

## Employability Skill Training Intervention in Higher Education in India: A Model Based Study

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**Article History:** Received: 10 January 2021; Revised: 12 February 2021; Accepted: 27 March 2021; Published online: 28 April 2021

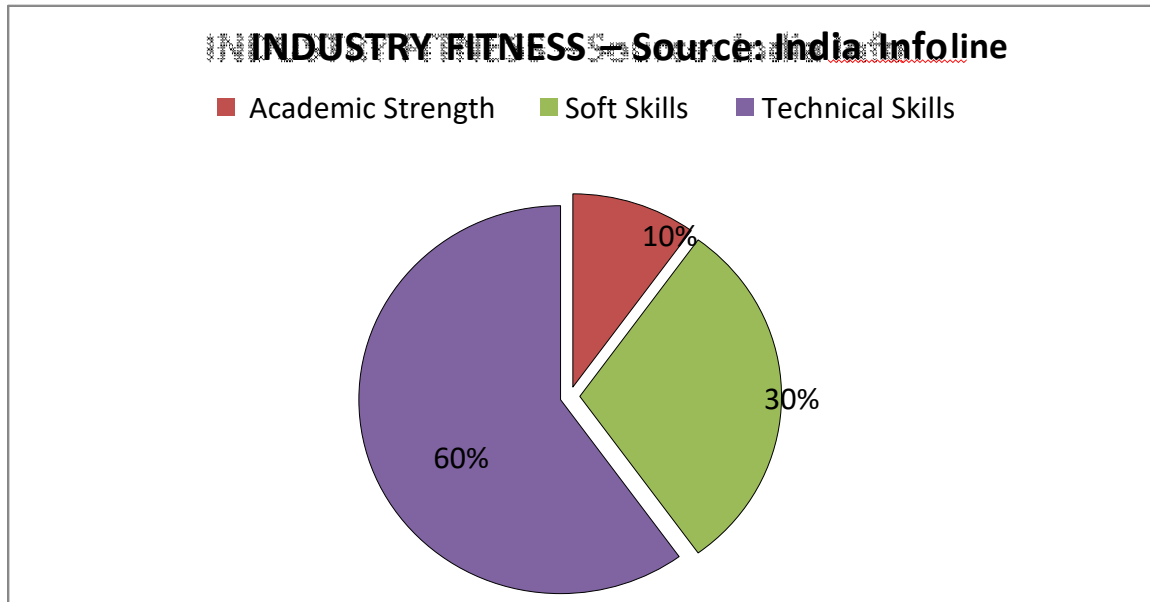
**Abstract:** The job-readiness among management graduates in India is a concern for higher education providers and employers who determine the two forces: supply and demand of job market. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are under pressure to provide training programmes that are more closely aligned with 'employers' needs' in terms of employability skills. Hence, the focus of the current study is to assess the employability skill - gap and job readiness of management students. This study intends to develop an appropriate and logical 'Employability Skills -Training intervention Model for business management students during their study period. The study employs multi-source data with mixed methodology (quantitative and qualitative) that increases concurrent validity and robust estimates. The outcome of this study would facilitate the HEIs to review and redesign the skill development programmes with a focus on accomplishing the balance among 'Academic Skills', 'Technical Skills' and 'Employability Skills'. It would facilitate the HEIs to review and redesign the skill development programmes with a focus on accomplishing the balance among 'Academic Skills', 'Technical Skills' and 'Employability Skills'.

