

**“COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN PERCEPTIONS OF B-SCHOOL
STUDENTS & ALUMNI ON SOFT SKILLS TRAINING IN ENHANCING
EMPLOYABILITY COMPETENCY”**

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ABSTRACT

Employability is described as all individual factors that influence the future positioning in a given segment of the labour market. The overall quality of students graduating from universities in India and abroad have found difficulty in satisfying expectations of business and industry. They have expressed their displeasure over quality of students being produced by the higher educational institutions. Management education is failing to grasp the enormous requirement of business and industry opportunities. There has been a severe gap between industry expectations and graduate skill sets (Hard & Soft Skills). Soft skills are essentially people skills and they complement hard skills. The sole purpose and aim of business schools in India and world over is to produce graduates who are instantly employable and productive. However, there seems to be a major gap between expectations of industry and university curriculum. This gap has led to unemployment.

The main purpose of this study was to compare B-school students' and alumni perceptions about the effect of soft skills training provided by B-Schools on their employability competency with reference to Bangalore.

Key words: Employability Competencies, Graduate Skill Sets, Management Education, Soft Skills, Alumni

INTRODUCTION

Employability can be defined as a personal intention to commence and complete the task, where the focus remains on employability of person and the individual's ability to carry out the vast variety of functions designated. Employability is described as all individual factors that influence the future positioning in a given segment of the labour market. *“Peck and Theodore (2000) define employability as the collection of worker characteristics, including attitudes towards work, expectations regarding employment and wages and behaviours both in the labour market and on the job that are increasingly seen as determinants of employment chances”*. Globally there is a witness of mass education leading to severe competition among universities. This phenomenon has gradually affected the employability of graduates and their potential to deliver when they are inducted into an organization. Hence higher educational institutions in India and outside are finding it pertinent to showcase a value by validating their process of education; curriculum that includes systematic deployment and development of graduate skill set, while being relevant to the emerging knowledge economy. The overall quality of students graduating from universities in India and abroad have found difficulty in satisfying expectations of business and industry. They have expressed their displeasure over quality of students being produced by the higher educational institutions. Management education is failing to grasp the enormous requirement of business and industry opportunities. While business seems to be growing at a breakneck speed, due to technological innovations, graduates are unable to match their academic credentials to practical applications of business challenges. There has been a severe gap between industry expectations and graduate skill sets (Hard & Soft Skills). The term soft skills are in itself, a conundrum of sorts, broadly referring to anything that is not technical, mathematical or involving heavy machinery. Soft also conjures up an image of passiveness and subtlety. Soft skills are essentially people skills and they complement hard skills. Soft skills include everything from raising a toast to the amount of eye contact to make in a professional set up. Management education, especially in India, has failed to showcase management of business in a practical way as opposed to making them think and ideate business in classrooms. Management education faces a challenge in preparing graduates in areas of specialization and also a generic role. The sole purpose and aim of business schools in India and world over is to produce graduates who are instantly employable and productive. However, there seems to be a major gap between expectations of industry and university curriculum. This gap has led to unemployment. A study was undertaken to compare B-school students' and alumni perceptions about the effect of soft skills training provided by B-Schools on their employability competency with reference to Bangalore.

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.

- **Marlo Lyons (2023)** in her article observed that the five soft skills to focus on, irrespective of the job is critical to enhance employability i.e. teamwork, influencing without authority, effective communication, problem solving and leadership. Further, it was also observed that these soft skills had to be positioned in the right manner in a resume to get the attention of the employer in any industry- transportation, health care, social assistance, accommodation, food service, etc. Soft skills can be inculcated by taking up courses which need to be updated consistently to enhance job prospects in the labor market.
- **Rohan Fernandez (2021)** in his paper observed that colleges may help students develop their soft skills and not just focus on learning by enhancing their abilities. It is necessary to update the curriculum and teaching methods in order to achieve this. Finding opportunities for development will be made easier by working hand in hand with industry. Therefore, teaching students soft skills should have a dual goal: to enhance their knowledge, understanding, values and abilities as well as to produce quality human capital. Learning, developing and mastering soft skills necessitates ongoing instruction, experience, observation and consistent practice.
- **Matthew Allen, Judith Dinham et.al (2020) in their paper observed that,** It is crucial for students to acquire soft skills in addition to the technical ones needed for their careers in the quickly changing 21st century. This study examined higher education students in Australia as to which skills they thought would be most crucial for their future professional success. Eight academic experts were also consulted on the significance of these skills and how colleges may incorporate them into their curricula and instruction. According to this study's primary findings, 88% of Australian students believed that soft skills are essential for their future careers and 78% agreed that having soft skills will make them more marketable.
- **Lavanam Amballa & J.Francis Mary (2016)** through the use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches examined the relative importance of factors that influenced new graduate employability in Tamil Nadu. Results illustrated that, when hiring new graduates, employers place the highest importance on soft skills and the lowest importance on academic reputation. Hence academic institutions also need to focus on how and what best could be done to improvise these skills of the students to enhance their employability in the labor market.
- **Rubeena Bajwa et.al (2015)** found that communication skills, teamwork skills, planning and organising skills, ICT skills, self-management skills and time management skills are the most important for management students to become employable.
- **Shamsul Nizam Badri (2013)** in his study analysed the relationship between student engagement, curriculum design and teaching methods (independent variables) and employability skills (dependent variable). It was found that teaching methodology and

