

## **Employability Skills Needed in the Emerging Global Job Market: Stakeholders' Perception**

Gopalakrishnan SOUNDARARAJAN

Faculty, Department of Business and Accounting, Muscat College, Sultanate of Oman.

Email: [soundararajan@muscatcollege.edu.om](mailto:soundararajan@muscatcollege.edu.om)

Stephen ARO-GORDON

Faculty, Department of Business and Accounting, Muscat College, Sultanate of Oman.

Email: [stephen@muscatcollege.edu.om](mailto:stephen@muscatcollege.edu.om)

Anitha RAVIKUMAR

Faculty, Department of Business Studies, Higher College of Technology, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman.

Email: [anitharaveekumar@gmail.com](mailto:anitharaveekumar@gmail.com)

Drishti Rupesh JESRANI

Research Assistant, Muscat College, Sultanate of Oman

Email: [mishitijid@gmail.com](mailto:mishtijid@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, companies all around the world have formed a higher expectation from the labours in the market. The recruitment needs by the employers for employment have changed drastically, and are not what the used to be in the olden days. There is certain kind of attributes searched for in an employee. These are employability skills sets. Different stakeholders have different perspectives on employability skills. Employability skills are found to have no common definitions. Different researchers or authors define employability skills differently. Employability skills are basic skill sets that are required to help in maintaining and keeping the job for a longer period, these skills are usually personal attributes, achievement skills, and more, that help the employee to be successful in their career option. In this literature review, it is studied if, the perceptions of the stakeholders towards the employability skills are meet or not, and if so, what might be the possible reasons. Articles from different authors and researchers were reviewed for writing this literature review.

Following the purpose of the study, it is taken into account, the different perceptions of employability skills by employers, higher education institutions, and employees/graduates. During the study, there were different challenges found, that were met by the employee and the employers, and its respective solutions and reasoning towards it.

**Keywords:** Employability skills, Stakeholders, Perception

### **Introduction**

In the growing times, globalization has affected the organizations and business, with ever-changing technology, labour market demands, and the attributes searched- in for professionals has also changed drastically (Yet-Mee Lim et.al, 2016). As the business environment is dynamic, it becomes difficult to supply products and services that will be able to sustain and attract consumers for a long period. Hence, the firms hunt for employees that can create a market where their products or services keep the consumers interested and which helps the firms to retain their competitive advantage.

The qualities that are searched in an employee in recent times are little more than just academic abilities, these qualities include oral and written communication skills, teamwork and team-building skills, multitasking, and other dynamic business skills. These skills expected from the employers while interviewing an employee are partly based on generic skills which are highly valued by prospective employers as additional attributes (Yet-Mee Lim et.al, 2016).

The growing market underlines the value of employability in education as well, with the emphasis on improving not only skills but also practical experience (Ekpoh Uduak,2015). Therefore, countries worldwide have started to invest in education, even in the rising global socio-economic challenges, which will help in generating highly self-reliant, motivated, and skilled graduates. There is a renewed focus among the youths apart from the school system in the

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advancement of practical as well as technical abilities in consideration with proficiency in the business world. Various researchers have widely discussed and defined the idea of employability. There is no definite definition for employability, different researchers defined employability differently. Employability is defined as an individual's potential for being worthy of a job; competencies, experience, and personal attributes are included as employability skills. It represents the ability of an employee to find a job, maintain a job, and switch between the job in the same business sector. ([Christina Hartshorn and Leigh Sear,2005](#)) Employability can also be termed as having organizational competency, skills relevant to work and employment, entrepreneurial skills, and communication skills relating to work ([Rebecca Boden and Maria Nedeva,2010](#)). This showcases that defining employability is dynamic and multi-dimensional, and can be hard to describe. This also means that there does not exist a centric definition for employability as it lacks measurement and consensus (Wakelin- Theron,2014).