**Keywords:** Higher education institutions, training, intervention, employability, skill

### I. Introduction

Businesses, especially after the great recession period (2008-2012) have been facing the challenges of VUCA World (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world in the context of business management). As entire world now is financially and digitally connected, the demand for trained management graduates from reputed business schools is on the rise (Daniels & Brooker, 2014). Business organizations require young employees who are competent in both hard and soft skills (Canning, July 2011). Hence, organizations' requirement for employees who possess qualities of leadership and team spirit to achieve the competitive goals has been catapult. Companies generally are satisfied with the academic and technical skills of the graduates but not so with their employability skills (Mussnug & Hughey, 1997). National Employability Report MBA Graduates, 2012 (Aspiring Minds, 2012) highlights that about 40 % of 'employable students' did not possess employability skills in 1,000 HEIs in India b) 60% do not get suitable placements due to their inadequate English communication and c) 50% of students are found weak in the domains of in finance, marketing and Human Resource Management. Several cross-nation studies validate lack of 'employability skills' among graduates in India. This is the main cause that makes them not fit for the responsible jobs offered by several sectors of the industry (S. S. Bhola, 2013). Thus, 'employability skills' have been evolving as critical attributes of graduates since the last two decades (Coetzee, 2014). Research studies (Blades, Fauth, & Gibb, 2012), (Butcher & Marsden, 2004) on graduate attributes agree upon the following employability skills: problem solving and decision-making, critical thinking, communication skills, team work, inter-personal skills, research skills, information literacy and ethical awareness. These skills are relevant to jobs in all the sectors, as opposed to job specific technical skills or qualifications. Therefore, acquiring employability skills is an assurance of a rewarding long-term employment.

As per the Global Skills Gap Report 2019-20, a survey conducted by Udemy, the largest market place for teaching and learning online (Udemy, 2019-20), industry requirement of Indian graduates equals 60% of Technical skills, 30% of Employability skills plus 10% of Academic skills. (refer fig.1)

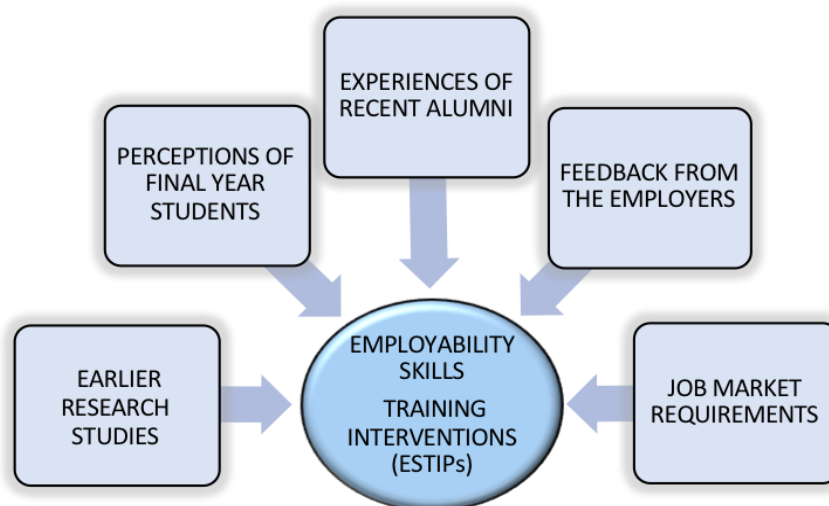


**Figure 1: Skill Distribution required among Indian Graduates for Effective Performance At Workplace.**

**II. Role of Higher Institutions in Developing Employability Skills**

There are about 13,000 B schools all over the world. Interestingly, one third of them are located in India which is a sign of considerable ‘quantitative growth’ of B schools in the past two decades. HEI plays a very important role in developing employability skills of graduate students. It enables their comfortable transition from universities to work place and progression later on in lives of graduates. But ‘employability skill’ among management graduates is a concern for higher education providers and employers who determine the two forces: supply and demand of job market. The crucial issue to HEI is how the equilibrium between the two forces could be brought and maintained. (Kumar, Kumar, & Mittal, 2019) has identified three reasons for the lack of employability skill in the graduates in India from the stand point of the educational institutions: a) lack of relevance of the graduate programmes, b) lack of truthfulness in research and c) and poor innovative attitude in the educational institutions. These generate educated mass without quality. The need of the hour is to improve the quality of education that meets the international standards. (All India Council for Technical Education, 2020) AICTE has been making a sincere attempt to give a practical approach to management education and prepare students of business management to fulfil the expectations of Industry employers.

