



The Role Of Soft Skills In Enhancing Employability Of Commerce Graduates: Student Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Employability has become one of the most critical concerns for students after the completion of their graduation, especially in a competitive and constantly evolving job market. Traditionally, employers placed significant emphasis on technical skills when recruiting candidates. However, the current employment landscape has shifted, with recruiters increasingly valuing soft skills alongside technical expertise. Recognizing this change, the researcher reviewed a wide range of literature to identify the soft skills that are most essential for enhancing employability. Among the most frequently mentioned were communication skills, teamwork, problem-solving, leadership, time management, emotional intelligence, and adaptability. Based on these findings, a survey was conducted to assess the role of soft skills in improving employability prospects among commerce graduates in rural areas. The study aimed to understand graduates' awareness of soft skills, their confidence in using these skills, and the challenges they face in developing them. A total of 150 commerce graduates participated in the survey, providing valuable insights into their perspectives and experiences. The survey results highlighted that while most participants recognized the importance of soft skills, many lacked confidence in their proficiency. Several respondents indicated that limited exposure, lack of institutional support, and inadequate training opportunities were significant barriers to skill development. Moreover, many participants found it difficult to access platforms or programs that would help them cultivate these essential skills. The study also sought suggestions on how these skills could be effectively improved. Respondents emphasized the need for educational institutions to incorporate soft skills training into the curriculum, conduct regular workshops and seminars, and provide practical exposure through internships and group activities. The findings suggest that with appropriate support and focused efforts from institutions, commerce graduates—particularly in rural regions—can significantly enhance their employability by developing strong soft skills alongside their academic qualifications.

Keywords: Employability, Soft skills, Educational Institutions, Commerce Graduates, Skill Development

INTRODUCTION

Possessing a graduation degree is no longer sufficient for securing and enhancing employment in the highly competitive market of the day. Employers expect the graduates to demonstrate a combination of both technical and soft skills. The soft skills which includes communication, teamwork, emotional intelligence, critical thinking and adaptability play a major role in securing employment to the graduates. These skills help the individuals to perform better and efficiently at the workplaces. The commerce graduates seeking employment in their core areas like the accounting, finance, management and entrepreneurship, are now supposed to have soft skills inclusive of client interaction, negotiation, data analysis and strategic thinking. Many of the commerce graduates enter the job market with limited pursuance of soft skills leading to difficulty in sustaining in the employment market.

Some of the key challenges faced by the commerce graduates includes:

- Inability to communicate their ideas and decisions clearly
- Lack of leadership qualities resulting in not taking initiatives to solve the organizational problems
- Difficulty in adapting to work environment and therefore finding it difficult to work in a team
- Inability to adapt new technologies and market trends.

To address these issues, the educational system needs to integrate soft skills in the curriculum to prepare students for both technical and non-technical skills.

IMPORTANCE OF SOFT SKILLS IN EMPLOYABILITY

India's Graduate Skill Index 2023 published by Mercer | Mettl identifies AI transforming the job roles offered to the graduates at the industries.

- The report identifies 45% Indian graduates as deemed to be ready for the job market I 2023.
- The employability rate in 45% in Tier 1 colleges, 49% in Tier 2 colleges and 46% in Tier 3 colleges, indicating the need for institutional efforts to align the curricula in lines with the industry requirements.

Soft skills have been essential in today's competitive job market. Soft skills are basically interpersonal and behavioural traits which determine how an individual effectively interacts with people and adapts to the environment and the situations. These skills are complimentary to the technical skills because a person may be competent in her/his technical area but if she/he cannot clearly communicate or collaborate with people, then there is a possibility of adverse impact on her/his productivity. Every employer these days looks for prospective employee who has both technical and soft skills for better productivity at the workplace.

• **Enhancing Job Readiness:** Soft skills ridge the gap between industry and academia. Employers prioritize candidates who can communicate effectively, solve problems proactively and collaborate with teams. It can be seen over time that the HR Managers emphasizing on soft skills over the technical skills for the prospective candidates.

• **Improving Workplace Productivity and Career Growth:** Employees who possess strong soft skills along with technical skills, contribute positively to the workplace leading to higher productivity and career advancement opportunities.

