# Analyzing Professional Students' Employability Skills and their Contribution on the Perceived Performance

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## ABSTRACT

*Getting employment after the completion of professional education is the ultimate aim of all professional students. To improve the chances for being employed these students require not only scholastics and academic abilities but also certain employability skills, including Language Proficiency Skills, Competency-based Skills, Personal Skills, and Social Skills, i.e. employability skills. The purpose of this paper is to contemplate the view of professional students towards their employability abilities. The study aims at measuring the professional students' employability skills and the extent to which they influence the perceived performance of the professional students. The study design is exploratory in nature and several statistical techniques have been used to analyze the data collected from a sample of 150 professional students. The structured online questionnaire comprised of 16 item scale based on previous studies. The Cronbach Alpha was used to determine the internal consistency of the scale items. Descriptive statistics techniques, Correlation and regression were used for further analysis. The results indicated that there existed a strong significantly strong correlation between the select employability skills. The overall regression model was found significant, which proves the perception of the contribution of the skills in overall performance. The result revealed that among the select skills, Language Proficiency Skills contributes the most towards the perceived performance of the professional students.*

*KEYWORDS: Language Proficiency Skills, Competency-based Skills, Personal Skills, and Social Skills, Contribution towards Perceived Performance.*

## INTRODUCTION

Employability Skills is a recent sphere for scholarly research, with the main volume of research papers published since 2000. Once acquiring a professional degree was a surety for getting employment; however this is no longer the case as evident by the unemployment rates in India. Advanced education has a bigger reason than negligible employability (Clarke et al., 2006; Gibbs, 2000); however, the aim of getting employed still remains a sensible supposition for the professional students. Educational programs focusing on the needs of the professional students and the market have been considered important by many researchers (Davis et al., 2002; Karns and Abraham, 2009; Jackson, 2014b), while others have highlighted the presence of disconnect between training and practice (Harrigan and Hulbert, 2011).

The term "employability" was initially authored by Beveridge (1909) in a book **Unemployment: A Problem of Industry**, however the concept has undergone a significant change during the past few decades (Sanders and De Grip, 2004) due to changes in the economic situations and government plans and policies. Presently, "Employability" doesn't just mean getting jobs (Atkins, 1999); it centres round manageability where the professional student can give solutions through innovation and best practices for various problems. A definitive point of the designing professional educational programs is to deliver experts who can give specialized solutions for the societal needs (Hassan, 2007). The employability abilities centre round the properties that help a professional student to accomplish this objective. Different models of employability have been presented by different researchers. These models give due significance to both specialized and individual abilities.

It is worth mentioning that the modern sophisticated market demands highly professional students, who have the requisite skills to improve productivity, as well as add to the value of the organization which has hired their services, with the help of their professional, technical and behavioural skills which help them in getting and retaining employment. As such professional students require not only sound technical knowledge but also desirable personal traits such as Language Proficiency Skills, Competency-based Skills, Personal Skills, and Social Skills, i.e. employability skills which ultimately make them the best option for the organization (Forbes, 2004).


## LITERATURE REVIEW

Review of extant literature describing employability skills provides a better perception and appreciation of what skills are required and what skills employers desire in employees. Employability skills are generally those skills that are fundamental for being successful in the market at all levels and sectors of employment. The appraisal of the employability skills to date has been fairly conflicting, however numerous researchers have proposed diverse models and scales to quantify employability skills. The major bulk of papers on employability skills may be grouped roughly into four categories: those definitional writing that characterized terms such as employability skills, competencies, soft skills, and work-prepared (Barrie, 2007; Cornford, 2005; Tomlinson, 2012; Williams et al., 2015); a work on educational modules required for improvement based on employers' needs (Bascoul et al., 2013; Brennan and Vos, 2013; Jaskari and Jaskari 2016; Spiller and Tuten, 2015; Taylor, 2003; Treleaven and Voola, 2008); work analyzing factor effecting employability aptitudes (Barker, 2014; Finch et. al, 2012; Jackson 2014a); and work investigating the inconsistencies between educating and practice (Jackson and Chapman, 2012; Martin and Chapman, 2006; Stringfellow et al., 2006;).

