



A Study Of Soft Skills Evaluation Among University Students And Comparisons To Achieve Enhancement For Employability

Ms. Soumya Singh

Assistant Professor, Shri G.P.M Degree College

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate the growing significance of soft skills in an ever- evolving environment. A study was conducted to explore and contrast the perceptions of students and employers about the significance of soft skills across India. Results indicate that 86% of respondents say there has been a greater focus on soft skills in the past 5–10 years and that firms place more importance on soft skills than students/graduates. Additionally, significant differences have also been found in the ranking of the 10 soft skills covered in this paper, which reflect varying levels of prioritization. This paper recommends that firms and Institutions of Higher Learning (HEIs) must collaborate not only to raise students' consciousness towards recognizing the significance of soft skills but also to encourage them to take personal responsibility to develop and obtain these vital skills in order to regularly adjust themselves to the changing job market as well as enhance their employability.

KEYWORDS

Soft Skills Frameworks, Employability, Impact of Technology, Human Resources Development.

Introduction

Now technology has turned to a new direction; markets are dynamic and human being are different. They have been adjusted based on the needs of business. However, technology cannot substitute human intelligence and therefore individuals have an advantage over technology: to communicate with each other. No artificial intelligence product, no robot can say something sympathetic suddenly or possess the authority to persuade a crowd of people in a way that causes the crowd to come to a consensus about a common course of action, nor can a machine construct that sense of camaraderie among individuals who are all collectively delighted

with the success of the plan. Everywhere nowadays market is placing utmost emphasis on candidates exhibiting good 'soft skills' and organizations are investing money in soft skills training programs for staff. Organizations are seriously noting that the employees do not possess soft skills and some studies indicate that soft skill training would enhance sustainability and minimize attrition rate as well. Soft skills provide candidates with a competitive advantage. Who impresses us more; a individual who has extremely good technical ability or individual who possesses tech skills as well as empathy, politeness and excellent work ethics? We surely would be more contented with an individual who is friendly, polite and positive towards us compared to an individual who possesses good technical ability but who is negative, rude and not friendly towards us. In all concerned situations, soft skills make the difference. The academic achievement and technical competence are significant, but now employers pay more attention to such soft skills as communication, collaboration, problem-solving, critical thinking emotional intelligence and AI. These skills make applicants competitive, as they are critical for achieving success in fast-paced, people-oriented work environments. Technology can mechanize numerous things, but it cannot substitute the human capacity for communicating, working together, and leading. In order to span the gap between employability and education, it is essential to emphasize acquiring technical as well as soft skills to cope with the needs of contemporary businesses.

The World Health Organization (WHO) endeavored to ensure that their skilled staff had the needed qualities to practice health equity with complete success. For that purpose, in 2016, it formulated a course on enhancing soft skills and it resolved to pilot this first in the Nordic and Baltic areas. The course worked well and participants provided favorable feedback, thus it would be utilized for WHO staff members of other regions as well. Though the course was specific to WHO, the topic is broad and could help numerous other organizations. There were quite a few employees who highlighted the fact that writing skills should be nurtured so that the employees could word problems in an efficient way so as to strive towards collective objectives. This incident showcased the role of communication specifically for such a large-scale organization with employees working in all corners of the world and belonging to different cultures. Any lack of communication or miscommunication in any large organization because of any strange reason or because of cultural and linguistic barriers would pose enormous obstacles and block the way forward.

The four best-known soft skills in the Asian world are, as per research done by the recruitment firm

Hays:

- Skill to communicate and interact.
- Skill to organize.
- Coordination art of a team.
- Skill to speak and write languages.

Review of literature

Boyatzis (1982) was the first to put in writing the significant role played by soft skills in management. He concluded that good soft skills were essential for the basic functioning of management.

Mindtools.com was founded by James Manktelow (1995) which is a large firm for career development. This company placed a high priority on soft skills such as communication, team management problem solving, stress management and other skills. The firm established in its study that training for a few days was not sufficient and employees must be provided with access to training whenever they were free.

James J. Heckman and Yona Rubinstein, (2001) in their research paper 'The Importance of Non cognitive Skills: Lessons from the GED Testing Program' utilize the evidences of a genuine US testing program to demonstrate quantitative significance of non-cognitive skills in assessing educational achievement.