• **3. Strengthening Business and Client Relationships:** Maintaining strong client relationship is essential for certain business organization. Possession of soft skills such as emotional intelligence, negotiating skills, persuasion and problem solving plays a vital role in such organization to build trust among the clients.

• **4. Increasing Adaptability in a Changing Job Market:** Employers prioritize graduates with skills such as adaptability, self-motivation and life long learning attitudes, to embrace new challenges in today's world of rapid technological advancements, automation and Artificial Intelligence (AI).

• **Boosting Confidence in Job Interviews and Career Advancement:** Presenting themselves confidently, exhibiting positive attitude during the job interview puts them in an advantageous position, thus boosting the confidence of the candidates and advancement in their careers over a period.

• **Contributing to Entrepreneurial Success:** Commerce graduates who aspire to become entrepreneurs, skills such as leadership, decision-making, communication skill, problem solving, negotiating, networking and decision-making plays a crucial role in the success of their enterprise.

Analysing all these, it can be said that technical knowledge alone is insufficient for successful career. Soft skills play a pivotal role in their employability and ensuring job security of a graduate.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The contemporary job market underscores the significance of soft skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence, in enhancing the employability of graduates. Employers increasingly prioritize these competencies alongside technical expertise, recognizing their role in effective workplace performance and career progression.

• Parihar et al. (2024) explore the role of soft skills in enhancing the employability of technical graduates. They conclude that a combination of technical knowledge and soft skills significantly improves employment prospects and contributes to long-term professional success.

• A semi-systematic literature review by Rahmat et al. (2023) analyzed 25 studies over three decades to identify essential employability skills sought by employers. The study highlighted that problem-solving, communication, teamwork, adaptability, and a willingness to learn are among the most valued skills.

• Elmoutanna and Motii (2022) highlight that 21st-century employers seek candidates proficient in both hard and soft skills. They emphasize that integrating soft skills development into university curricula through innovative teaching approaches is essential for preparing graduates to meet the demands of a competitive job market.

• Pandey, Shukla, and Singh (2022) discuss the influence of soft skills training on the employability of engineering and management graduates. They argue that soft skills are crucial for job readiness and career

advancement and recommend incorporating soft skills training into higher education to better prepare students for the workforce.

- A systematic review by Fernández-Sánchez et al. (2022) identifies the transversal competencies most valued by employers in university graduates. Their findings provide insights into aligning educational outcomes with labor market needs, emphasizing the importance of soft skills in various professional contexts.
- Afroze et al. (2019) examine the employability of engineering graduates in Bangladesh, revealing that despite technical proficiency, a lack of soft skills presents a significant barrier to employment. They advocate for strategies like self-training, institutional training, and participation in social programs to enhance these competencies.
- Mishra and Parihar (2013) focus on the technical education sector, noting that while technical graduates often possess strong technical abilities, they may lack essential soft skills such as communication and presentation skills. This deficiency can hinder their employability, suggesting a need for educational institutions to place greater emphasis on soft skills training.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To understand how commerce students perceive the importance of soft skills in getting a job.
2. To identify the key soft skills that students believe are essential for employment.
3. To assess students' confidence in their own soft skills.
4. To explore the challenges, students face in developing soft skills.
5. To suggest ways universities can help students improve their skills.

METHODOLOGY

This study includes both qualitative and quantitative approach to provide comprehensive understanding of the role of soft skills in enhancing the employability of Commerce graduates. The primary data for the study is collected through a structured questionnaire distributed among the commerce students of the rural areas. and the secondary data is collected from various relevant research articles and research papers, journals and reports from government.

A simple random sampling method was used to collect responses from commerce students, who are residing in Karnataka. The students selected are all from the rural areas. The sample size is 150 students (includes students pursuing B.Com as well as B.Com passed-out students). SPSS is used to analyse the quantitative data received from the respondents.

