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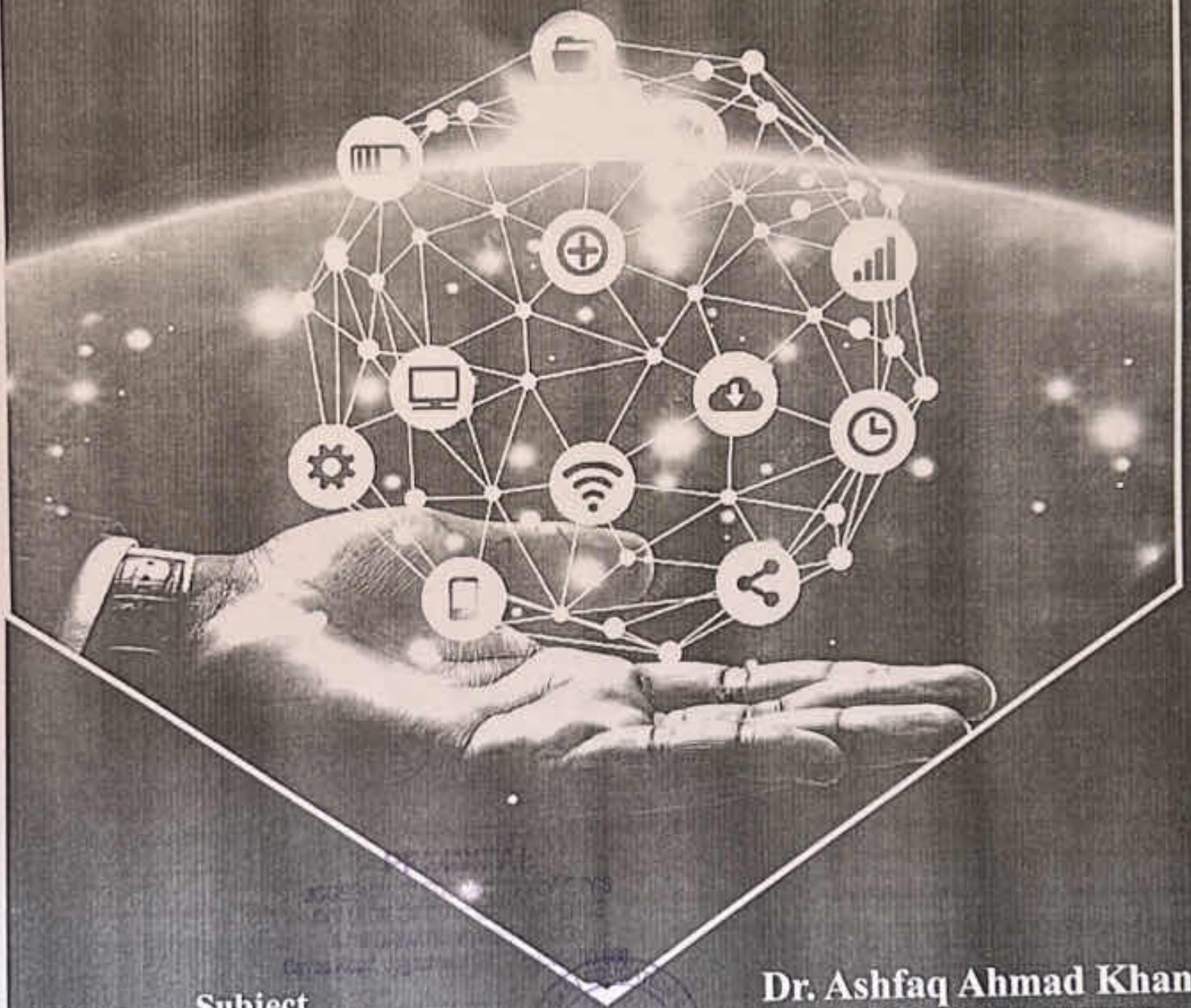


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Dr. Ashfaq Ahmad Khan
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Ashfaq Ahmad Khan