The focal point of employability both as supply side and as an individual construct has been dealt with widely in literature (Hillage and Pollard, 1998; McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005; Sanders and De Grip, 2004). Bridgstock (2009) underlined the abilities, attitudes and skills that people require to become marketable to prospective employers. Employability pertains to how well the people's abilities, attitudes and skills meet the prerequisites of the market. Employability requires various skills (Hillage & Pollard, 1998; Knight & Yorke, 2002).

### Employability skills of Professional Students in India

India is one of the developing markets in the world. India's transformation from an agrarian economy to an industrialized one requires more skilled and professional force. In spite of the fact that the nation has sufficient potential to convey to the needs of the global market, the lack of desirable employability skills among the professional students may turn into a bottleneck for future growth and development of the country. Even at present, several organizations are finding it progressively hard to locate the qualified force they require. Investigations have revealed the need for better employability skills as many remain unemployable. A recent study by the World Bank (2011) revealed 64% of employers were

not fully satisfied with the performance of their present employees in India (Andreas Blom, 2011). This shows there is a dire need for proper awareness and training for professional students to enhance their skills.

Advanced countries such as UK and USA dominate the employability literature, but scholarly work from other parts of the world, especially India is lacking, although some studies have been conducted. A recent study on Employability Skills of Management Students from Tamil Nadu, India (Selvam and Rozario, 2016) focused on the student's levels of employability skills with reference to rural colleges, and revealed that nearly half of the respondents had high level of employability skills with no significant variation based on gender. Another study on Employability skills of higher education graduates (Fatima Suleman, 2016) indicated the need for relational skills, such as interpersonal, communication and teamwork abilities. A Study on Students Perception of Employability Skills (Maran and Shekar, 2015) portrayed the influence of Institution on the students' opinion towards Employability skills. Another research on Measuring Students' Employability Skills (Muhammad K. Al-Alawneh, 2014) aimed to investigate University students' employability skills as they are perceived by them, which showed there existed variations in three domains: coping with stress, empathy, and interpersonal relationship. A study on Employability Skill Readiness among Business Students (ErniTanius and Susah 2013) succeeded in identifying the level of work readiness among them, in terms of listening skill, teamwork, collaboration and innovation skills.

## OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH

This paper focuses on the Employability skills of professional students in Rajasthan, India. The key goal of the paper is to add to the extant literature and gauge and identify skills which will enhance the general employability level of professional students. The study is an attempt to find the correlation between different employability skills and perception of the contribution of these skills in the overall performance of the students. In the research, 150 regular students of professional courses were respondents. The study throws lights to the contribution of different employability skills on the performance of professional students by using different descriptive and multivariate analysis. The present work addresses three questions:

1. Which employability skills are perceived as having low or high significance by the professional students?

2. Is there a correlation between different employability skills of professional students?

 3. What is the influence of employability skills on the perception of the contribution of these skills on the overall perceived performance of the students?

### Hypotheses

For the purpose following hypotheses were formed:-

H1: There is no significant correlation between different employability skills of professional students.

H2: There is no significant correlation between different employability skills and the perception of the contribution of these skills in the overall performance of the professional students.

H3: There is no significant influence of different employability skills on the perception of the contribution of these skills in the overall performance of the professional students.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In this research, the researcher has used non-probability convenience sampling method and taken a sample of 150 Engineering and Management students. A structured questionnaire was formulated including the common employability skills identified by different researchers. The instrument used different significant and well-recognized employability skills, combined in four major skill groups including Language Proficiency Skills (LPS), Competency-based Skills (CS), Personal Skills (PS), and Social Skills (SS). It consists of a 16- item scale along with questions related to other demographic details of the respondents. To assess the students' perception of the significance of selected employability skills and their impact on performance, five –point Likert scale ranging from 1 being "Not significant" to 5 "Most significant" was used. The statistical software SPSS has been used to perform the reliability measure Cronbach Alpha and other statistical technique viz. Correlation and regression analysis.

