

A Study on the Problems Faced by Graduates' Employability and Strategies for Improvement

Mengke Guo*

School of Economics and Management, Beijing Polytechnic, Beijing 100102, China

*Corresponding author: Mengke Guo, guomk1989@126.com

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Abstract: The study of employability in modern societies is important because it concerns individuals, the education system, employers, and society. This article analyzes the employability of graduates from the perspective of soft skills, hard skills, interpersonal skills, creativity and innovation, and leadership skills. Graduates face numerous issues and challenges in terms of employability. Therefore, schools and educational institutions, governments, and enterprises need to work together to enhance their competitiveness and chances of success in the workplace.

Keywords: Employability; Graduates; Strategies for improvement

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1. Introduction

The study of employability in modern societies is important because it concerns individuals, the education system, employers, and society ^[1]. Firstly, the study of employability contributes to the competitiveness of individuals, helps individuals in acquiring skills and qualities needed for career development, and helps them find a job that meets their goals and interests. From an educational standpoint, the study of employability helps to enhance the quality of teaching and improve educational methods, so as to ensure that students graduate with the skills required by the labor market. From the perspective of corporates, the study of employability helps corporations find employees with the necessary competencies, helps increase productivity and creativity, and helps in understanding recruitment, training, and retaining of competent employees. From a societal perspective, the study of employability has the following benefits. First, the study helps individuals find jobs more easily, which helps to increase the employment rate, economic income, and quality of life ^[2]. A high employment rate then contributes to social stability, whereas, unemployment and occupational instability will lead to social problems such as poverty, crime, and social inequality. Besides, increased employability has a positive impact on the national economy and improves the national competitive power. A labor force with diversified skills meets changing market demands better and is capable of promoting innovation. In the era of globalization, competition between countries and organizations is becoming more intense. A labor force with strong employability can increase the competitiveness of countries and organizations. The study of

employability can also contribute to a better understanding of the concept of sustainable development. A labor force with relevant skills contributes to the development of a sustainable economy, society, and environment. Hence, the importance of employability research lies in its far-reaching impact on individuals, the education system, employers, and society. By understanding and improving employability, we can better meet the needs of modern society and enhance economic prosperity and social stability^[3-4].

The concept of employability was first proposed in 1909^[5]. Employability is defined as an individual’s ability to get and keep a job^[6]. In the CNKI database, all the journals were searched precisely by using “subject” as the search field and “employability” as the search term. After selecting the field “Chinese core journals,” 1075 valid documents were obtained. In the Web of Science database, 8529 articles were obtained after noise processing with “employability” as the search term and “Article” or “Review” as the document type (the cut-off date was October 21, 2023). In general, there were many qualitative studies on employability and a few quantitative studies on strategies to enhance employability.

2. Key concepts

Employability competencies are the set of skills, qualities, and knowledge needed for one to be employed for a job, and these competencies can be categorized into different categories. These categories include soft skills, hard skills, interpersonal skills, creativity and innovation, and leadership skills. Soft skills consist of communication skills, teamwork skills, leadership skills, and problem-solving and decision-making skills. Hard skills consist of professional knowledge, technical skills, data analytics, linguistic skills, and math and science skills. Interpersonal skills encompass interpersonal skills, conflict resolution skills, data analytics skills, networking skills, and social intelligence. Next, creativity and innovation, encompasses creativity, innovative thinking, and adaptability. Lastly, leadership skills cover goal setting and planning, motivating and inspiring teams, decision-making, and effective management. The components of employability are shown in **Table 1**. These categorizations of employability skills help employers to understand and assess the skills of their employees, and also help individuals to understand their strengths and areas for development in the workplace. By considering these skills together, individuals can better respond to the demands of the workplace and enhance employment opportunities and career development.

Table 1. Components of employability

Category	Skills	Description
Soft skills	Communication skills	Speaking, writing, and listening skills
	Teamwork skills	The ability to work with others
	Leadership skills	The ability to lead others, motivate a team, and make decisions
	Problem-solving and decision-making skills	The ability to analyze a situation, find a solution, and make an informed decision
Hard skills	Professional knowledge	Professional knowledge and skills related to a specific industry, field, or job
	Technical skills	The ability to use a specific software, tool, or technology
	Data analytics	The ability to analyze and interpret data, to extract insights, and to develop strategies
	Linguistic skills	Multilingual abilities and being able to communicate effectively in an international work environment
	Math and science skills	Skills in the fields of mathematics, physics, chemistry, etc.

Table 1. (Continued)

Category	Skills	Description
Interpersonal skills	Interpersonal skills	The ability to establish, maintain, and develop good relationships with co-workers, supervisors, clients, and partners
	Conflict resolution skills	Dealing with conflicts and disputes, reaching a consensus, and maintaining harmonious working relationships
	Data analytics skills	Being able to analyze and interpret data, extract insights and formulate strategies
	Networking skills	Building and expanding a professional network in order to gain access to career opportunities and support
	Social intelligence	Understanding the emotions, needs, and motivations of others in order to better coordinate and collaborate
Creativity and innovation	Creativity	The ability to generate new ideas, perspectives, and solutions
	Innovative thinking	The ability to think creatively when solving problems and developing new approaches
	Adaptability	The ability to adapt to changing environments and new technologies
Leadership skills	Goal setting and planning	Setting strategic goals and developing implementation plans
	Motivating and inspiring teams	Being able to inspire and guide team members to achieve a common goal
	Decision-making	Making informed decisions under pressure and being held accountable for them
	Effective management	Managing resources, people, and budgets to achieve organizational goals

