Identifying Graduate Employability Skills: A Case of IT Graduates in India

– Ashish Kumar Awadhiya*

Assistant Director, Centre for Online Education, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi, India

✉ akawadhiya@ignou.ac.in   iD https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4676-5861

ABSTRACT

Purpose: Empirical evidences on employability reiterate that learners graduating from higher education are do not possess employability skills.This is due to mismatch between desired and available employability skills among the learners. This skill gap is more intense in the graduates of technical and professional programs. Considering this scenario, it becomes prime responsibility of the higher education system to identify the relevant graduate employability skills to enrich their learners with relevant employability skills so as to make them job-ready. This study aims to identify the key employability skills of IT graduates and relevant constructs of these skills.

Research Design/ Methodology: A qualitative study was conducted to identify employability skills required by IT graduates followed developing key constructs of each skills to be demonstrated by the learners. This qualitative research falls under descriptive research by analyzing the current market demand of skills for IT graduates.

Findings: The study identified eight key employability skills for IT graduates followed by the key constructs for these employability skills.The skills and their constructs identified in this research are contemporary in nature and represent the latest trend in the IT industry in India.

Originality/ Value: This study will help the HE institutes to identify programme relevant employability skills and their constructs. This will help them to deploy these skills in the curriculum delivery components so that learners graduating from these programs are employable. This study will also helpful for the IT graduates to develop these skills among them to become job ready.

Paper Type: Case Based Study

KEYWORDS Employability Skills | Employability | Higher Education (HE) | Graduates | Information Technology (IT)

Employability Skills: The current scenario

Employability is the very common term being used in the Higher Education (HE) as this is one of the major aims of this sector. (Saunders & Zuzel, 2010; Stiwne & Alves, 2010; Sumanasiri et al., 2015). However, it has been observed globally that learners coming out from HE institutes are not employable and lack Employability Skills (Rosenberg et al., 2012) and it becomes difficult for the employers to find the job ready fresh. Existing literature on employability reiterate that learners graduating from higher education are do not possess employability skills. Empirical studies also suggest that employers face difficulties in getting the job-ready graduates with required employability skills graduates (Awadhiya, 2020; Misra & Khurana, 2017; Sumanasiri et al., 2015).

Employability skills can be defined as 'the set of personal attributes and generic skills which are required for the fresh graduates to get employed and sustain the job and these skills are required across the sector and industry (Baird & Parayitam, 2019; Mukhopadhyay et al., 2015; Teng et al., 2019). Also known as soft skills, transferable skills, generic skills, essential skills, employability skills(Blom & Saeki, 2011; Wheebox, 2018), they include set of skills such as communication skills, problem solving skills, time management, team work, work planning and prioritization, leadership skills etc. (Blom & Saeki, 2011; Calonge & Shah, 2016; Misra & Khurana, 2017)) and while recruiting the fresh graduates', employers give equal importance to these employability skills. However, there is a mismatch between the desired employability skills among the learners and that expected by the employers(Awadhiya, 2020; Miglani et al., 2018). Employers question the academic curriculum and delivery mechanism for this employability skill gap and mention that higher education system is supply dominated rather than demand driven. Higher education system is unanimously blamed for this gap and it is expected that the HE institutes need to work rigorously to bridge this mismatch. They need to know the programme specific employability skill and develop these skills among their graduates so as to bridge this mismatch.

This skill gap is more intense in the graduates of technical and professional programs. The mismatch of the skills between industry requirement and learners is deeper among Information Technology (IT) Professionals(Misra & Khurana, 2017; Wheebox, 2018, 2020). The rationale behind this intense mismatch is the dynamic nature of IT field and therefore IT Professionals needs to get constantly updated with upcoming technologies(Ahmed et al., 2012; *Freshersworld.Com*, 2019; *Monster India*, 2019; *Naukri.Com*, 2019; Mcmurtrey et al., 2008; Misra & Khurana, 2017). Indian IT industry is growing exponentially and becoming global choice for IT jobs with large number of IT graduates coming out from HE education system.

Therefore, it becomes a prime responsibility of these HE institutes to identify key employability skills required by the IT programmes and mechanisms to deliver these skills to their graduates.