**Data Analysis and Interpretation**

An overview of the demographic variables related to their gender and professional education levels of the respondents participating in the present research study is presented in the given tables. The table- 1shows the distribution of the respondents according to gender and depicts that among the respondents, 76.7% are male while 23.3% are women. Thus male dominates the sample.

**Table- 1: Distribution of the Respondents according to Gender**

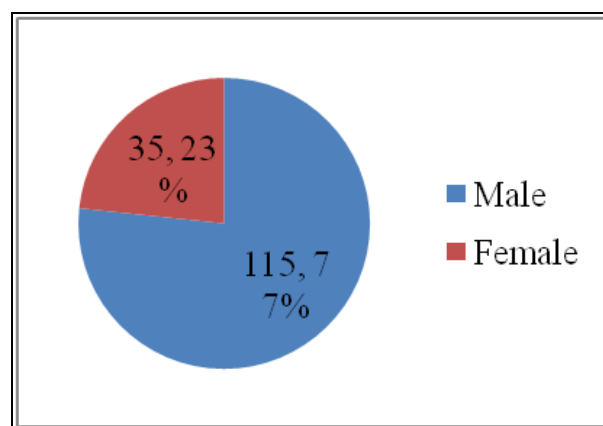| Gender | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------|-----------|------------|
| Male | 115 | 76.7 |
| Female | 35 | 23.3 |
| Total | 150 | 100 |

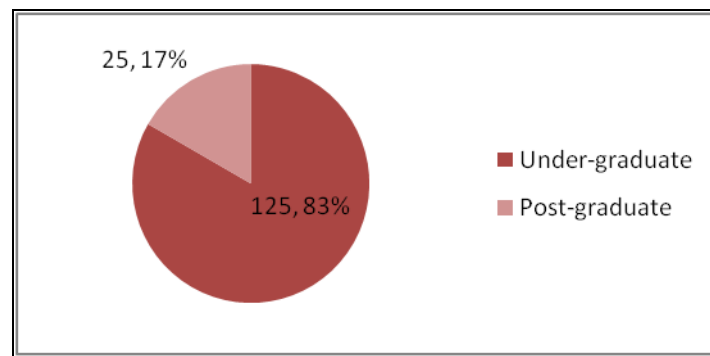

**Figure -1: Distribution of the Respondents according to Gender**

Table 2 shows the distribution of respondents according to their educational qualification. It is clearly depicted that 83.3% of the respondents are doing the Under-graduate professional course and 16.7 % are enrolled in Post-graduate professional courses. The dominant number of respondents is of Under-graduate professionals.

**Table- 1: Distribution of the Respondents according to Gender**

| Education Level | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Under-graduate | 125 | 83.3 |
| Post-graduate | 25 | 16.7 |
| Total | 150 | 100 |



**Figure -2: Distribution of the Respondents according to Educational Level**

After collecting the primary data using the structured questionnaire, the validity of the scale was determined by the Cronbach alpha test of reliability. It is commonly used as an estimate of the reliability of a psychometric test and according to Nunnally (1978), it should be 0.7 or above. The table -3 shows the values of the Cronbach alpha coefficient for the instrument of the present study, which clearly indicates that the value for all the items is above .7; therefore the instrument is highly reliable.

**Table-3: Consistency Measure using Cronbach Alpha**

| Employability Skill | No. of Items | Cronbach Alpha Value |
|---|---|---|
| LPS | 3 | .724 |
| CS | 5 | .855 |
| PS | 5 | .863 |
| SS | 3 | .743 |

**Descriptive Analysis of Employability Skills**

Means and Standard Deviations of Students Analytical Skills

The Table- 4 indicates the mean and standard deviations of different employability skills of the respondents. The mean scores of the four selected skills are close to 4 which explain that the respondents find these skills highly significant. It may be inferred that Language Proficiency Skills, Competency-based Skills, Personal Skills and Social Skills are considered as significant skills for employability by the respondents of the present study. The mean score of all the skills varies between 3.833 and 4.333, the respondents find Reading and Writing Skills highly significant with 4.333 mean score and Negotiation Skills have the lowest mean score of 3.833. The results prove that all selected skills are considered significant by the study respondents and the results are in accordance with several previous studies which found these skills highly significant.

