The Skills Gap in Indian Business Education: A Study Based In Bhopal

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ABSTRACT
This study investigates the perceptions and self-assessed competencies regarding employability skills among business school students in Bhopal, India. With a focus on essential skills such as communication, critical thinking, adaptability, and decision-making, this research aims to uncover how these future professionals evaluate their readiness for the workforce. Utilizing a quantitative approach, data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to explore differences across gender and age groups. The findings indicate a significant recognition of soft skills alongside technical knowledge as pivotal for career success. However, discrepancies between perceived importance and self-assessed proficiency suggest areas for potential curriculum enhancement. The results provide valuable insights for educational institutions aiming to align their offerings more closely with market demands and prepare students more effectively for their professional lives.

Keywords: Employability Skills, Business School, Bhopal, Self-Assessment, Curriculum Development, Soft Skills, Quantitative Research, ANOVA

I.   INTRODUCTION

The rapidly evolving job market of the 21st century places a premium on a diverse set of skills ranging from technical proficiencies to interpersonal aptitudes. Particularly for business school students poised to enter this dynamic landscape, understanding and assessing their own employability skills becomes crucial. These skills, broadly categorized under domains like communication, critical thinking, adaptability, and decision-making, serve as critical enablers in navigating the complexities of modern professional environments.

In light of this, our study aims to delve deep into the perceptions of management students from various business schools in the Bhopal region regarding these key employability skills. We focus particularly on how these students assess their capabilities within these areas, offering insights into their readiness to meet the challenges of the job market. This inquiry is not only pertinent for the students themselves but also for academic institutions looking to refine their curricula to better prepare future leaders.

Employability skills are often highlighted as the bridge between academic achievements and real-world success. Research has underscored the importance of these skills as they significantly enhance one's ability to effectively function within a workplace, irrespective of the job or industry (Smith & Rothwell, 2013). Skills such as decisive reasoning, effective communication, and strategic decision-making are repeatedly flagged by employers as essential, yet there is a noted gap in these areas among recent graduates (Jones, 2010).

Focusing specifically on the Bhopal region allows for an examination of these skills within a unique educational and cultural context. Bhopal, with its diverse mix of industrial and service sectors, presents a microcosm of the broader Indian economic landscape. This regional approach follows the scholarly precedent that emphasizes the significance of contextual influences on educational outcomes and employability (Patel & Kumar, 2014). By analyzing how students in this area perceive and evaluate their skills, we can gain valuable perspectives that may inform educational strategies both locally and in similar contexts globally.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

- **The Importance of Employability Skills**

Research has consistently highlighted the importance of employability skills, which include but are not limited to, critical thinking, communication, teamwork, and adaptability (Smith

& Rothwell, 2013). These skills are considered critical as they transcend specific job roles and are valued across various industries (Jones, 2010).

- **Gender and Age Differences in Skill Perception**

Several studies have investigated the impact of demographic factors like gender and age on the perception of employability skills. For instance, Marini et al. (2008) found that gender could significantly influence how individuals assess their competencies in areas such as communication and decision-making. Similarly, age has been shown to affect self-confidence in personal skills, with older students often reporting higher levels of self-efficacy (Brown & Glover, 2006).

- **Regional Studies and Their Relevance**

Focusing on a specific region, such as Bhopal, allows for a detailed understanding of localized educational and cultural impacts on skill development (Patel & Kumar, 2014). This approach is supported by the work of Gupta and Arora (2015), who emphasize the importance of context in educational research, particularly when considering the fast-changing economic landscapes of Indian cities.