HYPOTHESES

- H₀₁: Commerce students do not perceive soft skills as important for employability.
 H₁₁: Commerce students perceive soft skills as important for employability.
 H₀₂: Students do not have a clear understanding of the key soft skills required for employment.
 H₁₂: Students have a clear understanding of the key soft skills required for employment.
 H₀₃: Commerce students are not confident in their own skills.
 H₁₃: Commerce students are confident in their own skills.
 H₀₄: Students do not face significant challenges in developing soft skills.
 H₁₄: Students face significant challenges in developing soft skills.
 H₀₅: Universities do not play a significant role in helping students improve soft skills.
 H₁₅: Universities do not play a significant role in helping students improve soft skills.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

H₀₁: Commerce students do not perceive soft skills as important for employability.

H₁₁: Commerce students perceive soft skills as important for employability.

One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Commerce students perceive soft skills as important for employability	150	4.32	.627	.051

One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 0					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Commerce students perceive soft skills as important for employability	84.338	149	.000	4.320	4.22	4.42

A one-sample t-test was conducted to determine whether the mean response to the statement "Commerce students perceive soft skills as important for employability" is significantly different from the test value of 0. The results indicate that the mean score ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 0.627$) is significantly greater than 0, $t(149) = 84.338$, $p < .001$. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference ranges from 4.22 to 4.42, suggesting a high level of agreement among respondents. This finding is statistically significant at the 0.05 level, indicating that participants strongly agree that they actively work on improving their soft skills to enhance their employability. In other words, null hypothesis is rejected and alternative hypothesis is accepted.

H₀₂: Students do not have a clear understanding of the key soft skills required for employment.

H₁₂: Students have a clear understanding of the key soft skills required for employment.

One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Students have a clear understanding of the key soft skills required for employment	150	28.27	3.368	.275

One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 0					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Students have a clear understanding of the key soft skills required for employment	102.825	149	.000	28.273	27.73	28.82

A one-sample t-test was conducted to determine whether the mean response to the statement "Students have a clear understanding of the key soft skills required for employment" is significantly different from the test value of 0. The results indicate that the mean score ($M = 28.27$, $SD = 3.368$) is significantly greater than 0, $t(149) = 102.825$, $p < .001$. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference ranges from 27.73 to 28.82, suggesting a high level of agreement among respondents. This finding is statistically significant at the 0.05 level, indicating that participants strongly agree that they have a clear understanding of the key soft skills required for employment. In other words, null hypothesis is rejected and alternative hypothesis is accepted.

H₀₃: Commerce students are not confident in their own skills.

H₁₃: Commerce students are confident in their own skills.

One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Commerce students are confident in their own skills	150	28.67	4.275	.349

One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 0					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Commerce students are confident in their own skills	82.147	149	.000	28.673	27.98	29.36

A one-sample t-test was conducted to determine whether the mean response to the statement "Commerce students are confident in their own skills" is significantly different from the test value of 0. The results indicate that the mean score ($M = 28.67$, $SD = 4.275$) is significantly greater than 0, $t(149) = 82.147$, $p < .001$. The 95%

confidence interval for the mean difference ranges from 27.98 to 29.36, suggesting a high level of agreement among respondents. This finding is statistically significant at the 0.05 level, indicating that participants strongly agree that they have a strong confidence in their soft skills. In other words, null hypothesis is rejected and alternative hypothesis is accepted.

H₀₄: Students do not face significant challenges in developing soft skills.

H₁₄: Students face significant challenges in developing soft skills.

One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Students face significant challenges in developing soft skills	150	24.78	6.019	.491

One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 0					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Students face significant challenges in developing soft skills	50.424	149	.000	24.780	23.81	25.75

A one-sample t-test was conducted to determine whether the mean response to the statement "Students face significant challenges in developing soft skills" is significantly different from the test value of 0. The results indicate that the mean score ($M = 24.78$, $SD = 6.019$) is significantly greater than 0, $t(149) = 50.424$, $p < .001$. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference ranges from 23.81 to 25.75, suggesting a high level of agreement among respondents. This finding is statistically significant at the 0.05 level, indicating that participants strongly agree that they face significant challenges in developing soft skills. In other words, null hypothesis is rejected and alternative hypothesis is accepted.

H₀₅: Universities do not play a significant role in helping students improve soft skills.

