



## Employability Skill for Human Resource Graduates

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### Abstract

**Purpose of the study:** Educational institutions need to evaluate the quality of education not only to prepare their graduates for the labor market but also for accreditation authorities. Additionally, there is evidence that a significant portion of graduates wait several years before joining the employment market. Moreover, the primary cause of unemployment, in the eyes of companies, is the wide disparity between graduate-level skills gained at university and those needed by employers. As graduates joining different professional domains require various sets of abilities, this study focuses on determining the employability skills necessary for Human Resource (HR) graduates.

**Methodology:** In order to determine the essential competencies needed and the areas of mismatch, a total of 21 pertinent research on the employability skill of HR graduates were evaluated. The articles from the past ten years were chosen based on their high number of citations, and relevance to the research topic. Google Scholar was used for searching the relevant research papers.

**Findings:** The paper identified the most required skills for HR personnel, which includes communication and interpersonal skills, the ability to adapt, technical skills and comprehensive business knowledge.

**Implications:** This is a novel contribution to the body of knowledge on the employability abilities of recent HR majors. Students can use the article to better understand the demands of the labor market, and educational institutions can use it to rectify any gaps and adapt their curricula considering the discovered skill gap.

**Limitations and Future direction:** This study is limited to literature reviews which only identified the most researched skills using previous papers. Future quantitative studies can be developed to identify the skill set by taking into consideration the input of all stakeholders regarding graduates' employability.



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## 1. Introduction

The rapid use of technology in the workplace and the digital revolution during the COVID-19 pandemic affects the kinds of skills and character traits needed of human resource graduates. On the other hand, unemployment rate among the youth with tertiary education was high in Bangladesh even before the Covid-19 pandemic. The primary cause of unemployment, in the eyes of companies, is the wide disparity between graduate-level skills gained at university and those needed by employers. Gribble (2014) suggested that employability abilities differ from country to country and are largely impacted by national context and cultural values that are unique to each country. Thus, it is important to investigate the employability skills required for human resource graduates in the context of Bangladesh.

With the current changing trend of employment, students with a particular academic qualification are no longer guaranteed employment (Tanius & Susah, 2015). Due to economic and technological developments, businesses are now seeking employees with a range of skills that fit their requirements (Tanius & Susah, 2013). However, in search for the right employee it is often found that there is a gap between the candidate which is required and the candidates who are available for employment. Employers reportedly believe that fresh graduates' capacity to meet both present and future job requirements is insufficient (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005; Jackson, 2010). In the workplace, there are discrepancies between graduate performance and employer expectations (Helyer, 2011). Furthermore, in many areas, including critical thinking, leadership, decision-making, conflict resolution, and metacognitive skills, the expectations from the business graduates are not being met (Jackson & Chapman, 2012). Graduating students are aware that to be more employable, they need to possess a certain set of skills, including leadership, financial literacy, scientific literacy, ICT literacy, civic literacy, critical thinking and problem-solving ability, creativity, innovation, communication and collaborative skills, digital-adaptability, curiosity, futures literacy, commercial and social awareness (Reaves, 2019).

To understand what makes graduates employable, it is necessary to understand how research has identified the idea of employability. It is most portrayed as a set of skills by many. Knight & Yorke (2003) outlined it as "a set of achievements (skills, understanding, and personal attributes) that makes individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community, and the economy". Hampson & Junor (2010) described employability skills as "skills required not only to gain employment, but also to progress within an enterprise so as to achieve one's potential and contribute successfully to enterprise strategic directions". It could be defined as "a set of skills, knowledge, understanding and personal attributes that make a person more likely to choose and secure occupations in which they can be satisfied and successful" (Pool & Sewell, 2007). Uddin (2021) defined employability as a set of talents, abilities, traits, and competencies for obtaining, maintaining, and progressing in occupations successfully and satisfactorily.

Research on employability or the causes of unemployment has started rigorously in Bangladesh. This is mainly due to the rising unemployment rate amongst graduates. In 2019, the unemployment rate for graduates increased to 47% (Khatun & Saadat, 2020). This situation could be caused by several factors, including a lack of professional skills among graduates, an excessive supply of graduates compared to demand in the labor market, an outdated education system, outdated curricula, influences from lobbying, corruption, and political allegiance in the job market, as well as the frequent occurrence of crises, recessions, and pandemics (Ferdous et al. 2019 and Hwang, 2017). The fundamental source of the skill gap for graduates is that the skills taught fall short of what companies are looking for, and the difficulties students confront have not been recognized or addressed (Chowdhury & Miah, 2019a, 2019b). Bridging this gap between industry and academic is necessary which can be done by instilling skill-based teaching and training (Shahriar et.al. 2021).