A qualitative study was conducted to identify employability skills required by IT graduates. This study also developed key constructs to be demonstrated by the IT graduates for each employability skills. This study will help HE institutes to incorporate the identified employability skills in their programme curriculum, thereby supplying the job ready IT professionals to the industry and bridging the skill gap. This study will also help the HEpractitioners to adopt this process to identify programme relevant employability skills for different graduate programmes and deploy these skills in the various curriculum delivery components so that learners graduating from these programs are employable.

Methodology

This study is a qualitative study and involve identification of key employability skills for IT graduates and developing key constructs to be demonstrated by the IT graduates for each employability skills. This qualitative research falls under descriptive research by analyzing the current market demand of skills for IT graduates.

First the extensive literature review was done to identify most common job profiles of the fresh IT graduates and employability skills required to perform these jobs. Considering that the job markets and skills are driven by the market demand and economy, this study also took account of this fact. Therefore, the study also explored various Indian websites meant for jobs in India specifically for fresh IT graduates. These websites also provided data related to what are the jobs available for fresh IT graduates and relevant employability skills related to these profiles. After identification of the relevant employability skills, key constructs to be demonstrated by the graduates were listed. These constructs were also scrutinized from various job sites where the employers have listed the key attributes to be demonstrated by the candidates.

IT Graduates: Job Profiles and Relevant Employability Skills

There are various job profiles available for IT professionals however; at entry level IT graduates are offered with initial level jobs profiles. Following are some most frequently occurring job profiles for fresh IT graduates.

a. Programmer:

Programmer is the most common and most obvious job profile for IT graduates. This job profile is known with various designations such as Application Developer,

Developer, System Analyst, System Architect etc. The job involves knowledge of various languages like C, C++, Java, COBOL, etc.

The main role of programmer is to write the code/develop programs. These codes/programs may be related to any area such as banking, Manufacturing, Marketing, e-commerce.The work of programming/coding applies all the industry and involves programmers from freshers to highly experienced one depending upon the level of development. Basically, programmers need to design redesign, assemble, upgrade and enhance the codes for various applications. Since there is continuous upgradation in technologies and new programming languages, the programmers need to keep on upgrading their Knowledge, Problem Solving and, Critical Thinking is essential for the programmers since they have to develop complex codes, debug the application.

There are many check points and time lines in the software life cycle therefore the programmers need to be self-organized. Programming work is completely interdependent and the programmer has to work in collaboration with other programmers as well as other stakeholders therefore, teamwork is an indispensable skill needed for the programmers. As software service providers, programmers have too many times directly work with client, to understand their requirements and customize their services as per the requirements of the client. This chunk of task involves better communication skills, professionalism, and better presentation skills.

b. Network Engineers:

Network Engineers are basically responsible for planning and designing, implementing maintaining and managing the computer network in any organization.

This job profile is required across all domain of industry or mid to large size of the organization.

Prime duties of Network engineer include maintenance of computer network of the system which may be Local Area Network (LAN)/ Wide Area Network (WAN). They are in other words can be called as Security Officers of the Computer Network.

Key responsibilities include management of computer networks, providing alternatives or backup in case of network problem, solving network failure and security problems.

The Network Engineers should be able to solve various problems identify rout cause of the problem and reaching to the best solutions. They also need to think critically and identify newer ways to prevent their network from various security threats. They need to be proactive to analyze future problems and plan in advance. They also need to update themselves from global trends in the network & security areas.They should have excellent communication skills to

remain their services to different types and different level of the users which may be your own organization, external client, venders or suppliers.The job profile requires in depth understanding of your client's business requirements, their security issues, business threats, their priorities. Planning and organization skill, business ethics, decision making skills are very much needed for their task.

c. IT Technical Support

IT Technical support personals are involved in maintenance of Computer system, application, network. Since computers, network, applications are key components of any organization, IT technical support officers becomes vital support and mechanism for sustainable operations of the organization.

The organization deploy various line of IT technical support staff as per their size and the technicalities involved in their functioning. These technical support officers diagnose, solve and prevent the system problems either directly on the system and sometimes via telephonically or through Web access.

Also known as:

- Application Support Specialist

- Help Desk Operator

- Maintenance Operator

- Technician

Installing and configuring new systems, application maintenance of the systems, other related equipment, follow the application procedure and guidelines.Setting up various levels of user access and user rights, maintaining the query resolution logs and resolving the problems within time frame are additional responsibilities of the technical officers.The key skills required for IT technical staff are problem solving skills, communication skills, critical thinking in innovative thinking.

