

Prioritising Soft Skills Based on Need- A Study

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Abstract

This paper explores how college students prioritise soft skills in their career progression. The study explains students' perspectives on grading or ordering different soft skills. Questions like – why this skill, which skill first, and in what order are the focus areas? Making students employable with the regular academic curriculum is one of the primary objectives of educational institutions. Soft skills like communication, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and others are taught in an integrated manner with the curriculum, as these skills are vital for job-seeking and business success. Employers want to increase worker output, while educational institutions want students to acquire and use the finest soft skill practices. This study aims to present an authoritative understanding of the relationship between students and their approach toward a particular soft skill in their development and career progression. This study aspires to contribute a comprehensive and authoritative understanding of the intricate relationship between students and their approach toward specific soft skills in the context of their personal development and career progression. By shedding light on the nuanced considerations and preferences of students regarding these skills, the research aims to provide valuable insights that can inform both educational institutions and employers in fostering an environment conducive to the holistic growth of students as they navigate their professional journeys.

Keywords: College students, College students, Employability, Emotional intelligence

INTRODUCTION

Based on academic certifications, knowledge is not enough to face worldly competition. Every organisation today looks forward to recruiting people with a multidimensional approach to their work. Attitude and aptitude go hand in hand. Recruiters now consider soft skills like effective communication, analytical and problem-solving abilities, flexibility, active listening, collaboration, motivational skills, leadership, and emotional intelligence to be essential throughout the recruiting process. As a result, it's critical to find out how serious and urgently stakeholders—students, academic institutions, and business organizations—are about developing soft skills.

This paper reflects the different opinions of the students of other streams during their college education and how they prioritise various soft skills based on their understanding.

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Definition of Soft Skills

Soft skills like empathy, cooperation, effective communication, decision making, taking challenges positively, management of time and resources, teamwork, etc., are some of the basic skills that are helpful for an individual to navigate through a successful career prospective. These skills are universal and have applications in all spheres of a dynamic workplace [1].

Acquiring Soft Skills for Employability

Personal and professional growth go together, and soft skills development plays a crucial role.

When students can prioritise the skills as per their understanding and how these skills will be helpful in their professional development [2]. Acquiring soft skills will certainly improve productivity and satisfaction in the adopted job.

Self-assessment and evaluation help individuals prioritise soft skills based on their needs and requirements about the nature of their chosen job.

Soft skills like communication, team management, teamwork, empathy, problem-solving abilities, critical thinking, conflict resolution, punctuality, etc., are highly recommended for a successful job and self-satisfaction.

A Framework for Better Employability

It is always a zealous attitude of college students to become employable immediately after completing the degree to fulfil their goals. But they face higher competition for sustenance and satisfaction in a particular job environment [3].

Every student and organisation consistently focuses on the overall development of an individual to have assurance in their future job perspectives.

The following diagram shows the employability skills framework for the students to acquire better job prospects Figure 1.

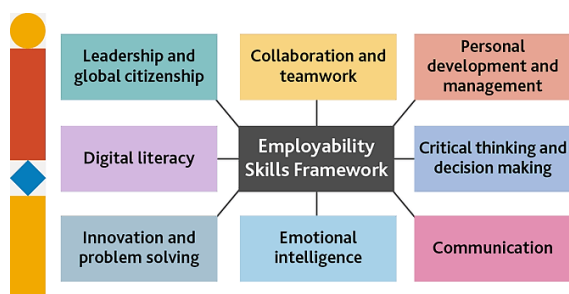


Figure 1. Employability skills framework for the students.

Various Soft Skills to Improve Employability

- i. The many subcategories of soft talents consist of:
- ii. *Leadership skills:* Acquiring leadership skills is necessary for enabling individuals and organisations to deal with problems, reach objectives, or create a positive culture where team members feel valued and empowered. Effective leadership encourages cooperation, drives innovation, and ensures that resources are used to the best possible extent to help achieve lasting success. Leadership skills are vital in every industry and every context [4]. When employing new staff, recruiters search for leadership qualities, which are essential for professional development.. When an individual demonstrates leadership qualities, it signals to potential employers that they can take initiative, make decisions, and navigate through challenges effectively. Leaders are known for influencing and motivating others, a crucial ability in team settings to drive productivity and achieve team goals. Individuals with leadership skills are often more adaptable to change, a highly valued trait in the rapidly evolving modern workplace. Therefore, possessing leadership skills can significantly improve one's chances of employability and provide opportunities for career enhancement.
- iii. *Interpersonal skills:* The capacity to collaborate with others while treating coworkers and team members with decency and empathy; positive and constructive relationships with friends and family. Superior interpersonal skills significantly enhance an individual's employability and productivity in team settings [5]. Employers respect individuals who can effectively communicate, collaborate, and manage conflicts, viewing these skills as significant predictors of

job performance. Solid interpersonal skills foster cooperative and synergistic work environments in a teamwork context. Team members who exhibit respect and empathy can facilitate open communication, strengthen relationships, and promote a positive, collaborative atmosphere. It leads to increased morale, a greater sense of team cohesiveness, and enhanced productivity and team performance.