According to research, finance is the most popular major for business graduates since it opens doors for careers in merchant banking, financial consulting, international finance, and cash management (Chumney, et al 2008). On the other hand, in the viewpoint of Ramachandran (2010), students majoring marketing can outperform if they are outstanding, have spontaneous nature and can influence others. They have impressive professions as project managers, brand managers, marketing managers, sales managers, and market research analysts, and they earn substantial salaries. With respect to MIS, it is found that in recent years it is getting

popularity due to the diverse career opportunities and can be part of numerous e-commerce and IT related industries. The programming skills, technical skill, and problem-solving skill is a requirement for learners (Turban et al., 2008). is another area of concentration. A thorough study by Lauder (2013) suggested a 39-item global employability skill model that is five-dimensional (personal traits, collaborating with others, achieving at work, future skills, and learning). According to this study, the list should be adjusted to reflect local priorities, and employers should notify candidates about the necessary employability skills. Additionally, it was discovered that an employability skill list should be tailored to a specific job category because job requirements vary depending on the group (Chowdhury & Miah 2016). These findings imply that every major and area of concentration has a distinct skill set and set of job opportunities. Human resource is one of the specializations which offers employment opportunities in hiring and selecting people, evaluating employee performance, and developing efficient policies for employee development. Several research was done on employability skills of business graduates but very few concentrated on HR graduates. This study aims to investigate, list, and summarize the most researched employability skills and the new skills needed by aspiring HR professionals considering the globalization and technological advancement.

## 2. Materials and Methods

Conducted a systematic literature review methodology search, classify a typology of literature reviews, go over the stages involved, and offer recommendation on which employability skills required for Human Resource Graduates. Journal papers were identified using employability skills and university students using the web-based search engines Google Scholar. The search was narrowed down to business students and only included English-language publications from the past ten years (2011-2021). Only journal articles were included in the search; books and news articles were not included. Twenty articles were selected for an in-depth analysis of university student's employability skills identified by other researchers.

## 3. Results and Discussions

Numerous studies were conducted in developed nations to assess employability competencies. In several fields of developed nations, a sizable percentage of graduates do not pursue careers related to their degree programs (Rodrigues & Machado, 2011; Tillman & Tillman, 2008). However, very little research from emerging nations unveiled a mismatch between graduates' skills and what employers were looking for (Bhanugopan & Fish, 2009, Ramakrishnan & Yasin, 2010).

Communication, teamwork, problem-solving, information technology (IT), creativity, interpersonal skills, leadership, self-management, flexibility, and critical thinking are among the most popular abilities and talents found by employability studies (Osmani et al. 2015). The studies done in the context Japan indicated cultural and diversity management, achievement orientation, initiative, knowledge are important skills. (Kajihara, 1997; Takachiho, 2000; Chino, 2003; Wakabayashi, et. al, 1999). On the other hand, numerical skills, willingness to learn and academic degree is considered important for Malaysian students (Quek, 2005). The research conducted on UK students highlighted the need for analytical ability, networking, political awareness, and research skills in addition to the common skills identified by others (Wellman, 2010; Wilton, 2011). However, commitment to the job, stress tolerance and confidentiality were listed as crucial employability skills for US students (Heckman, 2006; Fugate & Kinicki, 2008). The abilities and skills needed to retain employability vary, according to researchers like Aamodt, et al. (2010), because job market demands alter according to different parts of the world.

Numerous studies focused on students' perceptions of their employability skills (Jackson, 2013; Tanius & Susah, 2015). Considering that Di Fabio & Kenny (2015) suggested that students' self-perceived employability is a crucial component that they may grow if they are aware of it. On the other hand, Jackson (2013) asserted that students inflated self-perceptions and regular patterns of underrating and overrating show that self-assessment is problematic in the development and assessment of employable skills.

