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EMPLOYABILITY OF MBA STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Management students have a world of opportunity in terms of the various fields they can get into. But this doesn't necessarily translate to jobs for all the students who graduate. There is a gap between the actual skills and the skills expected in the workplace. Today, with the fast pace of transformation in several industries driven by technology, environmental factors etc. students need to have soft skills along with updated technical skills in the field of their choice, firstly to get a job and then to hold the job, excel in it and build a career. The study assesses the placement skills of postgraduate management students in the final year of the two-year full-time management programme in Tiruchirappalli district and adopts a holistic approach to understand what makes management students industry ready in the current scenario and assess their readiness for current jobs. Mixed methods are used to collect, analyze and integrate qualitative and quantitative data in the research process. The study identifies the skills, indicators for each and presents the views of the students, faculty, placement officers and recruiters.

Keywords: *Employability, Soft skills, Transferable skills*

INTRODUCTION

India is in an advantageous position owing to its low costs, mostly young, educated population, and the huge market. According to the ILO, 75 million youth are unemployed. And this figure has increased as a result of the pandemic. Human capital needs to be optimized to

create value and get the economy back on track. Automation will create 75 million to 375 million new jobs by 2030 (McKinsey report). The skill gap analysis conducted by the government shows that 109 million more skilled workers are required in 24 key sectors by 2022.

There is a fundamental transformation taking place in most of the jobs. With the advent of "boundaryless" careers, work has become something one can carry with oneself wherever one is. It no longer involves a finite set of tasks to be completed, it changes and increases with the business' goals and accordingly the skills and competencies required for a job continue to grow over a period of time (McMahon, Patton, & Tatham, 2003). From Job titles, positions, roles, responsibilities, skills to tasks within jobs, almost everything has changed. All jobs require a larger variety of complicated tasks to be performed. Besides this, the average length of time a job lasts is decreasing. Full-time jobs are harder to find and are giving way to part-time jobs, contracts and freelance work. Gig workers are projected to comprise 80 percent of the workforce by 2030. Technology is changing the future of employment. "The greening of our economies will create millions of jobs as we adopt sustainable practices and clean technologies, but other jobs will disappear as countries scale back their carbon-and resource-intensive industries" (ILO, 2019). People will have to work alongside machines and augment them because machines help them improve productivity and efficiency. On the bright side, this could mean that people would be engaged in higher-value jobs relatively earlier in their careers (Zao-Sanders & Palmer, 2019). Automation is less likely for tasks that involve applying high levels of cognitive function and expertise such as deductive reasoning, creativity, originality, communication, social and emotional skills, training, problem-solving, reading and writing. The important question is not whether there will be jobs at all but whether people (with their current skill sets) will be qualified for jobs in the near future. Unfortunately, those who lose their jobs in this transition period may be least equipped to seize the new opportunities (ILO, 2019). In order to stay relevant amidst the changes in the world of work, people have to reinvent themselves many times during their careers (ISR, 2020).

Management education being a versatile field, presents a wider spectrum of opportunity for students to start their careers and the potential to develop their careers. They are trained to perform in the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (Giles, 2018) business environment nowadays. It is projected that managers and executives will be in more demand in the next decade (McKinsey Global Institute, 2018). According to the India Skills Report 2020, management graduates are the most employable in the country (54%). In early times, companies told their employees what their contribution should be, today, employees have choices on how to improve their organization's

performance best. According to Clark (2017), organizations today encourage "intrapreneurs". Individuals who seek out opportunities to apply their skills or acquire new ones create more professional opportunities for themselves (inside the organization).

PREREQUISITES

Given this type of business environment, employees need to be able to communicate, collaborate, come up with creative solutions to problems, make decisions, show initiative and learn on a regular basis (Giles, 2018). Employees have to adopt new roles, work smarter, modify work behaviors, acquire new skills to be more productive and achieve a better work life balance.