In this regard, it is important to investigate the perceptions of graduates, alumni and the employers towards ‘employability skills’ by HEI’s and assess the employability-skill-gap. This study collected relevant data based on structured interviews from three potential contributing groups, senior students, alumni and employers associated with different higher education institutions from Bengaluru, India (see Figure 2).

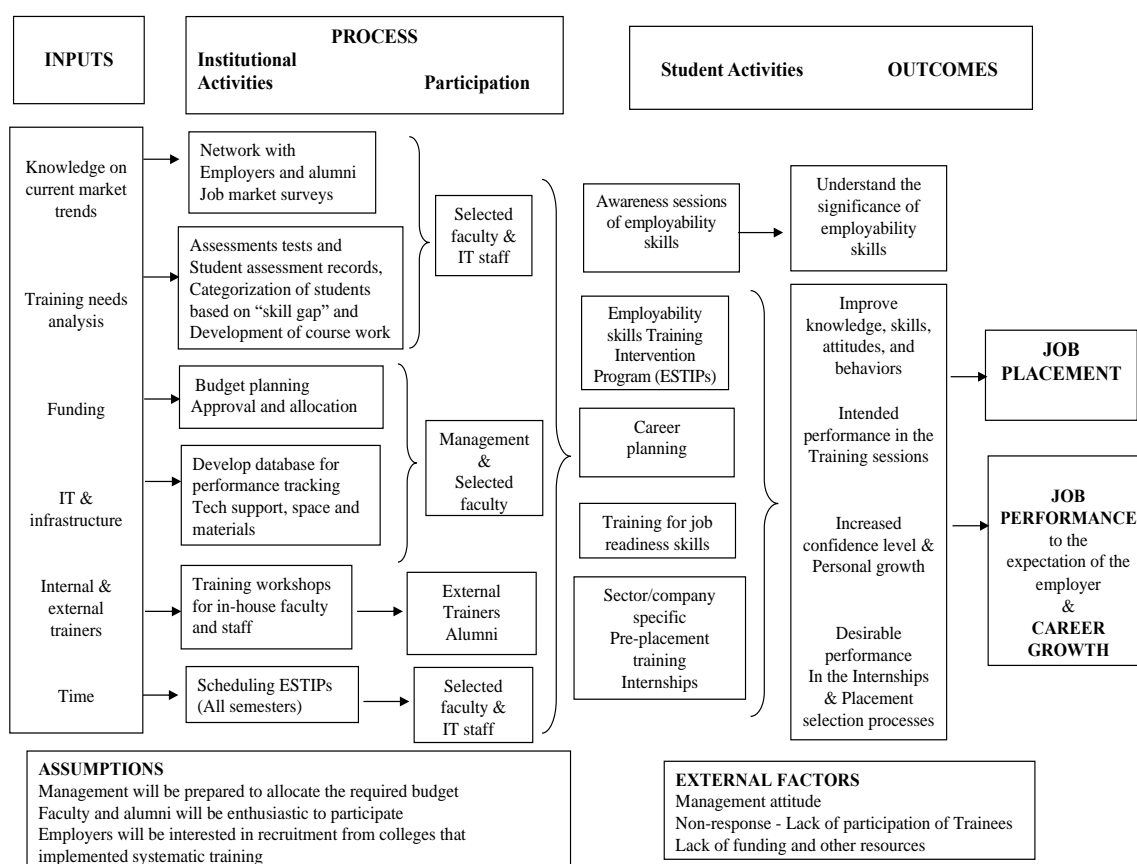


**FigureIII. Contributing Factors for Developing Employability-Skills Training Intervention**

The questions that arise from above structured interview on employability skills are: What is the level of professional communication, team building, adaptation, leadership and inter-personal skills of the graduating students required for job placement in different sectors? Are the academic curricula including training of employability skills robust enough so that the graduates can adapt to the multifaceted nature of their job responsibilities? Do the students feel assured that the knowledge, skills and abilities would prepare them to be efficient and effective in their jobs? How to scientifically develop and deliver the training programmes that match with the requirements of prospective employers? Reality that comes out from this data collection exercise is that: a) employability skill training programmes provided by HEI’s do not seem be effective enough to make the students ‘job-ready’ and b) a considerable number of students are not motivated enough to participate in the training programmes. As a result, sadly, those who pass through the selection round may get rejected or are not able to meet the expectations of employers even if they get selected. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are under pressure to provide effective training programmes more closely aligned with ‘employers’ needs’ in terms of employability skills (Stewart & Knowles, 2000).