3. Problem analysis

There are many factors that affect an individual's employability, which is not only related to the individual but also to the education system and society. This article analyzes the problems in the employability of newly graduated students ^[7]. First, there is a gap between the education system and the needs of the job market. Many students lack hard skills after graduation, which makes it difficult for them to find jobs related to their specialties. Secondly, students lack work experience, which makes them less favorable when they enter the job market. There are not enough internships and practical opportunities or students do not know how to seek them. Moreover, while students are usually trained in academics, they lack soft skills such as communication, teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving skills, which are equally important in the workplace. Fourthly, many students lack a clear career plan and do not know what their interests and goals are or how to achieve them. Fifthly, the high unemployment rate in certain fields and regions makes it difficult for students to find jobs, which may be related to the lack of employment opportunities or changes in market demand. Furthermore, rapid technological advancement is changing career demands, and students need to continually improve their technical skills to adapt to these changes. Seventh, many students face the problem of unstable employment, where work contracts may be temporary or part-time rather than long-term full-time employment. Eighthly, some students face social inequalities, which may make it more difficult for them to find jobs, especially those from low-income families. Additionally, mental health problems like anxiety and depression may affect their employability and employment opportunities. Besides, globalization has made competition more intense and students need to have an international outlook and intercultural communication skills. These issues and challenges require integrated solutions, including improving the education system, providing more internship opportunities, enhancing soft skill training, promoting career planning, and supporting mental health. Government sectors, educational institutions, employers, and students themselves need to work together to address these challenges to ensure that students are better equipped to enter the workplace and achieve success.

4. Strategies

Developing and improving employability is the key to finding and keeping a job, and a variety of efforts should be actively taken to improve one's employability. Firstly, graduates are encouraged to attend training courses, seminars, and workshops to improve their professional knowledge and skills and obtain relevant certifications to increase their competitiveness in their fields. Besides, they should also utilize online resources and educational platforms to learn new skills and knowledge and read more books and journals to stay on top of industry trends. Thirdly, they should take part in internships or voluntary activities to gain work experience and build connections, or they can also seek part-time jobs to add to their portfolio. Moreover, they should improve their communication, teamwork, time management, and problem-solving skills. This can be done by participating in social events, clubs, or volunteer work. Fifthly, they should participate in industry conferences, and seminars, and be active on social media platforms to establish connections and communicate with their peers. Additionally, they should undergo career counseling to clarify their career path and goals. Eighthly, they should seek different types of jobs and projects to gain diverse work experiences, while considering opportunities in other industries to gain different perspectives. Furthermore, they should continuously improve their communication skills by participating in speech classes to improve oral expression skills, and learn to write quality articles or reports to improve their writing skills. The tenth point is that they should maintain a positive attitude, build more confidence, and be more resilient so that they can overcome challenges and difficulties. They should also demonstrate a positive work attitude in the workplace. The next point is that they should keep abreast of industry trends to stay competitive and subscribe to industry news and professional publications to stay up-to-date. Lastly, they should be adaptable to new situations, flexible in responding to new challenges and opportunities, and able to adjust their career plans according to their personal needs and the industry's demands. In short, developing and enhancing employability is an ongoing process that requires self-investment, self-reflection, and continuous learning. By developing hard and soft skills, building a professional network and maintaining a positive attitude, the competitiveness and chances of success in the workplace will increase.

The joint efforts of schools, governments, and enterprises are also needed to overcome the challenges faced by graduates in terms of their employability. Schools and educational institutions can help students improve their employability in multiple aspects ^[8]. Firstly, schools and educational institutions should offer more career-related programs to ensure that students graduate with the necessary hard skills, while the education system needs to align with the demands of the job market by regularly reviewing and updating the curriculum. Besides, schools and educational institutions can provide specialized training and activities to enhance students' soft skills, such as communication, leadership, teamwork and problem-solving skills, social skills, and self-management skills. Thirdly, schools can collaborate with enterprises to provide internships, part-time jobs and project opportunities to help students gain practical experience. Furthermore, schools and training institutions should provide career counseling and resources to help students clarify their career goals and plan their career paths. The institutions should also encourage students to actively participate in career planning activities such as career fairs and mentorship programs. Fifthly, schools should provide mental health support to help students deal with anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues, and promote mental health education and awareness to reduce the occurrence of mental health problems. Next, training for technology and digital competencies should be strengthened to ensure that students can adapt to technological advancements, and online lessons should be provided to help students master digital tools and techniques. As for the government, policy support should be given to students to enhance their employability. The government can formulate policies to encourage employers to provide training and development opportunities to help employees upgrade their skills. Financial assistance and scholarships should also be provided to alleviate the financial burden

of students and to ensure that they can find suitable jobs. Enterprises can also play a role in improving the employability of graduates. Employers can provide training and development opportunities to help employees improve their skills. Employers should also create a work environment that supports their employees' mental health, and encourage innovation and learning. In summary, graduates, schools and educational institutions, government sectors, and enterprises need to work together to ensure that students are better prepared to enter the workforce and unleash their full potential.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we introduced the importance of studying the employability of graduates, identified the various components of employability, and provided a detailed interpretation of these components. In the current environment, graduates face several issues and challenges in terms of employability. Therefore, graduates, schools and educational institutions, governments, and enterprises need to work together to enhance their competitiveness and chances of success in the workplace.

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