Students and graduates aspire to get a job that offers freedom and autonomy, enables them to use their strengths, creativity, provides high compensation, challenges, offers career advancement, opportunities for personal growth and development, great work life balance, recognition, respect for the employee's lifestyle, pursue individual aspirations, make a meaningful difference, take ownership, derive meaning, purpose and impact from their work. In order to be able to get a job in companies that offer these great working conditions, students have to possess the qualities, skills and qualifications that will enable them to perform and thrive in such an environment. Though current education systems focus on developing cognitive skills, it is behavioural and non-cognitive skills that nurture an individual's capacity to collaborate, innovate, self-direct and problem-solve (European Union's New Skills Agenda for Europe, 2017).

For any job, technical skills and soft skills are important. Technical skills change rapidly and what was once a niche skill is now a basic skill hence having generic skills such as self- management skills (self-awareness, confidence, motivation, attitude, discipline,) problem solving, goal setting, the ability to learn, work in a team, make presentations, introduce themselves, manners and etiquette, analytical skills, IT skills, communication, leadership etc. along with Business Awareness, Domain Skills, Current Affairs, are important to keep up with the pace of development in every field. Since the work environment and college campus are two different worlds and a degree doesn't necessarily translate to skills needed in the workplace (Zao-Sanders & Palmer, 2019), generic or transferable skills form a bridge and enable students to make the transition easily. Students who have developed generic skills will be able to transfer these skills to the work context, adapt to the new culture of their workplace, learn, grow and start contributing quicker than those who have only technical skills. This also enables them to acquire the relevant technical skills. Thus developing and honing these skills and qualities, students will be industry ready and developing them further will make them high

potentials in the workplace. This is what makes them employable throughout their careers.

DEFINING EMPLOYABILITY

According to Vander Heijden(2005), Employability is "continuously fulfilling, acquiring or creating of work through the optimal use of competencies." Berntson (2008) defines employability as "an individual's perception of his or her possibilities of getting new, equal, or better employment." The employability of the people serves as the backbone of the organization (cited in Alrifai and Raju, 2019) and is critical to survive and thrive in the industry. Bersin, (2019) defines soft skills as "all the human skills we have in teamwork, leadership, collaboration, communication, creativity, and person to person service." It's easy to "teach" hard skills, (in higher education institutions and organizations) but soft skills must be "learned." Employability has to be studied from the demand side (employers' perspective) as well as the supply side (the students' perspective) (Alrifai & Raju, 2019).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Bersin, (2019) explaining the latest trends outlined in the LinkedIn study conducted in 2019 elaborates on the big issue companies face-people: finding and developing soft skills (91% of companies), creating the ideal work environment in the workplace. 80% of companies are looking for candidates with better soft skills. 92% of respondents ranked soft skills more important than technical skill and 89% mentioned that bad hires typically lack soft skills. The study identified creativity, persuasion, collaboration, adaptability, and time management to be the five most important soft skills in demand across industries currently. Assessing soft skills is quite difficult. Recruiters use new AI-based tools, 75% of companies ask behavioral questions, 70% observe the body language, half of them ask situational questions and a third ask candidates to work on projects and present the results.

Singh (2018) conducted a quantitative study assessing the soft skills of newly graduated business students. The study surveyed human resource professionals in Minnesota across business sizes and industries. Based on the recommendation of the World Economic Forum, social skills-such as persuasion, emotional intelligence and teaching others were taken for the study. Skills that corresponded to above average rating in the first performance review were compared with those ranked below average. Even though students get the same inputs in a classroom, their competency levels significantly differ as a result of their level of comprehension because of the "methods of meaning making, different starting points and different personal lenses." It was found that high performers were very good at self-

organization, collaboration, good communication skills (including oral and written communication), systems skills, technology skills, creativity, innovation and emotional intelligence whereas low performers lacked discipline, engagement and were average at the above mentioned skills. The results indicate that employability doesn't increase with one soft skill alone rather it needs takes a combination of soft skills to make a tangible difference. The important question raised is whether newly graduated students have suitable role models who exhibit the kind of characteristics that inspire them to optimally use their soft skills and acquire new ones.

