

Influence of Life Skills Development Toward Enhanced Employability Traits in Project Students- A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

With the advancement in technology and disruptions taking shape at an even more rapid pace, it becomes imperative for human resources to develop themselves ever more as human capital. This study focuses on the influence of life skills development towards employability traits in project students at Middle East College (MEC), Oman. Project modules are large credit final modules undertaken by students at the Diploma and Bachelor's stages of their course of study, in which the student not only gets to showcase their conceptual understanding of their taught modules but also get ample opportunity to work in teams, lead, coordinate and work on real-life organizational issues to find solutions.

The main objective of the study is to analyze the impact of formal life skills development on enhancing employability traits. The study focuses on life skills like communication, empathy, critical and creative thinking, self-awareness, and management that influence employability, learning, personal empowerment, and active citizenship. Various research exists on life skills development, but limited research is done on the impact of life skills development on employability traits, particularly in Oman. This study relies on a mixed approach. Both primary (interviews and questionnaires) and secondary sources were used to study the research objectives and draw conclusions. The data was further analyzed by using both qualitative and quantitative analysis, and also by connecting the data with the existing literature. The study draws appropriate conclusions based on the findings and recommends steps to stakeholders to increase marketability and appear attractive in front of potential employers.

Introduction

With the advancement of businesses around the globe, it has become crucial to add more talented human resources to the business world. There is a strong need felt for manpower who are more competent in human traits like critical thinking, ideating, adaptability, emotionally resilient, etc. The World Economic Forum and McKinsey study states an increase in the requirement of social and emotional skills in youth along with higher-order cognitive and technological skills by 2030. Possessing basic life skills is important for the survival of any individual in terms of personal or professional life. Investing in developing life skills increases the employability characteristics of the youth. Project students are highly required to possess life skills such as management, teamwork, communication, creativity, empathy, etc. to market themselves better.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the impact of life skills development on enhancing employability traits in project students

2. To recommend steps to increase the marketability of students after the completion of their educational journey
3. To contribute to the Oman Vision 2040 by focusing on the skills relating to youth employability

Literature Review

Human Resources Vs. Human Capital (The Evolution From Personnel to Human Capital)

The concept of resource is referred to as exploitability and usage while that of capital is value. According to Ejim (2023), the key difference between human resources and human capital is that human resource concentrate on the job performance of the people while human capital is forced on the ability and training of people processes. Both concepts are diverse in their aspects. Return of investments in a part of human capital while identifying the potential of the employees as per the company requirements is the sole responsibility of human resources. The human resource department of any organization bares the responsibility of identifying and deciding all the organizational investments of human capital, i.e. to improve the quality of employees. In the present times, it is highly important to evolve from human resources to human capital. In any organization, human capital is the key factor that improves its function and standards over time. Human resource management (HRM) and human capital management (HCM) are two important aspects that help the daily activities of HR in an organization, may that be operation, and achieving long-term and strategic goals (ADP, 2023). Automation, integration, self-service, and data security are some of the features that are common to both HRM and HCM.

Life Skills – Categories

Upskilling and Re-Skilling

Producing a highly skilled workforce that can promote knowledge-based skills has huge demand in today's industry. According to Vinayan et al. (2020), to develop the knowledge and skills of workers, the Malaysian Government introduced the Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Programme in the '90s. This was to ensure that a medium to a highly skilled workforce is generated to construct the business landscape and support the job requirements in Malaysia. Around 1.2 million graduates enter the industry each year who possess only academic knowledge and have not received any prior training. Thus, there is a need to identify and formulate strategies to train them for industrial benefit. According to Li (2022), there is a need to develop blueprints and strategies to transform the workforce with large-scale upskilling and reskilling. Developing new educational programs, and providing innovative curricula, training opportunities, and skill development opportunities are some of the key requirements for building a skilled and sustainable workforce.