Aneerav Sukhoo, Andries Barnard, Mariki M. Eloff, John A. Van der Poll, (2005) in their paper 'Accommodating Soft Skills in Software Project Management' have proposed that software projects can function without distortion with sound soft skills. Unless properly managed, these projects can consume a lot of funds and waste much time. Thus, we arrive at the premise that with every commendable performance, good soft skills are the key. Further research needs to be conducted as various soft skills can be employed each time for various companies.

Syed Azim, Andy Gale, Therese Lawlor-Wright, Richard Kirkham, Ali Khan, and Mehmood Alam (2010) authored an article entitled "The importance of soft skills in complex projects", part of an international business magazine, Emerald Insight. The article addressed the question of why projects got so complicated and hard to comprehend. Primarily, it focused on the aerospace sector and its complicated project environments. The research design used was qualitative in nature and semi structured interviews were employed in the methodology. The analysis picked out the 'people' issues and absence of soft skills as the cause of complexity in projects.

Meenu Paul Sood (2017) in 'Research Paper on Hospitality Management' Competencies' in the 6th International Conference on Emerging Trends in Engineering, Technology Science and Management researched the competencies considered by the stakeholders as the best competencies needed by the employees in the hospitality industry. The findings were that the students, teachers, and the industry guides of the university concurred that higher education should be responsible for imparting the soft skills necessary for employment to the university students.

Statement of the problem

Today interpersonal communication is a great asset for every employee. It is of very great importance and desired by everyone. Language is given special importance to areas where other languages than English are

spoken because when there is more than one language spoken in a business on a day-to-day basis, it is essential to keep a check on whether the staff of that business can converse effectively in every language so that business growth is not affected due to lack of efficiency.

Research Gap

The soft skills have come to be recognized widely as being of prime importance to employability, most of the literature in existence tends to concentrate on technical skills or graduate attributes in general. In spite of a growing focus on soft skills by employers, there still exists a considerable gap in the systematic assessment and benchmarking of soft skills in university students across various academic fields and institutions. That identifies certain areas of deficiency and strength in students' soft skills, including communication, teamwork, flexibility, and emotional intelligence, is lacking, particularly in non-Western or developing education systems. Studies that exist are often without practical strategies or models to apply evaluation findings to targeted skill development for enhanced employability outcomes.

Objectives

The research was carried out in order to comprehend and gain new knowledge on the issues of university students performing badly because they lacked good personality skills and the requirements of the new work environment that is changing dynamically and continuously nowadays.

- 1) To assess the existing level of soft skills among university students in different academic fields.
- 2) To evaluate the efficacy of current soft skills training programs in promoting employability.

Hypothesis

H_0 (Null): There is no significant disparity in soft skills expertise among university students across academic fields.

H_1 (Alternative): There exists a significant disparity in soft skills expertise among university students across academic fields.

H_0 (Null): There is no significant impact of structured soft skills training on students' employability readiness.

H_1 (Alternative): Structured soft skills training significantly impacts students' employability readiness.

Limitations of the study

According to opinions regarding the importance of training in soft skills if included in the academic curriculum of the university students The findings are not extensive but research can be continued further if greater segment of society is included. The research may gain deeper insights regarding training modules and set quantifiable outcomes with greater variables to all training modules. However, in the light of time limitation

and availability of sample population, this research could be restricted to the current findings.

Universities resist supplying information concerning their placement processes out of privacy. This study can be enormously inclusive and offer informative insight if the HR and Training Departments might supply more data concerning placements.

It was difficult to find universities that run soft skills training programmer and gather data from their students since they felt it would reflect badly on their shortcomings. They had to be assured that the research was not meant to assess the university but that the aim was to assist the students in terms of their soft skills, with an intention of performance improvement.

It was also not simple to get student respondents to complete the questionnaire since they were on the verge of finishing university education, and they had to be persuaded and calmed that this study would not jeopardize their career.

Research Methodology

Research is a scholarly pursuit in which the researcher's original contribution contributes to the already available body of knowledge making for its development. It is 'systematized effort to gain new knowledge' and is encouraged by curiosity and inquisitiveness.

❖ RESEARCH DESIGN

The structure of doing research is referred to as Research Design. The present study employs Descriptive Research Design as it is planned to further explore the research problem by observing the related variables. It can also be employed for observing market characteristics of soft skills. It is carried out by employing methods like Descriptive and Comparative, utilizing Qualitative and Quantitative secondary data.

