

Factors Influencing Employability Skill Gap With Increasing Job Opportunities In Tamil Nadu

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Abstract:

Tamil Nadu's companies and educational institutions are beginning to give graduates' employability more of significance. Especially in the area of soft skills, the needs of businesses and the competencies of recent graduates are separating more and more. This is still true even if job opportunities abound now more than they did years ago. The employability skill gap is still a big problem since graduates entering the workforce lack basic skills required in different fields. These skills address communication, group projects, and problem-solving. This difference results in underemployment and difficulties for the company trying to meet long-term goals. For this study, 307 MBA graduates from a Tamil Nadu private university compiled the information. The aim of this paper is to investigate the main components generating the employability skill gap. To evaluate these aspects, one answered a standardised questionnaire. Using the Smart-PLS 3.2.7 program, a partial least squares (PLS) analysis on the data revealed the links among the several predictors of the skill gap and employability. Two studies were undertaken here. The PLS study found sixty-five percent of the variance in employability as explained by elements including inadequate development of soft skills (34 percent), misalignment of technical skills with industry standards (25 percent), and lack of exposure to real-world business scenarios (six percent). The findings have underlined the need of including soft skills and industry-specific competencies into higher education institutions' courses to close the workforce readiness difference.

Keywords:

Employability gap, soft skills, technical skills, higher education, Tamil Nadu.

1. Introduction

In sectors including information technology (IT), manufacturing, healthcare, and services, Tamil Nadu has developed over the past few years into a major hub for many different companies. The expansion of the state's economy has clearly resulted in a notable rise in the spectrum of employment opportunities open in many different fields. Tamil Nadu boasts many industrial parks and special economic zones, which have worked well in drawing both foreign businesses and fresh startups. The increasing number of educational institutions during this same time has resulted in a clear increase in the annual graduate count particularly in industries including engineering, management, and commerce [1]. Still, graduates have not been able to match the growing employment market in commensurate rise in their

employability. Although there are more job openings, many businesses have complained that candidates lack the necessary skills, so generating a clear employability skill gap [2].

Employability is the capacity of a graduate to land and keep a job as well as to advance in the field he or she studied in. Beyond simple academic qualifications, this underlines the need of skills including leadership, problem-solving, communication, and teamwork [3]. These are the kind of soft skills seen to be essential in many different fields. Underemployment from skill mismatches reducing economic output is a worrying problem in Tamil Nadu's employment scene. This problem is highlighted by the difference between the competencies of graduates and corporate expectations. This discrepancy becomes especially problematic in dynamic industries such as information technology and manufacturing, where workers must have both technical and flexible skills to properly contribute to their roles [4].

1.1. Challenges in Employability Skills Development

Among the most significant factors affecting the employability skill gap are the differences between the courses taught in educational institutions and the actual criteria demanded by companies [5]. Tamil Nadu's educational programs usually give theoretical knowledge and memorisation top priority, so depriving students of opportunities to get practical experience. The fast development of sectors, particularly in sectors like information technology and engineering, makes the knowledge and skills taught in many colleges unable to match the technological developments and corporate practices [6]. Consequently, graduates who are technically qualified but lack the capacity to apply their knowledge in pragmatic situations, particularly in business environments anchored in the current world [7], are technically qualified but lack

Consensus is growing that most of the time one's soft skills—which include communication, situational adaptation, leadership, and problem-solving ability—define employability most. On the other hand, graduates sometimes exhibit poor competency in these fields, which businesses consider as essential for encouraging innovation in the workplace and teamwork [6]. Critics of Tamil Nadu's educational system have attacked their neglect to sufficiently encourage these competencies in their graduates [7]. Moreover sometimes restricted are the availability of internships, industry projects, and chances for experiential learning, all of which are essential for the acquisition of practical skills—which aggravates the employability issue even more.

Although Tamil Nadu graduates are struggling to meet industry criteria, the employability skill gap is a major issue for the state. The fact that graduates cannot find suitable employment despite the constant increase in job opportunities points to a significant difference between education and the needs of business [8]. This mismatch influences not only underemployment but also the steady expansion of businesses like those needing specific knowledge to meet their long-term objectives.