**Table-4: Means and Standard Deviations of Students Analytical Skills**

| Items | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|
| LPS-1 Listening Skills | 150 | 4.113 | .8711 |
| LPS-2 Reading & Writing Skills | 150 | 4.333 | .7743 |
| LPS-3 Negotiation Skills | 150 | 3.833 | .9226 |
| **Average LPS** | **150** | **4.093** | **.8560** |
| CS-1 Self Management Skills | 150 | 4.253 | .7959 |
| CS-2 Problem Solving Skills | 150 | 4.213 | .8076 |
| CS-3 Presentation Skills | 150 | 4.127 | .8846 |
| CS-4 Critical Thinking Skills | 150 | 4.100 | .8494 |
| CS-5 Creativity & Learning Skills | 150 | 4.260 | .7635 |
| **Average CS** | **150** | **4.191** | **.8202** |
| PS-1 Decision Making Skills | 150 | 4.253 | .8988 |
| PS-2 Organizing Skills | 150 | 4.133 | .7999 |
| PS-3 Leadership Skills | 150 | 4.267 | .8247 |
| PS-4 Technical Skills | 150 | 4.093 | .8302 |
| PS-5 Administrative & Operational Level Skills | 150 | 4.033 | .9299 |
| **Average PS** | **150** | **4.156** | **.8567** |
| SS-1 Interpersonal Skills | 150 | 4.167 | .7456 |
| SS-2 Social Networking Skills | 150 | 4.220 | .8660 |
| SS-3 Cultural Adaptability Skills | 150 | 4.167 | .8779 |
| **Average SS** | **150** | **4.185** | **.8298** |

**H1: There is no significant correlation between different employability skills of professional students.**

To identify the correlation between different employability skills, the results are tabulated in the table-5. The table showcases the results of the correlation among the different employability skills and all the select kill components constitute a positive correlation with each other. The correlation coefficient 0.761 between LPS and CS proves that there is a strong positive relationship. It shows that student's who find Language Proficiency Skills significant also consider Competency-based skills as a significant employability skill. The correlation coefficient .859 between CS and PS is an evidence of a strong positive correlation between Competency-based skills and Personality skills. It means that student's who finds Competency-based skills significant for employability also thinks Personality skills equally significant. The results of the correlation analysis among other employability skills with correlation coefficient as high as 0.675 between LPS and PS,  0.643 between LPS and SS, 0.727 between CS and SS, and 0.759 between PS and SS, depicts a positive correlation among them. These results clearly establish that there exist significant relationships between different employability skills. As shown in the table that value of Pearson's correlation coefficients is significant in every other case. Thus the hypothesis that

'There is no significant correlation between different employability skills of professional students" is rejected.

**Table-5: Correlation Coefficients and Employability Skills**

|       | LPS      | CS       | PS       | SS  |
|-------|----------|----------|----------|-----|
| LPS   | 1        |          |          |     |
| CS    | .761**   | 1        |          |     |
| PS    | .675**   | .859**   | 1        |     |
| SS    | .643**   | .727**   | .759**   | 1   |

N = 150, *p<.05, **p<.001, 2-tailed

**H2: There is no significant correlation between different employability skills and the perception of the contribution of these skills in the overall performance of the professional students.**

The table 6 depicts that the respondents' perception of the contribution of the skills is also positively correlated with these skills and the values of the coefficient are significant i. e. 0.529 with LPS, 0.493 with CS, 0.443 with PS, and 0.467 with SS. Therefore, the hypothesis that 'There is no significant correlation between different employability skills and the perception of the contribution of these skills in the overall performance of the professional students' is also rejected.