As mentioned above that the employers expect a selected set of generic skills while hiring an employee, the stakeholders in education are apprehensive regarding young graduates and students' acquisition of skills that are work-related (ORJI and Nna Sunaday,2013). Higher education plays a key role in equipping young people for employment. It is regarded that universities act as a major role in increasing Human Capital (Ekpoh Uduak,2015). It is suggested for the Higher Education Institutions(HEI) to take initiative and responsibility to improve the education system in such a way that it exalts the employability skills in students, which will help them to get employed quicker as well as meet the demands of employers (Yet-Mee Lim et.al,2016). It should be emphasized that students who attend higher education have a variety of aspirations, perspectives, and skills that are called for a more versatile way of conveying them. Furthermore, HEIs around the world are under immense pressure to generate highly-mobile graduates with the requisite expertise, skills, and attributes to make them employable in different economic sectors of the countries (Wakelin- Theron,2014). It has been acknowledged that student employability skills can be strengthened by establishing a working relationship or interaction between schools and employers, recognizing market realities, employee and student selection, as well as adopting a modern approach to teaching and learning that emphasizes core skills and behaviors, job-seeking abilities, and a repackaged range of technical and occupational competences (ORJI and Nna Sunaday,2013). Hence, the recent trend of putting in a greater focus on a graduate with the key skillset, ensures that the Higher Education curriculum includes opportunities to improve these skills in combination to a particular subject with its specified knowledge and skills. This will create a possibility for the success of applicants in the selection process by generating 'business ready' graduates, capable of making a dynamic start and quickly adapting to change. To add on, various training programs at various universities follow different approaches, such as providing job experience, work-related training and employability skills modules, and work-related activities and even involving employers in developing and evaluation of courses. For employability skills already present in the curriculum, universities also employ a variety of programs to make them more visible to students ([Sue Cranmer,2007](#)).

Employability skills are much more important in developing countries where drop-out levels are high and opportunities for further education are slim (ORJI and Nna Sunaday,2013). The increasing unemployment rate among the graduates from the HEI is a testament to the widening gap between the university curriculum and employer needs and demands (Ekpoh Uduak,2015).

### ***Study Objectives***

This study examines the perception of employers, students, HEIs, and employees who have similar views regarding employability skills. This will help to recognize the black hole in the curriculums which can be developed and enhanced to train graduates as well as students to get and maintain their jobs in the business world. This study has been carried out on the bases of objectives:

1. To understand the different perceptions of employers, employees/graduates, and higher education institutions.
2. To identify the theories on employability skills can be practiced in real life.
3. To know how the importance of employability skills affect the practical world.

### **Employer Perception On Employability Skill**

Though employers believe that technical expertise is important, they also require students to develop a multitude of knowledge and competencies that can be grouped into common skills and technical competencies (Yet-Mee Lim et.al, 2016).

Some employability skills are highly valued by employers such as generic skills, which are recognized by employers as well as practitioners are analytical, critical thinking, decision-making skills, interpersonal skills, oral and written communication skills, problem-solving skills, leadership skills, teamwork and teambuilding skills, and the ability to resolve conflicts and work under pressure (Ahadiat and Smith, 1994). In another research conducted by Kevin Lowden

et.al,2011, it was found that employers search for some kind of attributes, skills, and knowledge, intellectual competency that are needed for specified roles. Team working skills, problem-solving skills, self-management, knowledge of business, ICT knowledge, interpersonal and communication skills, capacity to use their own's creativity and leadership skills. In contrast to these skills, employers have emphasized the need for unique attitudes and experiences including, inspiration, perseverance, and dedication (Kevin Lowden et.al,2011). In terms of personal qualities, employers and professionals prefer students and entry-level employees, which are optimistic, responsible and competent, creative, enthusiastic, ethical, autonomous, inventive, knowledgeable, persuasive, reliable, self-confident, self-motivated, and those who showcase loyalty (Ahadiat et.al,1994). It is also found that the key attributes considered for an employee or a young graduate were trustworthiness, competency, sense for duty, optimistic behavior, and awareness of the business world for employability (Ahadiat et.al,1994). Even though employers viewed the graduates should have the ability to know when, how, and where use their theoretical knowledge in the practical world, resulting in producing higher – a level of performance (Ayiesah Ramli et.al,2010). Employers ranked more highly than technical and subject-specific skills, a range of personal qualities and core skills. It is not to disregard the importance of academic qualifications, but to underline the added value of personal attributes and core competencies (Venetia Saunders and Katherine Zuzel,2010).