H₁₅: Universities do play a significant role in helping students improve soft skills.

One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Universities do play a significant role in helping students improve soft skills	150	20.96	2.506	.205

One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 0					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Universities do play a significant role in helping students improve soft skills	102.435	149	.000	20.960	20.56	21.36

A one-sample t-test was conducted to determine whether the mean response to the statement "Universities do play a significant role in helping students improve soft skills" is significantly different from the test value of 0. The results indicate that the mean score ($M = 20.96$, $SD = 2.506$) is significantly greater than 0, $t(149) = 102.435$, $p < .001$. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference ranges from 20.56 to 21.36, suggesting a high level of agreement among respondents. This finding is statistically significant at the 0.05 level, indicating that participants strongly agree that universities do play a significant role in helping students improve soft skills. In other words, null hypothesis is rejected and alternative hypothesis is accepted.

ANOVA – AGE with Statements

H₀₆: The Perception of Commerce Students on Soft Skills requirement for Employability do not vary across Age.

H₁₆: The Perception of Commerce Students on Soft Skills requirement for Employability do vary across Age.

Test of Homogeneity of Variances

	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Commerce students perceive soft skills as important for employability	.185	3	146	.906
Students have a clear understanding of the key soft skills required for employment	1.841	3	146	.142
Commerce students are confident in their own skills	3.867	3	146	.011
Students face significant challenges in developing soft skills	.513	3	146	.674
Universities do play a significant role in helping students improve soft skills	.614	3	146	.607

Levene's Test was conducted to assess the assumption of homogeneity of variances for the ANOVA analyses. The results showed that the assumption was met for most variables, as their significance values were greater than 0.05: the importance of soft skills for employability ($p = .906$), understanding of key soft skills ($p = .142$), challenges in developing soft skills ($p = .674$), and the role of universities in improving soft skills ($p = .607$). However, the test indicated a violation of the homogeneity assumption for the variable measuring students' confidence in their own skills ($p = .011$).

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Commerce students perceive soft skills as important for employability	Between Groups	3.334	3	1.111	2.934	.035
	Within Groups	55.306	146	.379		
	Total	58.640	149			
Students have a clear understanding of the key soft skills required for employment	Between Groups	137.196	3	45.732	4.300	.006
	Within Groups	1552.597	146	10.634		
	Total	1689.793	149			
Commerce students are confident in their own skills	Between Groups	172.627	3	57.542	3.294	.022
	Within Groups	2550.366	146	17.468		
	Total	2722.993	149			
Students face significant challenges in developing soft skills	Between Groups	273.518	3	91.173	2.598	.055
	Within Groups	5124.222	146	35.097		
	Total	5397.740	149			
Universities do play a significant role in helping students improve soft skills	Between Groups	69.985	3	23.328	3.934	.010
	Within Groups	865.775	146	5.930		
	Total	935.760	149			

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine whether perceptions related to soft skills and employability differed significantly across student groups based on the factor Age. The results revealed statistically significant differences in students' perceptions regarding the importance of soft skills for employability ($F(3, 146) = 2.934$, $p = .035$), understanding of key soft skills required for employment ($F(3, 146) = 4.300$, $p = .006$), confidence in their own soft skills ($F(3, 146) = 3.294$, $p = .022$), and the perceived role of universities in supporting soft skill development ($F(3, 146) = 3.934$, $p = .010$). These findings suggest that different groups of students based on their age vary in how they value, understand, and feel supported in developing soft skills. Although the differences in perceived challenges in developing soft skills were not statistically significant ($F(3, 146) = 2.598$, $p = .055$), the result approached significance and may indicate emerging trends worth further exploration. Overall, the results underscore the importance of tailoring soft skill development initiatives to address group-

specific needs and perceptions within the student population. In other words, Perception of Commerce Students on Soft Skills requirement for Employability do vary across Age for 4 statements except 1.

ANOVA – GENDER with Statements

H₀₆: The Perception of Commerce Students on Soft Skills requirement for Employability do not vary across Gender.

H₁₆: The Perception of Commerce Students on Soft Skills requirement for Employability do vary across Gender.