Employability Traits

Every person has to deal with conditions to be employed in any position. The characteristics may include adaptability, work honesty, ethics, and work commitment that match the company's wishes and policies. All these skills and information during education should be taught to students in the framework of group projects or educational media, books, and internships. In this way, the graduates may possess the knowledge and skills for employment in companies. On the other hand, these experiences and information give them enough ability to solve problems. According to the available statistics and information, training people may help to improve their performance and work as per the

company's goals and policies. According to Aziz and Pangil (2017), there is a relationship between personality traits and employability traits that goes hand in hand.

Generally, all these features are divided into technical and non-technical categories. The first skill called non-technical skills is the ability to focus on group work, having good communication, responsibility, leadership, and management skill, being creative at work, and being patient are included in this category. On the other hand, the characteristics of technical skills are writing skills, having sufficient knowledge and familiarity with computers and modern technologies, software, producing daily reports, analyzing data, and other technical and experimental skills related to it (Calman-Grimsdale, 2021). It is important in today's era in the highly competitive labor market. Employers are willing to hire employees who are flexible, professional, experienced, and professional in communication, especially during the Covid-19 period, which had a great impact on the labor market and the economy (Helens-Hart, 2019).

Influence of Life Skills Development Toward Employability Traits

Human capital must be talented not only in terms of technical or intellectual but also in terms of social skills, as such skills can balance and support one another. It's been more than a decade since soft skills were identified as one of the most vital characteristics that lead to success in the profession.

According to The University of Edinburgh (2022), some life skills might have a significant influence on one's employability attributes and professional life. Some of them are:

- **Experiences & Abilities:** The experiences gathered using life skills can positively influence employment skills. An individual progresses through numerous stages of his life, gaining numerous experiences and being able to do specific activities and tasks. The individual's expertise and talents will enable him to improve employee performance and prosper in his professional life.
- **Identify Strengths & Weaknesses:** Life skills such as communication, teamwork, and so on can aid in determining an individual's strengths and weaknesses. According to the author, an individual may determine if he is skilled or dreadful at communicating by assessing the way he communicates. If the talent he possesses is insufficient for a certain profession, this is his weakness, and he may then concentrate on the gaps to strengthen his communication abilities and make him a great fit for the position.

Relationship Between Life Skills Development and Employability Traits

Sukumar et al. (2022) conducted research in India and found that Life Skills Training and Counseling Services Program (LSTCP) has a positive impact on life skills development which in turn influences the employability traits of the students. Training teenagers using the LSTCP's modules and methods can help advance mental health advocacy at the state level. Steptoe and Wardle (2017) studied the influence of five life skills such as positive attitude, self-control, perseverance, consistency, and conscientiousness in later life. The research highlights the possibility that developing and retaining such abilities in adulthood is important to one's health and happiness in later years. Throughout a 4-year study period, those with higher levels of life skills had a decreased risk of developing chronic diseases and physical disabilities.

Importance of Life Skills Development in Project Students

Meyer and Wurdinger (2016) studied the impact of life skills development in project-based educational institutions and found that qualities like time management, teamwork, communication, and individual initiative have developed the most among the students. Additionally, accountability, problem-solving, individual initiative, and work ethic are the most developed traits as per the survey results. Therefore, life skills development has a positive influence on the

project students and they can develop more life skills during their study. Project students greatly benefit by acquiring life skills that are necessary to survive in the 21st-century industry.

According to UNICEF (2019), to help young people thrive in education, the workforce, and throughout their own lives, they must acquire and practice a wide range of transferable skills known as life skills. They are made up of a set of competencies, including skills, attitudes, beliefs, habits, and domain-specific expertise. UNICEF and The World Bank have joined forces to create a uniform method of measuring the extent and depth of students' understanding of life skills in educational settings, to provide relevant data to policymakers and educators on how to best implement educational initiatives to foster important life skills. The approach is as follows:

