

# Evaluating Initiative and Enterprise as Vital Employability Skill: An In-Depth Analysis of Final-Year Undergraduate Students in Kasargod District

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## **Abstract**

Employability skills are a broad term for non-technical abilities and talents that have traditionally played a key role in productive and successful involvement of employees in their workplace. Employers are looking beyond traditional measurement of academic performance and they seek candidates with these employability skills while selecting employees. Therefore the graduates who are preparing to enter the job market should be well equipped with these essential skills. Generally, the employability skills comprises communication skill, team work skill, problem solving skill, initiative, planning and organizing skill, self management and technological skills.

This article is the outcome of the attempt made by the researcher to evaluate the job readiness of final year undergraduate students of an educationally and economically backward district in Kerala, namely, Kasargod. The assessment is carried out in terms of the initiative and enterprise, which is considered as an employability skill required for the job seekers. The analysis of data collected as part of this empirical study reveals that only 19.12 percent of the final year under graduate students is found to be employable.

## **Introduction**

Employability Skills describes the soft skills and competencies that have always been an important part of effective and successful participation in the workplace. These skills form a set of essential qualities and skills that help individuals become more effective and productive employees, and contribute effectively to the pursuit of the goals of their organization's work. What's new about workplace skills is their importance. Companies increasingly demand skills that boost employability. They often look for candidates with a combination of these skills because they are important to the success of the organization and can help improve productivity, innovation and employee retention. Employers are often concerned that many graduates are not qualified to take on jobs after graduation due to their inability to combine theoretical knowledge and practical work (Helle et al., 2006). Employability skills include communication, teamwork, problem solving, critical thinking, time management and organizational skills, as well as technical skills related to a field or industry specifically. Employers often seek candidates with a combination of these skills because they are important to the success of the organization and can help improve productivity, innovation and employee retention. In this article, the assessment of teamwork skills of final year undergraduate students of Kasargod district, Kerala state, who are preparing to enter the highly competitive job market, is carried out with the purpose of understanding the reality regarding the level of initiative of final year university students.

## Employability Skill

Yorke and Knight (2004) define employability as “the set of achievements – skills, understanding, and personal qualities – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and succeed in their chosen profession, thereby benefiting themselves, the workforce, the community, and the economy.” Work skills are important because they help individuals work more effectively. These skills enable employees to carry out greater responsibility within their organizations and also help them progress in their professional careers. Employability skills are essential for employees at every level and in every sector, as they provide the foundation for personal and professional development, adaptability, and flexibility. Ultimately, employability skills improve an individual's overall professional reputation and marketability to potential employers. Unlike technical or technical skills, employability skills are generic rather than job-specific.

Employability skills are important skills that are critical to the growth and development of an organization and, more broadly, the industry (Husain et al., 2012). The development of work skills appears to have a positive impact on employees' achievement of organizational and personal goals (Fugate et al., 2004; Van Dam, 2004). Researchers have highlighted the existence of a “skills gap” between job requirements and graduates' academic readiness (Morley, 2001; Andrews and Wooten, 2005). More specifically, employers believe that higher education has failed to develop the employable skills of graduates (Peddle, 2000).

## Literature Review

There have been several studies conducted on employability. A number of research studies have been conducted on the concept and definition of employability, the most well-known of which are Hillage and Pollard's (1998), Yorke and Knight's (2004), McQuaid and Lindsay's (2005), and Pool and Sewell's (2007). A number of scholars have proposed their own definitions of employability (Fugate et al., 2004; Heijde and Van Der Heijden, 2006). According to Hillage and Pollard (1998), the term employability is used in a wide variety of contexts with varying meanings and can be difficult to define as an operational concept. According to De la Harpe et al. (2000), there is concern worldwide that undergraduate programs do not adequately prepare students for the future by providing them with the skills and knowledge needed for success in the workplace. In the Dearing Report to Higher Education (1997), the importance of the development of key skills as well as the importance of work experience was emphasized. According to Kubler and Forbes (2005), employability involves cognitive skills, generic competencies, personal capabilities, technical competence, business/organizational awareness, and the ability to evaluate, reflect, and review. The concept was further developed by Yorke and colleagues. In 2006, Yorke argued that “Employability derives from complex learning, and is a concept of broader range than those of ‘core’ and ‘key’ skills” and viewed employability as a collection of capabilities or achievements that constitute a prerequisite but not sufficient condition for employment.

## Initiative and Enterprise

Initiative is the ability to take action without being told to do so. It is a key employability skill that employers value in employees. Employees who show initiative are seen as being proactive, self-motivated, and resourceful. They are also more likely to be creative and come up with new ideas. Employees having initiative are not afraid to take on challenges, come up with creative solutions to problems and are more likely to be promoted or given more responsibilities. Initiative prompts an employee to go above and beyond his/her job requirements, results in improved work performance and increased opportunities for advancement. Studies show that individuals having initiative exhibit behaviours such as volunteering for new projects or assignments, take on extra responsibilities, be proactive in identifying and solving problems and be a team player. Employees with initiative are considered as valuable asset to the organization.