Osmani, et al. (2017) examined the perceptions of academics and the challenges they face in developing employability in their students. Qualitative data was collected by means of semi structured interviews with faculty at a public university in Qatar on the basis that when the academics have a clear understanding of the requirements of the recruiters they will be able to incorporate them in the education process. The study conducted was a longitudinal on-going study in which 14 face to face interviews were conducted each between 60 to 90 minutes and the data was analyzed thematically. They perceived that certain attributes such as communication, teamwork, problem solving, creativity, critical thinking, time management, research skills and competence in using information and communication technologies are the most important and contribute to the employability of their students. They opine that the focus of higher education should be on the development of attributes that graduates require to succeed in the job market. The government of Qatar has introduced measures to promote local nationals taking up important positions currently held by foreigners. Universities have embedded employability in the curriculum and started training programmes to impart the necessary skills.

Williams (2015) investigated the perceptions of students and employers in relation to the soft skills needed to be successful in future employment. Employees who have soft skills work well with others and demonstrate a positive attitude in the work environment. Purposive sampling was used in the study and data was collected from 12 students and 7 employers at a community college by means of semi-structured interviews. The transcripts of participants' responses were imported in MAXQDA 11, open coded, analyzed and triangulation was used. Technical skills-occupational and vocational, literacy, numeracy, and technology skills; Nontechnical skills-soft skills constituted employability. Out of the soft skills identified, communication was found to the most important skill and also the one students lack in. Apart from this, critical thinking skills, decision making skills, interpersonal skills, problem-solving skills, self-management skills, teamwork and work ethic were deemed important. These are not an exhaustive list of soft skills rather they are the most

important ones employers look for. Students perceived that employability skills are important for job procurement as well as job performance and rated communication (written, oral and non- verbal) interpersonal skills and teamwork highly. Employers opine that communication skills, self-management, planning and organizational skills, interpersonal skills, and team work were the most important soft skills for entry level jobs. However they emphasized that it depends on the level of the job position and the nature of the job description. Based on the findings a 3 day workshop on job readiness was conducted for the students.

Studying the employability of students pursuing Technical education in Malaysia, Yusof (2012) developed a Measurement Model of Employability Skills using Confirmatory Factor Analysis. 280 respondents, all Engineering students in the final year of their studies were involved in the study, data were analyzed descriptively and the reliability (Cronbach Alpha value) was found to be higher than 0.70. The data was checked for unidimensionality of the items and the sub-scales through CFA using AMOS, a statistical program to perform structural equation modeling. The first and second order CFA fit with the hypothesized model. Here a systematic random sample was taken (Krejcie and Morgan (1970)) and the nine employability skills attributes identified were Communication, Team work, Leadership, Long life learning and Information management, Critical thinking and problem solving, Entrepreneurship, Ethic and moral, Technology Utilizing Skills and Social skills. Convergent validity was established as the factor loading for all items were above 0.5, discriminant validity is also adequate. Cronbach alpha value, sample size and methodology are similar to the current study. Hence the skills identified are of importance to all Technical students irrespective of country.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Despite there being a lot of emphasis on this from the industry and also the academia, many studies and reports say that only a small percentage of management graduates meet the expectations of employers (are employable) particularly among the lower ranker institutions and in tier 2 and tier 3 cities. There is an oversupply of graduates without the necessary skills. Skill level is what differentiates those who get the jobs from those who don't. Especially when academic qualifications are the same, employers choose candidates who possess the required transferable / generic skills. But these skills are hard to define measure and teach. Recruiters are finding it challenging to find students who possess the right mix. Students often assume that they have the skills required for the world of work but are subsequently disillusioned when not appointed. Reports by national bodies and organizations state that less than half of the management graduates are employable (ISR, 2014 - 2019), industry estimates are

around 2.5 to 8% for specialized roles that require cognitive skills and a high proficiency in English. Having a degree is important but unless students can supplement it with relevant skills, experiences, contacts and work-related attributes, they may not be selected. Since many claim that the postgraduate students do not have the necessary competencies for placement, there is a need to ascertain what level they are in terms of the specific competencies so that concrete steps can be taken to facilitate acquisition of the skills needed for placement.

