Employability Skills for the Digital Age: A Literature Review of Industry Expectations from Post-Graduate Students

Abstract

This paper analyzes twenty years of academic research (2005–2025) to investigate the alignment of employability skills developed during postgraduate education with the changing requirements of industry in the digital era. The objectives are to: (1) examine academic and industry viewpoints on employability competencies; (2) evaluate the degree to which current postgraduate training aligns with employer expectations; and (3) ascertain the essential skills necessary for professional success in modern organizational environments.
The review shows that employability has changed from being mostly about grades to being about a wider range of skills, such as communication, critical thinking, adaptability, professional behavior, and digital fluency. Even though there have been many changes to the curriculum and new teaching methods like Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) and Project-Based Learning (PBL), there is still a big difference between what happens in schools and what happens in the real world. This misalignment is exacerbated by disparate stakeholder expectations and inconsistent implementation mechanisms within higher education systems. Based on these ideas, the paper suggests a conceptual way to close the gap between academia and industry and describes how to create a prototype employability training module for PGDM students. By bringing together twenty years of research, the study helps to clarify the employability gap in the digital age and provides information for evidence-based curriculum redesign in postgraduate professional education, as well as a customized training module.

Introduction:

Employability skills have become more important in the changing global economy because they show how likely a graduate is to get a job. These skills go beyond just book smarts. They include critical thinking, communication, adaptation, digital literacy, and teamwork, which are all cognitive, interpersonal, and technical skills. As industries quickly adopt digital technologies, the need for such broad skills has grown, which has changed what employers expect from recent graduates.

In this sense, postgraduate diploma in management (PGDM) programs are very important for training the next generation of professionals. Unlike traditional academic degrees, PGDM programs are usually focused on the industry, flexible, and updated regularly to meet the needs of the market. Their goal is to close the gap between theory and practice by giving students the management skills and soft skills they need to do well in busy business settings.

In the digital age, skills that help you get a job are even more important. Employers are looking for PGDM graduates who are not only good at their jobs but also adaptable, emotionally intelligent, and able to lead through uncertainty as automation, AI, and remote work change job roles and shape employment roles. So, it's very important for teachers, curriculum designers, and lawmakers to know what the job market expects from PGDM graduates in terms of employability.

The goal of this systematic analysis is to look into what employers expect from PGDM graduates in terms of employability skills and see how well academic institutions are keeping up with these changing needs in their teaching materials. The study seeks to enhance

management education in the digital era by identifying existing deficiencies and exemplary practices.

This literature review will identify and synthesize contemporary research on employability skills, specifically for PGDM students. It will outline the scope and depth of research investigating the efficacy of PGDM programs in preparing students to meet the demands of the digital age workforce. The review aims to discern trends, gaps, and emerging issues specific to PGDM education by concentrating on this section, thereby enhancing our understanding of existing research and highlighting areas necessitating further investigation.

Literature Review:

Wilton (2008) examined the assumption that, due to their educational background, business graduates are inherently suited for management positions. He said that even with formal credentials, many graduates have trouble meeting the practical and social skills needed for management jobs. The study highlights that academic qualifications alone do not guarantee employability in management roles, revealing a disparity between business requirements and higher education provisions.

Pan and Lee (2011) utilized data from a national graduate destination survey to investigate the correlation between academic performance and perceived employability among managerial and business graduates. Their research demonstrated that while high academic performance substantially influences perceptions of employability, it is not the sole determinant. Other traits, such as practical skills, participation in extracurricular activities, and work experience in the field, had a big impact on graduates' chances of getting a job. The authors stressed the need for colleges and universities to adopt a more comprehensive approach to preparing students for the job market by combining academic rigor with hands-on learning and the development of soft skills.

Jackson (2012) developed and evaluated a model to measure undergraduate proficiency in essential employability skills. She found that even though a lot of students think they have the right skills, their self-evaluation doesn't match what companies expect. The report stresses how important it is for all stakeholders, including teachers, schools, and businesses, to work together to close this gap and make sure that academic results are more in line with what employers need.