- **Quantitative Measures of Skill Perception**

Quantitative analyses, notably ANOVA, are frequently utilized to understand differences in skill perception across different groups. This method helps in identifying significant trends and variances in large datasets, providing a robust framework for interpreting complex interactions between skills and demographic variables (Thompson, 2009).
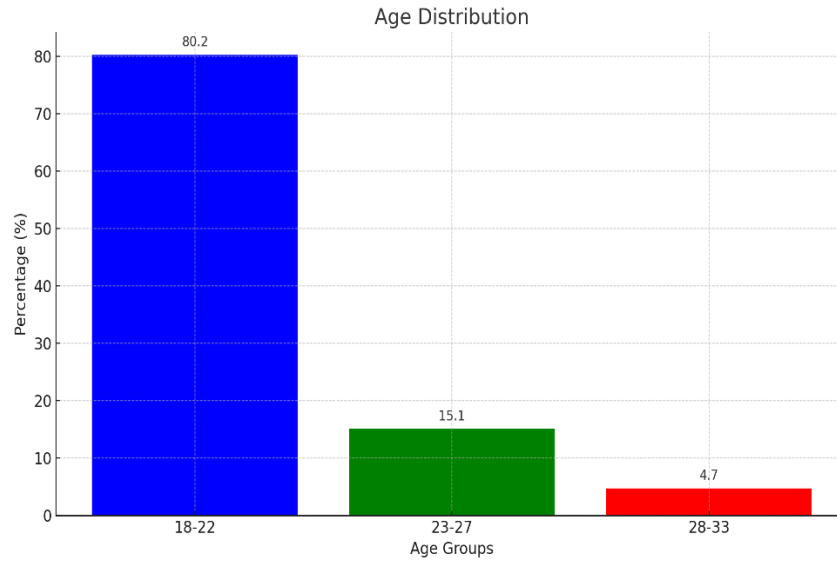
III.   OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This paper has two primary objectives:

1. To identify how students in Bhopal's business schools perceive various employability skills, thereby understanding what skills they deem most crucial for their career progression.
2. To ascertain how these students assess their own competencies in these skills, providing insights into their self-awareness and perceived readiness for the professional world.

1.   METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Utilizing a quantitative research framework, this study employs descriptive and exploratory methods to achieve its objectives. We use structured questionnaires to gather data on student perceptions, which are then analyzed using sophisticated statistical tools such as Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). This method allows us to explore potential differences in perception across various demographic groups, including gender and age, offering a comprehensive overview of how different segments within the student population view employability skills.

2.   DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

TABLE-1 AGE

| Age					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-22	679	80.2	80.2	80.2
	23-27	128	15.1	15.1	95.3
	28-33	40	4.7	4.7	100.0
	Total	847	100.0	100.0	

GRAPH-1 AGE

The survey primarily captures the views of young adults, with 80.2% of respondents aged 18-22 and 15.1% aged 23-27. Only a small fraction, 4.7%, are 28-33 years old. This shows a strong representation of late teens and early twenties, while still including perspectives from those in their late twenties and early thirties.

TABLE-2 GENDER

| Gender					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	399	47.1	47.1	47.1
	Female	448	52.9	52.9	100.0
	Total	847	100.0	100.0	

GRAPH-2 GENDER
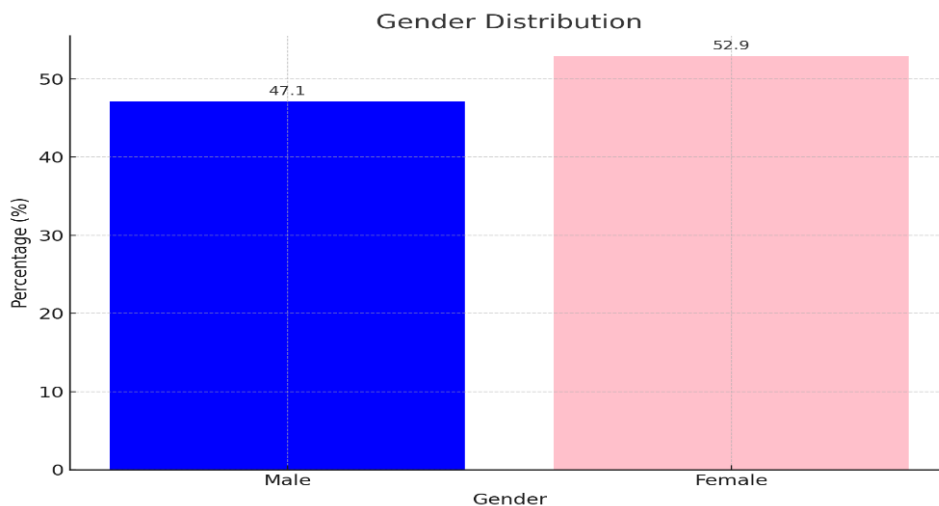
The survey features a nearly equal gender distribution, with 47.1% of respondents identifying as male and 52.9% as female, highlighting its inclusivity. This balance allows for a wide range of perspectives, enhancing the credibility and relevance of the findings. By integrating views from both genders, the survey ensures comprehensive insights and supports gender equality in research analysis.