The studies which focused on students' perception indicated that the most common employability skills are communication skill, team working (Jackson 2013, Uddin 2021), complex problem-solving ability, judgment ability, proactivity, negotiation ability as important skills (Chowdhury & Miah, 2016). However, Chowdhury & Miah, (2016), identified factors such as strength of reference, type and image of the university which could be influential factors but not employability skills. According to Tanius and Susah (2015), the students perceive their readiness in term of listening skills, lifelong learning, good self-direction, cooperation, and collaboration, and lastly in their capacity to generate novel ideas. Moreover Succi & Canovi, (2020), revealed contact network and conflict management skills were also considered important by the students. Likewise, professional knowledge, and responsibility are also highlighted by the students as essential skills (Uddin, 2021).

It has been observed that several of the existing literature explored the view of employers regarding the employability skills requirement. (Abbasi, et al 2018, Tempone, et al 2012, Jackling & Natoli 2015). Subject knowledge, application of knowledge, effective listening, breadth of knowledge, working securely, self-management, loyalty, honesty, and IT skills were prioritized by employers (Chowdhury & Miah, 2016, Tempone, et al. 2012, Azevedo, et al. 2012, Ahmed & Azim, 2016). Employers clearly want communication, customer/user orientation, teamwork, creativity, adaptation to change, and ethics (Succi & Canovi, 2020; Azevedo, et al., 2012, Tempone, et al 2012, Jackling & Natoli 2015). According to Nusrat & Sultana (2019), the recruiter from different industry has various employability skill preferences. Capacity to operate in a team, persuasion and influence, deadline and target focus, ability to perform under pressure, and leadership skill are prioritized by manufacturing recruiters. According to the recruiters from service organizations, it's crucial to have a strong work ethic, accountability, and the capacity to function well under pressure. According to industry opinions, managers are willing to assist employees in acquiring the skills necessary for their tasks since they prioritize attitude traits over competencies (Harkison, et.al 2011). Very few research included the perception of academicians. However, it is essential to include the perception of academicians to develop reliable finding regarding employability skill set imparted though the educational institution. According to the academicians' technological skills, cognitive skills, interpersonal communication, and leadership skills (Uddin 2021, Nusrat & Sultana 2019) are important. Similarly, Nusrat & Sultana 2019, identified presentation skill, critical thinking, and creativity skill as significant.

Researchers found that companies and students have very different perspectives on what constitutes an employable skill (Chowdhury & Miah, 2016). In their research, Ahmed & Azim (2016) found a significant discrepancy between the caliber of recent university graduates and the caliber requirements of the working world. Researchers identified significant skill gaps in leadership, interpersonal, analytical, self-management, listening, problem solving, communication (Tempone, et al 2012; Jackling & Natoli 2015), numeracy, and critical thinking (Abbasi et al 2018). Researchers who focused on academicians' and employers' perspectives on employability skills agreed that graduates are competent and self-assured in several non-technical abilities, but they fall short in crucial areas of the managerial skill set, including decision-making and critical thinking (Jackson & Chapman 2012).

### 3.1. Ranking of skills

In table-1 the employability skills were ranked according to the no of research done. It is noticed that the most researched skills are communication skill followed by problem solving and self-management and later by teamwork and cooperation. The least researched skill was social intelligence and hardworking and willingness to take extra work. It is evident that some of the skills were considered more for research than others. As the world of employment is changing, researchers should consider the new skill items while identifying the skill gap. The researchers who concentrated on HR graduates commonly identified the employability skills which include problem solving, self-management, ability, and willingness to learn (El Mansour & Dean, 2016; Paadi, 2014, Coetzee, et. al. 2015; Chowdhury & Miah, 2016). The study done on the HR graduates of Bangladesh by Chowdhury & Miah (2016) did not include the skill of cultural diversity management though this was considered as an employability skill by other researchers. He also did not include the skills like computer literacy, leadership

skill, analytical skills, social responsibility, social intelligence, and customer service orientation which was existed in the skill set for the HR graduates in another research. The analysis also indicated that influencing others, numeracy and hardworking were not analyzed for the skill set of HR graduates.