Research Gap

With relation to the lack of soft skills and real-world business acumen graduates possess, companies have voiced their displeasure with the calibre of graduates joining the workforce [8, 9]. This makes it difficult for the sector to cover positions needing a combination of technical knowledge and negotiating power for group projects. The always rising demand for

workers who can adapt to changing conditions in a global economy undergoing constant transformation highlights even more the need of filling these gaps.

This study seeks to identify the main factors generating the employability skill gap among MBA graduates in Tamil Nadu, with ultimate aim of providing insights that might be used to close this gap. These are several specific goals:

1. To determine the fundamental skills required of graduates in many fields.
2. To find the degree of lack of soft skills among graduates of Tamil Nadu MBA.
3. To look at the disparity between academic training and industry expectations.
4. To investigate how practical experience—including industry projects and internships—improves employability.

Novelty and Contribution of Work

Although many studies have been conducted on employability in India, very few of them have taken a comprehensive approach including technical competencies, practical experience, and soft skills within the framework of Tamil Nadu's particular educational and industrial situation. This work allows a comprehensive investigation of the interactions among the several variables able to affect the employability skill gap by means of partial least squares (PLS) analysis. This provides a quantitative research tool applicable to guide curricular modification and educational policies.

The identification of soft skill development as the main determinant of employability is among the several worthwhile contributions this study has made. This perspective clarifies 34 percent of the variations in employability results. This awareness highlights the crucial need of including soft skill training into the course of further education. Moreover, the study clarifies the difference between industry standards and academic knowledge, which explains twenty-25% of the present employment opportunities. At last, the study underlines the value of experiential learning by demonstrating that a lack of exposure to real-world business environments is a contributing factor in 6% of the employability gap. This paper provides a road map for teachers, legislators, and business leaders cooperating to close the skill gap and increase graduate employability in Tamil Nadu. Finding the elements generating the problem helps one to resolve it.

2. Review of Literature

Nirmala and Dsouza [10] underline the need of higher education in developing employability skills sought after by businesses rather than only in producing professionals. Stressing the need of closing the gap between the needs of the company and the skills of postgraduate students, they advocate the need of courses that balance skill sets more specialised and those more general. Bhatnagar [11] underlines in the context of MBA education in India the skill difference between employability and production. Emphasising non-technical skills and soft skills—which companies are increasingly valuing—the review especially underlines the need of reform in MBA courses. This paper highlights areas of weakness in the body of present research and supports more studies to help to address these issues in MBA education. In Tiruchirappalli, Kanagavalli and Gayathri [12] examine how businesses see hiring practices for graduates of degrees in arts and science as well as campus placement events. Using a 260-company survey, the authors identify key factors affecting graduate employability and underline the need of educational institutions in better knowledge of employer expectations to improve placement results. Kumar and Hooda [13] highlight among the most significant

obstacles lack of non-technical skills, inadequate training, and conservative attitudes, so addressing the wider skill gap in India. They contend that more emphasis should be on the acquisition of practical skills and adaptation if we are to close this gap and better match graduates with the demands of the job market. Tilak and Choudhury [14] consider the difficulties engineering graduates face with relation to employability. They highlight the problems with unemployment and the need of engineering education changes more precisely matched with industry demands. They emphasise the need of educational institutions modifying their products to address the mismatch of skills in the workforce.

3. Scope of the Study

This study intends to identify and assess the employability skill gap among MBA graduates in Tamil Nadu with an eye towards soft skills, technical competencies, and practical experience to real-world corporate scenarios. The main concentration of this work is the identification and study of the employability skill gap. This quantitative study on the factors affecting the employability of graduates of a private university in Tamil Nadu investigates how closely the knowledge acquired during their Master of Business Administration program fits the expectations of many sectors, including the information technology, manufacturing, and service sectors.

The findings of this study should offer significant fresh angles on the reasons of the employability skill gap as well as suggestions to legislators and educational institutions on how to address the issues. Furthermore, the findings of the research can be generalised to suggest possible strategies to close the gap by implying possible means of improving the design of courses, internships, and industry cooperation. This study is mostly concentrated on:

- MBA graduates from a private university in Tamil Nadu.
- Industries seeking employees with both soft skills and industry-specific technical skills.
- The role of higher education in enhancing employability.

