

Employability Skills of Chinese Future Teachers: Reference to a Pre-Employment Experiential Training Program

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Abstract

In order to prepare Chinese education graduates for future teachers, we need to better understand the skills, abilities and knowledge that will be valued and important in the future. It is under this premise that this study determines the four aspects of common employment skills that employers focus on, namely, application, knowledge skills, work skills, interpersonal skills and personal skills. We studied the mastery level of the four common employment skills of future teachers in China, and made a comparative analysis of the four employment skills. Based on the results, the researchers will propose a pre-graduation empirical training program for future Chinese teachers to help them improve their employment skills.

Keywords

China's Future Teacher, Employability Skills, Experiential Training.

1. Introduction

This study is rooted in the Common Employability Skills theory, as defined by the AMERICAN NATIONAL NETWORK OF BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS. These critical elements were the focus of our investigation, leading to the proposition of a pre-employment experiential training program tailored for future teachers, aimed at enhancing their co-employability. The co-employability skills framework, a collaborative endeavor between the Business Roundtable and the ACT Foundation, has created a comprehensive framework for identifying the fundamental skills universally required by employees, regardless of their specific industry or role. This framework also establishes a shared vocabulary for interpreting these skills. The Common Employability Skills (CES) framework delineates the foundational competencies essential for success in any profession or industry. It encompasses four core categories: applied knowledge, workplace skills, interpersonal abilities, and personal skills, each comprising the knowledge, skills, and abilities essential for these competencies.

These common employability skills are of paramount importance for preparing individuals to adapt to the ever-evolving demands of the future workplace. While educators endeavor to instill these skills in students, a substantial gap often exists between the theoretical concepts taught in schools and their real-world applications. As such, colleges and universities need to invest both time and resources into equipping their students with enhanced career-related skills prior to graduation. This entails creating simulated future workplace scenarios to help students strengthen their common employability skills, better preparing them to navigate the complexities of the real world.

Presently, the knowledge imparted to prospective teachers in Chinese educational institutions is primarily theoretical, with limited exposure to practical knowledge. This shortage of practical

experience stands as a significant obstacle to the development of future teachers' employability. While universities have taken steps to bolster employability training and encourage student participation in social practices, it remains impractical to expose all students to comprehensive real-world work experiences within the confines of their academic curriculum. Consequently, the role of role-playing, which provides authentic situational simulations, becomes pivotal in enhancing the employability training of college students.

2. Level of Employability Skills of Future Teachers in China

Employability skills refer to the basic skills needed to succeed in any profession or industry. In this context, it includes applied (academic) knowledge skills, workplace skills, people (interpersonal) skills and personal skills.

2.1 Applied (Academic) Knowledge refers to what students have learned in the classroom and their ability to apply and make use of these skills in workplace situations.

Table 1 shows the respondents' assessment on the employability skill level of the future Chinese teachers (education students) in terms of applied (academic) knowledge. Respondents believed that their level of applied (academic) knowledge and skills is mostly Above Average, as revealed by the overall mean of 2.73 with a standard deviation of 0.552.

Table 1. Level of Employability Skills as Perceived by Respondents in terms of Applied (Academic) Knowledge

Applied (Academic) Knowledge	Students (n=200)			Teachers (n=100)			Employers (n=20)			Overall (n=320)		
	M	SD	VI	M	SD	VI	M	SD	VI	M	SD	VI
1. Can read, follow and interpret instructions	3.16	.735	AA	3.12	.700	AA	3.50	.513	E	3.17	.716	AA
2. Can take down notes and make reports	3.02	.743	AA	3.08	.692	AA	3.45	.686	E	3.07	.729	AA
3. Can read, write and speak in English	2.30	.789	A	2.39	.777	A	2.20	.410	A	2.32	.767	A
4. Can make use of mathematical/computational skills	2.51	.802	AA	2.76	.754	AA	2.40	.503	A	2.58	.780	AA
5. Able to follow procedures and processes to complete a task	2.99	.780	AA	2.95	.642	AA	3.65	.489	E	3.02	.741	AA
6. Can think of creative and innovative ideas	2.68	.768	AA	2.63	.677	AA	2.30	.470	A	2.64	.729	AA
7. Can assess, analyze and resolve problems critically	2.81	.773	AA	2.61	.709	AA	2.25	.444	A	2.71	.750	AA
8. Can create plan, steps, procedures in addressing assigned tasks	2.85	.728	AA	2.78	.675	AA	3.05	.510	AA	2.84	.701	AA
9. Can make sound decisions and assess options.	2.82	.728	AA	2.72	.683	AA	2.85	.489	AA	2.79	.701	AA
10. Can develop practical applications	2.06	.928	A	2.48	.772	A	2.20	.410	A	2.20	.877	A
Overall	2.72	.598	AA	2.75	.493	AA	2.79	.296	AA	2.73	.552	AA