**Table 1 Ranking of skills**

| Skill  | Rank | No: of papers |
|--|------|---------------|
| Communication                                  | 1    | 19            |
| Self-management                                | 1    | 19            |
| Problem solving                                | 2    | 17            |
| Teamwork and cooperation                       | 2    | 17            |
| Interpersonal understanding                    | 3    | 13            |
| Leadership skills                              | 3    | 13            |
| Initiative                                     | 4    | 12            |
| Cultural and diversity management              | 4    | 12            |
| Critical thinking                              | 5    | 11            |
| Ability and willingness to learn               | 5    | 11            |
| Technical expertise                            | 6    | 10            |
| Achievement orientation                        | 6    | 10            |
| Conflict Management & Negotiation Skills       | 7    | 9             |
| Creativity, innovation, and change             | 7    | 9             |
| Personal planning, and organizational skills   | 7    | 9             |
| Analytical Skills                              | 8    | 8             |
| Decision making                                | 8    | 8             |
| Relationship building and                      | 9    | 7             |
| Computer literacy                              | 10   | 6             |
| Stress tolerance                               | 10   | 6             |
| Organizational commitment                      | 10   | 6             |
| Presentation skill                             | 10   | 6             |
| Adaptability                                   | 10   | 6             |
| Listening skills                               | 11   | 5             |
| Technology                                     | 11   | 5             |
| Customer service orientation                   | 11   | 5             |
| Influencing others                             | 11   | 5             |
| social responsibility                          | 12   | 4             |
| Mete-Cognition                                 | 12   | 4             |
| Language proficiency                           | 12   | 4             |
| Numeracy skill                                 | 12   | 4             |
| Social intelligence                            | 13   | 3             |
| Hardworking and willingness to take extra work | 13   | 3             |

#### 4. Conclusions

Findings from literatures indicate that research has placed a significant value on understanding employability skill and tried to identify means of improvement. The employability skill set vary as the job requirement vary in different region. Majority of the research was done on the context of developed countries where limited number of literatures was available in the perspective of Bangladesh.

The employability related research focused on the perception of three stakeholders namely students, academicians, and employers. Most of the research focused one or two stakeholders' opinion. It has been also

observed that industry wise skill requirement is different. Majority of the research concentrated on some common skill set communication, problem solving, teamwork, leadership, critical thinking, and initiative etc. Although very few research concentrated on stress tolerance, adaptability, computer literacy, creativity, social and emotional intelligence. Through intensive literature review the current study identified 33 employability skills which are necessary for the business graduates to be ready for the job market. Problem solving skills is the most important one followed by analytical and professional skills, where huge skill gap exists (Uddin, 2021).

Knowing what abilities, competencies, and skills are essential for HRM graduates can help students develop their skill sets before they graduate and contribute to higher education's goal of generating marketable graduates (Paadi, K. 2014). It is crucial for academics to comprehend and rectify the discrepancy between what HR graduates learn at business schools and the expectations of recruiters. In addition to lecture-based studies, incorporating case studies or simulation alongside lectures can enhance the problem-solving skill and result in better learning outcomes (Farashahi & Tajeddin, 2018). Curricular design should be modularized in conjunction with industry collaboration to match employer expectations.

Research needs to be done to develop a unified skill set and measure the gap of the skill set that is being taught at the university and those required by employees. A new set of skills needs to be included in the research on employability skill since the world of employment is changing due to the trend of globalization through significant advancements in communication systems and quick change in various technologies. The study will also be further enhanced by combining quantitative technique with a qualitative investigation of the important employability skills including all the stakeholders, including employers, students, and academicians, to discover the skill gap of graduates' employability.

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Samia Shabnaz is a Senior Assistant Professor in the Department of Management, American International University-Bangladesh (AIUB). She has more than 12 years of teaching experience in the field of Human Resource Management and entrepreneurship development. She contributed to the areas of her interest by publishing articles in renowned national and international journals. She also presented papers in the various international conferences of Canada, India, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Her area of research interest is microcredit, human resource management, entrepreneurship, gender, and education.

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Ms. Bohi Shajahan is currently a Senior Assistant Professor in the Department of Finance in the American International University- Bangladesh (AIUB). Besides teaching, Mrs. Bohi is also a passionate researcher with numerous research in the field of women empowerment microcredit, Islamic Banking, issues in finance, higher education etc. In the year 2019 she had been invited as a Keynote speaker in the International Conference on Higher Education in South Asia: Challenges and Possibilities, organized by Delhi University, India. Her objective as an active researcher is to contribute in the field of gender empowerment and education.

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