They also require professional and ethical skills required to solve critical business problems.

Time management and self-management flexibility are also required for a responsible IT technical staff. Working in team and stabilizing good report with the client also required for IT technical staff.

The IT technical staff mostly works under tremendous pressure and meet the timeliness in order to put the system in track.Very good listening skills and strong customer centric behaviour is also required for IT technical staff. IT technical staff has to frequently interact with the client/staff of various cultures& non-technical staff, either face to face or via telephonically. They need to have very strong

communication skills to understand the problems faced by their clients and resolve their query. They need to work in team and be professional in their work and follow ethical business practices.

d. IT Security Officer

The IT security officer basically responsible for security of the IT systems, network, database and other IT infrastructure, for external and internal threats like viruses, malware, fishing, hacking etc. these people basically install Firewall, Antivirus, and other security features to the IT infrastructure of the organization depending upon the requirement.Companies like banking defence, etc. may require more security features like, user authentication, biometric authentic payment security etc.

Role of IT security officer is very complex and require multiple skills like problem solving, critical thinking skills, proactive planning, customer centric approach, time bound action plan. This field involve lot of business threats to the organization, therefore the IT security officers needs to be more patient emotionally stable, systematic. They need to follow the guidelines and procedures to solve critical security threats. Team work, planning, communication skills, professional and ethical practices are key skills need to perform the job of IT security.

e. IT Sales

IT sales persons are mainly responsible for selling the IT products/services to the client. They are also responsible to demonstrate the features & qualities of the IT products/ services to the client, sometimes train the client on these product and services.

The first and foremost skill required for IT sales is the communication skills so that they can attract the client, explain about the product/ services. IT sales person also needs to work in collaboration (Teamwork) with the backend product/ service development team to understand key features of the product/ services and explain these features to the client. Therefore, team work is also an essential skill required for the IT sales officer. In the competitive age the job of the IT sales person is very challenging since there are continuous upgrades in the IT products/services.

Since, IT field is very dynamic and many competitors exist in the market. Therefore, IT sales person needs to explain critical comparison of his/her product/services to the client in terms of features, pricing, after sales support, security, configuration. This requires critical thinking, ability, analytical thinking, continuous learning about competitive product/ services, market price and demand.

They need to prepare themselves to answer and resolve the queries from the various level of officials from the client side.They need to project themselves as well-groomed professionals with proper product/ service knowledge, they need to be well planned, prepared and organized to impress and convince the client.They should behave professionally and demonstrate ethical conduct to the client and towards their organization.

f. Database Manager

This is very now a days most frequently job profile with prime responsibility of a managing the database. Although looks very simply, the role the database manager is to manage the data in such a way that it is safe and instantly retrieved in desired format to take decisions. This requires understanding various standards and guidelines. The database manager also needs to update the database, software and hardware at regular interval and taking the back-up of the database at defined period. They are also responsible to prepare and implement the disaster recovery plan for the database. Problem solving skills, team work, continuous learning and communication is key employability required to perform the activities of database professional.
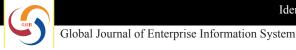
g. Website Developer

The core profile of a website developer includes designing and developing the webpage and user interphase as per the need of the customer. The job also include maintenance and updation of the web page followed by software documentation. Most of the organizations maintain their website, therefore demand of the website developers is very high. The web developer needs to be customer centric and professional in their approach. They need to be creative and innovative and think systematically while designing and developing the webpages and user interphases. They need to work in team and needs effective communication skills to execute the website development and maintenance activities. They also need to have problem solving skills to handle the downtime and security related issues. Since they interact with the client very frequently and have access to their interphase the website developers need to have professional and ethical behavior and self-management skills.

(*Freshersworld.Com*, 2019; *Monster India*, 2019; *Naukri.Com*, 2019; Gokuladas, 2011; Keller et al., 2011; Mukhopadhyay et al., 2015; Pang et al., 2019; Rosenberg et al., 2012; Scott et al., 2019)

Accordingly, the key employability skills required by IT graduates in Indian context are as follows

1. Communication Skills
2. Problem solving Skills
3. Decision Making Skills
4. Critical Thinking and Innovative Skills
5. Team Work
6. Professionalism and Ethical Behavior
7. Self-Management
8. Planning and Managing Skills

As per the nature of various job profiles discussed above the constructs of each skills are listed below