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P. S. Shelar

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CONTENTS

COMMERCE

1. A Comparative Study on Customer Preference towards Over-The-Top Platforms and Pirated Websites in India between 2019-2021 1-5
Atman Peerzade & Rahed Patel
 2. An Event Study on the Growing Concern over the Indian Sectoral Stock Indices as a Result of Silicon Valley Bank Collapse in the USA 6-12
Anil Kumar Mohanty & Anup Kumar Roy
 3. Challenges for Small Companies when Adopting Social Media for Increasing Customer Loyalty 13-18
Asgar Ali Khan
 4. A Study Model of Neo Banks and Consumer Perceptions in Mumbai 19-23
Bushra Mehmood Shaikh
 5. A Study on the Impact of Advertisement of Mobile Phones on the Consumer Behavior of College Students in Mumbai 24-28
Shobha Bennet Mathew
 6. Application of E-Commerce Among Entrepreneurs from Rural India 29-32
Subhash Dsouza
 7. A Survey of Employability Skills Among College Students: An Exploratory Factor Analysis Study 33-38
Amrita Sharma & Nooruzia Qazi
 8. Importance of Social Audit for Economic Growth 39-42
Vandana Singh
- ### ECONOMICS
9. Analysis of Trends in the Indian Retail Banking Industry During the Last Decade 43-46
Dhaya Nilgam
 10. Green Startup in India 47-50
Priyanka Arora
 11. A Panoramic Study of Working Women's Knowledge of Tax Saving Schemes in Mumbai 51-56
Shweta Shailesh Dubey
 12. Digital Economy: Rising Opportunities, Emerging Challenges, and Prospects in the Post-Covid World 57-65
Smriti Lata Sinha



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A Survey of Employability Skills Among College Students: An Exploratory Factor Analysis Study

¹Sunita Sharma & ²Nooruzia Qazi

¹IQAC Coordinator, JES College of Commerce, Science & Information Technology, Mumbai, India

²Head, Department of Commerce, B. M. Ruia Girls' College, Mumbai, India

Email: sunitasharma8460@gmail.com, nooruzia@yahoo.com

Abstract

Employability skills are the soft skills that allow you to work well with others, apply knowledge to solve problems and fit into any work environment. Graduate employability has become a key driver for universities, all over the world. An attempt in this research study has been made to study various skills which help to improve employability skills of graduates, and thus contribute to improving graduate employment outcomes. For the study, a self-structured questionnaire consisting of 39 statements was used for collecting primary data from 250 graduating students. 3 factors with 16 items, emerged from the results of exploratory factor analysis viz. adaptability skills, communication skills and critical thinking and problem-solving skills. These three factors together accounted for a 59.34 percent variance. The result of this study provides a validated and reliable variable for the employability skills of students that can be used for future research.

Keywords: Exploratory Factor Analysis, Employability Skills, Adaptability Skills, Communication Skills, Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills

Introduction:

Employability is the set of competent attributes that help one to get a job, while employability skills are the skills that help one attain the level of employability that is needed to remain in the same state. They are transferable skills that a person can learn, unlearn and relearn in order to be employed for a specific job.

Graduate employability has become a key driver for universities, in response to increasing pressure from governments and employer groups. Universities all over the world are adopting a range of generic skill-based learning outcomes, which when embedded into degree programs, are expected to increase graduate employability and therefore improve graduate employment outcomes. "Today the performance indicator generally used to determine the value of higher education by the governments and international rankings is the employment rate of graduates." (Teichler, 2009) Singh (2022) in his study shows that there is a direct

correlation between skills and employability in the industry. The study shows that students who scored better in learning agility, business communication, and emotional intelligence grew to managerial positions twice as fast to those who performed well in domain knowledge and average soft skills. Similarly, students who ranked higher on critical thinking and numerical ability grew faster in profiles such as Senior Analyst and big data. Creativity, critical thinking, analytical skills originality, and initiative are other sets of skills that can help aspirants achieve their career goals.

On World Youth Skills Day, 15th July 2021, Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted an initiative termed as "Going Online as Leaders (GOAL)" with an objective to set India's employability landscape at par with the talent demands globally.

Hence there is a need to identify different factors underlying employability skills. Keeping this objective in view, researchers have applied exploratory factor analysis

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Rizvi College of Arts, Science & Commerce ♦ Vol. 12 (2) ♦ January - June 2023 ♦ International Journal of Research

33



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in this study, to ascertain the factors that constitute employability skills among students.

Skill Gap in the Indian Higher Education System:

The government of India (January 2023) points out that India is a young nation with 65 percent of its population below the age of 35 years. This present demographic dividend presents an opportunity that must be leveraged to create a high-quality skilled workforce, to cater to global workforce demand.