This study gathered data that lays the foundation for building strategic training interventions programmes (STIPs) to address the problem of ‘employability - skill - gap’ The model developed is a sincere effort to offer a system for ESTIPs with an objective to create equal opportunity for the management graduates of B schools that face the similar conditions in the job market.

**The Conceptual Model on Employability Skill Training Program (ESTIP)**



**Figure 2: Conceptual Model of Proposed Employability Skill Training Program: Logic Model**

This conceptual model (Figure 3) using logic model framework (evidence-based logic method), has been built to develop a systematic process to design and deliver intended learning objectives and train students perform their best in their work places. Use of logic model to accomplish the targeted outcomes is supported by several earlier studies in any area (Baxter & et.al., 2014) (Newton, Poon, Nunes, & Stone, 2013) & (Peyton & Scicchitano, 2017). The proposed model comprises of three parts: a) inputs, b) process and c) outcomes. This model can be adapted by any higher education institute with modifications that may be unique to itself.

The following is the detailed description of each of the five important inputs, the process to procure them and the outcomes of the proposed ESTIPs:

## Inputs and Process

- a) **Knowledge of the current job market trends (JMT)** is the first input that forms the basis for the rest of the inputs. The latest trends in the job markets with respect to academic, technical and employability skills can be procured from networking with the employers, alumni and current job market surveys. Work experience is not mandatory in the Universities in India for admission into Business Management programmes. Hence, the best way to gain knowledge of current job market trends is to undertake a minimum of two internships to experience challenges at work places. For this reason, work related learning (WRL) was recommended by several studies (Ferns, Russlle, & Kay, 2016) (Freudenberg, Brimble, & Cameron, 2011). This process, in the B Schools, must be initiated by a designated team of faculty members, students and IT staff must be involved to collect relevant information and analyse to identify the skills in which training programmes have to be conducted. This process must be continuous to capture the dynamism of the job market and incorporate relevant changes in the training programmes offered. Active involvement of Business Management students in every task of the above-mentioned process generates awareness of the employability skills and their significance in job market requirements. Thus, an environment for the students can be set up to increase the receptivity of the ESTIPs and get the optimum benefit out of them.
- b) **Training needs analysis (TNA)** is generally used in organizations to identify the skill - gap of the employees and determine if any professional training is required (A.Noë Raymond, 2012). The same can be performed in the B Schools to devise a process of assessing the gap between the desired level of performance to meet the employers' expectations and actual level of performance of the students with respect to academic, technical and employability skills the current job market conditions. Preparation of assessments tests is crucial step in this process. This task must be followed by the assessment of students' current level of those skills and categorizing them as per their performance in the assessment tests. This step is an important one considering the fact that our students come from different academic, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. This is an important task that enables the faculty and trainers to identify the areas of matching / mismatching of the competencies of students of Business Management with the current job market requirements and expectations from the prospective employers. The skill-gap thus identified forms the strong basis for designing relevant ESTIPs to address both short-term and long-term skill needs. One type of training does not suit all categories. The ESTIPs must address the different categories of students. Segregating them would help to accomplish the targeted levels of competency in the required skills. The course structure of ESTIPs must be developed on the basis of the current job market requirement and the different categories of the students. The methodology for outcome-evaluation, for both formative and summative, must provide rubrics for each of the ESTIPs (Reddy, 2011) (Tam, 2014) (Tsinidou, Gerogiannis, & Fitsilis, 2010). This helps in objective evaluation of performance of students. The performance records and the feedback given to the students must be recorded to monitor the progress and assess the effectiveness of the ESTIPs.
- c) **Adequate Resources** are crucial to the efficient and effective conduct of the training programmes as they provide congenial learning environment (Rao, 2008). The focus group discussions with the alumni and final year students and interviews with the placement and training departments of the participating B Schools reported that the training programmes conducted for the students suffered from the inadequate funding, insufficient IT support, ill-ventilated training halls, poor / no audio-visual technology and not so effective trainers. Course-structure and evaluation procedures were not well organized and the feedback system was not effective. Most importantly time available for training was not sufficient as the training was not organized from the start of the MBA Programme.

