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AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENT EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS IN CONVENTIONAL EDUCATION: INFLUENCING FACTORS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstarct

This study explores the factors influencing the development of employability skills among students enrolled in conventional degree courses, specifically comparing government-aided and self-financing MBA programs. Employability skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability are essential for students to transition effectively from academia to the professional world. Despite increasing attention to skill development, conventional courses often struggle to equip students with these competencies. Using a mixed-method approach, including surveys and interviews with students, faculty, and employers, the research identifies key academic, institutional, and socio-economic factors impacting skill acquisition. A sample of 120 final-year MBA students—60 from government-aided courses and 60 from self-financing courses—was assessed using an Employability Skills Checklist. Results show a statistically significant difference ($P < 0.05$) in employability skill levels between the two groups. Additionally, significant relationships were found among various dimensions of employability skills. Findings highlight that curriculum design, teaching methods, practical exposure, student motivation, family background, and industry engagement substantially affect skill development. The study concludes by recommending that educational institutions integrate targeted skill-building initiatives into conventional courses to better prepare students for the workforce.

Key Words: Employability Skills, College Students, Government Aided (regular) Courses, Self-financing Courses, Gender

Introduction

India is set to become one of the youngest countries globally by 2030, with approximately 140 million youth in the college-going age group. Remarkably, one in every four graduates worldwide will emerge from Indian higher educational institutions (FICCI Higher Education Summit, 2023). Over the years, India has made significant strides in the education sector, not only by drastically increasing higher education enrollment rates but also by enhancing the quality of educational outcomes. The Government of India has invested substantially in youth development initiatives, encompassing higher education, skill development, healthcare improvement, employment generation, and entrepreneurship promotion through various flagship schemes. The Union Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports acts as the primary custodian of youth development, coordinating efforts alongside other ministries that serve the nation's youth. Recognizing the evolving needs of the country's young population, the Government has revised the National Youth Policy (NYP) to focus on priority areas such as education, employment, and entrepreneurship. This updated policy aims to harness the potential of youth and contribute significantly to the country's GDP growth. In the post-COVID-19 "new normal," India is experiencing a robust resurgence across all development sectors. The nation is poised to emerge as a global superpower, leveraging its vast human capital known for diligence and industriousness. Economic forecasts predict that India will become the world's third-largest economy by 2030, surpassing the UK by 2025, Germany by 2027, and Japan by 2030 (CEBR, 2020). Achieving this ambitious goal requires productive engagement of the youth in economic activities. While employment demand and supply appear balanced, it is the employability skills of candidates that ultimately determine the fit between job seekers and employers—a key concern for the labor market. With ongoing reforms aimed at enhancing the standards and quality of the

teaching-learning process, the Government of India introduced the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 to advance these objectives. While these efforts focus on educational restructuring, it is crucial to consider the outcomes of education—particularly higher education—which serves as a pathway to gainful employment and sustainable careers. Employability skills hold paramount importance for youth seeking to enter the workforce. Despite reforms, access to and affordability of higher education remain significant challenges, primarily influenced by the economic conditions of the youth. Additionally, self-financing institutions have become increasingly attractive due to their emerging brand value and the variety of facilities offered to enrolled students. Many young learners take pride in pursuing education from reputed self-financing institutions. In this context, it became essential to examine the employability skill levels among students enrolled in regular (government-aided) and self-financing postgraduate courses. The ultimate goal of higher education is to equip students with employability skills, and this study aims to assess whether significant differences exist between these two groups in their degree of employability skills.

