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**ENHANCING EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS OF YOUTH:
A SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE**

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Abstract:

Youth is the best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of the community. Youth not only entails the freedom of adulthood but also its responsibilities. Fulfilling responsibilities depends of economic self-sufficiency largely. To be economically independent depends of securing sustainable employment. Employment can be sought only, when one is fully employable or in other words possesses employability skills. Employability is group of group of essential abilities that involve the development of a knowledge base, expertise level and mindset that is increasingly necessary for success in the modern workplace. Employability is group of group of essential abilities that involve the development of a knowledge base, expertise level and mindset that is increasingly necessary for success in the modern workplace. Employability skills are the essential qualifications for job positions and hence have become necessary for an individual's employment and its success at just about any level in the work place. Life of a youth today is ridden with so many burdens in the context of core subject matter and associated skills leaving little scope for any other learning. This study strongly recommends employability skills as integral part of the curriculum even at the cost of technical expertise since that can be acquired at any time but employability skills have to be developed gradually over time. More over acquiring employability skills will help the youth handle life situations also skillfully. The need for skilled and efficient manpower in the industry has buttressed the need for enhancing one's employability. Hence securing employment depends on one's employability skills which in turn provides a secure present and a safe future for the youth today. Based on this focus, the researcher has conducted a study to find out the employability of youth in community colleges in Chennai.

Key Words: *Youth, Employability Skills and Employment*

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INTRODUCTION

“Youth” is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community. Along with the independence of adulthood there comes the responsibility of livelihood, which depends on employability. Employability is a confluence of several skills, abilities, knowledge, competencies and capabilities that enable individuals to get employment and be successful in their professional careers. It helps them individually as well as institutionally. It also dwells at the skill sets and mindset that is essential to execute tasks effectively and efficiently. Employability depends on the knowledge, skills and attitude of the individuals. It is a state of being employed and accomplishing the given tasks with the skills, knowledge and abilities. Employability is not only the ability to acquire a suitable job but also to sustain it. Employability refers to a person's capability of gaining initial employment, maintaining employment, and obtaining new employment if required. Employability not only depends on whether one is able to fulfill the requirements of specific jobs, but also on how one stands relative to others within a hierarchy of job seekers.

YOUTH AND EMPLOYMENT

According to the United Nations “youth” is often indicated as a person between the age where he/she may leave compulsory education, and the age at which he/she finds his/her first employment. Getting employment for

youth has been an important milestone for times immemorial. However, getting a suitable job and sustaining it comes with challenges that dwell on employability. According to the third edition of the National Employability Report, Engineering Graduates - 2014, Less than one out of four engineering graduates are employable. The low employability among engineering graduates is a cumulative outcome of poor education standards and higher demand of skilled employees, creating a drastic skill gap in the country.

The report reveals that corporates look for candidates who have basic skills in order and don't need much training on being hired. Hence, candidates with lower quality of skills in comparison to basic job requirements are left out in the entire process." An economy with a large per cent of unemployable qualified candidates is not only inefficient, but socially dangerous. Secondly, there's a large mismatch in aspirations of graduating engineers and their job readiness, which can create large scale dissatisfaction (Times of India 2014).

Wheebox (2014), Pitches for improving education system in India. Not even one Indian university featured in the list of top 275 universities in the world, according to the Times Higher Education Survey. According to Aspiring Minds (2014) 47 percent of graduates are not employable in any sector given their English and cognitive skills. They are unemployable in any sector. There is a dire need for improved focus on vocational training, specific targeted intervention in areas of computer and English skill. Less than 25

percent students are able to apply concepts to problems. Our higher education system needs to lay greater stress on application of concepts and discourage habit learning. Employers should also start questioning their traditional ways of selecting and sourcing graduates and find new ways to reach employable youth.