- iv. *Cooperation and group dynamics*: Effectively negotiating at work and inspiring people to achieve targets and goals. Additionally beneficial to leadership, networking, and dispute resolution are interpersonal skills. In an increasingly interconnected global economy, collaboration and teamwork skills are core competencies employers actively seek. It now involves more than merely doing individual assignments; rather, it involves cooperating to achieve shared objectives. Collaboration fosters creativity and learning, promoting an environment where individuals collectively solve problems, share knowledge, and learn from one another.
Moreover, teamwork skills are vital in a diverse workplace as they facilitate understanding and overcome cultural and language barriers. Employers value teamwork and collaboration because these skills result in higher-quality outcomes that are achieved faster. They contribute to a more flexible, responsive organisation better equipped to adapt to rapid changes in the business environment. Teamwork skills signal an individual's ability to integrate and adapt within a social and professional context, improving overall organisational productivity. As such, job applicants who demonstrate strong collaboration and teamwork skills are often viewed as an asset, likely to contribute positively to the company culture and bottom line.
- v. *Skills for management and personal growth*: This capacity relates to self-awareness on stress management, emotional intelligence, discipline, and accountability. By taking the time to comprehend the opinions and viewpoints of their team members, leaders may foster an environment of trust and inclusiveness. Because team members feel appreciated and understood, it promotes higher levels of employee motivation and engagement. Eventually, it could lead to more collaboration and teamwork.
- vi. *Innovation and Problem-solving*: The ability to respond to emerging situations requiring quick assessment and response. These personality and behavioural traits affect performance and interpersonal interactions at work. Potential employers highly emphasise a job applicant's innovation and problem-solving skills. During a job interview, these skills differentiate candidates by demonstrating their ability to think creatively and devise practical solutions to challenges. Candidates who exhibit these skills are perceived to be proactive, adaptable, and able to guide a team or a project through unforeseen circumstances. In terms of career progression, these skills are invaluable. As employees climb the corporate ladder, the complexity and impact of their problems increase. Those who can innovate and solve problems effectively often find themselves better equipped to seize opportunities, handle crises, and implement change, all of which are critical to advancing their careers.
- vii. *Proficiency in communication*: Effective verbal and nonverbal communication is essential because it affects how one presents their message to an audience and the reaction or results that follow. Effective communication fosters respect from others, improves comprehension of one's point of view, and builds trust with stakeholders and coworkers.
- viii. *Emotional Intelligence*: Understanding other's points of view, reflecting compassion, and displaying empathy are skills dealing with emotional intelligence. For every work, you have to gain the trust and cooperation of another person. People with compassion tend to be more well-liked than those without, and leaders and managers who are successful consistently show compassion. When there is a dispute or conflict, having this ability is essential since it may help to diffuse the tension and lead to more fruitful dialogue.
- ix. *Listening Skills*: Effective managers and leaders are able to better grasp the perspectives of their colleagues and apply this knowledge to build strong working relationships.. The same applies to external business-like situations while dealing with people, say- vendors, customers, etc. Leaders and managers need to be able to focus entirely. It will prevent misconceptions and lead to smarter judgments based on correct facts.

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- x. *Decision-Making Skills:* Decision-making skills significantly bolster the chances of employability and career growth. Quick and effective decision-making is a highly sought-after trait in most professions, particularly those that require leadership or managerial roles. Having the ability to analyse situations, evaluate potential solutions and their implications, and then choose the most effective course of action is invaluable. It shows that an individual can take initiative and resolve issues independently and demonstrates a level of responsibility and maturity that employers value. Moreover, insightful decision-makers often tend to perform better under pressure. They are more likely to take calculated risks that can lead to significant innovations and progress in their roles, thus paving the way for accelerated career advancement. People have to choose their daily schedules for both their personal and professional lives every day. While some judgments are simple, many need to be carefully thought through. Before making a final decision, it is crucial to weigh all the options and their implications. The results have the power to make or break a day, week, month, or year. That's why sound decision-making is a vital quality to possess.
 - xi. *Presentation Skills:* Effectively communicating with a business audience by explaining, enlightening, or teaching them through a presentation is a talent that must be developed over time. An audio-visual, PowerPoint, or audio presentation are examples of standard presenting techniques. Understanding your audience, outlining your goals, and establishing a system for measuring presentation results are all crucial. Careful preparation, organization, word choice, and powerful audiovisuals that perfectly complement the speaker's speech are necessary.
 - xii. *Ability to Speak in Public:* Proficient public speaking abilities are essential for job advancement. Every career advancement level will surely bring with it the chance to speak in front of sizable crowds, whether in a team environment or at a bigger event. Speaking in front of an audience calls for assurance, knowledge, and persuasive abilities, especially when discussing technical subjects. Prominent orators possess the ability to simply and effectively communicate complex ideas, and they can modify their speeches in response to audience input. It makes it a necessary leadership talent.

In addition to the above, Group Dynamics and Team Building, Negotiation Skills, Business Etiquette, Time Management, Cultural Inclusiveness, and Gender Sensitivity are also some of the skills that need consideration.