Review of Literature

Employability has increasingly become a central focus in higher education research, especially in the context of preparing graduates for the dynamic demands of the labor market. Andrews and Higson (2008) emphasize the growing importance of 'soft skills'—such as communication, teamwork, and adaptability—over purely technical or 'hard' business knowledge in shaping graduate employability across Europe. Their study highlights that employers increasingly seek graduates with well-rounded competencies that go beyond academic knowledge, reflecting a broader global trend. Similarly, Bridgstock (2009) draws attention to the often-overlooked role of career management skills in enhancing employability. She argues that alongside academic qualifications, the ability to actively manage one's career trajectory through self-awareness, networking, and adaptability is crucial for graduates to remain competitive. This perspective broadens the understanding of employability to include lifelong learning and proactive career development. Brown, Hesketh, and Williams (2003) explore employability within the framework of a knowledge-driven economy, underscoring the shift from traditional qualifications to a more nuanced skill set that integrates personal attributes and social capital. Their research points to the increasing complexity of labor markets and the necessity for graduates to possess both technical knowledge and social competencies to thrive professionally. Jackson (2016) proposes a re-conceptualization of graduate employability by stressing the significance of developing a pre-professional identity during university education. This identity formation helps students internalize the expectations of their future professional roles, thereby aligning their skills and attitudes with industry needs more effectively. Knight and Yorke (2003) discuss employability in relation to 'good learning' practices within higher education. They argue that employability is not simply about skill acquisition but is deeply connected to the quality of learning experiences that promote critical thinking, problem-solving, and reflective capabilities, all of which contribute to a graduate's ability to adapt and succeed in varied work environments. Smith (2012) focuses on the role of universities in fostering employer engagement, which is pivotal for aligning educational outcomes with labor market demands. He highlights how collaboration between academic institutions and industry partners can enhance curriculum relevance and provide students with practical exposure, thereby strengthening their employability. Tomlinson (2012) provides a comprehensive review of graduate employability, pointing out that it is a multifaceted concept involving not only skills and knowledge but also personal attributes, contextual factors, and social networks. His work advocates for a holistic approach to employability that integrates educational, social, and economic dimensions. Yorke (2006) offers a foundational understanding of employability in higher education, clarifying what it entails and what it does not. He emphasizes that employability is more than just securing a job; it includes the continuous capability to gain and maintain employment, adapt to change, and progress within one's career. Collectively, these studies

underscore the complex interplay of skills, personal development, institutional support, and external engagement that influence student employability. They advocate for educational reforms that integrate experiential learning, career management, and industry collaboration to effectively prepare graduates for the challenges of modern work environments.

Statement of the Problem

The present study seeks to assess the levels of employability skills of the students pursuing regular and self- financing courses in Hyderabad and probes to explore whether employability skills of these two categories of youth differ significantly

Objective of the Study

The present study was undertaken with the following objectives:

- To assess the levels of employability skills of students undergoing studies in regular and self- financing courses
- To study the differences in employability skills among the students pursuing regular and self- financing courses
- To study the relationship among the dimensions of employability skills

Research Design

The present study adopted an exploratory research design.

Hypotheses:

H0 1: There will be no significant difference among the students of regular and self-financing courses with regard to their employability skills

H0 2: There will be no significant gender differences in employability skills among the students of regular and self-financing courses

H0 3: There will be no significant relationship among the dimensions of employability skills

Operational Definitions

Employability Skills

Employability refer to the level of readiness of an individual to take up a work which also includes possession of the requisite skills, knowledge, attitudes and an understanding about work environments in an organization that makes them to be productive and enables achieving the organizational goals.

Sample

The subjects included for the purpose of conducting the present study comprised of students pursuing final year Master's Degree Programme in Business Administration in regular (government aided) and self- financing courses in Hyderabad.

Size and Source of Sample

The total number of respondents included for the study constituted 120 students who were presently pursuing final year MBA programmes in six different colleges Hyderabad City (three institutions which are government aided (regular) and three institutions which are self-financing respectively. The sample therefore consisted of 60 respondents correspondingly each from those who were pursuing government aided (regular) courses and self-financing courses. Among the 20 respondents from each of the six higher educational institutions, equal gender representation was provided ie., ten male and female students were included from each institution. For selection of respondents to conduct this study, stratified random sampling method was adopted. For collection

of data, an Employability Skills Checklist was developed by the investigators.
Each test item was provided a provision to record the response of the respondent by checking one option viz.,always, often, sometimes, rarely and never. The total score for dimension ranged between 0 to 24 with 0 as a minimum score and 4 as the maximum score for an item. For negatively phrased item, reverse scoring was done. For each dimension, a score up to 6 was considered as low in that skill, 7 to 12 as moderate, 13 to 17 as high and 18 to 24 was regarded as very high in a particular employability skill. All the dimension scores were added to obtain a comprehensive Employability Skills score. Scores up to 54 were placed in the low employability skills category, scores between 55 to 108 were regarded as moderate level, scores in the range of 109 to 162 were attributed to high employability skills and the scores between 163 to 216 were recognized as very high employability skills.