Alumni Survey revealed that the training was effective enough to help them get through the placement selection rounds. However, between 55% and 70% of the business management graduates experienced challenges in their initial jobs (w.r.t employability skills) though above 90% of them knew they were important to their employers. The analyses of data and qualitative data confirm the inadequacy of resources and poor preparation and delivery of employability training programmes.

- d) **Funding** to develop and operate programs to fulfill the targeted training objective is critical. It has been observed that B Schools add the fee for all the training programmes as a part of their tuition fee. Hence, estimation, budget planning and allocation of funds for conducting ESTIPs effectively must be done simultaneously while designing the ESTIPs. The training programme should not suffer due to lack of funds at any point of time. A team of members of Management of the B School and Student Training & Development must be a part of budget planning and allocation of funds. As the management of the B School is involved in this process approval for funding will be granted without any glitches. Requirement of funding for ESTIPs must be well thought out at the time of budget planning to avoid any ad-hoc expenses.

- e) **IT and Infrastructure** must support the ESTIPs by allocating required space for effective learning, developing database for performance tracking of the students and providing technical support for the delivery the programmes on campuses and off campuses. The requirement of infrastructure and IT for each of the ESTIP must be pre-planned and incorporated in the Budget planning. Students must be involved in this process as it creates opportunity for them to experience important management activities.
- f) **Internal and External Trainers** for conducting ESTIPs must be selected with utmost care. Selection of Internal faculty members as trainers as well as external trainers should be based on the JMT (Job Market Trend) and TNA (Training Need Analysis). Ideally, a combination of trainers with corporate background, those who have analytical and creative thinking and excellent communication skills should be appointed as trainers ESTIPs. The trainers must be given orientation of the profile of the trainees and the intended learning objectives of ESTIPs. Workshops must be conducted to train / update the trainers to adapt them to the current trends in the job market. The cost of hiring external trainers and any additional payment to the internal trainers must be factored in while planning the budget. Training Involving recent alumni as external trainers / advisors for training would be effective as they have first-hand experience of the challenges and pressures at work places.