SKILLS

In the present study, the researcher wanted to find out how employable management students were at the end of the two year full time post graduate management programme. In order to be industry-ready students need to have a host of technical and soft skills. Technical skills vary based on the industry and job position. So management students have to start acquiring the basic technical skills required in the field of their choice. During the campus recruitment season, recruiters use aptitude tests to screen candidates. Here their Quantitative ability, Verbal ability and Analytical skills are tested. Students are then tested on communication skills by means of group discussion, discussing a case study/ giving a short speech on a topic, making presentations and a personal interview. Communication is almost always on top of the list of competencies required by employers and is the most important skill for management graduates. Some careers are almost entirely based on it – for example, jobs in Marketing, Advertising, Public Relations, Teaching, etc. communication skills are the most important. Effective communication depends on Active Listening, Reading Comprehension, Written Communication, Speaking Skills and Body language. Employers opine that graduates who have strong technical skills but lack good oral and written communication find it challenging to succeed in their careers (Liebowitz, 2004 cited in Gokuladas, 2010).

Most of the employers who recruit MBA students on campus shortlist the candidates on the basis of their communication skills-ability to communicate clearly and confidently and get the message across. This includes verbal and non verbal communication. Faculties pay a lot of attention to provide adequate opportunity for students to hone their communication skills. This all essential skill enables people to navigate the work environment-build relationships, collaborate and develop the organization's culture. In the present scenario, communicating using technology is crucial. It is more important and quite challenging to communicate effectively without being able to meet the other people-colleagues, customers, clients, and still make all the stakeholders happy. Having discussed the soft skills employers' desire, it is also important to be able to present these skills properly. "He /she who gets hired is not necessarily the one that can do the job

best but the one who knows the most about how to get hired" (Bolles, 2018). In all the institutions where data was collected, training was provided to the students to develop the skills tested in the campus placements.

METHODOLOGY

The study aimed at assessing the actual level of Employability of the students. An exploratory cum descriptive research design was adopted, a cross sectional study was done using a mixed methods approach. Students doing the full time post graduate management programme in Tiruchirappalli district were taken for the study. Interviews were conducted with 4 placement officers and 7 recruiters to identify the skills required. A proportionate random sample of 337 students (in the final semester of their course) was drawn by lottery method. All of them did a self-assessment. Interviews were conducted with 24 faculty members and they were asked to assess the employability of the students. The researcher also observed the skills of the students by conducting group discussions, mock interviews and a written test. 72 students participated in the group discussions, 36 in the mock interviews and 36 took the written test. Since employability is a multidimensional topic a holistic approach was taken and methodical triangulation was used to synthesize the insights got from the interviews, questionnaires and observations.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The tables present the results of the self-assessment done by the students and are compared with the faculty assessment and are also compared with the results of the observation carried out. The information got from the interviews with placement officers and recruiters are included along with the results of relevant studies done by other authors.

Table No. 1: Self-Assessment on Communication Skills

Communication Skills	V Poor	Poor	Average	Good	V Good
1. Active Listening	25 (7.42%)	64 (18.99%)	79 (23.44%)	112 (33.23%)	57 (16.91%)
2. Reading Comprehension	7 (2.08%)	55 (16.32%)	158 (46.88%)	56 (16.62%)	61 (18.10%)
3. Written Communication	26 (7.72%)	52 (15.43%)	45 (13.35%)	146 (43.32%)	68 (20.18%)
4. Speaking Skills	24 (7.12%)	60 (17.80%)	87 (25.82%)	83 (24.63%)	83 (24.63%)
5. Body language	36 (10.68%)	56 (16.62%)	50 (14.84%)	86 (25.52%)	109 (32.34%)

