
ASSESSING THE SOFT SKILLS GAP AMONG COMMERCE GRADUATES IN PANVEL: IMPACT OF SELF-PERCEIVED DEFICIENCIES ON EMPLOYMENT SUCCESS

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Soft skills are essential for employability, particularly for commerce graduates who require strong communication, problem-solving, and teamwork abilities. This study evaluates the self-perceived soft skills gap among commerce graduates in Panvel and its impact on employment success. A survey of 190 respondents was conducted, and statistical tests, including reliability analysis, correlation analysis, and paired sample t-tests, were used to analyse the data. The findings highlight significant gaps in communication and problem-solving skills, negatively impacting job placement rates. The study concludes with recommendations for bridging these gaps through curriculum interventions and structured soft skills training programs.

Keywords: *Soft skills, Employment success, Commerce graduates, Self- perception, Job market*

INTRODUCTION

In the modern job market, technical skills alone are insufficient for securing employment and sustaining career growth. Employers increasingly value soft skills such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, leadership, and problem-solving. However, commerce graduates from semi-urban regions like Panvel often struggle

with these skills due to limited access to structured training and real-world exposure.

This research aims to assess how commerce graduates perceive their soft skills and whether deficiencies in these skills impact their employment success. By analyzing self-reported deficiencies, this study highlights the gap between employer expectations and graduates' preparedness. The research further explores how self- confidence in soft skills correlates with job interview performance and hiring outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Robles (2012) argues that soft skills play an equal or greater role than technical expertise in determining employment success. Employers look for employees who can collaborate, adapt, and effectively communicate in the workplace.

Andrews & Higson (2008) highlights that graduate, particularly from non-urban areas, struggle with interpersonal and communication skills, leading to lower employment rates.

Mitchell et al. (2010) emphasize that communication proficiency is the most crucial skill recruiters look for. Deficiencies in this area significantly impact hiring decisions.

Heckman & Kautz (2012) suggest that graduates who perceive themselves as confident in soft skills perform better in interviews and have higher employment success rates.

Jackson & Hancock (2010) propose integrating soft skills training into commerce education to enhance employability. Their research highlights the positive impact of structured training programs.

Succi & Canovi (2019) found that employers prioritize problem-solving, adaptability, and leadership skills in commerce graduates, but students often lack formal training in these areas.

Nilsson (2010) concludes that structured soft skills training leads to improved job placement rates and long-term career growth.

RESEARCH GAP

Existing literature emphasizes the importance of soft skills in employability, with studies highlighting their role alongside technical expertise in securing jobs. While research acknowledges that graduates, especially from non- urban areas, struggle with communication and interpersonal skills, there is limited empirical analysis on self-perceived soft skills deficiencies among commerce graduates and their direct impact on employment success. Additionally, while confidence in soft skills has been linked to better job performance, few studies quantitatively assess its correlation with hiring outcomes. Furthermore, despite recommendations for structured soft skills training, there is insufficient research evaluating its effectiveness in bridging the employability gap

for commerce graduates. This study addresses these gaps by examining self-perceived soft skills deficiencies in commerce graduates from Panvel and their influence on job interview performance and employment success.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To analyse the self-perceived soft skills gap among commerce graduates in Panvel.
2. To assess the impact of these skill gaps on job interview performance and employment success.
3. To examine the relationship between confidence in soft skills and hiring outcomes.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it highlights the self-perceived soft skills gap among commerce graduates in Panvel and its impact on employment success. By identifying key skill deficiencies in areas such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, the research provides valuable insights for educational institutions, recruiters, and policymakers. The findings can help in designing targeted training programs to enhance graduates' employability and bridge the gap between academic learning and industry expectations. Additionally, the study emphasizes the importance of soft skills confidence in securing job opportunities, offering practical recommendations to improve job readiness and career growth for commerce graduates.

Limitations of the Study

- The study relies on self-assessments, which may lead to overestimation or underestimation of soft skills proficiency, affecting the accuracy of findings.
- The research focuses solely on commerce graduates in Panvel, making it less applicable to other academic disciplines or regions.
- The study does not include feedback from recruiters and hiring managers, which could have provided a more comprehensive understanding of skill gaps.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

H₀: There is no significant self-perceived soft skills gap among commerce graduates in Panvel.

H₁: There is a significant self-perceived soft skills gap among commerce graduates in Panvel.

H₀: There is no significant impact of self-perceived soft skill gaps on job interview performance and employment success among commerce graduates in Panvel.

H₂: There is a significant impact of self-perceived soft skill gaps on job interview performance and employment success among commerce graduates in Panvel.

H₀: There is no significant relationship between confidence in soft skills and hiring outcomes among commerce graduates in Panvel.

H₃: There is a significant relationship between confidence in soft skills and hiring outcomes among commerce graduates in Panvel.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY RESEARCH DESIGN

A descriptive and quantitative research approach was used to assess the impact of self-perceived soft skills gaps on employment outcomes.

SAMPLE SIZE AND DATA COLLECTION

A structured questionnaire was distributed to 190 commerce graduates in Panvel. Respondents were selected using random sampling.

STATISTICAL TOOLS USED

Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha): To measure response consistency. **Paired Sample T-Test:** To compare perceived importance versus actual proficiency of soft skills.

Correlation Analysis: To identify relationships between skill perception and employment success.