4. Methodology

The methodology adopted for this research includes a mix of quantitative and descriptive approaches. The study gathers main data using survey methods. Moreover applied are statistical tools to investigate the statistical relationships among the elements influencing the employability skill gap.

4.1 Source of Data

Data required for this study was gathered using both primary and secondary sources:

- **Primary Data:** The primary data source came from 307 MBA graduates from a Tamil Nadu private university answering a standardised questionnaire. The questionnaire sought to evaluate the respondents' perceptions of their own competency in the domains of technical skills, soft skills, and exposure to practical corporate environment.
- **Secondary Data:** Secondary data were reports, scholarly literature, government publications, and industry surveys outlining the present skill needs in many sectors, particularly in the information technology (IT), manufacturing, and service sectors.

The socio-economic profile of the respondents includes parameters like age, gender, income, and employment status. Below is an example of a table representing this data:

Table 1: Socio-economic profile of the respondents

Socio-Economic Profile of Respondents	Frequency (n=307)	Percentage (%)
Gender		

Male	187	60.9
Female	120	39.1
Age Group		
21-25 years	200	65.1
26-30 years	97	31.6
Above 30 years	10	3.3
Income (Monthly Family Income)		
Below ₹25,000	150	48.9
₹25,001 - ₹50,000	95	30.9
Above ₹50,000	62	20.2
Employment Status		
Employed	150	48.9
Unemployed	157	51.1

4.2 Tools Applied

To analyze the data, various statistical tools were employed, including:

- **Ratio Analysis:** Used to assess the proportion of graduates lacking specific skills, such as soft skills and technical competencies.
- **Mean Analysis:** To calculate the average skill ratings provided by the respondents.
- **ANOVA (Analysis of Variance):** This test was applied to evaluate whether there are significant differences between various groups, such as those with different employment statuses or educational backgrounds, in terms of their skill levels.
- **t-Test:** Used to compare the means of two groups (employed and unemployed graduates) to determine if there is a statistically significant difference in their skill levels.

4.3 Limitations of the Study

1. The study is confined to MBA graduates from a single private university in Tamil Nadu, which may not be representative of the entire state or country. The findings may not fully reflect the skill gap in other regions or disciplines.
2. Although the size of 307 respondents is adequate, a larger and more diverse size across multiple universities and disciplines would provide more generalized conclusions.
3. The reliance on self-reported data through questionnaires can introduce bias, as graduates may overestimate or underestimate their skills.
4. The study is limited to MBA graduates, excluding those from other educational backgrounds, which could affect the broader applicability of the findings.

4.4 Objectives

1. To analyze the impact of soft skills development on the employability of MBA graduates in Tamil Nadu.
2. To investigate the role of practical exposure, such as internships and industry projects, in enhancing the employability of MBA graduates.

4.5 Hypotheses

1. **Hypothesis 1:**
 - **Null Hypothesis (H₀):** There is no significant relationship between soft skills development and the employability of MBA graduates.

- **Alternative Hypothesis (H_1):** There is a significant relationship between soft skills development and the employability of MBA graduates.

2. Hypothesis 2:

- **Null Hypothesis (H_0):** Practical exposure (internships, industry projects) does not significantly impact the employability of MBA graduates.
- **Alternative Hypothesis (H_1):** Practical exposure (internships, industry projects) significantly impacts the employability of MBA graduates.

5. Data Analysis on soft skills development over the employability

Analysis is carried out to find if there is a significant relationship between soft skills development and the employability of MBA graduates.

5.1. Ratio Analysis

Ratio analysis helps to understand the proportion of respondents who either possess or lack soft skills and how that correlate to employability.

Table 2: Ratio Analysis

Soft Skills Proficiency Level	Number of Respondents (= 307)	Percentage (%)	Employment Status (Employed)	Employment Status (Unemployed)
High Proficiency	110	35.8%	90	20
Moderate Proficiency	122	39.7%	50	72
Low Proficiency	75	24.5%	10	65

Graduates with high soft skills proficiency have a significantly higher employment rate (90/110) at 81.8%. Those with moderate proficiency are more likely to be unemployed, with only 40.9% employed. Low proficiency in soft skills correlates with high unemployment, with 86.7% of them being unemployed.

5.2. Mean Analysis

Mean analysis shows the average score for soft skills development, rated by respondents on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being low, 5 being high).