Source: Primary Data

In the self-assessment, majority of the students (33.23%) say that they can understand and accurately recall most of the information. 16.9 per cent say their listening skills are excellent and that they can interpret, evaluate and summarize information too. Almost half of the respondents (46.9 %) feel that they can read and understand simple content. 18.1 per cent of them say that they read regularly and enrich themselves. Majority of them (43.2%) opine that they can write well but with a few errors and 20% are confident about their ability to produce error-free business communication. One fourth of the respondents feel their speaking skills are average and they speak when they are forced to do so, one fourth feel that they can speak fairly well but hesitate and don't come forward to speak and one fourth say that they are very confident and able to articulate their ideas in public. 8% of them feel that their communication skills are poor. Around 20% of the respondents feel that they are very good in each of the skills and 32.4% expressed that their body language is very comfortable and confident.

Table No. 2: Faculty Assessment on Communication Skills

Communication Skills	V Poor	Poor	Average	Good	V Good
1. Active Listening	0	4 (16.67%)	12 (50%)	8 (33.33%)	0
2. Reading Comprehension	0	4 (16.67%)	14 (58.33%)	6 (25%)	0
3. Written Communication	0	2 (8.33%)	13 (54.17%)	9 (37.50%)	0
4. Speaking Skills	0	3 (12.50%)	9 (37.50%)	10 (41.67%)	2 (8.33%)
5. Body language	0	2 (8.33%)	12 (50%)	10 (41.67%)	0

Source: Primary Data

The table shows how the faculty have rated their students on Communication skills. Nearly 50% of them said that most of their students have with either good or very good speaking skills and half of their students are average at listening, reading comprehension, body language. 16.7% of them feel that many students listen but struggle to understand and interpret information. Active listeners pay attention to detail, are better at understanding the needs, wants of clients, colleagues so they are able to take in more relevant information, ask for missing details, build rapport, collaborate and problem solve better (Tigar, 2020). Majority of the faculty (58.3%) say that the students can manage to read and understand when the content is simple and 25% of the faculty say that most of their students read fast and comprehend well. 37.9% of them say that the students can write well but with a few errors. 41.67 % say their students can speak fairly well and 37.3%

opine that their students speak in front of others only if they are forced. 8.3% say that some of the students are very confident and able to articulate their ideas in public. They emphasize that students should converse in English more to be able to speak the language fluently since many of them seek jobs in bigger cities and reputed organizations. None of the faculty have rated their students "very good" on most of the criteria indicating that they feel there is scope for more improvement.

Table No.3: Comparison between Self-Assessment and Faculty Assessment on Communication Skills

Communication Skills	Self-Assessment		Faculty Assessment	
	N=337	%	N=24	%
Low	36	10.68	6	25.00
Medium	188	55.79	9	37.50
High	113	33.53	9	37.50
Min.	6		11	
Max.	25		21	
Median	17		16	
S.D.	3.679		2.82	
Mean	17.124		16.33	

Source: Primary Data

From the table, it is clear that there is considerable difference in the self-assessment and faculty assessment with regard to the number of respondents whose level of communication is low and medium indicating that the students may not be aware that their proficiency is below the level expected of management graduates. Students may perceive that their writing is good based on their marks they have scored in examinations. However the highest level had almost similar rating, showing that some of the students were able to communicate effectively.

The Faculty members expressed that students who lack proficiency in the English language find it harder to get through the selection process. The lack of reading has resulted in poor communication skills of the students (both in written and oral communication). Communication skills are the first and most important criteria according to the placement officers and this was also confirmed by the recruiters. The spoken skills of the students were assessed by means of a group discussion and personal interview. The written skills of the students were assessed by a written test. Overall, the faculties have rated the Communication skills of students lower than the Self-assessment done by the students.

Table No. 4: Spoken Skills observed by means of Group Discussion

Spoken Skills	Respondents	
	N=72	%
Low	31	43.06
Medium	17	23.61
High	24	33.33
Min.	13	
Max.	27	
Median	18.5	
S.D.	4.005	
Mean	18.805	

Source: Primary Data

The performance of the one third of the students (33.33%) was observed to be good. They could express themselves well and discuss the topic given. 23.6% of the students' performance was average and the majority of them (43.06%) were not able to present their views in the group discussion. This indicates that they should work on their spoken skills to be ready for their final placements.