Legend: M (Mean Score); SD (Standard Deviation); VI (Verbal Interpretation)
 3.26-4.00=Excellent (E); 2.51-3.25=Above Average (AA); 1.76-2.50=Average (A);
 1.00-1.75=Below Average (BA)

The "read, follow and explain" indicator stands out with the highest mean score of 3.17, demonstrating a relatively strong performance, as indicated by a standard deviation of 0.716. Moreover, its verbal explanation is categorized as Above Average. In contrast, the "Can you develop practical applications" indicator exhibits the lowest mean value of 2.20, coupled with a standard deviation of 0.877, implying a less consistent performance. The verbal interpretation for this indicator is rated at an Average level.

The well-known idiom "knowledge is power" holds only partial truth. In reality, knowledge transforms into power when it is put into action. Hence, it is the applied knowledge that truly wields power. Knowledge occupies a paramount position in an individual's life, serving as the foundation upon which many tasks are executed. This concept finds resonance in biblical scripture, specifically Hosea 4:6, where it is recorded that people perished due to their lack of knowledge.

It's essential to recognize that basic skills encompass more than mere "reading." Employees require a broader spectrum of communication and problem-solving proficiencies. This includes proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, listening, arithmetic (applied mathematics), digital literacy, teamwork, problem solving, and research skills. These competencies are crucial for success in the contemporary professional landscape, as highlighted by scholars like Stein (2000) and government agencies like the U. S. Department of Labor (1991).

2.1. Workplace Skills

Practical job skills encompass the knowledge, skills, and experience essential for executing a job competently and achieving excellent performance.

Table 5 provides an insight into how respondents assessed the proficiency of future Chinese teachers (education students) in terms of workplace skills. The respondents predominantly rated the level of workplace skills as "Above Average." The overall mean score for these workplace skills evaluations was 2.84, reflecting a relatively positive perception of the skills possessed by these individuals. Additionally, the standard deviation of 0.616 suggests a moderate level of consensus among the respondents regarding the perceived skill level.

The item "Can engage in note-taking and observe verbal and non-verbal communication" exhibits the highest mean value, scoring 3.02, indicating a relatively strong performance in this skill area. The standard deviation of 0.765 suggests moderate variability in respondent evaluations, and the verbal explanation is rated as Above Average.

Conversely, the indicator "Can manage the financial and material resources of the task / project" presents the lowest mean value, tallying 2.66, implying a somewhat lower proficiency level. The standard deviation of 0.738 indicates a moderate degree of dispersion in respondent ratings. However, the verbal explanation for this indicator is still rated as Above Average.

In today's rapidly evolving professional landscape, driven by technology and innovative business models, new recruitment criteria for entry-level candidates extend beyond technical capabilities or academic qualifications. Candidates are expected to demonstrate the ability to apply contemporary workplace intelligence. As automation and algorithms increasingly handle routine tasks, future roles across various domains will necessitate the application of skills such as emotional intelligence, creative thinking, problem-solving, negotiation, collaboration, storytelling, critical thinking, and entrepreneurship. These capabilities are regarded as crucial for future job roles and are listed as some of the top ten job skills for the future by institutions such as the World Economic Forum ("Business World, New Delhi," 2021, Jun 17).