Initiative as an employability skill relates to aspects such as change management, Identifying opportunities, reflecting on one's own practice for improvement, engaging colleagues and adapting to new situations. Change management refers to response to change within the organization and in leadership demonstrated in implementing change. As part of identifying opportunities, members of the organization should be encouraged to share ideas for the growth of the organization. Employees who demonstrate initiative are more likely to be considered for promotion and offered opportunities for career advancement. Employees can show initiative and enterprise at all levels by suggesting ways to work more effectively, to reduce costs, to reduce complaints and to improve service.

### Initiative and Enterprise as employability Skill

International agencies who studied employability skills considered initiative and enterprise as one of the core employability skill. The framework entitled 'The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills' which is popularly known as 'SCANS' report developed by The U.S. Department of Labor (2004) comprises major employability skills and its dimensions. Initiative and enterprise is scheduled as a component of thinking skill, which is a dimension of employability skill. Department of Education and Training, Government of Australia (2006) has developed an employability skills framework that consists of communication, teamwork, problem solving, initiative and enterprise, planning and organizing, self-management and learning and technology skills. In Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada-ESDC (2007) included initiative and enterprise as an essential skill.

### Research on Initiative and Enterprise

Initiative is a valuable employability skill that refers to the ability to take action and make decisions without being prompted. It involves being proactive, self-motivated, and willing to go beyond the basic requirements of a job. Numerous research studies have explored the importance of initiative as an employability skill and its impact on career success. Here are some key research findings and studies related to initiative as an employability skill:

A study by the University of Michigan found that employees who showed initiative were more likely to be seen as being creative and innovative. They found that personal initiative is positively related to a number of workplace outcomes, including job performance, job satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behaviour.

Another study, by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), found that 72% of employers said that initiative was important for new graduates. The study also found that employers were more likely to hire graduates who had demonstrated initiative in their previous jobs. A study by the University of Pennsylvania that surveyed over 100 employees in a variety of organizations found that employees who showed initiative were more likely to be seen as being team players and leaders. The study also found that initiative was positively correlated with job performance and organizational citizenship behaviour. A comprehensive study by James J. Heckman, John Eric Humphries, and Tim Kautz (2014), examined the impact of non-cognitive skills, including initiative, on academic and labour market success. It highlights the importance of these skills in predicting employment outcomes. The authors emphasize that non-cognitive skills are crucial alongside cognitive abilities in determining success in both academics and the labour market. Another study by Gatewood, R. D., Feild, H. S., & Barrick, M. (2013), investigates the skills and attributes that corporate recruiters consider when hiring employees. Initiative is identified as a key skill that influences hiring decisions, candidate's suitability for a job and their long-term success in the workplace.

The research by Chet Robie and Kathryn Ryan (2015) examined the views of both employers and graduates regarding employability skills. It highlights the alignment between the skills graduates believe they possess (including initiative) and what employers value. The article titled Proactive Behavior in Organizations by J. Michael Crant (2000) that was published in the Journal of Management defines proactive behavior as "a self-initiated action that changes the situation in which one finds oneself." He argues that proactive behavior is an important construct in organizational behavior because it can lead to positive outcomes such as improved job performance, greater job satisfaction, and higher levels of career success. Crant argues that proactive behavior is a learned behavior, and that it can be developed through training and experience. He also argues that proactive behavior can be encouraged in organizations by creating a culture that supports and rewards it.

The studies by Adam M. Grant (2008) showed that people are often motivated to engage in pro social behaviors, such as helping others or donating to charity. This suggests that intrinsic motivation and pro social motivation can work together to create a synergistic effect that can help people persist at pro social goals. The study revealed that initiative which is an element of pro social behaviour results in career success. The meta analysis undertaken by Stajkovic and Luthans (1998) examined the relationship between self-efficacy and work-related performance in 114 studies with a total of 21,616 participants found self-efficacy and associated initiative is an important predictor of work-related performance. The article by Seibert, Crant, and Liden was a valuable contribution to the literature on proactive personality and job performance. Proactive personality is a personality trait that is characterized by taking initiative, being self-directed, and taking action to change the environment. Proactive personality is positively related to job performance and organizational citizenship behavior. It provides strong evidence that proactive personality is an important predictor of job performance.

These studies collectively emphasize the significance of initiative as a critical employability skill. They demonstrate how possessing and demonstrating initiative can positively affect career prospects, job performance, and overall success in the labour market.