TABLE-3 STREAM

Stream					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Marketing	380	44.9	44.9	44.9
	HR	210	24.8	24.8	69.7
	Finance	122	14.4	14.4	84.1
	Agribusiness Management	47	5.5	5.5	89.6
	IT	58	6.8	6.8	96.5
	Retail Management	30	3.5	3.5	100.0
	Total	847	100.0	100.0	

GRAPH-3 STREAM
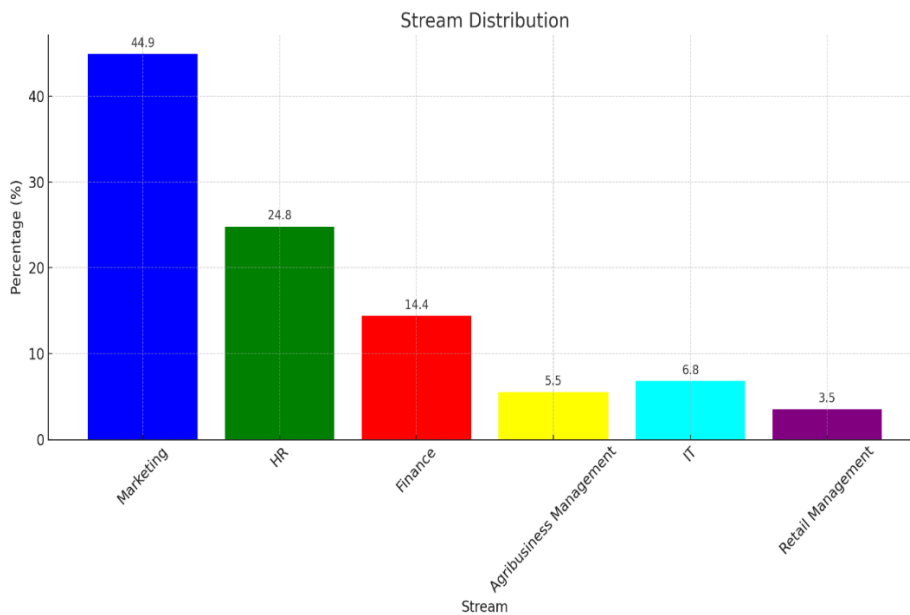
The survey demonstrates diverse academic participation, led by 44.9% from the Marketing stream, followed by Human Resources (24.8%), Finance (14.4%), Information Technology (6.8%), Agribusiness Management (5.5%), and Retail Management (3.5%). This variety ensures that the insights encompass a wide range of perspectives, reflecting the relevance of communication skills across different industries and academic disciplines. Such diversity enhances the survey's comprehensiveness and applicability to various fields.

Q1. Some of the skills that are thought to be necessary for employability are listed below. Give them a ranking of importance.

TABLE-4

	Skill	Most Important (%)	Important (%)	Neutral (%)
1	**Decisive Reasoning/Critical**	51.2	45.5	3.3