Table 2. Level of Employability Skills as Perceived by Respondents in terms of Workplace Skills

Workplace Skills	Students (n=200)			Teachers (n=100)			Employers (n=20)			Overall (n=320)		
	M	SD	VI	M	SD	VI	M	SD	VI	M	SD	VI
1. Can complete tasks with quality on a given time	2.86	.748	AA	2.83	.682	AA	3.55	.510	E	2.90	.733	AA
2. Can manage financial and material resources for tasks/projects	2.66	.780	AA	2.64	.689	AA	2.80	.523	AA	2.66	.738	AA
3. Can locate, organize, analyze and make use of information	2.75	.737	AA	2.67	.620	AA	3.05	.686	AA	2.74	.703	AA
4. Can convey information thru writing reports	2.76	.737	AA	2.86	.766	AA	3.15	.813	AA	2.82	.754	AA
5. Can make use of technology available in the workplace	2.70	.788	AA	2.94	.736	AA	3.35	.587	E	2.82	.779	AA
6. Can engage in note-taking and observe verbal and non-verbal communication	2.92	.742	AA	3.08	.761	AA	3.70	.657	E	3.02	.765	AA
7. Can understand roles and assignments when working in teams	2.94	.744	AA	2.80	.667	AA	2.90	.641	AA	2.89	.715	AA
8. Can follow written instructions, review print and digital resources.	2.95	.758	AA	2.92	.734	AA	3.70	.571	E	2.98	.761	AA
Overall	2.82	.665	AA	2.84	.532	AA	3.11	.442	AA	2.84	.616	AA

Legend: M (Mean Score); SD (Standard Deviation); VI (Verbal Interpretation)
 3.26-4.00=Excellent (E); 2.51-3.25=Above Average (AA); 1.76-2.50=Average (A);
 1.00-1.75=Below Average (BA)

2.2. People (Interpersonal) Skills

Interpersonal skills encompass the ability to effectively manage both internal and external relationships within an organization. This includes the capacity to establish extensive connections with the surrounding environment, absorb and transform external information, and correctly navigate relationships with superiors, subordinates, and peers. Proficiency in interpersonal skills is a crucial criterion for evaluating whether a public relations professional can adapt to the demands of modern society and effectively communicate with others.

Table 3 provides insights into how respondents evaluated the proficiency of Chinese future teachers (education students) in terms of interpersonal skills. The respondents indicated that the majority of these individuals exhibited interpersonal skills above the average level. The overall mean score for these evaluations of interpersonal skills was 2.92, suggesting a generally positive perception of their abilities in this area. Furthermore, the standard deviation of 0.617 indicates a moderate degree of agreement among the respondents regarding the perceived level of interpersonal skills.

Table 3. Level of Employability Skills as Perceived by Respondents in terms of People (Interpersonal) Skills

People (Interpersonal) Skills	Students (n=200)			Teachers (n=100)			Employers (n=20)			Overall (n=320)		
	M	SD	VI	M	SD	VI	M	SD	VI	M	SD	VI
1. Can understand teamwork and working with others	2.98	.740	AA	2.85	.672	AA	3.05	.510	AA	2.95	.708	AA
2. Can respond to client/customer needs	2.84	.733	AA	2.94	.708	AA	3.35	.671	E	2.90	.730	AA
3. Can participate as team leader or team member	2.83	.760	AA	2.76	.698	AA	3.00	.725	AA	2.82	.739	AA
4. Can discuss options and resolve conflicts	2.86	.730	AA	2.84	.662	AA	2.80	.410	AA	2.85	.692	AA
5. Respect individual differences	3.16	.742	AA	2.94	.679	AA	3.35	.489	E	3.11	.718	AA
Overall	2.94	.657	AA	2.87	.556	AA	3.11	.442	AA	2.92	.617	AA

Legend: M (Mean Score); SD (Standard Deviation); VI (Verbal Interpretation)
 3.26-4.00=Excellent (E); 2.51-3.25=Above Average (AA); 1.76-2.50=Average (A);
 1.00-1.75=Below Average (BA)

The measure of "respect for individual differences" demonstrates the highest mean value, scoring 3.11, signifying a notably strong performance in this aspect. The standard deviation of 0.718 indicates a moderate level of variability in respondent assessments, and the verbal interpretation rates this skill as Above Average.