The India Skills Report (ISR) 2022 is a merger of two distinct studies from Wheebox National Employability Test (WNET) which analyzed the employability among 3 lakh youth across various educational and professional domains in India and the India Hiring Intent Survey, conducted for 150 corporates across 15+ industries. The WNET, assessed the employability amongst students evaluating the job-readiness for the market in India, while the India Hiring Intent Survey 2022 studied the hiring trend and preferences of employers in top industries.

The outcomes of the survey were –

- ❖ WNET discovered that in the year 2022, 51.3 percent of Indian youth were unemployable. This percentage had increased with respect to the year 2021.

- ❖ Institutes struggle to prepare their students to battle the challenges of the business world. The curricula reflected outdated course material, irrelevant to the ongoing happenings in the industry, leading to a severe dearth of employable talent across India.

- ❖ Top companies in India are adopting new recruitment strategies centered around specific soft skills like communication, agility, proactiveness, and empathy. However, HEIs seldom educate their students on these parameters.

- ❖ Among the 150 corporations surveyed across 15+ industries and sectors, 75 percent of corporate leaders expressed that there was a skill gap in their industry. 67 percent of Banking, Financial Services, and Insurance (BFSI) employers also reported a skill gap deficit. The skill gap deficit was 100 percent in the retail industry.

- ❖ We need to prepare the students for the age of digital acceleration. They need to be trained in soft skills to tackle global changes and to be able to impart knowledge in a collaborative manner which are the requisites of a modern workplace. Problem-solving, critical thinking, presentation skills, corporate agility, time management,

and problem-solving abilities are other soft skills which paired with the domain knowledge and experience of a candidate become an invaluable asset for an organization.

- ❖ IT skills in particular are shaping up the job ecosystem with focus on the latest technologies. Employers want adaptable individuals who can learn, relearn and unlearn as the demands of the job continue to dictate new trends. To contend in the modern economy, it is important to upskill one's knowledge with the latest technology tools, that is from basic HTML knowledge to advanced Python coding.

- ❖ There are 10 million students occupying the higher education space but 95 percent of these students don't have access to education that can help them build a well-rounded career. Most of educational institutions, struggle to keep up with the requirements of the industry, failing which they continue to teach students concepts that are no longer relevant to the industry's needs in current times.

ISR 2022 concludes by stating that although technology-driven infrastructure is the foundation of modern enterprises, the core catalyst of digital age skilling is a human-first approach. Nowadays, companies expect individual ownership over a hierarchy culture, because the adoption of technologies and tools available can function when everybody in the organization is involved. They should focus on the value-added contribution of employees and their unique skill sets. The key skills required as per ISR 2022 to excel in the digital age are – communication skills, social media, data analytics and interpretation, critical thinking skills, knowledge management, strategy planning, teamwork and adaptability, ethics and responsibility, creativity and social intelligence in particular, are likely to be essential skills for most new jobs created between now and 2030; because these skills give humans a clear advantage over machines and software, and offer protection against developments in automation.

The Objective of the Study:

To identify the constructs related to Employability Skills.

Significance of the study:

Various research studies point out one thing in common that is, the employment policy is changing from 'employment rate' to 'employability' which means that the shift from quantity to quality has posed an urgent question, that is how to effectively enhance and shape the employability of graduates through training and practicing. Keeping this



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objective in view the researchers have applied exploratory factor analysis, to ascertain the factors that constitute the employability skills of graduating students.

Research Methodology:

An exploratory, quantitative and inferential research was conducted to study the perception of undergraduate students about the challenges of current education system and their relation with the employability skills of the students. The variables in the study are communication skills, critical thinking and problem-solving skills and adaptability skills and challenges faced by students with the current education system which includes – teaching methodology, educational framework, practical exposure and access to resources.

Universe of the study: College students from Suburban Mumbai.

Sample size: 250 college students from Suburban Mumbai.

Sampling: A stratified random sampling method was used to collect data from the respondents.

Instrument of data collection: Self-administered questionnaire consisting of 39 statements.

Data Collection: Primary data was collected online; it was sourced by personally distributing and retrieving completed questionnaires from the respondents.