Advice on Developing Soft Skills

- i. Step outside of your comfort zone and routine by investigating new ideas and experiences.
 - ii. Engage in reading, discussing, and arguing current events with friends and peers to enhance your awareness, self-assurance, and speaking skills.
 - iii. As a leader, make an effort to pay closer attention and comprehend what others are attempting to say. It will support replies that are more logical and well-rounded.
 - iv. Remain receptive to novel concepts, viewpoints, strategies, and behaviors. It will present unanticipated chances for your benefit.
 - v. Before speaking, carefully select your words. Be specific about what you want to say and the kind of response you want from other people. It will put you in a more advantageous position.
 - vi. Before communicating, keep the intended audience in mind. Individual variations should be taken into account, as each person has an own set of beliefs, prejudices, and ideas. When addressing a bigger audience, choose terms that are accepted and appealing to all people. When speaking directly to an individual, consider what words would work best for them.
 - vii. Seek indications from the intended recipient or audience that they have understood.
 - viii. Be transparent when you seek, discuss, and evaluate the recommendations, viewpoints, and counsel of your peers. It will facilitate the quicker acceptance and approval of ideas and proposals.
 - ix. Make sure all participants are aware and organize, prepare, and schedule meetings, reviews, and presentations well in advance. After that, offer to finish it in the allotted time. It is critical to prioritise addressing and resolving conflicts at the earliest.
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Overview of Goals

This essay examines the role that soft skills have in achieving success and professional advancement. In the current labor market, having technical skills by itself does not ensure a successful career. The study examines the literature on soft skills and identifies the most important ones for professional growth in order to demonstrate the association between students and soft skills and job success. It also emphasizes how soft skills and job success are mutually beneficial. The information gathered will be important for people looking for work.

The goal of the study is to offer suggestions on how people and students may use soft skills to thrive in their career and organizational development. The research aims to improve understanding of the importance of soft skills at work and stimulate more studies on this issue based on real facts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Di Gregorio et al. (2019), the growth of digital marketing is changing the marketing approach. In order to compete in the digital age, businesses now need to reevaluate their plans, hire new personnel, and set up new organizational structures. As per Teng, Weili, et al. (2019), university students displayed a significant understanding of the importance of enhancing their soft employability skills to compete in the job market in the future. In an effort to increase employability, higher education institutions are reevaluating the roles that support services, academics, and career services play [6]. In the United Kingdom, non-academic skills are given more importance for employability in the higher education system, according to Tang (2019). In 2019, Vasanthakumari S studied personal qualities, habits, attitudes, and social graces contributing to being a good employee and compatible co-worker. The study identified two types of skills: hard and soft. Soft skills, including interpersonal and personal attributes, are essential for professional growth, intellectual property rights, and effective communication. By enhancing an individual's interactions, job performance, and career prospects, soft skills play a crucial role in one's career. Developing emotional intelligence can improve our productivity, success, and empathy toward people and situations [7,8]. It can also positively impact our interactions with others, ultimately helping them become more productive and successful. (Tripathy 2020).

According to Foster, Wickzer, et al., the goals of the Soft Skills transformation plan for students are:

- i. Ensure attendance 90% of the time.
- ii. Improve problem-solving skills
- iii. Demonstrate understanding of requests with effective responses
- iv. Improve listening skills through group interactions
- v. Learn verbal and non-verbal skills with appropriate language and visual clues
- vi. Adopt a collaborative approach to problem-solving

Summary of Findings

The paper highlights the significance of soft skills in professional development and success and recommends effective methods for individuals and organisations to use soft skills to achieve career growth and success. It emphasises the need for companies to prioritise promoting a soft skills culture and the importance of lifelong learning. Students and job seekers alike will benefit from the study's conclusions. Improving interpersonal, intrapersonal, communication, empathy, listening, public speaking, decision-making, team consultation, and negotiation contributes significantly to individual and collective performance. In addition, qualities like business etiquette, time management, emotional intelligence, cultural inclusiveness, and gender sensitivity make an individual more acceptable within the job requirements. It recommends various methods for improving soft skills, such as stepping outside of one's comfort zone, being open to learning, listening more and speaking less, remaining open-minded to feedback, communicating, consulting and discussing with colleagues, and addressing and resolving conflicts on priority [9,10].

Implications for Future Research

This study provides an overview of the importance of soft skills in achieving professional growth and success. While the research has highlighted a range of methods for improving soft skills, there is still potential for further exploration into different areas, including:

- i. How organisations can use technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual reality (VR) to enhance their employees' soft skills
- ii. Evaluate existing programs, policies, and frameworks that companies implement to develop soft skills
- iii. Explore ways to measure the impact of soft skills on the individual's performance

CONCLUSION

To demonstrate one's approach in being more positive, conducive, and adaptable traits that contribute to a vibrant workplace culture where all individuals maintain a healthy balance between individual and teamwork to progress toward meeting personal and company goals. Therefore, soft skills development and training deserve all stakeholders' attention and investment of time and resources. This study has highlighted all vital focus aspects within the soft skills framework.

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