Jackson (2013) examines data from Edith Cowan University to demonstrate how work-integrated learning (WIL) enhances undergraduate employability. The study says that structured WIL programs greatly improve important soft skills like communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability that are needed in all fields.
Employers prioritize workplace readiness, which includes professionalism and initiative, over technical knowledge. WIL helps students get jobs by showing them how to use what they've learned in school in real life. Placement quality, industry context, and institutional support all have an impact on the results, though.
Jackson, who has strong connections in the industry, suggests that WIL be included as an assessed basic part of undergraduate programs to regularly improve graduates' chances of getting a job and doing well on the job.

Chadha and Mishra (2014) look into how sectors' expectations of management graduates' job readiness are changing. They stress that companies today value soft skills like communication, flexibility, leadership, and problem-solving more than just academic knowledge. Their research reveals a divergence between the curriculum of management students and the essential skills demanded by the business sector. The authors recommend incorporating industry engagement and practical training into the management curriculum to prepare graduates for the workforce.

Chadha and Mishra (2014) examine the evolving expectations of industries concerning the job readiness of management graduates, highlighting that contemporary companies prioritize soft skills such as communication, adaptability, leadership, and problem-solving over mere academic knowledge. Their research reveals a divergence between the curriculum of management students and the essential skills demanded by the business sector. To prepare graduates for the job market, the authors suggest adding real-world training and industry involvement to the management curriculum.

Aithal and Kumari (2015) investigate the strategies through which higher education institutions can successfully develop employability skills in students. The research identifies various pedagogical methodologies, such as experiential learning, industry collaborations, and competency-based training, as critical determinants affecting employability. It emphasizes the imperative for educational institutions to move beyond traditional pedagogical approaches and adopt innovative, outcome-focused methodologies that align with industry requirements, thus preparing students for real-world challenges.
Sumanasiri, Yajid, and Khatibi (2015) analyze the existing literature to explore the complex notion of graduate employability, emphasizing that it encompasses not only academic qualifications but also soft skills, work experience, and personal characteristics. The research emphasizes the significance of higher education institutions in influencing employability via curriculum development, industry engagement, and skill enhancement programs. It advocates for a comprehensive and stakeholder-oriented strategy to synchronize graduate competencies with labor market demands.
Creasey (2015) examines strategies to enhance students' employability by aligning their academic pursuits with the practical skills required in contemporary job markets. The study emphasizes the necessity of incorporating employability skills—such as communication, critical thinking, and teamwork—into higher education curricula to enhance graduates' preparedness for professional environments. Through a comprehensive examination of educational policies and corporate expectations, the study uncovers inconsistencies between academic performance and employment criteria. Creasey advocates for a collaborative approach involving educators, business executives, and students to develop targeted interventions that promote relevant competencies. The findings suggest that graduate employability can be significantly enhanced through proactive curriculum development, opportunities for experiential learning, and continuous skills evaluations.

Through extensive research of the literature, Gowsalya and Kumar (2015) defined the skills needed for modern workers to get jobs. Their research shows that employability is made up of both academic qualifications and "soft skills" like communication, adaptability, and problem-solving. The study characterizes employability skills as teamwork, leadership, interpersonal abilities, and professional ethics, which are crucial for career preparedness. The researchers point out that the gap between what employers want and what students can do is getting bigger. The study indicates that integrating academic and experiential learning

may bridge this gap. It also says that schools should work with businesses to make sure that their classes are useful in the real world. The essay asserts that academic frameworks must incorporate employability skills to prepare graduates for an evolving global market.

Osmani (2015) examines the evolution of graduate employability through the analysis of graduate attributes and employment outcomes literature. The survey found that transferable skills like communication, problem-solving, teamwork, and adaptability are becoming more and more important for getting a job after graduation. It knows that even though technical skills are important, companies are putting more and more value on soft skills and character traits that help graduates do well in changing situations.
Osmani, on the other hand, says that schools define, teach, and test these traits in different ways. The survey also shows that there is a big difference between what employers want and what graduates can do. It suggests that employability skills should be taught in a more structured and goal-oriented way.
Osmani proposes ongoing collaboration among educators, employers, and students to align educational outcomes with market demands. The review showed that embedding targeted, evidence-based graduate quality into the curriculum makes it easier to find work and stay in a job.