Interpretation

Higher the score indicated in a dimension indicated higher skill in each of the nine domains of employability skills. For the Employability Skills Score, all the dimension scores were added together to get a global score.

Data Collection

For the purpose of the collecting the data, the researchers obtained the list of students from each of the management faculty of six institutions in Hyderabad (three government-aided and three self-financing institutions) and stratified the students based on gender and adopted simple random method for selection of twenty students in one institution (with 10 male and female students respectively). The subjects selected were contacted through e-mail who consented to participate in the study voluntarily. The Employability Checklist was converted into a Google Form and was circulated to the participants for submitting their responses. Due confidentiality was maintained during the entire process.

Data analysis

The data thus emerged through the above process was scored and classified for statistical treatment. Descriptive statistical methods were employed to describe the levels of employability skills of the respondents besides inferential statistical techniques such as t-test to study the statistical difference between regular and self-financing students including their gender were computed. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was calculated to study the significant relationships among the dimensions of Employability Skills.

Results

The following sections present the results of the present study.

1. Employability Skills of the Respondents

Based on the data collected, it was observed that the mean Employability Skills Score of all the respondents was

Table 1: Employability Skills of the Respondents (Total and Dimension-wise)

Dimension	No. of Respondents	Mean Scores	Level
Communication	120	16.49	High
Creative Thinking	120	15.03	High
Job Seeking Skills	120	13.85	High
Leadership	120	15.11	High
Planning	120	13.99	High

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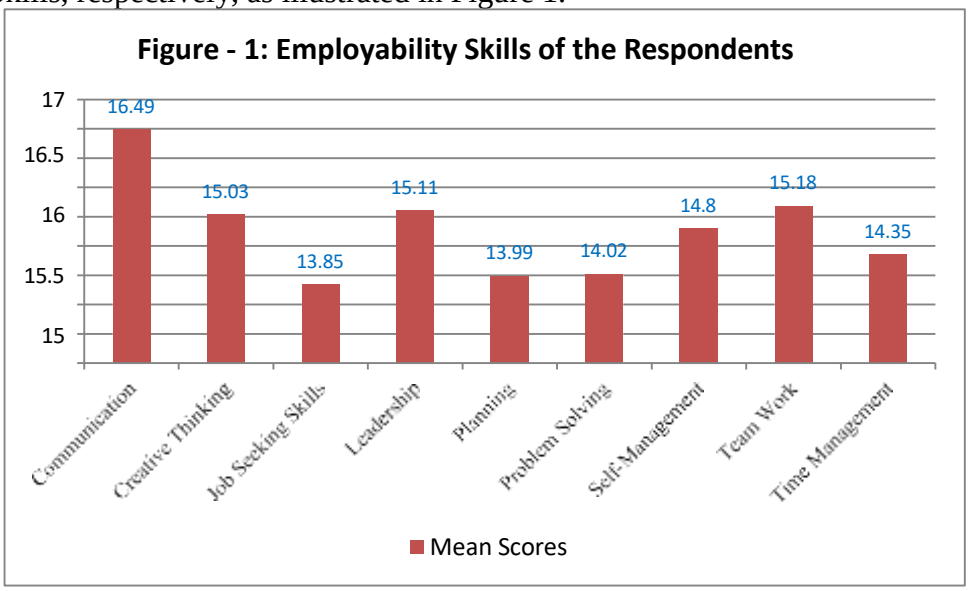
Dimension	No. of Respondents	Mean Scores	Level
Problem Solving	120	14.02	High
Self-Management	120	14.80	High
Team Work	120	15.18	High
Time Management	120	14.35	High
Employability Skills (Total)	**120**	**132.85**	**High**

From Table 1, it is evident that the respondents, on average, possess a high level of overall employability skills. When examining the individual dimensions, the respondents scored highly across all areas. Communication skills ranked the highest, followed closely by Teamwork, Leadership, Creative Thinking, Time Management, Self-Management, Problem Solving, Planning, and Job Seeking Skills, respectively, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure - 1: Employability Skills of the Respondents