### **Objectives of the study**

- 1) To assess the level of initiative and enterprise skill possessed by the students.
- 2) To examine the association between gender and the initiative and enterprise skill of the undergraduate students of Kasargod district.
- 3) To understand the employability of undergraduate students in terms of their initiative and enterprise skill

### **Methodology**

This study was designed as a project based assignment which an evaluation method that focuses on assessing participants' knowledge, skills, and abilities through the completion of a project or task. Unlike traditional assessments that rely on survey, project-based assessments require participants to apply their learning to real-world situations or complex problems. Project-based assessments can be implemented at various educational levels and across different subjects or disciplines. They promote active learning, problem-solving, collaboration, and critical thinking skills. Two Activities such as group discussion and group activity were used as part of project based assessment. In group discussion, groups with ten members were assigned with a topic to be discussed and finally arrive at a conclusion. 15 minutes were allotted for each group. In group activity Groups with ten members are assigned with a task to be performed. 30 minutes were allotted for completing the activity.

### **Scaling Techniques**

The initiative and enterprise skill was assessed using a score with maximum of ten and minimum of one. The scores 1 and 2 represented very poor expression, 3 and 4 represented poor expression, 5 and 6 represented average expression, 7 and 8 represented high expression and 9 and 10 represented very high expression. So the range of score between 1 – 4 represents a poor level/expression of a skill, 4.1 – 6 represents a medium level/expression of a skill and 7.1 – 10 represents a high level/expression of a skill.

### **Sample Design**

From the population of 2775 students, 523 students from 12 Colleges belonging to Government, Aided and Self financing colleges were selected at random for the study, which is 18.85 percentage of the population. Approximately 45 students from each College were selected who belonged to one/two courses depending on the number of students in each course. The course/s was/were selected at random and sufficient care was taken to ensure that students belonging to the three streams are uniformly included in the study. The Stratified Random Sampling technique is adopted here. The gender wise split up of the sample is given below.

**Table 1 – Gender wise split up of the sample**

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	195	37.3
Female	328	62.7
Total	523	100.0

Source: Primary data

### Tools for data collection

This study was designed as a project based assignment which an evaluation method that focuses on assessing participants' knowledge, skills, and abilities through the completion of a project or task. The students selected as sample for the study were asked to perform various activities that reflect the manifestation of initiative and enterprise skill. Two Activities such as group discussion and group activities were carried out as part of the evaluation process. The data regarding the initiative and enterprise skill was collected using structured observation method.

### Hypotheses

H1: The undergraduate students who are getting ready to enter the job market do not possess the initiative and enterprise skill.

H2: There is no significant difference between male students and female students in their initiative and enterprise skill.

**Table 2 – Initiative and enterprise score of the respondents**

Gender		Initiative score of the respondent								Total
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Male	Count	5	40	35	25	30	40	5	15	195
	Percentage	1.0	7.6	6.7	4.8	5.7	7.6	1.0	2.9	37.3
Female	Count	40	40	88	72	48	32	8	0	328
	Percentage	7.6	7.6	16.8	13.8	9.2	6.1	1.5	.0	62.7
Total	Count	45	80	123	97	78	72	13	15	523
	Percentage	8.6	15.3	23.5	18.5	14.9	13.8	2.5	2.9	100.0

Source: Primary data

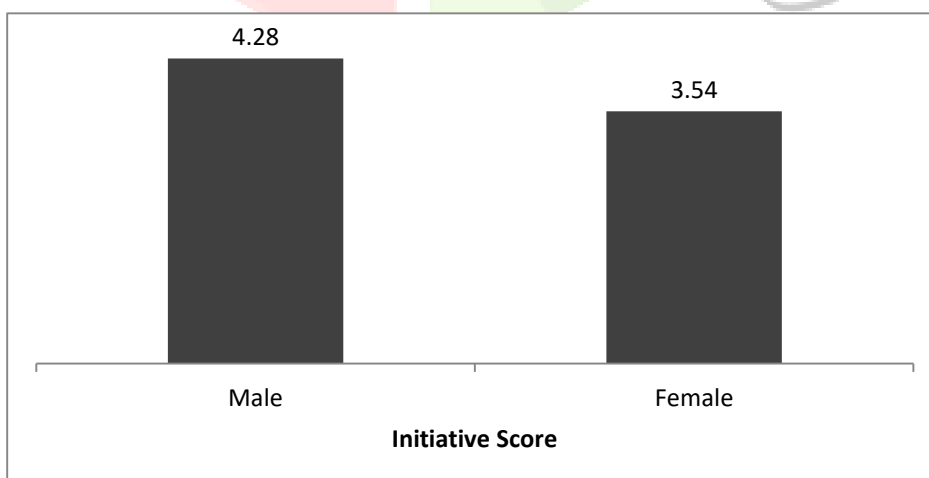
**Table 3 – Level of Initiative and enterprise skill of the respondents**