Conversely, the indicator "Can participate as a team leader or team member" exhibits the lowest mean value, registering 2.82, suggesting a somewhat lower proficiency level in this regard. The standard deviation of 0.739 implies moderate variability in respondent evaluations. Nevertheless, the verbal interpretation still rates this skill as Above Average.

The dynamics of interpersonal relationships are profound and have a significant impact on individuals, representing one of the most common challenges faced in contemporary society. Throughout their lives, individuals engage with numerous people, and their ability to navigate these relationships effectively can profoundly shape their personality, mental well-being, attitude, and behavior (Nacar and Tumkaya, 2011).

2.3. Personal Qualities/Skills

Individual skills pertain to a person's specific areas of expertise and technological proficiency. These skills encompass a spectrum of behaviors and competencies that empower employees to establish effective relationships and carry out essential workplace functions appropriately.

Table 4 provides an overview of how respondents assessed the proficiency of Chinese future teachers (education students) in terms of their individual skills. The respondents generally rated the level of individual skills as "Above Average." The overall mean score for these evaluations of individual skills was 2.96, indicating a positive perception of their abilities in this domain. Additionally, the standard deviation of 0.610 suggests a moderate level of consensus among the respondents regarding the perceived level of individual skills.

Table 4. Level of Employment Skills as Perceived by Respondents in terms of Personal Qualities/Skills

Personal Qualities/Skills	Students (n=200)			Teachers (n=100)			Employers (n=20)			Overall (n=320)		
	M	SD	VI	M	SD	VI	M	SD	VI	M	SD	VI
Demonstrate responsibility, integrity and self-discipline	3.08	.736	AA	3.03	.717	AA	3.60	.598	E	3.09	.733	AA
Can easily adapt to different modes of instructions and exhibit flexibility.	2.83	.771	AA	2.93	.742	AA	3.65	.489	E	2.91	.771	AA
Can work independently with minimal supervision	2.81	.766	AA	2.70	.759	AA	2.85	.587	AA	2.78	.754	AA
Have the willingness to learn	2.97	.789	AA	2.82	.716	AA	2.60	.503	AA	2.90	.757	AA
Can display positive attitude and sense of self-worth	3.02	.757	AA	2.98	.681	AA	3.00	.459	AA	3.01	.717	AA
Can take the opportunity to take a leadership role in some tasks/projects.	2.84	.807	AA	2.80	.725	AA	2.65	.587	AA	2.81	.769	AA
Treat others with respect.	3.36	.723	E	3.15	.672	AA	3.40	.503	E	3.30	.701	E
Can be responsible for professional growth.	2.98	.780	AA	2.78	.705	AA	2.55	.510	AA	2.89	.752	AA
Overall	2.99	.652	AA	2.90	.558	AA	3.04	.397	AA	2.96	.610	AA

Legend: M (Mean Score); SD (Standard Deviation); VI (Verbal Interpretation)
 3.26-4.00=Excellent (E); 2.51-3.25=Above Average (AA); 1.76-2.50=Average (A);
 1.00-1.75=Below Average (BA)

"Respect for others" emerges as the skill with the highest mean value, scoring an impressive 3.30, indicating a remarkable proficiency in this area. The standard deviation of 0.701 suggests a moderate level of variability in respondent evaluations, and the verbal interpretation categorizes this skill as "Excellent."

On the other hand, the indicator "Can work independently under least supervision" exhibits the lowest mean value, with a score of 2.78, implying a somewhat lower proficiency level in this particular skill. The standard deviation of 0.754 indicates a moderate degree of dispersion in respondent ratings, but despite this, the verbal interpretation still rates this skill as "Above Average."

As highlighted by Catalano (2018), personal skills often correlate with personality traits such as optimism, responsibility, integrity, humor, insight, wisdom, prudence, and good judgment. However, it's important to note that personal traits like empathy, team spirit, leadership, communication, confidence, good behavior, negotiation, social skills, and learning abilities can be improved through exercise and practice. These skills collectively contribute to an individual's effectiveness in personal and professional contexts.