Table No. 5: Spoken Skills observed by means of Personal Interview

Spoken Skills	Respondents	
	N=36	%
Low	16	44.44
Medium	7	19.44
High	13	36.11
Min.	16	
Max.	35	
Median	26	
S.D.	5.789	
Mean	25.027	

Source: Primary Data

The above table shows that one third of the respondents (36.1%) were able to give very good answers and face interviews confidently. Thus showing that they have prepared themselves to face interviews. 19.44% of them were average at facing interviews and required more practice. However it was observed that many students (44.4%) were not able to speak confidently to get through a personal interview. This would definitely reduce their chances of getting selected in the campus placements.

In some institutions, about 70% of the students had done their schooling in the regional medium and hence find it quite difficult to converse in English. Language proficiency was observed to be one of the causes students did not do well in the group discussions and personal interviews. Most of these students expect their institutions to

provide training in Spoken English to enable them to communicate fluently. In some institutions, students from the regional medium were around 10 – 15 per cent. Placement officers said that the students who could communicate well in English were able to get a job.

Table No. 6: Written Skills observed by means of a Written Test

Written Skills	Respondents	
	N=36	%
Low	13	36.11
Medium	11	30.56
High	12	33.33
Min.	9	
Max.	25	
Median	16.5	
S.D.	4.923	
Mean	16.861	

Source: Primary Data

By observation, it was found that there were almost equal numbers of the respondents in each of the levels. One third of them (33.33%) were able to write well and 30.6% were average. One third of the students (36.1%) had poor written skills which would hinder their ability to communicate in writing in the workplace since written communication is important to interact with one's team on a daily basis, prepare presentations, reports etc.

Recruiters expressed that the quality of the resumes submitted by students is average and recommended that they should improve the way they write and present themselves through their resumes. Management graduates are expected to communicate effectively and this is a crucial skill expected for all job positions management graduates are recruited for. To be successful in careers in the digital age, job-seekers need to have "a personal brand not just a resume" (Weiner, 2020).

Table No.7: Distribution of the respondents based on their Performance in Group Discussion

Group Discussion	V Poor	Poor	Average	Good	V Good
1. Communication: Language	0	16 (22.2%)	30 (41.67%)	22 (30.56%)	4 (5.56%)
2. Clarity of ideas	0	21 (29.17%)	29 (40.28%)	20 (27.78%)	2 (2.78%)
3. General Knowledge	0	20 (27.78%)	33 (45.83%)	16 (22.22%)	3 (4.17%)
4. Domain Knowledge	0	19 (26.39%)	37 (51.39%)	14 (19.44%)	2 (2.78%)
5. Interaction in a Group	0	18	26	22	6

		(25%)	(36.11%)	(30.56%)	(8.33%)
6. Comfort & Confidence in Group Discussion	0	17 (23.61%)	25 (34.72%)	19 (26.39%)	11 (15.28%)

Source: Primary Data

It was observed that one third of the respondents (38.5%) were able to interact well in a group. All the respondents had quite a lot of practice participating in group discussions as part of the curricular activities and during placement training sessions. They were also used to discussing and working in teams to organize various programmes in their department. This could explain why many of the respondents seemed very comfortable and confident in the group discussion. Performing well in the group discussion is crucial because it is used as an elimination round in the selection process. Around 5% of the respondents were rated very good in most of the criteria and close to 20% were rated good in group discussion. Therefore one fourth of the students would be able to clear this round easily. Though none of the respondents were rated very poor in Group Discussion, majority of the respondents have been rated average in most of the criteria, they could improve their performance with more training and practice. For some students, language was a barrier as they could not express themselves well in English and this resulted in poor scores.

Faculty members said that if students improved their domain knowledge and general knowledge and practice discussing in groups them would be able to express their ideas clearly.