In addition to this, the dynamic economic conditions and the structural global challenges faced by many employers, it has been recognized that other skills such as entrepreneurial sensitivity and cross-ethnic competency, are likely to be considered as valuable attributes for new graduate recruits. (Venetia Saunders and Katherine Zuzel,2010). Employers, as well as students, found that having work-experience, internships, and co-curricular activities as particularly helpful in improving marketable skills while at university. It was also noted in the research that though jobs required proper qualifications and degrees, these skills added to long-term employability for the young graduates (Kevin Lowden et.al,2011). Furthermore, other than generic skills, work experience, and personal attributes employers also highlighted that initiative to develop a first good impression, CV preparation, and self-presentation at job interviews are all very important. However, most students seemed to lack the ability and drive to impress during this initial process. A frequent criticism was that the graduates or early employers often do not take time and effort to design employer-oriented CV's and some employers pointed out that some candidates often showed little interest to apply to their interviews and to conduct a background search on the employer or the organization, leading to unreasonable and unrealistic expectations (Kevin Lowden et.al,2011).

To add, another perception is viewed by the employers where the HEI's could do more to introduce and address employability skills across their various courses. It was noted by the employers that the universities showed less responsiveness and participation in meeting the demands and needs of employers and the labor market (Kevin Lowden et.al,2011).

### **Higher Education Institution's Perception On Employability Skills**

It is not just an employer's duty to bring awareness skills amongst the graduates and students. Even educators or Higher Education Institutions play an equally critical role in helping improve student employment outcomes (Song Ju et.al, 2014).

If employers are the decision-makers while recruiting, then the educators should introduce and train the graduates and students, in the field of employability skills to meet the demands of the labor market and employers. Therefore, it also necessary to know the perspective or the perception of the HEI or the educators regarding prime employability skills (Song Ju et.al, 2014). That's how education provides marketable skills and skills that are relevant to work performance, and therefore the more educated professionals, the more successful; they will be in the labor markets, both in terms of earnings and employment opportunities (Kelebogile Paadi,2014). Nevertheless, in the 21st century, education institutions need to have new educational policies and changes. Moreover, they should also search for new partnerships between the HEIs and states that will help in providing more funds and also regulate HEI. Governments have therefore called on HEIs to play a significant role in advancing the capacity to provide better support to the students and graduates, particularly from the first generation, this can be done through creative partnerships with companies, industries, and communities and to be more adaptive and versatile in consideration with the curriculum (N Wakelin- Theron,2014). Though, whether higher education institutions could or should cultivate employability skills has become a topic of debate. Researchers argued that many of the employability variables are conceptual and prescriptive; they emphasized evidence that supports current theoretical proposals on employability (N Wakelin-Theron,2014). Courses at universities are frequently academically focused and centered entirely on subject knowledge and rather than also giving attention to work-related (Ekpoh Uduak,2015). The findings done by the (Ekpoh Uduak,2015) are not particularly unexpected, since there is a general uproar of low performing students in universities. It is additionally mentioned in the study that universities do not prepare the students in the terms business environment. The university graduates are poorly prepared for the job market as there is a discrepancy between the

university opportunities and training and education regarding the demands of the business employability needs. Likewise, there is also a disparity between the skills gained by the university graduates and those needed by the labour market. It was noted that current university undergraduate programs do not provide the kind of continuous learning and basic skills to excel in their careers (Ekpoh Uduak,2015). However, the challenge remains to find the most appropriate method include employability skills in the HEIs curriculum. Even though there is a debate about whether there exists a correlation between employability skills, development, and actual employment. The survival of the higher education institutions depends on their alumni whose future employment is subjected to the procurement of certain work knowledge (N Wakelin- Theron,2014).