2.4. Summary Evaluation

Table 5 provides a comprehensive overview of the aggregate evaluation of the employment skills of future Chinese teachers (education students). Respondents consistently rated these

skills as "Above Average," with the overall mean score reaching 2.85. The standard deviation of 0.773 indicates a moderate level of variability in respondent assessments. This data reflects a generally positive perception of the employment skills possessed by these individuals, highlighting their proficiency in various aspects relevant to their future careers as teachers.

Table 5. Summary Table on the Level of Employability Skills as Perceived by Respondents

Employability /Skills	Students (n=200)			Teachers (n=100)			Employers (n=20)			Overall (n=320)		
	M	SD	VI	M	SD	VI	M	SD	VI	M	SD	VI
Applied (Academic) Knowledge Skills	2.72	.598	AA	2.75	.493	AA	2.79	.296	AA	2.73	.552	AA
Workplace Skills	2.82	.665	AA	2.84	.532	AA	3.11	.442	AA	2.84	.616	AA
People (Interpersonal) Skills	2.94	.657	AA	2.87	.556	AA	3.11	.442	AA	2.92	.617	AA
Personal Skills	2.99	.652	AA	2.90	.558	AA	3.04	.397	AA	2.96	.610	AA
Grand Total	2.85	.799	AA	2.83	.725	AA	3.03	.716	AA	2.85	.773	AA

Legend: M (Mean Score); SD (Standard Deviation); VI (Verbal Interpretation)
 3.26-4.00=Excellent (E); 2.51-3.25=Above Average (AA); 1.76-2.50=Average (A);
 1.00-1.75=Below Average (BA)

The summary table provides an overview of the perceived level of employability skills among respondents:

The measure of "personal skills" is rated the highest, with a mean value of 2.96, suggesting a strong proficiency in this category. The standard deviation of 0.610 indicates a moderate level of variability in respondent evaluations, and the verbal interpretation categorizes this skill as "Above Average."

In contrast, the index "applied (academic) knowledge skills" has the lowest mean value of 2.73, indicating a somewhat lower proficiency level in this area. However, the standard deviation of 0.552 suggests a relatively consistent rating across respondents, and the verbal interpretation still rates this skill as "Above Average."

In today's intricate economy, graduates are required to possess not only high levels of education in terms of their disciplines and degrees but also a multitude of skills and abilities (Suartha et al., 2017). Without employability skills, graduates may struggle to secure suitable employment opportunities (Movahedi, 2017). The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines employability as "portable capacities and qualifications that enhance individuals' ability to utilize their existing educational and training opportunities, secure and retain decent employment, advance within and between organizations, and adapt to evolving technical and labor market conditions" (ILO, 2004, cited in ILO, 2013, p. 1). These skills are crucial for individuals to succeed in a dynamic and competitive job market.

3. Proposed Pre-Employment Experiential Training Program

I propose the development of an experiential training program for future Chinese teachers' employment skills. This program will be designed in conjunction with the results of future teacher employment skills assessments, with the aim of enhancing the employability of China's future educators. The program's training content will revolve around crucial workplace skills, such as practice teaching, communication, coordination, teamwork, leadership, and reflective analysis.

To ensure the success of this initiative, funding will be secured. A professional guidance team will be assembled, and specialized training equipment will be procured. Role-playing experiential training methods will be employed during the training sessions. After the training, participants will provide feedback, which will be used to refine the program continually. This iterative process aims to enhance the effectiveness of the training and, consequently, the participants' employability.

Ultimately, this training program seeks to empower future Chinese teachers with improved collective employability skills. It aims to boost their confidence in facing the challenges of the workplace, thus enhancing their competitiveness in the job market.

4. Conclusion

In this era of immense employment pressure, China's aspiring teachers will encounter a rising tide of workplace challenges. Our research findings underscore the pressing need for future teachers in China to access platforms and mentors that can assist them in enhancing their general employability skills prior to entering the job market. Such preparation is crucial for helping them acclimate to the demands of the workplace and confidently confront their impending careers. Building upon the insights garnered from our survey, we have formulated an experiential pre-employment training program tailored for future teachers in China. This program is designed to empower future Chinese educators by equipping them with the necessary skills and confidence to navigate the competitive landscape of job hunting and excel in their workplaces.

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