The concept of key employability skills provides a bridge between education and work. In a dynamic knowledge-based economy the job-specific skills that workers need cannot be readily predicted, and are subject to on-going change. What is important, therefore, is the capacity to continually adapt and upgrade through key or generic skills that can be applied in different settings. The general consensus then is that training for employability is important, both in terms of general education and more specifically for future employment.

According to the Confederation of India Industry (CII) Only 10 percent of MBA graduate are employable and only 17 percent of the engineering graduate are employable. According to the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) a huge number of college graduates entering the workforce every year in India has the potential to provide workforce for the world by 2020. And yet here we are today with awfully low employability rates in metropolitan cities like Chennai, Delhi and Bengaluru. The reasons for such low employability rate are lack of language skills, outdated syllabus, insufficient practical sessions and absence of career counseling facilities. Thus Youth today are constantly battling these challenges

in securing a suitable employment and sustaining it.

EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

Employability skills are a set of achievements, understandings and personal attributes that make individuals more likely to gain employment and to be successful in their chosen occupation. Employability skills are all about the ability of individuals to exhibit their skills to the prospective employers and the ability to execute the tasks thereby achieving organizational goals and objectives. Besides, it also talks about the ability to switch over to other jobs comfortably. Employability skills refer to specific skills essential for employment. These are the critical tools and traits required to perform tasks at workplace. These skills are much sought after these days by employers. The needs of employability skills differ from country to country and from sector to sector and from time to time. However, certain qualities such as communication skills, interpersonal skills, integrity, right attitude, problem solving, decision making and team building skills can be taken as a few common skills of employability skills. All businesses cry for employability skills as these enable their growth and competitiveness. These skills are essential for all employers cutting across all industries. These are the additional skills apart from the core skills and hard skills.

ENHANCING EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

“To be employed is to be at risk, to be employable is to be secure.” (Peter

Hawkins, 1999). Mere academic abilities alone will not be adequate. What is essential is something beyond academic domain such as communication skills, problem solving skills, communication skills which are known as employability skills. When applicants possess these skills then it becomes easier for employers to train other technical skills comfortably. To sum, both educational institutions and industry should work together for enhancing employability skills as it is rightly said that you need to clap with both hands to get the results.

Employability refers to a person's capability for gaining and maintaining employment.

For individuals, employability depends on the knowledge and skills. Finding a source of livelihood is a life skill which is buttressed by the development of good employability skills. In the era of fierce competition and a cut throat environment, it is important for students on the threshold of their careers to enhance their employability skills in order to carve a niche for themselves in their professions as well as sustain it. Hence it is important to understand the need for youth to strengthen their key employability skills and the means to it.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The most important milestone in the lives of Youth today is securing a stable employment. Opportunities are many but are young people able to find suitable jobs is the question and if they do are they the able to sustain it, particularly those from the low income group. Employability refers to a person's capability for gaining and maintaining

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NEED AND IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

Employability skills are general skills that are needed to get most jobs, but they also help you to stay in a job and work your way to the top. Generally speaking, there are eight skills that employers want you to have, no matter what industry you're working in. They include communication, presentation, teamwork – team building, problem solving, decision making, initiative, enterprise – Entrepreneurship, planning, organizing - time management, self-management including – awareness of self, learning - preparing curriculum vitae, preparing for written examinations – group discussions, personal interviews and technology – computer literacy - job portals.

Every organization wants the right man for the right job, hence to empower the youth for this expectation will first entail understanding their present skill level and then bridging the gap between what is skill level is present and what level of expertise is expected. Thus it is

imperative for such a study to measure employability skills in terms of the areas mentioned above and make recommendation in order to fill the requisite gaps.