Data Analysis:

The study examines employability skills of students which contribute to improve graduate employment outcomes. A self-structured questionnaire consisting of 39 statements was used for collecting primary data from 250 graduating students. Five-point Likert Scale consisting of; Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Disagree nor Agree, Agree and Strongly Agree was asked to know how much the respondents agree or disagree with the statements. The data collected was analysed using SPSS version 21. A set of 39 items representing the employability skills of students were tested using factor analysis. Three factors viz. Adaptability skills, Communication skills, and Critical thinking and problem-solving skills with 16 items were identified as a result of Exploratory Factor Analysis.

Table 1: Profile of Respondents

Gender	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Male	90	36
Female	160	64
Total	250	100

Source: Researcher's compilation from primary data

Among the 250 respondents interviewed, 64 percent were female respondents and 36 percent were male respondents.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

Code	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
CS_1	I find it easy to explain information to others	3.292	1.19518
CS_3	I am reasonably confident while replying in an interview/Viva	3.048	1.1537
CS_6	I am comfortable replying to teacher's questions in class without worrying about communication skills	3.324	1.2875
CS_3	I am comfortable asking questions in class without worrying about communication skills	3.288	1.32117
CS_7	I am able to speak comfortably in front of a formal group/public	3.104	1.25258
PS_2	I can visualize how ideas and techniques can be used to arrive at the best possible solution	3.544	1.0356
PS_3	I can analyse other's ideas by evaluating advantages and disadvantages logically	3.564	1.09302
PS_4	I like to make critical comparison between alternatives/options before arriving at decisions	3.423	1.17402
PS_5	When I try to solve a complex problem, I thoroughly evaluate a range of suggestions before arriving at a conclusion	3.556	1.0368
PS_7	When assigned with a new project, I can come up with innovative or different way of accomplishing the task.	3.496	1.20946
AS_3	I openly accept challenges and changes	3.632	1.13025
AS_4	I can adjust behaviour and language in dealing with individuals based on situation	3.668	1.20815
AS_5	I can handle pressure in difficult circumstances	3.38	1.19722
AS_2	I am always flexible and open to new ideas	3.632	1.15359
AS_12	I am open to learn new skills required to complete a task	3.972	1.09911
AS_41	I can effectively handle conflicts with team members	3.434	1.17119

Source: Researcher's compilation from primary data

Table 2 exhibits the Code numbers, Mean, and Standard deviation of different items selected under the latent construct of employability skills. Three constructs were identified through exploratory factor analysis as mentioned in Table 5. Among the items selected under communication skills, CS-6 registered the highest mean of 3.324. Among Critical thinking and problem-solving skills, PS-3 witnessed the highest mean of 3.564, and AS-12, under Adaptability skill, scored the highest mean i.e., 3.972. The data were further analysed using the data reduction



technique of exploratory factor analysis.

The exploratory factor analysis technique is used to identify the interrelationship among the items of employability skills. In this factor analysis, principal component analysis with varimax rotation was performed to identify the latent constructs on all items. In the process of exploratory factor analysis, those items are selected which meet the specified standard of EFA test forming a cluster with minimum information loss (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 2006). Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin and Bartlett's test of sphericity was used in the study to measure sampling adequacy in order to check the ratio of the case to variable ratio for the purpose of analysis. Bartlett's test of sphericity should reveal significant results at ($P < 0.05$) (Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2010). The value of KMO ranges between 0 to 1. The generally acceptable value of KMO should be above 0.6 (Zainudin, 2012). Total variance explained was also examined as an extraction process of items to reduce them into a manageable number before further analysis. In this process, items with eigenvalues exceeding 1.0 are extracted into different components (Zainudin, 2012; Pallant 2007). Communality is as the proportion of common variance found in a particular variable. Higher communality represents a higher amount of variance in the variable. The acceptable level of communality is 0.5 and above. The Cronbach alpha value of 0.6 and above indicate better internal consistency (Zainudin, 2012).

Table 3: Communalities

Items	Extraction	Items	Extraction
AS_2	.387	PS_4	.370
AS_3	.632	PS_5	.665
AS_4	.652	CS_3	.513
AS_5	.364	CS_6	.640
AS_11	.570	CS_5	.682
AS_12	.390	PS_7	.514
PS_2	.560	CS_1	.514
PS_3	.520	CS_7	.620

Source: Researcher's compilation from primary data

An exploratory factor analysis was run, which extracted three constructs with 16 items. The remaining items were omitted from the analysis owing to low communality, negative determinants, and low factor loading. Communalities for all the 16 items are above the standard

measure of 0.5 as mentioned in Table 3. The Kaiser Meyer Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (MSA), which measures the adequacy of the data for factor analysis, was 0.917 which is very well above the standard level of 0.8. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity revealed significant results with a p-value of 0.000 as mentioned in the table.