Gender		Level of Skill			Total	Mean Score
		Low	Medium	High		
Male	Count	105	70	20	195	4.28
	Percentage	53.8	35.9	10.3	100	
Female	Count	240	80	8	328	3.54
	Percentage	73.2	24.4	2.4	100	
Total	Count	345	150	28	523	3.81
	Percentage	66	28.7	5.4	100	

Source: Primary data

**Table 4 – t test for equality of means of initiative and enterprise score**

t-test for Equality of Means			
Variable	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
The initiative score of the respondent	4.883	521	.000

**Diagram 1 – Diagram showing the initiative and enterprise score of respondents**

### Interpretation

65.9 percent of students have low level of skill of initiative, 28.7 percent have medium level and 5.4 percent have high level skill of initiative. Among males the percent of students having low, medium and high levels of initiative skills are 53.8, 35.9 and 10.3 respectively. Among females 73.2 percent of students are having low,

24.4 percent are having medium and only 2.4 percent are having high levels of initiative skills. The mean Initiative score of male students is 4.28 and that of female students is 3.54. The mean Initiative score of the whole group of students is 3.81 out of 10. It is found that the difference among the male students and female students in their initiative score is statistically significant.

### Criteria for deciding Employability Skill

The researcher could not come across any study that specified a methodology for assessing the employability score of a person or recommended a cutoff score. Therefore the researcher proposed a score of 6 or above (out of 10) for a person to be considered to have employability skill or to consider as employable. The data revealed that the maximum score assigned is 8 and the minimum score is 1. Therefore, the score below 4 were to categorized as low level of initiative and enterprise skill, scores between 4 to 6 were categorized and medium level of initiative and enterprise skill and 7 to 8 were categorized as high level of initiative and enterprise skill.

### Employable and Unemployable Students on the basis of initiative and enterprise skills

The following table show the gender wise split up of the sample. 30.77 percent of the male students (60 out of 195) are employable and 12.20 percent of female students (40 out of 328) are employable. As a whole, only 19.12 percent of the final year degree students are employable on the basis of their initiative and enterprise skill.

**Table 5 - The employability status of students**

Employability status	Male		Female		Total	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Employable	60	30.77	40	12.20	100	19.12
Not Employable	135	69.23	288	87.80	423	80.88
<b>Total</b>	195	100	328	100	523	100

Source: Primary data

### Testing of hypothesis No.1

In order to test the hypothesis one sample t test was applied. The test value is taken as 6 which is the minimum score required to be considered as an employable person.

**Table 6 - One-Sample Test**

	Test Value = 6			
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Initiative score of the respondent	-28.976	522	.000	-2.18547



The test produced a t value of  $-28.976$  and the significance value was  $.00$  which is less than the p value  $0.05$ . The result can be interpreted that mean score is not 6 and since the t value is negative, the mean score is less than the test value of 6. Further, from the research it is revealed that only 19.12 percent of students are employable when the problem solving skill is considered. Therefore the hypothesis that the undergraduate students who are getting ready to enter the job market do not possess the employability skills in terms of their initiative and enterprise skills is accepted.

### Testing of hypothesis No.2

Statistical testing has proved that the difference in initiative and enterprise skill among the male students and female students is significant. So the hypothesis that there is no significant difference between male students and female students in initiative and enterprise skill is rejected.

### Findings

The major findings of the study are summarized below.

1. The average initiative and enterprise skill score of the final year degree students is only 3.81 out of 10, which means the graduates are going out of the campuses with a moderate level of initiative and enterprise skill. When gender wise analyzed, male students are slightly better than female students in their initiative and enterprise skill and this difference is found statistically significant also.
2. When the initiative and enterprise skill of a final year graduate student is considered, only 19.12 percent of the final year degree students are found to be employable. On a gender wise comparison, the 30.77 percent of the male students and 12.20 percent of the female students are employable. The difference between the male and female is found to be statistically significant.

### Conclusion

In today's competitive job market, corporations are increasingly emphasizing employability skills over traditional academic achievements when hiring new employees. This shift in focus means that graduates preparing to enter the workforce must be adequately equipped with these essential skills. One crucial aspect of employability is the ability to take initiative. To shed light on the initiative and enterprise levels of final-year graduates in Kasargod, a region with educational challenges in the state of Kerala, the researcher conducted a comprehensive study. The primary aim was to assess the extent to which these graduates possessed employability skills, with a particular emphasis on their capacity for taking initiative. The findings of the study revealed a somewhat surprising trend: a significant proportion of final-year graduates in Kasargod demonstrated a deficiency in employability skills, especially in the domain of initiative and enterprise. This underscores the importance of addressing this skills gap and ensuring that graduates are better prepared to meet the evolving expectations of the job market.

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