Universities should re-vamp their courses per the labour market as this might help the young graduates in finding and maintaining the job quicker. Having a course taught that can be applied in the practical world will also boost the confidence in the graduates for applying to work (Ekpoh Uduak,2015). Kevin Lowden et.al,2011 agreed that the growth of employability skills and attributes in HEIs must also be incorporated in the curriculum. This indicates an integrative initiative on the part of all stakeholders to develop employability skills for the students. Universities should set up career advancement or development centers to put together graduates, employers as well as alumni (Nguyen Dahn Nguyen et.al 2005). Such career- development centers function as a channel of knowledge about the real working life of workers. Such centers may host special seminars to provide employable personal attributes for students seeking jobs (Nguyen Dahn Nguyen et.al 2005). Students must be subjected to HEIs interactions that build understanding, skills, introspection, and contemplation through effective education and learning, as this improves employability. It remains a fact, that the HEIs need to invest and promote more employability development among their students. It is also noted, that there can be a notable increase in the value of higher education institutions if they are regarded as relevant to the economy and the society by being independent of the government (N Wakelin-Theron,2014). In recent times, few higher education institutions' strategies for promoting employability skills and attributes in practice include help in career decision making or search for a job, enhancement of employability skills through university programs, internships, placements, and personal developmental planning. Internships were considered helpful for the students, and due to which, placements and internships are being used by universities to give valuable work experiences to students (Kevin Lowden et.al,2011).

A research study was done by Kevin Lowden et.al,2011 found out what do the representatives from the HEIs perceive as the skills, competencies, understanding, and quality that would develop employability in graduates. There was an accord among the HEIs on the attributes and competency which supported the employability of graduates. An HEI representative highlighted the 'graduate mindset' which placed value on the 4 E's, and these are •Enterprising, •Ethical, •Engaged diligently showing interest in education and student life, •Enquiring. Another HEI representative listed qualities, credentials, and expertise for the graduate's employability, and these are • Good oral and written communication skills, • Ability to use creativity and innovativeness in their work, • Independent, • Responsible, • Potential to solve a problem with creativity, • Time Management skills, • Teamwork and Team building skills. • Aware of markets and business, • Willingness to learn, •Inspired and Enthusiastic, • Prepared to work and • Presentation skills. The educators believed that they could help the students more than just little in training and development of employability skills. It can be observed that the perceived employability skills of the educators or HEIs are alike to the employer's perception of employability.

However, the conjecture is that the graduate's chances of acquiring employment do not only depend on or concern one stakeholder but also it should involve government, HEI, industries, and even students. This is because working as a team in this will help find a viable and feasible technique and resolution to the problem if unemployment in graduates. (Ekpoh Uduak,2015).

Human capital theory suggests that education improves the efficiency of students, thereby improving work performance (Kelebogile Paadi,2014). This is because education offers, marketable skills and attributes that can be applied in the practical world hence, more highly educated graduates are, more competitive and they would be in the job market, both in terms of income and job opportunities (Yuzhuo Cai,2012).

The University of Catalonia created a learning environment in which complexities of real-world professional background in the field of communication are replicated as a virtual internship, like teamwork, problem-solving, under restricted circumstances or deadlines, customer orientation, and so on. The objective of the agency is to provide graduates, with experiences that may be faced by them in the job market in the future. TUAS Wildau in Business Informatics, holds a bachelor's degree programs, every two weeks a representative from the company provide a task to students related to present market situations, through student team meetings and evaluate the results after stipulated time given for completion of the task. Moreover, experts are invited to present a lecture or introduce new policies or practices that have entered the market (Ardiana Ornellas.et.al,2018).