❖ Data Collection Methods

A. Secondary Data

The data was collected for very secondary sources such as:

- Government and education reports: UNESCO, Ministry of Education, labour ministries.
- University soft skill assessment reports.
- Research papers and theses on academic topics.
- Employer surveys and job market analysis reports. (e.g., LinkedIn, McKinsey, World Economic Forum reports)
- Labour market statistics: employment figures, job readiness surveys

B. Data Analysis Methods

- **Content Analysis:** To summarize qualitative descriptions of soft skill competencies in academic and industry reports.

- **Comparative Analysis:** Compare student vs. employer data, or between regions/universities.
- **Trend Analysis:** Monitor time series changes in employability and soft skills using historical data.

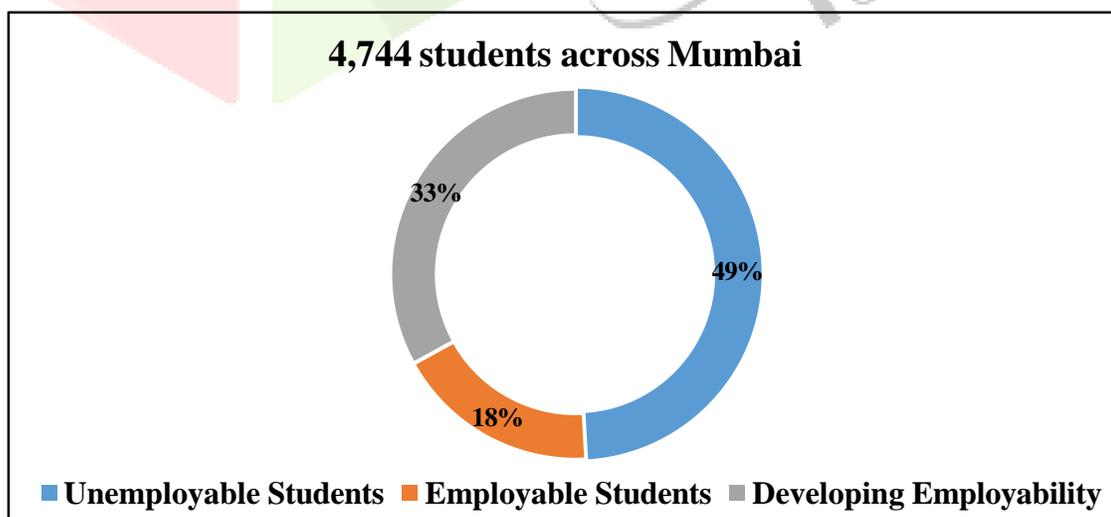
Data Analysis

This is an empirical study which uses variables explained in terms of comparison on percentage basis through t test. Data has been gathered from private and public universities of Mumbai region to carry out the research. In the study sample of 500 from each have been selected respectively. We are not providing the names of the universities so as to keep it confidential.

The data gathered was duly coded, tabulated, processed and analyzed. Frequency tables were applied in the research to quantify the percentage favorable responses to a series of parameters to observe the extent of all the universities.

1.1 The economic times survey report; assess the existing level of soft skills among university students in different academic fields.