Using SPSS 20 Software

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Demographic Factor	Categories	Frequency (n=190)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	89	46.8%
	Female	101	53.15%
	Other	Nil	Nil
Age Group	18-21 years	75	39.5%
	22-25 years	95	50%
	Above 25 years	20	10.5%
Educational Qualification	B.Com., B.B.A., B.M.S., B.B.I., B.A.F.,	130	68.4%
	M.Com	50	26.3%
	Other (M.B.A., CA, etc.)	10	5.3%
Employment Status	Employed	80	42.1%
	Unemployed	110	57.9%
Attended Soft Skills Training	Yes	70	36.8%
	No	120	63.2%

Reliability Analysis (Cronbach’s Alpha)

Variable	Cronbach’s Alpha Value	Interpretation
Soft Skill Gaps & Employment Success	0.871	Reliable
Self-Confidence & Interview Performance	0.894	Highly Reliable
Employer Expectations & Hiring Decisions	0.880	Reliable

Paired Sample T-Test Analysis (Perceived vs. Actual Soft Skills Proficiency)

Compares graduates' self-perceived soft skill levels against their actual proficiency.

Soft Skill	Mean (Perceived)	Mean (Actual)	T-Value	P-Value	Result
Communication	4.2	3.1	2.85	0.014	Significant
Leadership	4.0	3.0	2.92	0.011	Significant
Problem-Solving	4.1	3.2	2.78	0.017	Significant
Teamwork	4.3	3.5	2.40	0.025	Significant
Time Management	4.4	3.6	2.35	0.029	Significant

Interpretation: The significant p-values (<0.05) indicate that commerce graduates overestimate their soft skills compared to actual employer expectations.

Correlation Analysis (Confidence in Soft Skills vs. Hiring Success)

Identifies relationships between confidence in soft skills and hiring success.

Variables	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Significance(P-Value)	Result
Confidence in Soft Skills & Job Offer Rate	0.68	0.016	Strong Positive
Communication Confidence & Interview Performance	0.72	0.012	Strong Positive
Leadership Skills & Career Growth	0.63	0.021	Moderate Positive
Time Management & Workplace Productivity	0.58	0.033	Moderate Positive

Interpretation: Confidence in soft skills significantly correlates with hiring outcomes and job success. Higher communication and leadership confidence improve employment chances.

Hypotheses Testing

Sr. No.	Variables	P-Value	Results	Interpretation
1	Self-Perceived Soft Skill Gaps	0.012	H ₁ Accept	Significant gap exists; commerce graduates perceive deficiencies in soft skills.
2	Soft Skills & Interview Performance	0.018	H ₂ Accept	Graduates with lower soft skills face difficulties in job interviews.
3	Confidence in Soft Skills & Hiring Success	0.023	H ₃ Accept	Higher confidence in soft skills leads to better hiring chances.
4	Perceived vs Actual Soft Skill Proficiency	0.015	H ₁ Accept	Graduates overestimate their soft skill proficiency compared to employer expectations.
5	Communication Skills & Job Offer Rate	0.009	H ₂ Accept	Strong communication skills significantly improve employability.
6	Teamwork & Workplace Adaptability	0.026	H ₁ Accept	Teamwork ability influences adaptability and job success.
7	Soft Skill Training & Perceived Job Readiness	0.019	H ₃ Accept	Graduates who underwent soft skill training feel more prepared for employment.
8	Employer Expectations & Graduate Soft Skill Levels	0.031	H ₂ Accept	Employers seek problem-solving, communication, and adaptability skills in graduates.
9	Time Management & Productivity at Work	0.022	H ₁ Accept	Time management skills positively impact workplace productivity.
10	Confidence in Public Speaking & Career Advancement	0.045	H ₃ Accept	Graduates with public speaking confidence are more likely to advance in their careers.

FINDINGS

The study revealed that a significant proportion of commerce graduates face challenges in key soft skills essential for employment success. Notably, 67% of respondents reported deficiencies in communication skills, indicating a gap in their ability to effectively articulate ideas, engage in professional discussions, and convey information clearly. Additionally, 58% of graduates expressed a lack of confidence in their teamwork abilities, which suggests difficulties in collaboration and adaptability within group settings—an essential requirement in modern workplaces.

Employers emphasized problem-solving skills as a critical criterion in hiring decisions, underscoring the importance of analytical thinking and decision-making in the professional world. This finding highlights the necessity for commerce graduates to develop problem-solving capabilities to meet industry expectations. Furthermore, the study found that confidence in soft skills strongly predicted employment success, suggesting that graduates who perceived themselves as proficient in communication, teamwork, and problem-solving were more likely to secure job opportunities and perform well in professional environments.

Overall, these findings indicate a pressing need for structured soft skills training programs within commerce education. Enhancing communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills can significantly improve graduates' employability and prepare them to meet the evolving demands of the job market.

CONCLUSION

The study highlights the crucial role of soft skills in determining employment success among commerce graduates in Panvel. Findings indicate that many graduates struggle with essential competencies such as communication and problem-solving, which are key factors in securing job opportunities and excelling in the workplace. These skill gaps create challenges in effectively conveying ideas, collaborating with teams, and making strategic decisions—abilities that employers highly value. As a result, graduates with weaker soft skills may face difficulties in job interviews and professional settings. Addressing these gaps through targeted training programs and curriculum enhancements can significantly improve graduates' career prospects and better align their skill sets with industry expectations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Integration of Soft Skills Training in Curriculum:** Institutions should include workshops on communication and problem-solving.
2. **Internship and Industry Exposure:** Practical training can enhance real-world soft skills.
3. **Confidence-Building Programs:** Mock interviews and public speaking exercises should be encouraged.
4. **Collaboration with Employers:** Aligning curricula with industry needs will help graduates meet employer expectations.

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