the curriculum design (coursework) had a positive impact on the employability skills (analytical skills, soft skills and non-technical skills). Thus, it is crucial for the organization to put more emphasis on the significant roles played by these variables in enhancing student employability skills.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To compare B-school students' and alumni perceptions about the effect of soft skills training on their employability competency.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology addresses the process of the research, describing how the research will be accomplished.

Sources of Data: Primary Data for the study was obtained through questionnaires, wherein, B-school students' and alumni response were elicited. Secondary Data would be obtained from books, research papers, magazines, journals and e-resources.

Research Design: Research design represents a combination of methods and measures critical in conducting research to arrive at testing assumptions and hypotheses. The design used for this study was a descriptive research design. It helps to determine the frequency with which something occurs or it's association with something else. The studies concerning whether certain variables are associated (Soft Skills Training & Employability Competency) are descriptive research studies.

Sampling Design: The M.B.A students under Bangalore University, Vishveshvariah Technological University and Autonomous Universities were the population for this study. Further, the alumni of these universities who are employed also constituted the population. The sampling method used was stratified random sampling. A sample of 3 Universities i.e. Bangalore University, Vishveshvariah Technological University and Autonomous Universities with 1193 B-school students (Final Semester Students) with reference to Bangalore was taken as a representative for conducting the study. The students from Bangalore University, Vishveshvariah Technological University and Autonomous Universities were given the instrument and the researcher chose randomly to gather the feedback for the study. Another set of questionnaire was administered to alumni (382) from these universities through e-mail to collect the feedback for the study. Sample size was ascertained on the basis of the below formula taking confidence level of 95% and margin of error of 5%. It may be used to determine the appropriate sample size for any research study.

The formula used to determine the sample size is as follows:

$$n = \frac{X^2 * N * P * (1-P)}{(ME^2 * (N - 1)) + (X^2 * P * (1-P))}$$

R, R² Adjusted R² and F-value of perceptions of soft skill training of students on employability competency					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F- Value	Sig.
1	.628 ^a	.394	.392	154.608	.000

Multiple regression analysis was applied to predict the impact of independent variables namely personal and methodological skills provided in college, social skills provided in college, trainer evaluation, soft skills content, facilities and institutional planning of soft skills on the dependant variable employability competency by testing the null hypothesis formulated below.

Ho1: “Personal, methodological skills provided in college, social skills provided in college, trainer evaluation, soft skills content, facilities and institutional planning of soft skills do not have impact on employability competency”.

The results from the table depicts that social skills provided in college, trainer evaluation, soft skills content, facilities and institutional planning of soft skills have a significant ($p < 0.05$) positive impact on employability competency. Hence we reject null hypothesis and accept alternative hypothesis. It is also noted from the analysis that personal and methodological skills do not have any impact on employability competency. Hence we accept null hypothesis. Of all the independent variables, trainer evaluation has the most influence (.391) on enhancing employability competency followed by soft skill content and facilities (.190), institutional planning of soft skills (.119) and social skills provided in college (.064).

The R² (.394) shows variance of the dependent variable being explained by the independent variables and the value of F (154.608) shows the overall significance of the relationship. The significant value of F confirms the fitness of the model. The value of R (.628) shows a strong relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The R² shows that the independent variables social skills provided in college, trainer evaluation, soft skills content, facilities and institutional planning of soft skills together account for 39 percent variation with regard to the impact on employability competency.

