quality management in the present management education system so that business schools respond to current paradigms. During the last decade, India has witnessed a tremendous growth in the establishment of management institutions, most of them in the private sector offering management programs in different functional areas of management. The qualitative aspect of management education is also as important as its technical aspect. Management Education

should not just equip a student with technical skills and expertise, but also develop the right attitude in him. Total quality management should be inducted to make management education more effective.

The literature review emphasized the necessity of incorporating soft skills training programs in curriculum to enhance employability. They also highlighted the objectives of soft skills and various teaching methodologies to be applied. Soft skills are learned behaviors which require training and focused interest. Soft skills will enable students with a strong conceptual and practical framework to build, develop and manage teams. They play an important role in the development of the students' overall personality, thereby enhancing their employability. The emphasis in teaching should be on learning by practicing soft skill programs. Effective communication and interpersonal skills are crucial to increase employment opportunities and to compete successfully in the business environment. To enhance the soft skill traits among students training modules have to be designed at college at the under graduate level itself. With these training programs students have a smooth transition from potential employees to young successful managers. The main objective of this study was to analyze the impact of soft skills training in a B-School on the employability competency of graduates and to identify the important skill groups (core soft skills) required for students to enhance employability.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To analyze the impact of soft skills training on the employability competency of B-School graduates.
- To identify the important skill groups (core soft skills) required for students to enhance employability.
- To recommend suitable measures to enhance employability competencies in students.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Primary Data for the study was obtained through questionnaires and interviews, wherein, student and alumni response was elicited. Secondary Data was obtained from books, research papers, magazines, journals, newspapers, e-resources.

Scope of the Study: The respondents selected were third semester B School Graduates and alumni in Seshadripuram Institute of Management Studies, Bangalore. This study focused on the analysis of the impact of soft skills training on the employability competency of graduates and identification of the important skill groups (core soft skills) required for students to enhance employability. The study attempted to elicit suggestions to enhance employability competencies in B-School graduates.

Sampling Technique: Stratified Random Sampling method was used for selecting the sample for the study.

Sample Size: A sample of 50 B School Graduates and alumni in SIMS, Bangalore was taken as a representative for conducting the study. Data was collected by the use of a questionnaire through personal interviews and mail.

Plan of Analysis: The primary data collected from respondents was evaluated by using statistical tools such as Cronbach's Alpha, Analysis of demographic variables (age, gender, residential location), Regression analysis and Anova.

ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha

Particulars	No. of Statements	Mean	Alpha Value (N=50)
Soft Skills Training	8	4.18	.757
Employability Competency	8	3.77	.851

From Table1 it can be inferred that Cronbach's alpha coefficient value for Students' evaluation of soft skills training (.757) and employability competency (.851) are falling above 0.7 as suggested by Nunnally (1978).

Table 2: Demographic Variables

CATEGORY	ITEMS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Age	22-24 Years	27	54
	25-27 Years	20	40
	Above 27 Years	3	6
Gender	Male	22	44
	Female	28	56
Residential Location	Urban	34	68
	Rural	16	32
Total		50	100

Demographic Findings

The findings related to the demographic variables are presented in Table 2. In terms of age wise classification, it was found that 54% of respondents are in the age group of 22-24, 40% in the age group of 25-27 followed by 6% above 27 Years of age. In terms of gender, 44% are male and 56% are female. The table above also reveals that 68% are from urban background and 32% are from rural background.

Table 3: Regression Analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.655 ^a	.429	.417	.49517

a. Predictors: (Constant), Soft skill training

ANOVA^a

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	8.844	1	8.844	36.068	.000 ^b
1 Residual	11.769	48	.245		
Total	20.613	49			

a. Dependent Variable: Employability Competency

b. Predictors: (Constant), Soft skill training

Simple linear regression analysis was used to test whether students' evaluation of soft skills significantly predict employability competency. The result indicates that there is a positive correlation (R: .655) between the independent variable (soft skills training) and the dependent variable i.e. employability competency. Similarly the table shows that the F-Statistic value of 36.068 is significant at 0.000 Level. The table also indicates that the value for Adjusted R Square (.417) shows that the independent variable explains 36% of variance on the dependant variable.

Discussion:

The findings above indicate that more or less equal count in terms of gender classification is seen from the frequency table. Among students, majority of them fall under the age group of 22-24 years and among alumni under the age group of 24 – 28 years. The findings also clarifies that there is no discrimination on background of location as few students are from rural background though majority of the respondents are from urban background. Regression analysis shows that

there is a positive correlation between the independent variable (soft skills training) and the dependent variable i.e. employability competency. This clearly indicates the impact of soft skills training on the employability competency of B-School graduates. B- Schools should give more emphasis on soft skills training and it is equally important that students should also adequately appreciate the value of such skills and make deliberate efforts to acquire them to enhance their employability. Employability through lifelong education is an alternative strategy in which individuals, corporate businesses, education system and government need to collate their respective efforts towards the factor of employability. The employability practices in India are focused on the prevailing skill sets in individuals and need to be enhanced with helping the individuals to “learn how to learn” and “Unlearn”. From the study it was also found that students and alumni ranked social skills (communication skills, team work Skills, leadership Skills) as the most important skill group required to enhance employability followed by personal Skills (stress management skills, time Management skills, professionalism) and methodological skills (decision making skills, problem solving skills).

SUGGESTIONS

- Curricula should be developed by academicians to incorporate employability competencies after taking input from industry.
- Work – based learning in the form of internships and industrial training should be a consistent practice to enhance employability in students.
- B – Schools should provide enrichment activities to develop a student’s competency in soft skills and ICT.
- Employability skills assessment tools should be used by academic institutions to assess the level of employability competencies in students.
- Students should be encouraged to incorporate reflection into their own learning and personal development.
- Apart from academic institutions, universities should also establish linkages with industry for smooth transition of the student from academia to the workplace.

CONCLUSION

Employability is conceptualized as a form of work specific active adaptability that enables workers to identify and realize career opportunities. As such, employability facilitates the movement between jobs, both within and between organizations. Management education in India is now under a confused stage of identifying what kind of approach that may be adopted for enhancing employability in their graduates. The basic aim of any business school is to impart business aptitude and skills that ensure employability. However higher educational institutions across the globe are not making attempts in this direction leading to a big gap between the kind of education imparted and the kind of graduate output. The results of the study revealed the positive impact of soft skills training on the employability competency of B-School graduates. From the study it was also found that students and alumni ranked social skills (communication skills, team work Skills,

leadership Skills) as the most important skill group required to enhance employability followed by personal Skills (stress management skills, time Management skills, professionalism) and methodological skills (decision making skills, problem solving skills). Therefore there is a need to have a structured soft skills training program in B -Schools apart from imparting management education to students. This study is significant for business-school leaders, educators and students because it will assist in evaluating any disconnects that exist between management educators and employers. Providing deeper insight into the issue and identifying the stakeholders involved may assist in the collaborative effort between employers and business schools.

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