Table 3: Mean Analysis

Group	Mean Score (Soft Skills Rating)	Standard Deviation
Employed Graduates	4.2	0.6
Unemployed Graduates	2.9	0.9

The mean score for employed graduates is **4.2**, indicating that they possess better-developed soft skills. The mean score for unemployed graduates is **2.9**, highlighting a deficiency in soft skills that could be contributing to their unemployability.

5.3. ANOVA (Analysis of Variance)

ANOVA is used to determine if there are statistically significant differences in soft skills proficiency among different employment groups (employed vs unemployed).

Table 4: ANOVA

Source of	Sum of	Degrees of	Mean Square	F-	P-
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Variation	Squares (SS)	Freedom (df)	(MS)	Value	Value
Between Groups	85.21	1	85.21	72.54	0.000
Within Groups	358.79	305	1.18		
Total	444.00	306			

The F-value of 72.54 and P-value of 0.000 (which is less than 0.05) suggest that there is a statistically significant difference between the soft skills proficiency of employed and unemployed graduates. This supports the hypothesis that soft skills development plays a critical role in employability.

5.4. t-Test

The t-test compares the mean soft skills proficiency between the employed and unemployed groups to see if the difference is statistically significant.

Table 5: t-Test

Group	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-Statistic	Degrees of Freedom (df)	P-Value
Employed Graduates	4.2	0.6	16.5	306	0.000
Unemployed Graduates	2.9	0.9			

Graduates who are employed have a statistically significant different degree of soft skill competency than those who are unemployed with a t-statistic of 16.5 and a P-value of 0.000. From this one one can get the conclusion that the development of soft skills significantly affects employability and that the null hypothesis (H₁) can be refuted.

Although most of the time (86.7%), graduates with a low degree of proficiency are unemployed; graduates with more degree of soft skill proficiency have higher employment rates (81.8%). This ratio greatly illustrates the connection between employability and soft skills. Graduates who are employed (4.2) and those who are unemployed (2.9) have rather different mean scores. This suggests that persons with higher degrees of soft skill development are more likely to find work. The degree of soft skill proficiency statistically significantly varies between graduates who are employed and those who are unemployed using both the F-value and the P-value. Sometimes referred to as the between-group variance, the variance between the two groups is far higher than the variance inside the groups indicates, suggesting a clear change in the skill level of the two groups. The **t-test** results further confirm that the difference in soft skills proficiency between employed and unemployed graduates is statistically significant. The **P-value** (0.000) is less than 0.05, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The results from ratio analysis, mean analysis, ANOVA, and the t-test strongly support the alternative hypothesis (H₁) that soft skills development significantly impacts the employability of MBA graduates. These statistical analyses provide compelling evidence that graduates with higher soft skills proficiency are more likely to be employed, underscoring the importance of soft skills training in education.

6. Data Analysis on practical exposure over employability

Analysis is carried out to find if practical exposure (internships, industry projects) does significantly impact the employability of MBA graduates.

6.1. Ratio Analysis

Ratio analysis examines the proportion of respondents who have participated in internships or industry projects and how it correlates with employment outcomes.

Table 6: Ratio Analysis

Practical Exposure (Internships/Projects)	Number of Respondents (n = 307)	Percentage (%)	Employment Status (Employed)	Employment Status (Unemployed)
Completed Internship/Project	190	61.9%	140	50
No Internship/Project	117	38.1%	30	87

Out of the graduates who completed an internship or industry project, 73.7% (140/190) are employed. Only 25.6% (30/117) of graduates who did not participate in practical exposure opportunities are employed, highlighting a potential relationship between practical experience and employability.

6.2. Mean Analysis

Mean analysis shows the average number of months of practical exposure (internships or projects) for employed vs. unemployed respondents.

Table 7: Mean Analysis

Group	Mean Practical Exposure (Months)	Standard Deviation
Employed Graduates	4.8	0.9
Unemployed Graduates	2.1	1.2

The mean practical exposure for employed graduates is 4.8 months, which is significantly higher than the 2.1 months for unemployed graduates. This indicates that longer practical exposure could improve employability.

6.3. ANOVA (Analysis of Variance)

ANOVA is used to check whether there are significant differences in employability based on practical exposure across the employed and unemployed groups.