Communication Skills

To demonstrate the communication skill the IT graduate should be able to

i. express my ideas/view point clearly.

ii. summarize information to the level of the user/ listener.

iii. feel comfortable giving my inputs during discussion

iv. give due consideration to views and opinions of other people.

v. listen to the people to understand what they are trying to say.

vi. find it easy to read, write and speak in English.

vii. find it easy to draft e-mails applications, summary, reports in English

viii. avoid difficult and technical words while presenting my views.

ix. easily express thoughts into precise words

x. have enough vocabulary to communicate/ express views

Problem solving Skills

To demonstrate the problem-solving skill the IT graduate should be able to

i. analyse the problem to find possible solutions.

ii. take views of others on the possible solutions of the problem.

iii. anticipate the possible problems and plan solutions for them.

iv. keep an alternative plan while solving the problem.

v. visualize the problems through various angles.

vi. gather different aspects of problems through various sources.

vii. resolve the communication gap to resolve the problem

viii. logically sequence backward and forward information of any problem.

ix. identify actual solutions of the problem

x. select the solution in such a way that problem does not reoccur

Decision Making Skills

To demonstrate the problem-solving skill the IT graduate should be able to

i. take decisions easily.

ii. evaluate decisions before selecting them.

iii. believe in collective decision making

iv. take decisions on the basis of facts.

v. convey dis-agreements while taking decisions.

vi. make full efforts towards my commitments.

vii. understand the consequences my decisions.

viii. take opinions from experienced people while taking any decision

ix. consider all the available options while taking any decision

x. interpret written information, graphs and data to make decisions

Critical Thinking and Innovative Skills

To demonstrate the Critical Thinking and Innovative Skills the IT graduate should be able to

i. analyse and evaluate data and information to reach on conclusions.

ii. generate new and effective ways of doing a task.

iii. decode complex information and draw conclusions from it.

iv. visualize the future impact and complexities of any event.

v. form assumptions based on the available information.

vi. realistic goals and plan accordingly.

vii. quickly respond to the changing conditions

viii. accept new ideas

ix. see the future opportunities in problematic situations

Team Work

To demonstrate the Team work skill the IT graduate should be able to

i. work with people of different backgrounds.

ii. share information with my team.

iii. motivate and appreciate my fellow-workers

iv. continue to work with the group

v. give positive feedback to my team members about their work.

vi. give due respect to the cultures and opinions of fellow colleagues.

vii. work towards achieving common goal.

viii. give due importance to the feelings and emotions of co-workers.

ix. actively contribute in group activities.

x. take need-based responsibilities in the team

Professionalism and Ethical Behavior

To demonstrate the Professionalism and Ethical Behaviorthe IT graduate should be able to

i. work in order to achieve organizational goal.

ii. Understand the customer requirements.

iii. give due importance to the services quality

iv. encourage honesty in work place.

v. fulfill the commitments

vi. behave responsibly towards community and environment.

vii. Give credit due credit to others work.

viii. show respectful behavior for colleagues and clients.

ix. Be flexible with respect to roles and responsibilities.

x. follow rules and regulations of the organization.

Self-Management

To demonstrate the Self-Management skills the IT graduate should be able to

i.   Be aware of his/her activities and words and their consequences.

ii. manage emotions in different situations.

iii. keep trust on him/her self-worth and maintain positive mind set.

iv. keep him/her-self updated towards newer developments in my area.

v.   maintain good physical and mental health.

vi. make best use of skill development and training opportunities.

vii. keep him/her-self updated with global business practices

viii. keep him/her-self well-groomed and presentable.

ix. accept the feedback to improve him/her-self.

x.   be aware of him/her strengths and weaknesses.

Planning and Management Skills

To demonstrate the Planning and Management Skills the IT graduate should be able to

i.   prioritize tasks as per their importance

ii. plan work as per the timeline

iii. make best use of the available resources

iv. analyse required time and efforts to execute any task

v.   identify tools and resources to carry out a task

vi. arrange information in usable and retrievable form

vii. differentiate between important and unimportant work

viii. maintain punctuality and work as per schedule.

ix. work in systematic and process-oriented environment.

x.   follow processes and guidelines.