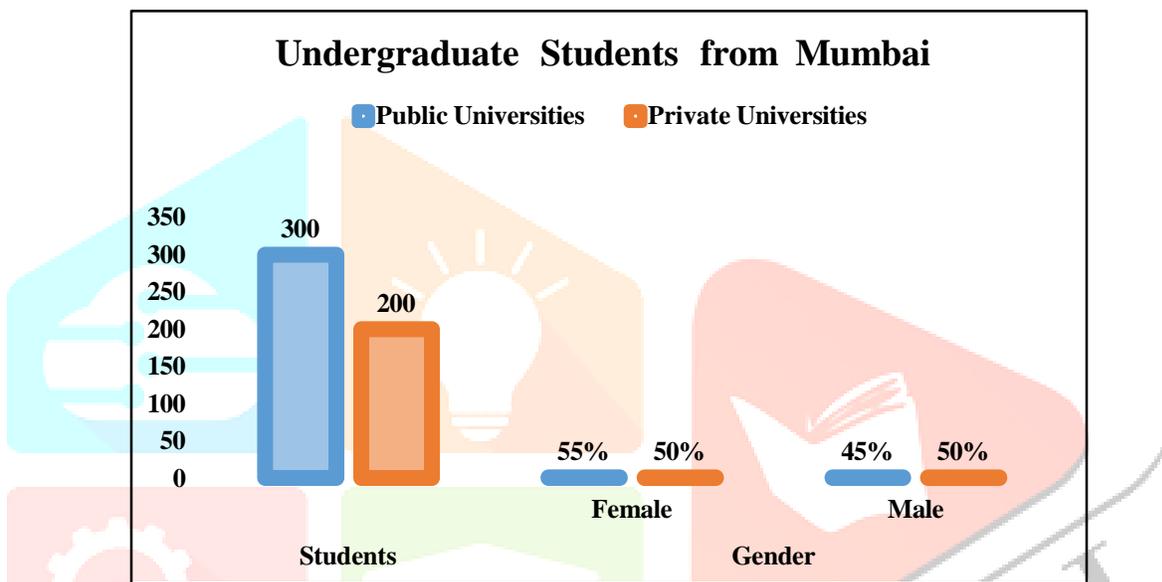
4,744 students across Mumbai		
Students	Percentage %	Area of study
Unemployable Students	49.22%	Require specialized training.
Employable Students	17.90%	Deemed job-ready.
Developing Employability	33.09%	Possess some skills but need improvement.



Aided courses (B.A., B.Com, and B.Sc.) are less employable than unaided courses (BAF, BFM, BMM, and BMS). Engineering students are more employable than non-engineering students. B.Sc. (IT/CS) students are relatively less employable.

1.2 Soft Skills Assessment among University Students in Mumbai (2023) survey report by Time of India.

Interviewed 500 undergraduate students from Mumbai				
Universities	Students	Gender		Academic Programs
		Female	Male	
Public Universities	300	55%	45%	Arts, Science, Commerce
Private Universities	200	50%	50%	Engineering, Management, Hospitality



It conducted a survey of 500 undergraduate students from Mumbai, consisting of 300 public university students and 200 private university students. There were 55% women and 45% men in public universities, while private universities were evenly split between male and female students, with 50% being males and 50% females. The types of academic programs also differed between the two categories of universities. Public universities mostly taught courses in Arts, Science, and Commerce, while private universities specialized in Engineering, Management, and Hospitality. As a whole, public universities covered a greater number of students, and a little more female population than private institutions.

Suggestions and Recommendations

To enhance the soft skills and employability of students in Mumbai universities. In the first place, public and private universities need to include training in soft skills in their curriculum. The training programs should focus on paramount areas such as communication, leadership, time management, critical thinking, teamwork, and flexibility. Incorporating these skills as part of traditional courses or including them as optional courses can effectively make students more work- ready.

Soft skill evaluation also needs to be institutionalized. With the aid of self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and

teacher input ideally supplemented with psychometric tests, students are able to track their development in the long run and identify areas where they need improvement. The teachers also play an essential part in this task; thus, it will become an inherent promotion of soft skills within the classroom to train them to implement active learning, discursive exercises, and problem-solving within their instruction.

Another recommendation is to enhance industry-academia collaboration. Hosting experts for guest lectures, career talks, and guest participation in real-case studies can bridge the gap between class learning and industry demands. Similarly, project study and internship must be given top priority, especially in public universities, as this study found that private university students; who had more such exposure been more capable in the majority of the soft skills.

Conclusion

The present study focuses on the most important role played by soft skills in shaping the employability of university students. Through an in-depth study and comparison between students of public and private universities in Mumbai, it was revealed that while students from private universities are found to possess higher soft skills such as communication, team work, time management, and leadership, public university students are lagging behind due to lower exposures and systematic training. These findings underscore a growing imperative for institutions particularly public universities; to adopt more holistic, skill-based education models that go beyond the classroom. As competition in the job market grows, employers now seek graduates who are not just technically proficient but also adaptable, communicative, and critical thinkers with leadership qualities. Therefore, it is the conclusion of this study that certain interventions, curriculum reform, collaboration with industry, and ongoing assessment are required to produce holistic graduates. Through the implementation of systematic soft skills programs, universities can significantly boost the employability of their students and contribute to the creation of a stronger and future-proofed workforce.

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