Dr. Naveen Prasadula (2025) conducted research on the employability skills of MBA students in the State of Telangana and found that these skills were at an "average" level. He emphasized the need for management institutions to make concerted efforts to better equip students with employability skills. He further suggested that universities and academic institutions should align their curricula with evolving industry requirements to enhance student readiness for the workforce. Similarly observed that most business management students recognized the importance of soft skills for employment and career growth. They stressed the necessity of continuous capacity-building efforts through training programs aimed at improving students' soft skills Lynyte(2016) highlighted the importance of integrating employability skills into academic courses by incorporating experiential learning methods tailored to employer expectations. Earlier, Haynes (2013) examined employability skills in management students from an industry perspective and concluded that students often lacked the skills required by employers. He recommended that management institutions undertake pedagogical reforms to address these gaps.

2. Employability Skills of the Respondents with respect to Gender

Table – 2 presented below shows the average scores of the respondents on the overall employability skills based on the gender.

Table 2: Gender-wise Employability Skills of the Respondents suitable for your report or paper:

Dimension	Gender	No. of Respondents	Mean Scores	Level of Employability Skills

Dimension	Gender	No. of Respondents	Mean Scores	Level of Employability Skills
Communication	Male	60	17.24	High
	Female	60	15.74	
	Total	120	16.49	
Creative Thinking	Male	60	14.75	High
	Female	60	15.32	
	Total	120	15.03	
Job Seeking Skills	Male	60	13.09	High
	Female	60	14.62	
	Total	120	13.85	
Leadership	Male	60	15.44	High
	Female	60	14.79	
	Total	120	15.11	
Planning	Male	60	13.62	High
	Female	60	14.36	
	Total	120	13.99	
Problem Solving	Male	60	13.13	High
	Female	60	14.92	
	Total	120	14.02	
Self-Management	Male	60	14.46	High
	Female	60	15.14	
	Total	120	14.80	
Team Work	Male	60	14.57	High
	Female	60	15.80	
	Total	120	15.18	
Time Management	Male	60	13.80	High
	Female	60	14.91	
	Total	120	14.35	
Employability Skills (Total)	Male	60	130.10	High
	Female	60	135.60	
	Total	120	132.85	

From Table – 2, it is noticed that among the male and female respondents, the female student youth were found to have scored higher than their male counterparts in the overall employability skills with higher average scores on Creative Thinking, Job-seeking Skills, Planning, Problem Solving, Self-Management, and Teamwork than the male respondents. While the male respondents possessed higher levels of Communication, Leadership, Time Management skills in comparison with the female respondents which is depicted in Figures – 2 and 3.

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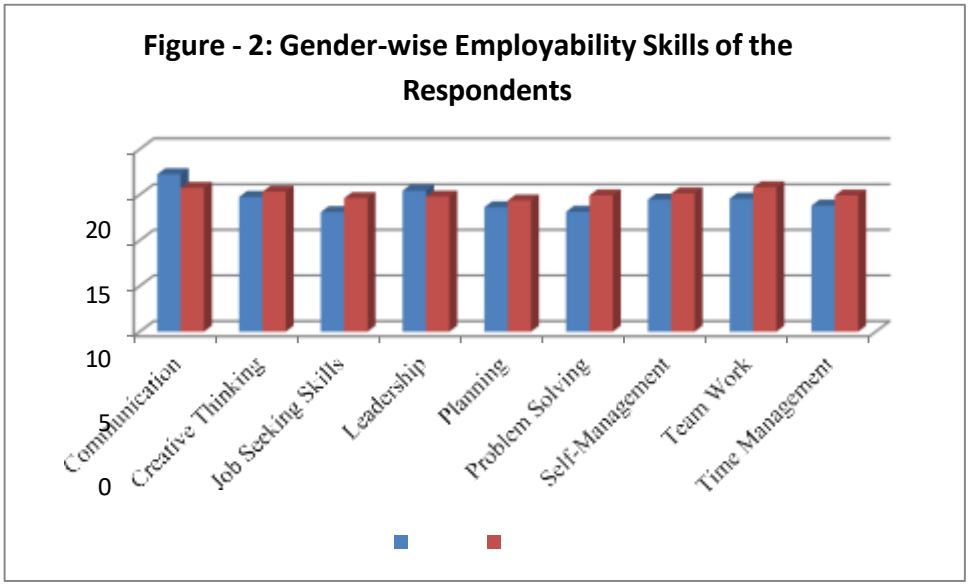