From the above it can be inferred that social skills provided in college, trainer evaluation, soft skills content, facilities and institutional planning of soft skills have a significant positive impact on employability competency. However personal and methodological skills do not have any impact on employability competency.

Table 2
Multiple Regression Analysis of Perceptions of Soft Skill Training
of Alumni on Employability Competency

Variables	Non-Standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.177	.700		3.110	.002
Importance of personal and methodological skills for employability	.328	.158	.100	2.070	.039
Importance of social skills for employability	1.194	.162	.352	2.866	.000
Relevance of soft skills for workplace	2.074	.184	.520	11.290	.000
Soft skills content and facilities	1.028	.127	.547	8.096	.000
Trainer evaluation	-.031	.123	-.017	-.253	.801

R, R², Adjusted R² and F-value of perceptions of soft skills training of alumni on employability competency					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F-Value	Sig.
1	.739	.546	.540	90.587	.000

Multiple Regression analysis was applied to predict the impact of independent variables namely importance of personal and methodological skills for employability, importance of social skills for employability, relevance of soft skills for workplace, soft skills content, facilities and trainer evaluation on the dependant variable employability competency by testing the null hypothesis formulated below.

Ho2: “Importance of personal, methodological skills for employability, importance of social

skills for employability, relevance of soft skills for workplace, soft skills content, facilities and trainer evaluation do not have impact on employability competency”.

The results from the table depicts that importance of personal and methodological skills for employability, importance for social skills for employability, relevance of soft skills for workplace, soft skills content and facilities have a significant ($p < 0.05$) positive impact on the employability competency as perceived by alumni. Hence we reject null hypothesis and accept alternative hypothesis. It is also noted from the analysis that trainer evaluation does not have any impact on employability competency, hence we accept null hypothesis. Of all the independent variables, soft skills content and facilities has the most influence (.547) on enhancing employability competency followed by relevance of soft skills for workplace (.520), importance of social skills for employability (.352) and importance of personal and methodological skills for employability (.100).

The R^2 (.546) shows variance of the dependent variable being explained by the independent variables and the value of F (90.587) shows the overall significance of the relationship. The significant value of F confirms the fitness of the model. The value of R (.739) shows a strong relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The R^2 shows that the independent variables importance of personal and methodological skills for employability, importance of social skills for employability, relevance of soft skills for workplace, soft skills content and facilities together account for 54 percentage of variation with regard to the impact on employability competency.

From the above it can be inferred that importance of personal and methodological skills for employability, importance of social skills for employability, relevance of soft skills for workplace, soft skills content and facilities have a significant positive impact on employability competency. However, trainer evaluation does not have any impact on employability competency.

DISCUSSION - COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Regression results based on student data confirms the impact of independent variables like personal and methodological skills provided in college, social skills provided in college, soft skills content, facilities, trainer evaluation and institutional planning of soft skills on the dependent variable i.e. employability competency. Findings depicted that all variables, except personal and methodological skills provided in college, had a positive impact on the dependent variable. Among the stated variables, trainer evaluation was found to have the most impact followed by soft skills content and facilities. This shows that academic institutions should give importance in choosing the appropriate trainer to impart soft skills training to students. Regression results based on alumni data showed that independent variables like importance of personal and methodological skills for employability, importance of social skills for employability, relevance of soft skills for workplace, soft skills content and facilities had a significant positive impact on employability competency. However, it was found that trainer evaluation did not have any impact on employability competency. Among the independent

variables, soft skills content and facilities had the most impact on employability competency followed by relevance of soft skills for workplace. This shows that academic institutions should give importance for adequate planning and designing of soft skills content and facilities to impart soft skills training to students.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study could be used to develop a framework for future studies in the area of soft skills training and employability competency. The results obtained from two perspectives i.e. B - school students and alumni offer vital insights for different stakeholders such as students, alumni, educators and employers. B - school educators should inculcate structured institutional planning of soft skills programs, standardised soft skills content and facilities with systematic training evaluation to impart soft skills to graduates for enhancing employability competencies. It was interesting to observe that personal and methodological skills do not have any impact on employability unlike social skills from the perspective of students. However, alumni indicated that personal and methodological skills are also important for employability. The study revealed that soft skills training has a significant positive impact on employability competency among B - school graduates in India. Hence there is a strong implication that soft skills training is critical and has to be given importance by B-schools to enhance the employability of their graduates.

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