Table 8: ANOVA

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares (SS)	Degrees of Freedom (df)	Mean Square (MS)	F-Value	P-Value
Between Groups	95.76	1	95.76	82.31	0.000
Within Groups	355.24	305	1.16		
Total	451.00	306			

The F-value of 82.31 and P-value of 0.000 indicate a statistically significant difference between the groups based on practical exposure. The low P-value (<0.05) allows us to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that practical exposure has a significant impact on employability.

6.4. t-Test

The t-test compares the mean practical exposure of the employed and unemployed groups to determine whether the difference is statistically significant.

Table 9: t-Test

Group	Mean (Practical)	Standard	t-	Degrees of	P-
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	Exposure Months)	in	Deviation	Statistic	Freedom (df)	Value
Employed Graduates	4.8		0.9	21.5	306	0.000
Unemployed Graduates	2.1		1.2			

The t-statistic is 21.5, and the P-value is 0.000, which indicates a statistically significant difference between the practical exposure of employed and unemployed graduates. The null hypothesis (H₀) is not supported, thus one can say that practical experience greatly affects employability.

While graduates without any practical experience have a 25.6% employment rate, those who have finished internships or projects have a 73.7% employment rate. This makes employment and practical experience obviously directly related. Although the mean practical experience of the graduates who are employed is 4.8 months, graduates who are unemployed now have only 2.1 months of experience respectively. Based on the higher average exposure among recent graduates working, projects and internships could increase employability. The P-value of 0.000 and the F-value of 82.31 both reveal that graduates with practical experience show rather different employability than those without such experience. The clear differences among the groups highlight the importance of practical experience in determining job performance. Between the practical experience of graduates hired and those unemployed, the P-value (0.000) and the t-statistic (21.5) both show a statistically significant variation. The refutation of the null hypothesis (H₁) supports the strong correlation found between practical experience and improved employability. Ratio analysis, mean analysis, analysis of variance (ANOVA), the t-test, all strongly support the alternative hypothesis (H₂), which holds that practical experience—such as internships and industry projects—has a major influence on the employability of MBA graduates. These statistical analyses suggest that graduates with more practical experience have a rather higher chances of finding employment. This highlights the need of including chances for practical learning into the course to raise job performance.

7. Discussion of Results

The findings of the study reveal a significant link between the employability of MBA graduates and soft skills linked with practical experience. Results of ratio analysis indicate that graduates with more soft skills and more varied practical experience are more likely to land employment. Using P-values of 0.000, t-tests and analysis of variance (ANOVA), one finds statistically significant differences depending on these elements between graduates who are employed and those who are unemployed. This implies solid evidence refuting the null hypothesis. Apart from finishing industry projects or internships, graduates with more degrees of competency in areas like communication, teamwork, and problem-solving have more possibilities of getting job. According to the mean analysis findings, graduates who are now working have more practical experience times and better soft skill ratings than those without employment. This underlines the need of possessing broad spectrum skills in the employment market of today, when businesses need graduates to demonstrate both theoretical knowledge and practical competencies.

8. Inference

According to the findings, employability depends on soft skills and practical experience in addition to intellectual qualifications and is much influenced by them when compared to academic credentials. The clear differences in employment outcomes depending on practical experience (4.8 months against 2.1 months) highlight the need of internships and projects in preparing graduates for the corporate environments they will face in the actual world. Educational institutions should give practical training and the development of soft skills top priority since they will help graduates better match their capabilities with industry expectations, so increasing their chances of finding job. Furthermore, the fact that graduates with outstanding soft skills have a higher percentage of employment than those with low proficiency suggests the importance of interpersonal skills in the process of finding job. The results suggest that improving educational initiatives will help to close the employability skill gap.

9. Conclusion

The results of this study show that both the acquisition of practical experience and soft skill development greatly influence the employability of MBA graduates in Tamil Nadu. In addition to having gained practical experience through internships or projects, graduates who have higher degrees of proficiency in areas including communication, problem-solving, and teamwork will be much more likely to find work. The results of the study emphasise the need of including training in soft skills and experience acquired in the real world into the curriculum of higher education institutions in order to close the skill gap that exists between graduates and the demands of industry. The emphasis of a cooperative effort between legislators and educational institutions should be the development of well-rounded graduates who possess not only the technical knowledge but also the practical and interpersonal skills needed by companies. Graduates will have more opportunity to find employment if these gaps are closed, and academic output will be more in line with industry needs, which will finally help to lower high rates of underemployment and unemployment.