**Table-6: Correlation Coefficients of Different Employability Skills and the Perception of the Contribution of These Skills in the Overall Performance**

|       | Perception of the contribution of the skills (Rate- 0 to 100) |
|-------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| LPS   | .529**                                                        |
| CS    | .493**                                                        |
| PS    | .443**                                                        |
| SS    | .467**                                                        |

N = 150, *p<.05, **p<.001, 2-tailed

**H3: There is no significant influence of different employability skills on the perception of the contribution of these skills in the overall performance of the professional students.**

The next step was to analyze the collected data to determine the influence of these skills as independent variables on the dependent factor i. e. the perception of the contribution of these skills on the overall performance.

When regression analysis is conducted to compute the in-depth analysis of the nature of the relationship between each independent variables and the dependent variable, the estimation of F is 16.455 which is significant at 0% level (Table-7).

**Table-7: Regression Model**

|            | Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | F      | Result | R² |
|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|--------|------|
| Regression | 16350.092      | 4   | 4087.523    |        |        |      |
| Residual   | 36019.684      | 145 | 248.412     | 16.455 | ***    | .312 |
| Total      | 52369.776      | 149 |             |        |        |      |

**Different Employability Skills and the Perception of the Contribution of These Skills in the Overall Performance**

| Variable   | b     | SE    | t     | Sig. | Result |
|------------|-------|-------|-------|------|--------|
| (Constant) | 4.715 | 8.999 | .524  |      | NS     |
| LPS        | .330  | 2.953 | 3.040 | .601 | **     |
| CS         | .149  | 4.431 | .965  | .003 | NS     |
| PS         | -.045 | 3.961 | -.309 | .336 | NS     |
| SS         | .181  | 3.066 | 1.632 | .758 | NS     |

a. Dependent Variable: Perception of the contribution of these skills in your overall performance (Rate from 0 to 100)

b. All requested variables entered.

In linear regression, the model specification is that the dependent variable, Y is a linear combination of the parameters e.g. in simple linear regression for modelling four data points there are four independent variables X,

$Y = b_0 + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + b_3X_3 + b_4X_4 + E$

Here Y = Perception of the contribution of these skills in your overall performance

And

$X_1 = LPS$

$X_2 = CS$

$X_3 = PS$

$X_4 = SS$

By taking the calculated values from the above table

Perception of the contribution of these skills in the overall performance (Rate from 0 to 100) = 4.715+ 0.330 (LPS) + 0.149 (CS) + -.045 (PS) + 0.181 (SS) + S.E.

These results establish that all other employability skills except language proficiency skills fail to significantly influence perceived performance, though overall impact is 31%. It implies the significance of language proficiency skills is very high in contributing towards perceived performance of professional students.

**Conclusions**

Employability skills are viewed as special qualities of professional students. These skills can help in determining the specific characteristics of individuals that support them in better performance during employment. The present research aimed at exploring the presence of important employability skills among professional students in Rajasthan India.

The result shows that out of all the employability skills professional students hold only LPS at the highest level. The research identifies that all the studied employability skills are strongly correlated yet the LPS is considered as the most significant skill and highly influencing skill by the select respondents.

## Limitations and Suggestions

One of the limitations of this research is the nature of the sample, by covering only professional students from one Technical University; so forthcoming studies may broaden the focus of research, and include others. Moreover, the study is based on self-reporting method, which leads to concerns regarding presence of biases especially as the students may overstate or even understate their skills and their contribution on their perceived performance. The study is based on few selected skills; more skills may be studied. Another limitation is the study may have generalized the findings so more detailed studies need to be conducted to authenticate these findings, especially cross-national studies may reveal more insight into the relationship between the selected skills and students' perceptions. Future studies may provide more significant understanding for the employability skills.

It is important to refresh the educational curriculum frequently to fulfil the rapidly changing skill needs of the business. Educational training should not only enhance knowledge and prepare students mentally but also make young professionals employable by developing language proficiency, competency-based skills, personal skills, and social skills etc. Further, there should be a lasting and feasible arrangement to prepare our young professionals to raise their abilities and knowledge to achieve occupations in the global market. For an ongoing guaranteed standard supply of skilled manpower, there should be regular contact between industry and academicians, which will contribute in better understanding of required employability skills by the industry.

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