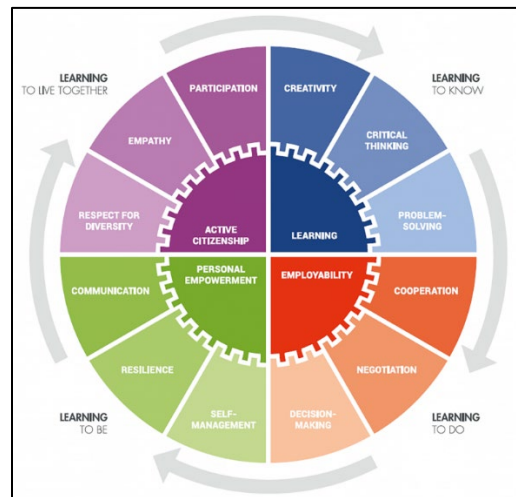


Figure 1. A uniform method of measuring the extent and depth of students' understanding of life skills in educational settings (UNICEF, 2019).

Methods

The study relies on a mixed approach. Both primary and secondary sources are used to study the research objectives and draw conclusions.

Primary data were collected through interviews and questionnaires. The population of the study is the project students (for the survey) and project supervisors (for interview) of Middle East College, Oman. The sample size of the study; for the questionnaire is 60 students and for the interview are 5 project supervisors from departments of management studies, and computing and electronic engineering. The sampling technique used is convenience sampling.

Secondary data were collected and reviewed from various journal articles, company websites, newspapers, e-books, etc. The data will be further analyzed by using both qualitative and quantitative analysis, and also by connecting the data with the existing literature.

Data Analysis

Qualitative Analysis

The following are the interview questions:

1. What are the most important life skills a student must possess in today's world?

2. What role do life skills play in students' employable opportunities?
3. 'Upskilling and reskilling are important in today's workplace'. Kindly justify your opinion.
4. In your view, do project students who are well aware of life skills have a better understanding of the project requirements and the industry needs?
5. How do you think people can be superior to smart technologies in the present day?
6. Do you believe over certain years can AI adopt life skills similar to human beings?

Table 1. Interview questions and answers from interview 1 and interview 2.

No.	Questions	Interview 1	Interview 2
1.	What are the most important life skills a student must possess in today's world?	Life Skills like Critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, and effective communication are very much needed, but more so Empathy and self-awareness so relationships even in a professional environment are built and sustained.	
2.	What role do life skills play in students' employable opportunities?	They help in the development of the individual to tackle professional and personal situations, come up with new ideas, collaborate and work with teams and build a positive environment around them.	
3.	'Upskilling and reskilling are important in today's workplace'. Kindly justify your opinion.	With constant changes in the environment due to advancements in technologies, globalization, disruptions, and the use of different tools, it has become necessary that as humans if we need to have a sustainable career then upskilling and reskilling are vital.	

4.	In your view, do project students who are well aware of life skills have a better understanding of the project requirements and the industry needs?	They will be able to see the social impact of their project outcomes in a considerably better way. Projects are just not testing of technical or conceptual knowledge, they also provide a peek into real-world situations and needs.	
5.	How do you think people can be superior to smart technologies in the present day?	People are smarter than technologies, but technologies being machines are capable of not feeling tired or bored. So they can take care of functions that may require the base human capabilities and do not require more deep critical emotional intuitive thought processes. If people practice and keep working on developing their human or life skills, it is possible to not lose out on the real human-required job opportunities in the market	
6.	Do you believe over certain years can AI adopt life skills similar to human beings?	Research is certainly on to bring in more humane traits into technology, but I believe it will take many many more years to achieve all the positive life traits humans are born with but unfortunately over the years become complacent about.	