OBJECTIVES

- To know the existing level of employability among youth in Community Colleges in Chennai
- To find out ways to improve to employability skills among youth in Community Colleges in Chennai
- To make recommendations for incorporating employability skills in higher education Community Colleges in Chennai

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research describes the level of employability among youth in Community Colleges in Chennai. Hence a descriptive research design is the most suitable for this study. It is a fact finding investigation with adequate interpretation. The researcher used a questionnaire as a research tool for this study. The questionnaire was designed based on the objectives of the study. A pretest was conducted among ten respondents in order to find out the validity of the tool and adequate changes were made to the tool in accordance with the results of the pretest and the tool was finalized. The researcher adopted Simple Random Sampling through the lottery method to collect data. The total sample size was 100.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This research indicates that only 33 percent of the respondents were aware of their professional goals to some extent while 27 percent of the participants were neutral to the concept of a professional goal without any specific opinion or clarity while, 20 percent of the participants were not aware of their professional goals at all. This can be attributed to the fact that they come from low and very low economic background with little scope to learn beyond their core subjects.

Also this research shows that 53 percent of the participants were confident in taking decisions while the remaining could not make decisions easily. This evaluation further indicates that 50 percent of the participants could communicate easily while the others struggled to communicate. Further a majority of participants (60 percent) did not know what body language is. This is a key skill required in successful interviews. This study further indicates that only 30 percent of the respondents knew how to their C.V. The reason for this is the lack of exposure to employment related activities or employment enhancing activities.

This research shows that only 70 percent of the participants are totally unaware about job portals. Also their access to technology for using job portals was limited. This research also indicates that 60 percent of the participants do not feel confident in facing written examinations related to employment opportunities probably because of the continuous exposure to written examinations with in

the syllabus of text books which is the hallmark of our education system.

This evaluation shows that a majority of respondents 65 percent of the participants cannot express their views easily in a group. 33 percent can express to a certain extent and the rest were neutral. 70 percent of the participants agreed that they were not confident in facing personal interviews as per this evaluation and only 47 percent of the participants were partially aware about entrepreneurship. This can be attributed to a lack of initiative and empowerment because most of the participants were first generation college goers from the low income category.

SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study, the recommendations of the Researcher are:

- **Encourage spoken English in the institution** - English as a medium of communication is essential in today's work environment. Hence youth should be encouraged to read, write and speak in English to enhance communication particularly in educational instructions.
- **Create a library and space for the students** to read in the college so that reading and writing skills are enhanced. Since the students cannot afford to buy books. This will help them gain knowledge within their means

- **Power point presentation** as a tool should be used regularly and encouraged to be used in order to encourage professional and public speaking among Youth.
- **Group Activities to be held frequently** in order for the Youth to apply their theoretical knowledge. Hence more usage of themes related to their area of study in practical activities is recommended for effective learning.
- **Importance** should be given to employability skills and steps should be made an integral part of the syllabus.
- **Students should be encouraged to present** their assignments to the group. This will increase their confidence in facing a group and motivate them to put their best foot forward.

CONCLUSION

Shifts in economies throughout the world, prompted by globalization, technological change, increased competition, and the growing sophistication of customers and clients mean that employers are increasingly looking for a set of generic skills to accompany technical skills. Simply put, getting a degree is just not enough to launch a career. a portfolio of employability skills is the need of the hour. Employers like to recruit graduates who have gone the 'extra mile', 'joined in', can work both individually and in a

team, shown a capacity for leadership, and demonstrated a willingness to take risks and in experiencing new situations and cultures. The success of individuals in a knowledge-based economy will increasingly depend upon skills, creativity and imagination. While basic literacy, numeracy, technical skills craft skills remain vital, today's economy and society increasingly demands people with an ability to cope with change and adapt quickly to new environments and people. This is why employability skills are more and more important.

Employability Skills cannot be suddenly obtained in that sense; they have to be developed over a period of time, which is why college is a good place to begin training in the same. With regard to the community college, employment is the core objective hence employability skills are as important as subject relevant knowledge. The concept of Employability as a commodity is closely linked to government policy in which graduates represent a valuable resource in the increasingly knowledge based economy. The ability of Youth to be able to respond to the changing needs of a rapidly developing labour market is seen as vital for economic growth. To be employed is to be at risk, to be employable is to be secure' (The Art of Building Windmills, Peter Hawkins, 1999)

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