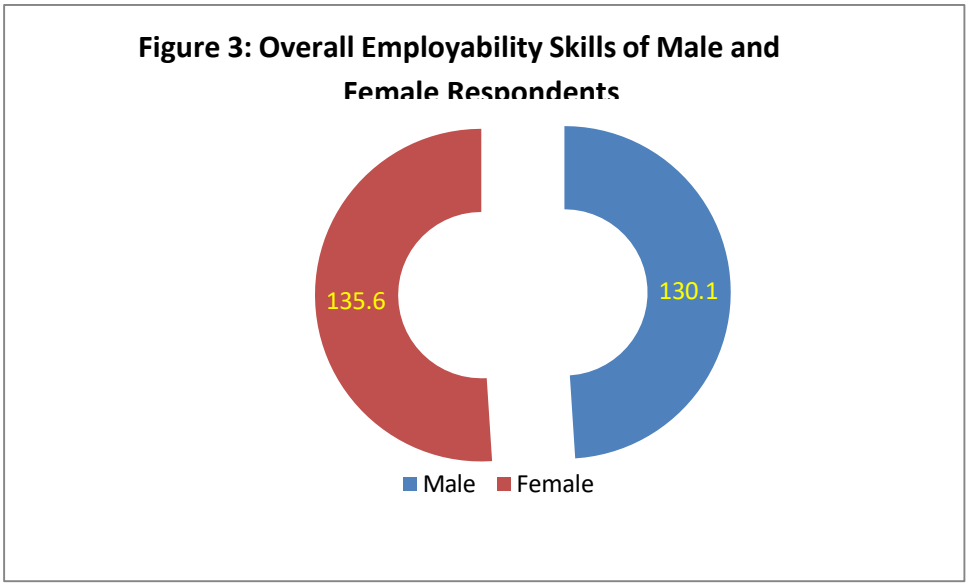

3. Significance of Differences in Employability Skills between the Students Pursuing Government Aided (regular) Courses and Self-financing Courses

With the responses obtained from 120 respondents (60 each from Government Aided and Self-Financing Courses) the average scores of the respondents on the overall employability skills with regard to their nature of courses being pursued ie., government aided and self-financing courses are presented in Table – 3 along with the statistical differences among these two groups.

Table – 3 Difference in Employability Skills between Students of Government Aided and Self-financing Courses

Groups	N	Mean	SD	SEM	t
Students of Government Aided (Regular) Courses	60	137.31	14.19	1.8319	3.2729**
Students of Self Financing Courses	60	128.39	15.63	2.0178	

**** Significant at 0.01 level**

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From the Table-3 above, it is noticed that the students from Government Aided (Regular) Courses scored higher on the overall employability skills than the students pursuing education through self-financing courses. Further, it was studied that there was a statistically significant difference among these two groups with respect to the overall employability skills which was found to be significant at 0.01 level. The present study also probed the statistical differences among the students of government aided courses and students of self-financing courses with respect to the dimensions of employability skills which are shown in Table – 4.

Table – 4 Differences among Students of Government Aided and Self-financing Courses on various Dimensions of Employability Skills

Dimensions of Employability Skills	Groups	N	Mean	SD	SEM	t
Communication	Students of Government Aided Courses	60	17.16	4.45	0.5745	1.5822
	Students of Self-financing Courses	60	15.82	4.82	0.6223	
Creative Thinking	Students of Government Aided Courses	60	15.76	3.61	0.466	2.2092*
	Students of Self-financing Courses	60	14.31	3.58	0.4622	
Job Seeking Skills	Students of Government Aided Courses	60	14.1	3.17	0.4092	0.7753
	Students of Self-financing Courses	60	13.61	3.73	0.4815	
Leadership	Students of Government Aided Courses	60	15.52	4.21	0.5435	1.0316
	Students of Self-financing Courses	60	14.71	4.39	0.5667	
Planning	Students of Government Aided Courses	60	14.21	4.63	0.5977	0.529
	Students of Self-financing Courses	60	13.77	4.48	0.5784	
Problem Solving	Students of Government Aided Courses	60	14.67	4.02	0.519	1.5979
	Students of Self-financing Courses	60	13.38	4.79	0.6184	
Self-Management	Students of Government Aided Courses	60	15.42	4.82	0.6223	1.4778
	Students of Self-financing Courses	60	14.18	4.36	0.5629	