|				
	Thinking			
2	**Communication Skills**	81.8	16.5	1.7
3	**Confidence**	76.0	22.3	1.7
4	**Decision Making**	62.0	34.7	3.3
5	**Adaptability and Versatility**	47.9	42.1	9.9
6	**Domain Knowledge**	43.8	52.9	3.3
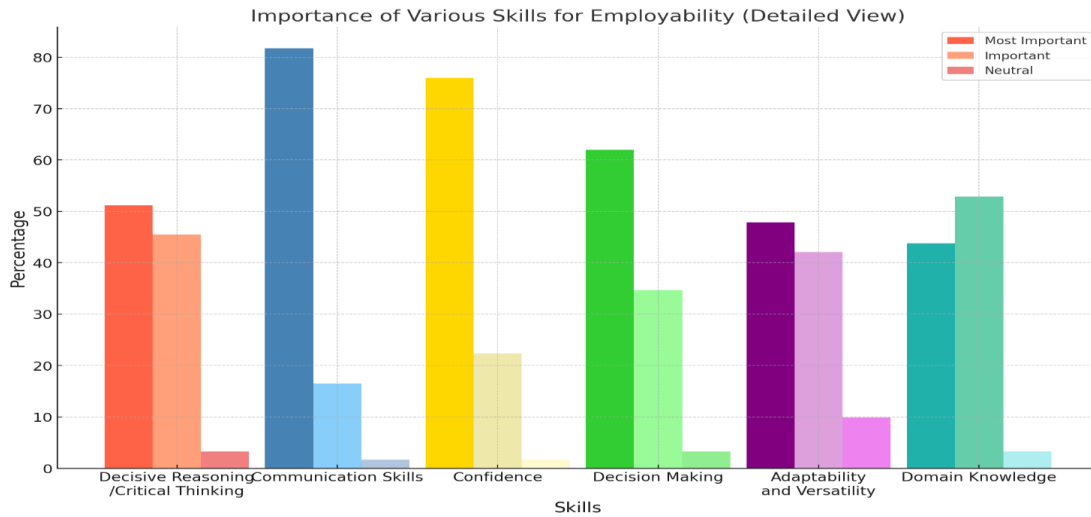
GRAPH-4

The survey from business school students in Bhopal on employability skills indicates a strong preference for Communication Skills, with 81.8% rating it as "Most Important," highlighting its critical role in professional settings. Confidence and Decision Making are also highly valued, emphasizing the importance of self-assurance and informed decision-making in careers. While Decisive Reasoning/Critical Thinking and Adaptability are appreciated, Domain Knowledge, though considered essential, is seen as less critical compared to interpersonal and analytical skills. This suggests a clear recognition among students that soft skills are pivotal alongside technical knowledge for career success.

Q2. Given beneath are a portion of the employability ranges of abilities. Demonstrate your level of capability in every expertise.

TABLE-5

	Skill	Very Proficient (%)	Proficient (%)	Neutral (%)	Least Proficient (%)
1	**Decisive Reasoning/Critical Thinking**	50.4	36.4	11.6	1.7
2	**Communication Skills**	27.3	59.5	8.3	5.0
3	**Confidence**	26.4	54.5	15.7	3.3
4	**Decision Making**	47.1	43.0	8.3	1.7
5	**Adaptability and Versatility**	47.9	36.4	12.4	3.4
6	**Domain Knowledge**	46.3	39.7	9.1	5.0

GRAPH-5

Levels of Capability in Employability Skills
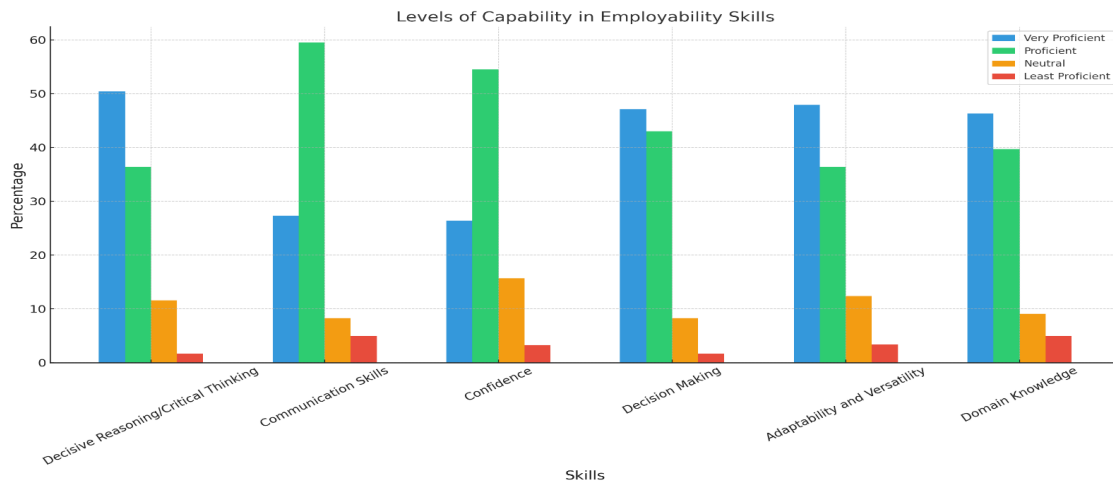
The self-assessment data of employability skills from business school students in Bhopal reveal varied confidence levels across different competencies. A significant portion of students feel "Very Proficient" in Decisive Reasoning/Critical Thinking and Decision Making, with scores of 50.4% and 47.1% respectively, illustrating a strong self-belief in their analytical and decision-making capabilities. Similarly, Adaptability and Versatility also rank high, indicating that nearly half of the respondents are confident in their ability to manage change effectively. In contrast, Communication Skills and Confidence, despite being highly valued, show lower levels of perceived proficiency (27.3% and 26.4% "Very Proficient" respectively), suggesting a potential gap between the importance of these skills and students' confidence in them. This mix of high confidence in technical skills and lower confidence in interpersonal skills provides valuable insights into areas where students may require further training and development to fully prepare for the job market.