Table 4: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.917
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1691.553
	df	120
	Sig.	.000

Source: Researcher's compilation from primary data

Three constructs extracted under exploratory factor analysis together accounted for 59.341% variance with eigen value of above 1 for each construct. For a reliable measure of internal consistency, Cronbach's Alpha should be 0.7 or higher. Cronbach alpha value for each construct is also above standard value of 0.7 indicating better internal consistency of items selected under each construct. Items with factor loading above 0.5 were considered for analysis as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Matrix of components after rotation, percentages of explained variance and Cronbach's alpha of three dimensions extracted. (Rotated Component Matrix')

Domain/Item	Components with Factor Loading		
	1	2	3
Factor 1: AS			
AS_4	.781		
AS_5	.743		
AS_8	.703		
AS_12	.691		
AS_2	.600		
AS_11	.571		
Factor 2: CS			
CS_3		.791	
CS_7		.754	
CS_9		.680	
CS_6		.600	
CS_1		.628	
Factor 3: PS			
PS_5			.712
PS_7			.727
PS_4			.719
PS_2			.652
PS_3			.541
Eigen Value	6.738	1.442	1.313
% of Variance	42.111	9.021	8.209
Cumulative %	42.111	51.132	59.341
Cronbach Alpha Value	.876	.823	.807
Determinant	.001		
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis			
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization			
3 components extracted.			
Rotation in 10 iterations			

Source: Researcher's compilation from primary data

Description of the scale items:

Factor 1 - Adaptability Skills: Adaptability is a soft skill that means that one easily adjusts to changing circumstances. They reflect how a person works and interacts with others in the workplace. (Kaplan, et al., 2023). Adaptability set of skills defines the capacity of an individual to change his actions, course, or way to deal with getting things done to suit another circumstance. The statements extracted in Table 5 under factor one, comprise statements that express the Adaptability skills of respondents. These variables are thus denoted by a factor labeled- 'Adaptability Skills' in the study. This factor is most important as it accounts for 42.11 percent of the total variance with an eigenvalue of 6.73 and Cronbach alpha value of 0.86.

Factor 2 - Communication Skills: Communication skills are the abilities one uses when giving and receiving different kinds of information. It involves listening, speaking, observing and empathising. These skills allow one to understand others and be understood by others. The second factor comprises five statements that express the Communication skills of respondents. These variables are thus denoted by a factor labelled- 'Communication Skills' in the study. This is the second most important factor in the study with 9.02 percent of total variance with an eigenvalue of 1.44 and a Cronbach alpha value of 0.82.

Factor 3 - Critical thinking and Problem-Solving Skill: Critical thinking is a mental process of actively and skilfully conceptualizing, applying, analysing, synthesizing and evaluating information to reach an answer or conclusion. Problem-solving is the result of critical thinking. It involves discovering and analysing the problem with the goal of finding the best possible solution to overcome the obstacle. Statements identified under the third factor expresses the Critical thinking and Problem-solving Skill of respondents. These are denoted by a factor of critical thinking and problem-solving skills in the study. This

factor accounts for 8.21 percent of the total variance with an eigenvalue of 1.31 and Cronbach alpha value of 0.81.

Conclusion:

"Employability skills are the soft skills that allow you to work well with others, apply knowledge to solve problems, and fit into any work environment" (Doyle, 2020). "Development of employability skills is aimed at the removal of the disconnect between demand and supply of skilled manpower, skill- gradation and building of new skills and innovative thinking not only for existing jobs but also jobs of the future" Government of India (January 2023). The present study contributes to the measurement of employability skills. It prepares the students for the job market and to face the challenges of the corporate sector. Data from 250 respondents was analyzed using SPSS 21. A set of 39 items representing the employability skills of students were tested using factor analysis, results of the study revealed three-factor model with 16 items being valid and can be used for further analysis. Three factors namely, Adaptability skills, Communication skills and Critical thinking and problem-solving skills were identified as a result of Exploratory Factor Analysis. These three factors together accounted for a 59.34% variance. The results of this study provide a validated and reliable variable for the employability skills of students that can be used for future research.

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