## **Employee/Students Perception On Employability Skills**

Young graduates and early employees face a lot of problems once they enter the world of work. This is simply because they lack generic skills demanded by the employers and find it difficult to maintain their employment due to a dynamic business environment that expects the workers to adjust accordingly. Due to which, it is important to find out the differences in the importance given to employability skills by graduates and employees in regards to their perception. The literature on the importance of employability skills perceived by students is limited but also inconsistent (Alex Tymon, 2013).

Graduate employability is multidimensional and involves academic success, career management skills, and knowledge of the labour market and workplace. Despite the widespread approach in the provision of employability skills in higher education, there are still discrepancies between the graduate job performance and the employer's requirement which exists. It is noticed that the employer expectations from the graduates are been met, hence it is significant to understand and also to be aware of student's perceptions regarding the employability skills and develop them accordingly. There are several reasons why it is required to also take into account a student's as well as an employee's perception of employability. Theoretically, having effective learning involves a clear understanding regarding the importance of the content and relevant activities displayed that can be improved by having a positive order which will give an obvious outcome. In addition to this, students who place a high emphasis on what they are learning can also affect their ability to pass learned skills through various contexts, for instance from university classrooms to the workplace. Furthermore, undergraduate awareness on the significance of that prompt better use of portfolios to demonstrate skills learned in future job applications, thereby boosting job prospects. Explicit awareness of the value of employability skills, and having translucent addition in the curriculum would boost the ability of students to express their competencies to the employers. As the business environment is dynamic the students and employees need to be aware of the rising need to distinguish themselves from the rest, in the labour market (Denise Jackson,2013).

It was noted that the employees face early employment problems as they are unsuccessful to meet the appropriate employer's requirements. The reasons identified the employees failed to meet the demands required by the employers were (i) lack of ability to use theoretical knowledge in application, (ii) report writing, (iii) poor communication with others, (iv) comprehension of responsibility, (v) inability to work in a team and (vi) personal reasons. The reasons followed by the problems noted by the graduates and entry-level employee were as follows: (i) lack of cooperation between the higher education institutions and employees,(ii) disinterest in the career, (iii) choice employment,(iv) insufficient job training, (v) absence of job description, (vi) lack of proper oral and written communication skills, (vii) lack comprehension of responsibilities,(viii) temperament of the employee/graduate,(ix) job environment,(x) family background, (xi) gender discrimination and (xii) compensation. Further, it has been discussed that the graduates or students have not been properly introduced to and developed employability skills by the higher education institutions (Clarke Marilyn, 2008).

Many graduates have a powerful economic driver. They understand the importance of employability skills, and that a degree may not alone be appropriate. In recent times as there has been an increase in literacy rates all over the world, this has led to the surplus supply of graduates this makes it difficult to start for their career. This is illustrated by increasing unemployment among graduates, increased competition among the graduates, and a greater degree of uncertainty about what graduates should expect from higher education (Marie-Pierre Moreau and Carole Leathwood,2006). Due to an increase in competition between the graduates, this has also led to the change in an employer's perception and expectations in the labour market. A degree, once a perk or differentiator, is now often treated as a requirement for a career, particularly in industries that may have not have needed a degree at the entry-level in the past (Michael Tomlinson 2008). Therefore, graduates are constantly conscious of the need for specific qualifications and qualities for job progress (Alex Tymon, 2013). This can also be seen in research by Michael Tomlinson et al.,2008, where the students felt that, the degree had lost its distinguishing significance, and that there was a need to improve their employability broader. Higher education students find themselves in a competitive market, with an increasing supply of graduates joining the job force with common profiles and jobs. The difficulty confronting students is to achieve a comparative edge in a dynamic job market where workers are focus on academic qualifications.