• (*Freshersworld.Com*, 2019; *Monster India*, 2019; *Naukri. Com*, 2019; Gokuladas, 2011; Keller et al., 2011; Mukhopadhyay et al., 2015; Pang et al., 2019; Rosenberg et al., 2012; Scott et al., 2019; Singh & Singh, 2017; Wheebox, 2016, 2017, 2018)

Results and Discussion

On the basis of job profile analysis, this study identifiedeight employability skills for IT graduates. These skills include Communication, Problem solving, Decision Making, Critical Thinking and Innovative Skills, Team Work, Professionalism and Ethical Behaviour, Self-Management followed by Planning and Managing Skills. Although for entry level graduates, magnitude of skills needed is very less and this can increase according to the experience and exposure. Accordingly constructs for each employability skill have been mentioned in behavioural terms and these constructs should be validated and assessed using suitable evaluation methods.

Programme wise employability skills,after due identification can be incorporated in the programme curriculum and delivered through different components adopting the process adopted in this study. Importance level of these skills also needs to be assessed through employers in Indian context so that learners get appropriate content load for each skill. This study will also helpful for the IT graduates to develop these skills among them to become job ready.

Conclusion and Recommendation

There is immediate need to bridge the employability skill gap among the IT graduates considering the significant demand of job ready IT graduates in India(Noll & Wilkins, 2002). HE institutions need to instill employability skills using innovative methods, so that their graduatesare job ready and employable. Curriculum designers and developers of HE system may consider identifying programme relevant employability skills by analyzing the industry requirements and integrate these skills in the curriculum using systematic approach(Noll & Wilkins, 2002). There is a need for research to identify the pedagogy and instruction to deliver these skills through programme curriculum components and to ascertain that these components are producing desirable results.

Type of employability skills and their relative importance varies in relation to time, economic conditions and requirements of the industry. HE institutes needs to make continuous efforts to address these changes and keep them up to date so that they inculcate contemporary skills among their graduate and the same applies to the graduates also. At the same time industry also need to communicate their requirement to the academia. Better industry academia collaboration is the key to address the employability skills gaps and it can be improved by interventions from policy makers. There is a need for continuous research in the area of employability skill, which is still in its early phase in Indian context and attracts immediate attention.

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Annexure 1

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Reviewers Comment

Reviewer's Comment 1: There is an actual need to address the gap between the existing and desired employability skills in IT sector graduates. Thus, to address this problem the study offers the solution for that by identifying the relevant employability skills with their key constructs for the IT graduates.

Reviewer's Comment 2: The paper is over all presented in a very lucid and structured manner. A good number of supportive existing literature is provided in the study. Overall the paper offers a strong basis for further study in the area but the findings can't be generalized due to the lack of the empirical data.

Reviewer's Comment 3: This findings of the study will be of great help for the IT graduates to develop the identified job ready skills among them as desired by the employers.The study further provides a scope to conduct a similar study either in some other area or in the same area with some quantitative analysis of primary data.

Conflict of Interest: Author of a Paper had no conflict neither financially nor academically.

Editorial Excerpt

The article has 05% of plagiarism which is the accepted percentage as per the norms and standards of the journal for the publication. As per the editorial board's observations and blind reviewers' remarks the paper had some minor revisions which were communicated on a timely basis to the author (Ashish) and accordingly all the corrections had been incorporated as and when directed and required to do so. The comments related to this manuscript are noticeably related to the theme "**Identifying Employability Skills of IT Graduates**" both subject-wise and research-wise. Due to the lack of employability skills in the HE institutions the learners are not found job ready for the employers this gap is highest in the IT sector. Keeping this in mind the study to identify employability skills required by IT graduates and thus offer key constructs to be demonstrated for each employability skills. Overall, the paper promises to provide a strong base for the further studies in the area. After comprehensive reviews and editorial board's remarks the manuscript has been categorised and decided to publish under "**Case Based Study**'' category.

Acknowledgement

The acknowledgment section is an essential part of all academic research papers. It provides appropriate recognition to all contributors for their hard work and effort taken while writing a paper. The data presented and analyzed in this paper by (Ashish) were collected first handily and wherever it has been taken the proper acknowledgment and endorsement depicts. The author is highly indebted to others who had facilitated in accomplishing the research. Last but not least endorse all reviewers and editors of GJEIS in publishing in a present issue.

I would like to convey my sincere regards to Prof. Madhu Parhar, Prof. STRIDE, IGNOU (Presently Director, CEMCA, New Delhi) for her guidance during the conduct of this research.

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