Table No. 8: Distribution of the Respondents based on their Performance in Personal Interview

Personal Interview	V Poor	Poor	Average	Good	V Good
1. Presentation	0	3 (8.33%)	12 (33.33%)	12 (33.33%)	9 (25%)
2. Level of confidence	0	3 (8.33%)	11 (30.56%)	10 (27.78%)	12 (33.33%)
3. Self-Introduction	0	8 (22.22%)	14 (38.89%)	9 (25%)	5 (13.89%)
4. Business Awareness	0	13 (36.11%)	10 (27.78%)	10 (27.78%)	3 (8.33%)
5. Ability to manage pressure	0	4 (11.11%)	13 (36.11%)	10 (27.78%)	9 (25%)
6. Ability to understand & answer accordingly	0	2 (5.56%)	13 (36.11%)	10 (27.78%)	11 (30.56%)
7. Clarity of purpose	0	5 (13.89%)	13 (36.11%)	12 (33.33%)	6 (16.67%)

Source: Primary Data

The above table shows the results of the observation of mock personal interviews conducted with the students. One third of the students (33.3%) displayed a high level of confidence while facing the personal interview. 25% of the respondents were able to introduce themselves

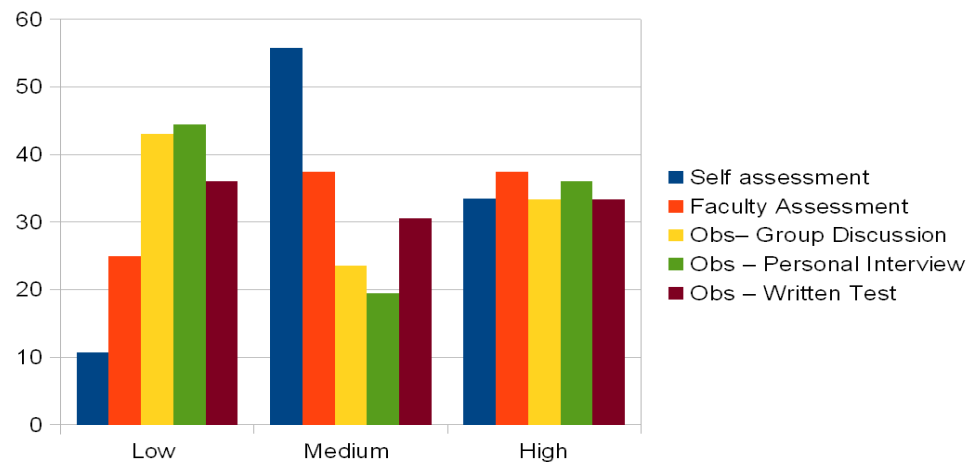
well and 13.9% of them delivered an impressive self introduction highlighting their strengths and how they could contribute to an organization. More than half of the respondents were able to understand and answer questions well. Many of the students had faced interviews for internship in the previous semester and were able to confidently answer questions. The main area where students seem to be lacking is Business Awareness (36.1% have been rated poor) and is a crucial area where companies expect management graduates to have sound knowledge in. The personal interview is usually the last round of the selection process and where salary negotiations take place. So students should carefully prepare for personal interviews to get the job after advancing through the various levels of the selection process.

During the Interviews with Recruiters, they stated that they would like students to be able to substantiate their skills and achievements (mentioned on their resumes and in their interviews) with evidence. This will also show their ability to demonstrate them in the job (Hugh-Jones, 2008). Students can record achievement and also reflect on it. Recruiters also expressed that candidates need to improve their Business Awareness in order to apply their theoretical knowledge and add value to the organization. They are expected to show a clarity of purpose and talk about their career goals, know about the organization, the job position they are aiming for and also be able to talk about how current events, industry best practices, articles published etc. by the organization resonates with their own work ethic or work-related goals (Tigar, 2019). This sort of preparation can help students come up with answers to questions that might be asked in the actual interview and having thought out their views they would be able to present them in a confident manner and articulate how they could add value to the organization. Most of the respondents have been rated average in the almost all the criteria. In order to be able to clear the final placement interviews students should at least be good in each of them. If they are very good they can compete with students from other business schools for better job offers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The skills recruiters expect in the order of priority are: Communication skills, Good Attitude, Presentation, Understanding of products and clients, Confidence, Numeracy skills, Presence of mind, ability to withstand pressure, Etiquette, General Knowledge, Current Affairs and Networking. One third of the students have the required level of soft skills that recruiters expect. Students opine that pursuing the Management Programme has greatly contributed to developing and honing their professional skills. On communication, 33.5% gave themselves a high rating, 37.5% of the students were given a high rating by the faculty and this was also consistent in the observation-33.3% of the students were rated high in the group discussions, 36.1%