Team Work	Students of Government Aided Courses	60	15.64	4.29	0.5538	1.3215
	Students of Self-financing Courses	60	14.73	3.17	0.4092	
Time Management	Students of Government Aided Courses	60	14.83	4.75	0.6132	1.2197
	Students of Self-financing Courses	60	13.88	3.72	0.4802	

*** Significant at 0.05 level**

From Table 4, it is inferred that students enrolled in government-aided courses scored higher across all dimensions of employability skills compared to those in self-financing courses. However, the only statistically significant difference between these two groups was observed in the dimension of creative thinking, with significance at the 0.05 level. The findings of indicated no significant difference in employability skills among students from three different categories of institutions based on their years of establishment. Their study also revealed no significant gender-based differences in overall employability skills. In contrast, the present study identified significant differences in employability skills between students pursuing government-aided and self-financing courses. Consequently, the null hypothesis ($H0_1$), which stated that "there will be no significant difference among students of regular and self-financing courses with regard to their employability skills," is rejected.

4. Significance of Differences in Employability Skills of the Respondents based on Gender

Though the female respondents scored higher on an average in the employability skills, the statistically significant differences were computed to ascertain if they significantly differed or not. The gender differences among the respondents in their employability skills is given below in Table – 5.

Table – 5 Gender Differences in Employability Skills of the Respondents

Groups	N	Mean	SD	SEM	t
Male Students	60	130.1	17.63	2.276	1.7262
Female Students	60	135.6	17.27	2.2295	

From the table above, it was found that the male and female respondents did not statistically differ in the overall employability skills. The gender differences among the respondents in various dimensions of employability skills were probed to find out the significant difference, if any. Table – 6 provides the details of gender differences across the dimensions of employability skills of the respondents.

Table – 6 Differences in various Dimensions of Employability Skills of the Respondents based on Gender

Dimensions of Employability Skills	Groups	N	Mean	SD	SEM	t
Communication	Male	60	17.24	3.47	0.448	2.2482*
	Female	60	15.74	3.83	0.4945	
Creative Thinking	Male	60	14.75	4.29	0.5538	0.7767
	Female	60	15.32	3.73	0.4815	
Job Seeking Skills	Male	60	13.09	3.76	0.4854	2.391*
	Female	60	14.62	3.23	0.417	
Leadership	Male	60	15.44	3.68	0.4751	0.8672

	Female	60	14.79	4.49	0.5797	
Planning	Male	60	13.62	3.58	0.4622	1.0873
	Female	60	14.36	3.87	0.4996	
Problem Solving	Male	60	13.13	4.66	0.6016	2.2291*
	Female	60	14.92	4.12	0.5319	
Self-Management	Male	60	14.46	3.26	0.4209	1.1763
	Female	60	15.14	3.07	0.3963	
Team Work	Male	60	14.57	3.45	0.4454	2.0334*
	Female	60	15.8	3.17	0.4092	
Time Management	Male	60	13.8	3.61	0.466	1.7124
	Female	60	14.91	3.49	0.4506	

*** Significant at 0.05 level**

Selvam (2016) in his study on the employability skills of rural MBA students found that MBA graduates were more employable and that the rural students possessed high levels of employability skills. His study also found that the levels of employability skills among rural youth did not vary much with the national situation. Further, his study identified that the respondents of the research did not differ significantly on employability skills with regard to gender and first generation learners. Kazilan, Hamzah and Bakar (2009) and Kong (2011) studying the differences between males and females, found through their study that females had higher levels of employability skills than the males. Chithra (2013) explored the gender differences in relation to employability skills and identified that the male and female respondents of their study did not significantly differ in their employability skills which she attributed the reasons to cultural sensitization and socialization factors. Bindu & Unninarayanan (2018) The results of their study showed no difference in the employability skills among the three categories of institutions on the basis of years of their existence/establishment. Their research revealed that there was no significant difference in the overall employability skills between male and female students. From Table – 6 above, it is observed that the male and female respondents differed statistically in the dimensions viz., Communication, Job Seeking Skills, Problem Solving and Team Work and the differences were found to be significant at 0.05 level. Therefore, the hypothesis (H_0 2) stating that "there will be no significant gender differences in employability skills among the students of regular and self-financing courses" is rejected.