Further, the similarity was identified between students' perceptions and literature in terms of abilities and personal qualities aligned with employability. Communication, information technology, coordination in team building and teamwork, and scheduling and organizing were the most widely mentioned abilities. The personal attributes accepted included versatility, adaptability, working hard, determination, and devotion. The personality characteristics that students considered to be important to their professions are individuality or creativity, constant learning, professionalism, self-confidence, and self-motivation (Beverley Jackling and Claude Calero,2006). In a research study, it was observed that personal abilities such as independent thinking, innovation and creativity, and versatility were

ranked as the most important skills, for development in career by the graduates and the employees (Beverley Jackling and Paul De Lange,2006). Moreover, employers suggested solutions for early employability problems faced, which were also supported by employers. This were:(i) including training as part of the curriculum, (ii) focus on written communication, (iii) development of oral and written communication, (iv) workshops and seminars for introducing problem-solving. (v) motivating in the group projects and (vi) provision of professional practical advice (Yet-Mee Lim et.al,2016). In addition to this, the graduates appeared to regard extra-curricular activity at the university and job experience rather than their degree, as adding them into their CV's is like brownie points to help in maintaining their jobs (Kevin Lowden et.al,2011).

Though there might exist a minor difference in thoughts and perception, it was gladdening to have that there appears to be a strong convergence between the employer, HEIs, and employees/graduates in their perceptions of employability skill. Furthermore, it was fortunate that the students/employee and higher education institutions are aware of the fact that there seems to be of greater importance given to employability skills in today's world.

## **Conclusion**

Many students, graduates, employees, HEIs, and employers want higher education institutions to include employability skills in the curriculum. It can be further observed that graduates/employee reveal that workshops, seminars, job training, internships held by higher education institutions and companies helps in development in employability skills, and also benefits their job position. Many of the employees and young graduates are aware that a degree or qualification alone, may not be sufficient to maintain a job, and that with increasing competition in the labour market, it is equally important to have generic or soft skills as this will also help in better development of bio-data. Though the employees have mentioned the difficulties they face in early employability, it was also stressed by them that having enough motivation, creativity, independence, and being committed can help in maintaining the job.

Higher education institutions are seen as the middleman in helping reach a congruence that would teach the importance of employability skills that will help in increasing the opportunity for the job seeker and the job provider to match accordingly. It was emphasized that higher education institutions should update their course where the theory taught is based and used in the practical environment. Thus, this will help exalt the graduate's confidence. Universities providing internships, career development centers, etc gave positive results, as this helped to gain perception and experience on employability skills to the graduates. It was also suggested that higher education institutions should indulge themselves in partnerships, as this will help the universities to keep in touch with the labor market, and bring about changes in their curriculum accordingly.

Labour market needs are created by employers. As the business world is dynamic and there is an increase in the competition this results in to change in demands and needs by the employer. It was stated by the employers that, though having a good qualification or degree is important, the development of generic skills and the ability to apply theoretical knowledge in an application is also equally important. Employers have specified clearly on what set of employability skills do they search for in an employee, though there does not exist a common definition of employability skills. They require the employees to have technical skills as well as a broader range and concept of personal and generic attributes and skills. The literature on graduate employability discloses, that the employers and the HEIs need to work together to develop strategies that help in contributing to graduate employability.

There were also good practical practices in real-life that were identified, where it was shown how the universities have started to introduce the work environment to the students, by inviting professionals or experts and conducting virtual internships that give real-life experiences to the students and thereby, simultaneously exalting their employability skills.

This literature review has highlighted, the significance of how the employability skills in the practical world and how can be included and developed, to be introduced to the graduates. On how the universities should be able to link academic as well as employability in the curriculum. Moreover, it has identified the different perceptions of the stakeholders and, the challenges faced by the employers as well as the employee in the light of lack of employability attributes. This has also provided possible solutions to the challenges that can be overcome. All the stakeholders should work together as a team to help the future generation to support the benefits of seizing the complete skills, for personal development as well.

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