Divan and McBurney (2016) examine the ways in which students assume responsibility for their employability development throughout their academic experience. The study shows that even though students know how important employability skills are, many of them have trouble taking advantage of opportunities to build those skills unless someone helps and guides them. The authors emphasize the necessity for higher education institutions to develop structured, reflective, and integrated strategies within curricula to assist students in effectively managing and improving their employability during their academic pursuits.
In 2017, Singh, Chawla, Agarwal, and Desai devised and evaluated a scale to assess the impact of innovation on the employability of management students. The study discovered that contemporary employment is significantly contingent upon essential innovation-related competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability. The scale demonstrated significant validity and reliability through empirical evidence. The authors emphasized the necessity of integrating creativity into recruitment and educational practices to enhance graduates' readiness for challenging employment environments.

In 2018, Gedye and Beaumont looked into how college students think about and define work. Through qualitative analysis, the study revealed that numerous students equate employability primarily with the ability to secure employment post-graduation, thereby overlooking broader aspects such as personal development, transferable skills, and long-term career advancement. The findings underscore a constrained understanding of employability among students, primarily influenced by short-term employment aspirations rather than comprehensive career preparedness. The authors suggest that colleges and universities should put in place better communication and guidance policies so that students can see employability in a more complete way.

Lisá, Hennelová and Newman (2019) investigated the discrepancies between the anticipations of university graduates and employers regarding essential employability skills. The comparison analysis revealed a significant discrepancy: employers prioritize practical skills such as teamwork, communication, and problem-solving, while students focus predominantly on academic knowledge and technical competencies. The study emphasizes the imperative for institutions to align their curricula with industry demands by prioritizing

soft skills and practical applications. To get graduates ready for the job market, it is important to close this gap in expectations.

Moghaddas, Nilforooshan, and Sadeghi (2025) specifically examined the impact of proactive personality and core self-evaluation on employability in dynamic work environments. The researchers posited that individuals who possess a positive self-assessment and demonstrate initiative are more likely to attain employability, attributable not only to their personality traits but also to the mediating factors of career exploration, adaptability, and strategic planning. Their findings underscore the significance of the three mediators—adaptability, job exploration, and career planning—in transforming personal attributes into employability outcomes; thus, enhancing these domains will facilitate increased career readiness across various profiles.

Timming, Borg, French, and Mortensen (2025) examined whether job seekers, particularly recent graduates, accurately discern what companies prioritize in prospective employees. They used a between-subjects experimental design to look at how hiring managers and graduates see important qualities that make someone employable. The study found that job seekers might misunderstand or overestimate certain traits they think employers value. This can lead to mismatches in job applications and hiring results. The results underscore the imperative for enhanced career guidance and alignment between industry demands and higher education.

Li and Jansaeng (2025) examine the potential of Project-Based Learning (PBL) to enhance the employability of college students within higher education contexts. PBL can help people learn important job skills like communication, critical thinking, and teamwork. However, it is not used well because schools don't support it enough, teachers aren't ready for it, and the curriculum isn't integrated evenly. Their findings emphasize the necessity for universities to systematically eliminate these barriers to ensure the success of PBL, enabling students to acquire the practical skills demanded by employers.

Pepple, Akaighe, Sambo, George-Aremu, Bosah, and Trollman (2025) examined the influence of guest lectures on improving student employability. The study emphasized that when thoughtfully integrated into the academic curriculum, guest lectures serve as an indispensable educational resource by acquainting students with current industry practices, career realities, and professional expectations. The researchers looked into issues like how to make sure that guest content fits with educational goals and how to keep students interested. They decided that to have the most effect, schools need to carefully choose industry speakers, provide contextual help, and include lectures in a way that encourages students to think about what they are learning.