in the interviews and 33.3% in the written test. Hence they are the ones most likely to get one or more job offers. Having good communication skills enables the students to communicate their understanding of their domain and discuss these topics during the selection process. This is also crucial to be able to connect with other employees and team members. Emotional competence serves as the foundation for the development of interpersonal skills (Gustein & Sviokla, 2018). The vast majority of the students were rated average and have to put in some effort to develop their skills to a higher level. There is a mismatch between the perceptions of the students on their own skills and that of their faculty and the level of skills displayed during the observation. The top one-third of the students were able to do a realistic self-assessment of their skills however the students who were rated lowest in the observation and in the faculty assessment had assumed that their skills were good enough to get a placement. Zao-Sanders & Palmer (2019) emphasize that the era of automation demands exceptional soft skills the ability to write, listen, and communicate effectively. Communication, both in-person and online is an important skill to thrive in the world of (remote) work in 2020 and further on. In addition, recruiters expressed that they expect students to have a better understanding of Micro and Macro Economics, subject knowledge, industry specific information and to prepare themselves for the job positions offered. Given that the students have been through some training and the campus recruitment process, they have a better understanding of the requirements and can make changes where required. Also taking into consideration that things change at a faster pace in organizations than higher education institutions can catch up with, students have to capitalize on the opportunities, the learning environment provided to become agile learners who can apply their knowledge. From studies conducted from around the world it is evident that employability and competence development depend on a strong sense of innovation and collaboration practices implemented in higher education (Abelha et al., 2020). Fresh graduates make up 15% of the talent demand in India while those who have between 1-5 years of work experience are preferred by employers (the demand is as high as 40%) (ISR, 2020). However with a bit of work experience or no work experience at all, young graduates are characterized by their curiosity, purpose, the ability to quickly acquire skills as and when required, the capacity for self-direction and self-development, the determination to make a successful career even though they would have to navigate various roles, industries to use their potential to make a meaningful contribution (Zao-Sanders & Palmer, 2019) and these traits make them valuable to organisations.

Level of Communication Skills of the students

CONCLUSION

The study has identified the skills and indicators for each level to enable students to assess themselves and prepare for the jobs they desire. Faculty members and Institutions can also facilitate the development of these skills, assess their students periodically and help them find the best fit (jobs that match their interests/capabilities). Most of these skills are inter-related and context based. Though each of them can be defined and distinguished between, in practice they go together and complement one another. Assessing the employability of the students is important for students to be aware of their current level of skills and to enable them to prepare for the job positions they are interested in. Student's perception of their skills is important for them to understand "areas of agreement or potential mismatches" (with that of the faculty and recruiters) (Abelha et al., 2020). Adopting the right mindset, staying motivated to acquire new skills and apply them; using technology to learn will enable the students to be in determining the direction and take control of their careers (Zao-Sanders & Palmer, 2019). Clark (2020) suggests that job seekers be proactive and seek out opportunities to develop/showcase one's skills and take charge of one's career. When skill-based industry-oriented teaching (Tiwari & Malati, 2020) is adopted in institutions offering the management programme, it would bridge the skill gaps and enhance the employability of the students. As with self-assessment (by the students) institutions should prioritize developing and assessing employability as it is necessary to facilitate better acquisition of work related competencies, provide appropriate training/remedial training and hence get better placements for their students.

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