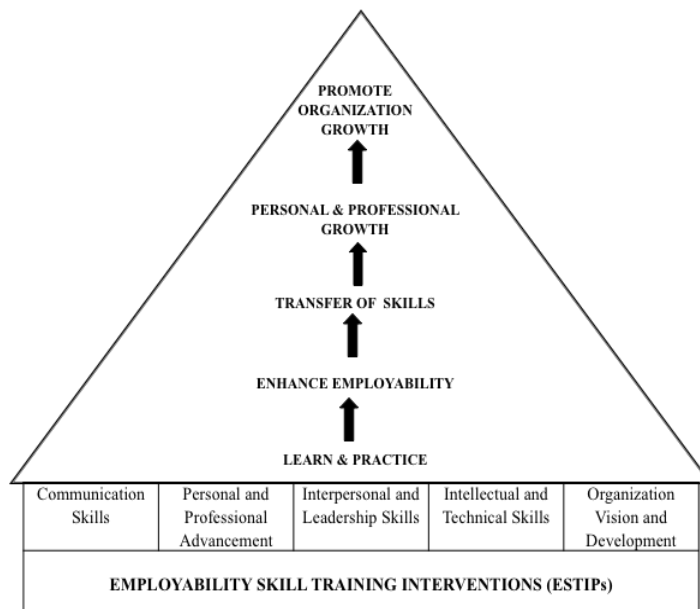
### **Student Activities and Outcomes**

When all the required inputs are arranged the foundation for the conduct of ESTIPs would be strong. The training programmes must begin with the awareness sessions on employability skills which will make the trainees realize the significance of those skills in their professional lives. When the 'awakening' occurs the learning would be with great enthusiasm. This is the most important step before beginning any ESTIP. The ESTIPs must be followed by career planning, job readiness and sector/company specific pre-placement training and internships to make the passing out students fully ready for the selection rounds and personal interviews conducted by the employer organizations for internships and final placements. Students trained in the systematic way would be able to improve their knowledge, skills and attitude (KSAs) and behaviours. They attend the training sessions with more enthusiasm and determination than before. As a result, their performance in the training sessions, internships and in the final placement selection rounds would be improved. If they have developed the right professional attitude and competency, their potential is recognized by the organizations they intern at and if there are any job opportunities, they will be considered for hiring.

**The final outcomes** of this entire process would be the job placement to the satisfaction of the graduates and their performance at the work place to the expectation of the employers. This confidence would help them to accomplish competency for career progression in the desirable direction.

### **ESTIPs for Personal & Professional and Organization growth**

Strategically developed ESTIPs for the target groups of trainees with appropriate evaluation methodology and feedback would certainly enhance their employability. Such well-trained graduates will then be ready to apply the skills (transfer of the skills) for their own professional growth and the growth of the organizations they work for.



**Figure 4:ESTIPs for Organizational Growth**

The model (refer fig.4) represents the process by which graduates transform into competent professionals who can contribute to the growth of the organization if their employability skills training (ESTIPs) is strategically developed and delivered. The visual presentation of the triangle tip upwards represents the skill growth transformed from the basic skills in all five areas measured in the study. Continuity in learning and practice is a crucial effort for students that enhances employability. After seeking an appropriate level of employment, students continue to learn specific job skills, transform to reach certain level of personal and professional growth. Thus, it is inevitable for students to continuously learn, reform, and refine skills for greater achievements.

**III. Assumptions of the model**

This model is based on three important assumptions:

- a) Management will be willing to allocate funding and required resources
- b) Students, Alumni and faculty members will participate in the processes of designing and delivery of ESTIPs and
- c) Employers will be interested in recruiting graduates from the B Schools that conduct ESTIPs in a systematic way as recommended in LmBEST.

**IV. Limitations of the Model**

External factors on which cannot be controlled may also be specified as limitations:

- a. Attitude of the management of the B Schools towards the ESTIPs
- b. Non-response of the students and lack of participation
- c. Insufficient resources
- d. Lack of enthusiasm from the employers

**V. Conclusion**

The latest trend in the job market values the strength of employability skills of the graduates. LmBEST is a sincere effort to make the stakeholders realize that student training must include employability skills exclusively to supplement the academic and technical skills and enhance the employability of the students. Therefore, ESTIPs must be designed on the basis of current job market requirements and the current level of skills levels of the students from the beginning of the programme. They must be delivered with utmost care to accomplish the desired results. The effect of ESTIPs would be marred if they suffered any shortage of resources. It has to be kept in mind that there is no ‘single effective solution’ that can be applied generally to all the B Schools. Each school has to go through the grind of the process recommended by the LmBEST and design their own processes to design and deliver the ESTIPs. programmes to conduct.

It is found that that where industry has been engaged in the training and development of graduates the quality of supply of labour has been satisfactory to the employers (Iyer & Dave, 2015). They concluded that industry plays a pivotal role in enhancing the in employability of the graduates and influences the macro policies that target human resource development. Thus, economic development of a country depends on the level and quality of skill sets of labour market. Corporations that have more than 2,500 employees and large campuses should take the onus of collaborating with the HEIs to train graduating students to make them industry ready. There are several ways to fulfil this collaboration such as internships, workshops and live projects which can provide the students opportunities to experience the work life and employer expectations.

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