Quantitative Analysis

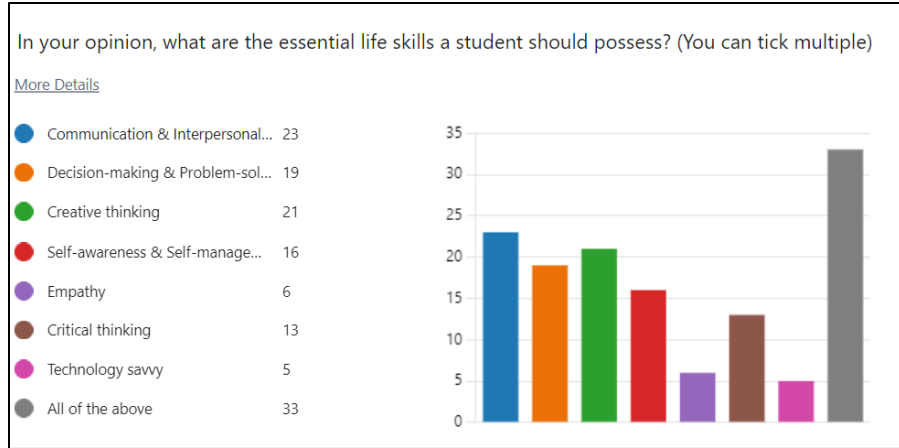


Figure 2. Essential life skills for project students

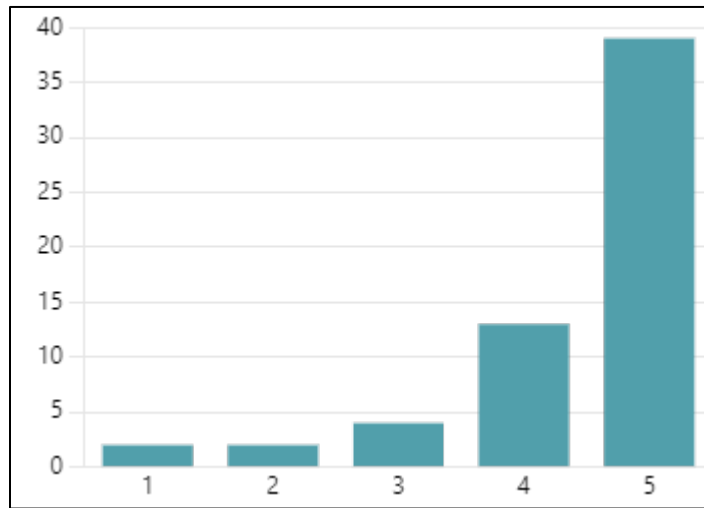


Figure 3. Importance of life skills when considering employability/entrepreneurship

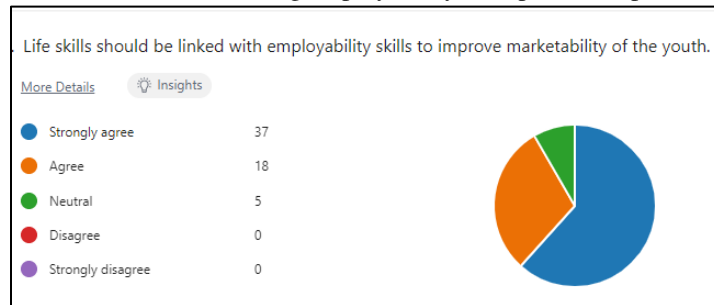


Figure 4. Importance of life skills when considering employability/entrepreneurship

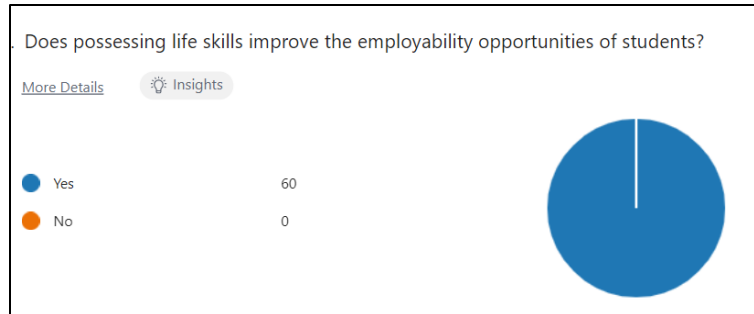


Figure 5. Relationship between possessing life skills and employability opportunities

Findings and Discussion

From the analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data, the following results were obtained:

Conclusion

Future researchers may use this study to:

- Study the impact of life skills development on enhancing employability traits in project students
- Understand the steps to increase the marketability of students after the completion of their educational journey
- Understand the Oman Vision 2040 by focusing on the skills relating to youth employability discussed within the study

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