5. Correlational Analysis among the Dimensions of Employability Skills

In order to probe the relationships between the dimensions of employability skills of the respondents, correlational analysis among the sub-dimensions of employability skills were computed and the co-efficient of correlation and the levels of significance are indicated in Table - 7.

Table – 7 Correlation among the dimensions of Employability Skills

Dimensions of Employability skills	**Correlation Coefficients across Dimensions of Employability Skills**								
	C	**CT**	**JSS**	**L**	**P**	**PS**	**SM**	**TW**	**TM**
C	---	0.239*	0.199*	0.196*	0.332**	0.103	0.117	0.297**	0.228*
CT		---	0.271**	0.265**	0.342**	0.277**	0.213*	0.137	0.246*
JSS			---	0.298**	0.296**	0.246*	0.168	0.174	0.254**
L				---	0.368**	0.338**	0.285**	0.371**	0.201*
P					---	0.109	0.247*	0.119	0.304**
PS						---	0.121	0.258**	0.384**

SM							---	0.314**	0.365**
TW								---	0.375**
TM									---

* Significant at 0.05 level

** Significant at 0.01 level

From Table - 7 presented above, it is evident that there were that there were significant relationships among most of the sub-dimensions of Employability Skills. Communication showed a strong and significant relationship with various dimensions of employability skills. It was significantly associated with Creative Thinking, Job Search Skills, Leadership, and Time Management at the 0.05 level. Moreover, Planning and Team Work demonstrated an even stronger connection with Communication, significant at the 0.01 level. Critical Thinking correlated significantly with Job Search Skills, Leadership, Planning, and Problem Solving at the 0.05 level, while Self-Management and Time Management exhibited high levels of association, both statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Job Search Skills were positively linked to Leadership, Planning, and Time Management at the 0.05 level. Problem Solving was highly related to Job Search Skills, with significance at the 0.01 level. Leadership showed a significant correlation with Time Management at the 0.05 level. Additionally, Planning, Problem Solving, Self-Management, and Team Work were closely interrelated with Leadership at the 0.01 level. Planning was significantly correlated with Self-Management at the 0.05 level, and showed an even stronger relationship with Time Management at the 0.01 level. Problem Solving was significantly associated with Team Work and Time Management at the 0.01 level. Finally, Self-Management was positively correlated with both Team Work and Team Management, with significance at the 0.01 level. Team Work and Team Management were also significantly related to each other at the 0.01 level. While all the correlations were positively associated with each other, it was noticed that the relationships between Communication, Problem Solving and Self-Management; Creative Thinking with Team Work; Job Search Skills with Self-Management, Planning with Problem Solving and Team Work; Problem Solving with Self-Management were not found to be statistically significant. The hypothesis (H_0 3) stating that "there will be no significant relationship among the dimensions of employability skills" is rejected.

Conclusions

This study highlights that while students enrolled in conventional education programs generally exhibit high levels of employability skills, significant disparities exist based on gender, type of institution, and specific skill dimensions. Communication, teamwork, leadership, and critical thinking emerge as vital skills that shape students' readiness for the workforce. The findings reveal that students from government-aided courses tend to possess stronger employability skills compared to those from self-financing institutions, with creative thinking showing the most notable difference. Several factors including curriculum design, teaching methods, socio-economic background, and institutional support play crucial roles in shaping these skills. Challenges such as unequal access to quality education, varying institutional resources, and the evolving demands of the job market must be addressed to bridge the employability gap. To enhance employability outcomes, educational institutions must integrate skill development into their curricula more effectively, promote experiential learning, and strengthen industry-academia collaboration. Tailored interventions and continuous training programs focusing on both hard and soft skills will better prepare students for dynamic professional environments. Ultimately, equipping youth with robust employability skills is essential not only for individual career success but also for India's broader economic growth and global competitiveness in the coming decades.

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