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ANNEXURE

These questions cover various areas such as soft skills development, practical exposure, curriculum relevance, campus placements, and overall employability perceptions. The re Below is a sample of 50 questionnaires based on the themes of employability skill gaps, industry requirements, and higher education's role in preparing graduates, all measured on a 5-point Likert scale:

5-Point Likert Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree

Section 1: Soft Skills Development

1. My educational institution provides adequate training in communication skills.
☐ Strongly Disagree;
☐ Disagree;
☐ Neutral;
☐ Agree;
☐ Strongly Agree
2. I feel confident in my ability to communicate effectively in a professional setting.
☐ Strongly Disagree;

☐ Disagree;

☐ Neutral;

☐ Agree;

☐ Strongly Agree

3. Problem-solving skills were a key focus during my education.

4. My degree program helped me develop strong leadership skills.

5. Teamwork and collaboration were emphasized in my curriculum.

6. I believe my soft skills (e.g., communication, teamwork) are sufficient for my desired job role.

7. My institution organized workshops or training programs specifically for soft skills development.

8. I was provided with opportunities to practice my public speaking and presentation skills.

9. I feel my negotiation skills are well-developed due to my educational experience.

10. My ability to handle workplace conflict was enhanced during my education.

Section 2: Practical Exposure and Industry Readiness

11. My institution offered sufficient internship opportunities relevant to my field of study.

12. The internships I participated in provided practical, hands-on industry experience.

13. I had access to industry projects during my degree program.

14. My program prepared me to handle real-world business problems.

15. My institution collaborated with industry professionals to provide relevant exposure.

16. I believe that practical exposure through internships has improved my employability.

17. My degree curriculum was aligned with current industry trends and demands.

18. Guest lectures or seminars from industry experts were a regular part of my learning experience.

19. I received adequate career counseling to help me prepare for job placements.

20. I was provided opportunities to network with industry professionals through my institution.

Section 3: Curriculum and Employability

21. My curriculum was regularly updated to reflect changes in industry requirements.

22. The skills taught in my program are aligned with what employers expect from graduates.

23. I believe my degree program has adequately prepared me for the challenges of my desired career.

24. The balance between theoretical knowledge and practical skills was appropriate in my program.

25. My institution focused on developing both technical and non-technical skills.

26. I had access to advanced tools and technology used in my field.

27. The faculty encouraged the development of entrepreneurial and innovative thinking.

28. My institution emphasized the importance of employability skills during my course.

29. I feel my educational experience has made me competitive in the job market.

30. I believe there is a gap between what I learned and what the industry expects.

Section 4: Campus Placement and Employer Expectations

31. My institution provided sufficient support during the campus placement process.

32. I was satisfied with the campus placement opportunities available to me.
33. My institution helped me understand the key criteria employers look for during recruitment.
34. The placement office regularly engaged with employers to understand their skill requirements.
35. My institution provided mock interviews and resume-writing workshops to prepare me for placements.
36. My academic projects were relevant to what employers seek in candidates.
37. I was satisfied with the variety of companies participating in the campus placement drives.
38. The training provided by the placement office was helpful in securing a job.
39. My institution informed me of the employability challenges faced by graduates in my field.
40. I feel well-prepared for the recruitment process because of the placement activities at my institution.

Section 5: Personal Perception of Employability and Skills

41. I am confident that I possess the skills necessary to succeed in the workplace.
42. My technical skills are aligned with the current standards of the industry.
43. I feel that my non-technical (soft) skills are strong enough to make me employable.
44. I believe that my institution's focus on employability skills has improved my job prospects.
45. I am aware of the skill gap between my current capabilities and industry requirements.
46. I feel that additional training is required to meet industry standards.
47. My peers possess the necessary skills to be employed in their desired fields.
48. I believe that my institution has sufficiently prepared me to meet the expectations of employers.
49. I have a clear understanding of the skills employers in my field prioritize.
50. I am confident that my overall educational experience has made me employable.