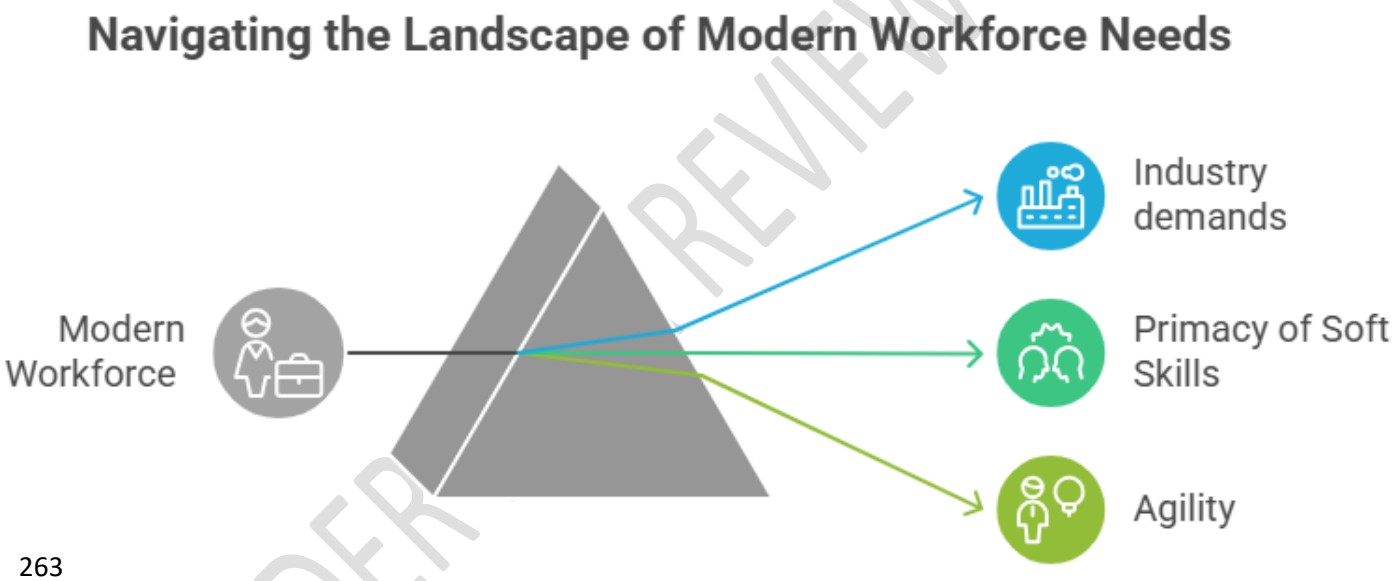
Gap Identification:

The studies that were looked at show how important soft skills, hands-on experience, and skills related to innovation, such as critical thinking, creativity, and flexibility, are for improving the employability of recent graduates. Despite this, there are still obvious gaps in research, especially when it comes to how to successfully integrate the curriculum, how to

teach, digital skills, interpersonal skills, and the long-term success of programs that help people get jobs. By conducting targeted research, addressing these deficiencies can facilitate the creation of more effective teaching strategies, align with industry standards, and improve career opportunities for postgraduate students in dynamic settings.

There is also a gap between what students learn in school and what is expected in the workplace, especially when it comes to soft skills like communication, critical thinking, and adaptability. Different points of view from stakeholders can lead to employability strategies that don't work. The most important gaps can be summed up as follows:

1. **Mismatch Between Education and Industry:** There is a persistent gap between the academic preparation provided by higher education institutions (HEIs) and the practical skills required by employers.
2. **Importance of Soft Skills:** Communication, teamwork, adaptability, problem-solving, and leadership are all skills that are consistently seen as important for being ready for a job.
3. **Changing Expectations of Employers:** Employers now value soft skills and new ideas more than just academic knowledge. This shows how workplaces are always changing. So, being flexible and adaptable is one of the most important things.



Objectives: The goals of this research are:

1. To examine employability skills in both academic and industrial contexts.

2. To find out how well current academic training meets the needs of the industry

3. To find out what skills are most in demand in today's fast-changing job market.

Discussion

Over the past twenty years, researchers and institutions have changed their focus on postgraduate employability several times, making it a more complex idea. Since 2005 and continuing into the current decade, the discourse has gradually shifted from academic achievement to the comprehensive cultivation of skills and attributes essential for dynamic industries.

Prior research, notably Wilton (2008), emphasized the deficiency of practical and interpersonal skills among business graduates, thereby underscoring the insufficiency of academic qualifications alone. This understanding made one realize that preparing for a career required more than just knowledge. Jackson (2012) demonstrated discrepancies between students' perceptions of their employment prospects and employer expectations as the decade progressed. Timming et al. (2025) found similar mismatches, which suggests that career advice systems still need to improve to close the perceived gap.

