


# Exploration of Employability Skills in Business Management Studies Within Higher Education Levels: Systematic Literature Review

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## ABSTRACT

Higher education in the United Kingdom is becoming more responsible to focus beyond teaching and learning process; this is evolving to further reflect the needs of the marketplace, engagement with firms within the industry, responsibility to enhance talent, and to close the skills gap to prepare students for employment opportunities during studies and after graduation. The purpose of this study is to provide the key employability skills in business management studies within higher education with further focus on the UK as one of the leading Western and knowledge-based economies through a systematic literature review process. The study also aims to highlight employability skills reported in the selected studies by categorising them into three main categories: very common employability skills required, common employability skills required, and uncommon employability skills required. However, throughout the studies included in the review, focus on specific skills varied due to the way researchers assessed as well as external factors taken into consideration such as cultural differences, external environment changes, the type of educational institutions, and the way curriculum was delivered, as well as the variations of specific interests of employers from a sector to another. The review is organised in six key sections: Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Results and Analysis, Discussion, and lastly, Conclusion and Implications. The reported employability skills resulted in the review can be taken into consideration to further enhance understanding of how employability skills can be embedded into curriculum within business management schools in the UK and other organisations that are responsible for articulation of employment related policies for students and recent graduates. The review can also establish that enhancement of employability skills should be a collective responsibility including universities, employers, policymakers, and students to ensure that educational outcomes are meeting the needs of the market. Higher education providers should aim to close the gap of employability by the point of graduation stage and to be ready to compete in the overcrowded labour market.

## KEYWORDS

Business Management, Curriculum Development, Employability Skills, Higher Education

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## INTRODUCTION

In the review of the key performance indicators as published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in 2013, the higher education in the United Kingdom is becoming more responsible beyond teaching and learning process, as higher education institutions are becoming more involved locally in several aspects such as engagement with market place, firms, as well as being viewed as responsible to enhance talent within the workforce (Pollard *et al.*, 2013). This is also considered as public policy and higher education priority given the current changing climate of markets as well as uncertainty (Tomlinson, 2012). Furthermore, higher education institutions are having an increasing role to serve the nature of the British economy as it is being more knowledge based in comparison with other economies. Therefore, the need for skills enhancement is a key to this development, such as creativity and innovative thinking (Harvey *et al.*, 2002).

The nature of the demands and challenges of the newly graduate students can be diversified (Sarrazin *et al.*, 2018), with the consideration that many students are already in part time employment as this goes through their studies as well as having previous industry experience due to having a diverse body of students in British universities coming from traditional and non-traditional backgrounds, this, as a result, has changed the expectation of graduates in the labour market (Harvey *et al.*, 2002). Therefore, there is an increasing importance to embed key employability skills required in the labour market into the educational offer and experience (Harvey *et al.*, 2003; Harvey *et al.*, 1997). However, it was argued that the increasing focus on the job market demand as break into academic autonomy as this might shift education to training at universities. Furthermore, arguably employers are not only looking for trained graduates to do certain tasks, but they are also looking for well-educated graduates that can adapt to a changing business environment and situation (Brigden & Grieveson, 2003).

It is indicated by (Haigh & Clifford, 2010; QAA, 2001; Burton, 2016) that key graduate attributes can be summarised as the following: Firstly, knowledge and information management. Secondly, being results oriented and focused. Thirdly, having innovative and creative thinking. Fourthly, expertise. Fifthly, communication skills and ability to work with others. Sixthly, being able to manage and lead. Seventhly, being autonomous and quality oriented through awareness, commitment, and compassion. Eighthly, ability to adapt to changing situations. Ninthly, self-learning and self-reflection to ensure continuous professional development.

The purpose of this study is to provide the key employability skills in business management studies within higher education with further focus on the UK as one of the leading western and knowledge-based economies, through a systematic literature review process. The study also aims to highlight employability skills reported in the selected studies by categorising them into three main categories as the following: very common employability skills required, Common employability skills required, and Uncommon employability skills required.

The review is organised in six key sections as the following: Introduction, Literature review, Methodology, results and analysis, discussion, and lastly conclusion and implications.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

It was discussed that employers in the domestic and international labour markets are being increasingly demanding as there is intense competition for available vacancies within markets due to various external factors such as economic uncertainty. Therefore, employers are aiming to employ more skilled and educated graduates reflecting key employability skills as discussed in the introduction (Harvey *et al.*, 1997; Lee, 2002; Mason, 2003; Rothwell & Arnold., 2007). Based on this consideration, UK government is passing the message to students in higher education to consider their studies as an investment, this would reflect significant benefits in meeting the demands of the labour market (Tomlinson, 2008).

What are employability skills?

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