Test of Homogeneity of Variances

	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Commerce students perceive soft skills as important for employability	.078	1	148	.781
Students have a clear understanding of the key soft skills required for employment	4.413	1	148	.037
Commerce students are confident in their own skills	.016	1	148	.900
Students face significant challenges in developing soft skills	.002	1	148	.968
Universities do play a significant role in helping students improve soft skills	.038	1	148	.845

Levene's Test was conducted to assess the assumption of homogeneity of variances across groups for five key soft skills constructs. The results indicated that the assumption was met for most variables, with p-values well above the .05 threshold: importance of soft skills ($p = .781$), confidence in soft skills ($p = .900$), challenges in developing soft skills ($p = .968$), and the role of universities in soft skill development ($p = .845$). However, a significant violation of the homogeneity assumption was observed for the construct "students have a clear understanding of the key soft skills required for employment" ($p = .037$).

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Commerce students perceive soft skills as important for employability	Between Groups	.052	1	.052	.131	.718
	Within Groups	58.588	148	.396		
	Total	58.640	149			
Students have a clear understanding of the key soft skills required for employment	Between Groups	93.367	1	93.367	8.656	.004
	Within Groups	1596.427	148	10.787		
	Total	1689.793	149			
Commerce students are confident in their own skills	Between Groups	59.255	1	59.255	3.292	.072
	Within Groups	2663.739	148	17.998		
	Total	2722.993	149			
Students face significant challenges in developing soft skills	Between Groups	159.274	1	159.274	4.500	.036
	Within Groups	5238.466	148	35.395		
	Total	5397.740	149			
Universities do play a significant role in helping students improve soft skills	Between Groups	4.307	1	4.307	.684	.409
	Within Groups	931.453	148	6.294		
	Total	935.760	149			

The one-way ANOVA results reveal significant group differences in select perceptions related to soft skills among commerce students. Notably, a ****statistically significant difference**** was observed in the perception

that students have a clear understanding of the key soft skills required for employment, $*F^*(1, 148) = 8.656$, $*p^* = .004$, and in the perception that students face significant challenges in developing soft skills, $*F^*(1, 148) = 4.500$, $*p^* = .036$. These findings suggest meaningful variations in how different groups of students understand and experience the development of soft skills. However, no significant differences were found in students' views on the ****importance of soft skills for employability**** ($*p^* = .718$), ****confidence in their own skills**** ($*p^* = .072$), or the ****role of universities in enhancing soft skills**** ($*p^* = .409$). This implies a shared consensus across groups regarding the general importance and institutional support of soft skills, but highlights the need to focus on enhancing student awareness and addressing developmental challenges through targeted interventions. In other words, Perception of Commerce Students on Soft Skills requirement for Employability do vary across Gender for 2 statements except 3.

FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

FINDINGS

- Commerce graduates are aware of the importance of soft skills in securing a good job and they also know that the employers value soft skills more than the technical skills.
- Among the identified soft skills for the study- Communication, team work, problem-solving, leadership, time management, emotional intelligence, adaptability; they find all mentioned are very important except emotional intelligence where the response is scattered among all the given options for measurements.
- The respondents find it little difficult to develop communication skill given their rural background.
- The respondents found it difficult to develop soft skills due to lack of confidence, absence of these skills in their curriculum.
- The respondents rarely participate in the soft skills training programme.

SUGGESTIONS

- The respondents suggested to organize awareness programmes and training sessions on soft skills at their institutions.
- They also suggest imbibing soft skills in the course curriculum, thus encouraging students as well as faculty to keep themselves updated on the soft skills.
- Mentoring helps the respondents to gain confidence while learning and improving the soft skills that are helpful in securing jobs in the job market.
- Regular training sessions on soft skills helps the respondents to learn these skills at a faster pace.
- Respondents expect their institutions to organize more of team building activities which improves most of their soft skills.

CONCLUSION

To enhance employability, educational institutions must integrate soft skills training into their programs. This can be done through interactive learning methods such as case studies, role-playing exercises, group discussions, and industry mentorship programs. By focusing on both technical and soft skills, commerce graduates will be better prepared for the competitive job market and positioned for long-term career success.

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