Around this time, Project-Based Learning (PBL) began to gain traction, and Li and Jansaeng (2025) observed its effectiveness in fostering essential employability skills. But two things that were seen as holding things back were support from institutions and teachers being ready. At the same time, soft skills like communication and problem-solving were always brought up as things that were missing. Research by Chadha and Mishra (2014) and Aithal and Kumari (2015) calls for creative teaching methods.

Beginning in 2015, there was a growing need for frameworks that would help people get jobs. Jackson (2013) substantiated the effects of Work-Integrated Learning (WIL), although results varied according to placement quality, while Osmani (2015) emphasized inconsistencies in the definition and assessment of transferable skills. Moghaddas et al. emphasized the necessity of integrating proactive personality traits into employability development by 2025; however, effective methodologies for cultivating these attributes are still lacking in research.

This timeline says that employability strategies are still not working well because stakeholders aren't working together and the curriculum isn't aligned. This stresses how important it is to have organized employability mapping and targeted training programs that help postgraduate students develop the most in-demand skills, like communication, critical thinking, adaptability, and soft skills, through flexible, outcome-driven, and student-centered methods.

Conclusion

This study underscores a continuous disconnect between postgraduate academic training and industry expectations, especially regarding fundamental employability skills including communication, adaptability, critical thinking, and teamwork. Different ideas about things among students, teachers, and employers lead to broken strategies and graduates who aren't ready for the job market.

The study stresses how important it is to find employability skills early on in postgraduate programs. By figuring out what students are good at and what they need to work on early on, schools can create customized, competency-based training modules that better meet the needs

of the job market. To make sure that skills stay useful and get stronger over time, students need to keep evaluating and improving their skills throughout their academic careers.
The results also show how important it is for all stakeholders—academia, industry, and students—to work together in a structured way to make curricula that are useful and focused on outcomes. Adding reflective practices, mentorship, and real-world applications can make graduates even more ready for work.
In conclusion, a phased approach that includes early diagnostics, personalized training, and final readiness evaluations is a long-term way to close the employability gap. This makes sure that graduate students are not only academically qualified, but also professionally ready to handle the changing challenges of today's workplaces.

The Study's Limitation:

Scope: The findings are derived from selected academic studies and secondary research, which may not accurately represent the diversity of postgraduate programs available across various fields or countries. So, one should be careful when applying the results to all colleges and universities.

Stakeholder representation: The study relies on pre-existing data while examining the perspectives of employers, professors, and students. We didn't gather direct primary data from a wide range of stakeholders, especially from niche industries. This would limit the depth of our understanding of real-time skill gaps.

The study encompasses a temporal span of two decades (2005–2025) and multiple geographical regions characterized by diverse educational systems and labor market dynamics. Local economic conditions and institutional capabilities may affect the significance of identified patterns and deficiencies.

Limited empirical testing: Although different treatments are suggested (like PBL, WIL, and mentoring), the study doesn't actually test how well these models work in a controlled setting, so the suggested strategies are more theoretical than backed up by evidence.

Changing needs in the industry: Because technology and job requirements are changing quickly, the skills that are in demand may also change quickly. This means that expertise may not last long unless curricula are always changing.

What else can be studied:
Based on what this study found about the difference between postgraduate courses and what employers want, future studies can use a more empirical and interactive design. A pilot training intervention may be conducted on a selected cohort of postgraduate students, commencing with a comprehensive assessment of employability skills to identify significant individual and group-level deficiencies in communication, critical thinking, adaptability, and professionalism. These diagnostics lead one to offer a personalized, modular training program that includes mentoring from industry professionals, learning through experience, and structured soft skill development that meets the needs of today's businesses. Students would undergo assessment post-intervention based on established criteria to evaluate progress in skill acquisition. This evidence-based, iterative approach would yield profound analysis regarding the efficacy of targeted employability training and inform curriculum development.

So, the suggested intervention gives a repeatable way to improve graduate preparation, align academic training with changing business needs, and make career changes easier.

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