INFERENTIAL ANALYSIS
OBJECTIVE-1
1.   Identify Business School students' perception of employability skills

Hypothesis: Students do not have a specific perception of employability skills which is influenced by their Gender and Stream.
Supportive Hypothesis:
Students do not have a specific perception of employability skills which is influenced by their Gender.

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Decisive reasoning/ Critical Thinking	Between Groups	20.178	1	20.178	68.971	.000
	Within Groups	247.211	845	.293		
	Total	267.388	846			
Communication Skills	Between Groups	1.685	1	1.685	8.846	.003
	Within Groups	160.992	845	.191		
	Total	162.678	846			
Confidence	Between Groups	16.370	1	16.370	79.941	.000
	Within Groups	173.035	845	.205		
	Total	189.405	846			

Decision Making	Between Groups	4.590	1	4.590	15.105	.000
	Within Groups	256.782	845	.304		
	Total	261.372	846			
Adaptability and Versatility	Between Groups	7.463	1	7.463	17.511	.000
	Within Groups	360.124	845	.426		
	Total	367.587	846			
Domain Knowledge	Between Groups	3.870	1	3.870	12.763	.000
	Within Groups	256.229	845	.303		
	Total	260.099	846			

The statistical analysis indicates significant differences in the perceptions of employability skills among the surveyed groups, as evidenced by p-values less than 0.05 for each skill. Consequently, the null hypothesis — that there is no variation in skill perceptions between groups — is rejected. This suggests that factors such as gender may influence how different skills are valued among the participants.

Hypothesis: Students do not have a specific perception of employability skills which is influenced by their GENDER.

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Decisive reasoning/ Critical Thinking	Between Groups	.025	5	.005	.016	1.000
	Within Groups	267.363	841	.318		
	Total	267.388	846			
Communication Skills	Between Groups	.243	5	.049	.252	.939
	Within Groups	162.435	841	.193		
	Total	162.678	846			
Confidence	Between Groups	.218	5	.044	.194	.965
	Within Groups	189.187	841	.225		
	Total	189.405	846			
Decision Making	Between Groups	.096	5	.019	.062	.997
	Within Groups	261.276	841	.311		
	Total	261.372	846			
Adaptability and Versatility	Between Groups	.064	5	.013	.029	1.000
	Within Groups	367.523	841	.437		
	Total	367.587	846			
Domain Knowledge	Between Groups	.448	5	.090	.290	.919
	Within Groups	259.651	841	.309		
	Total	260.099	846			

The ANOVA results show no significant gender-based differences in perceptions of various employability skills, with all p-values exceeding 0.05. Thus, the hypothesis suggesting gender influences on skill perceptions is not supported by the data, indicating that gender does not significantly affect how students perceive these skills.

2.   Ascertain students' perception of their own employability skills.
Hypothesis: Students do not have a certain level of confidence in their employability skills, varying across different skill sets on the basis of their age.

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Decisive reasoning/ Critical Thinking	Between Groups	2.179	2	1.090	1.667	.189
	Within Groups	551.573	844	.654		
	Total	553.752	846			
Communication Skills	Between Groups	45.271	2	22.636	30.215	.000
	Within Groups	632.283	844	.749		
	Total	677.554	846			
Confidence	Between Groups	2.123	2	1.061	1.476	.229
	Within Groups	606.819	844	.719		
	Total	608.942	846			
Decision Making	Between Groups	10.054	2	5.027	8.700	.000
	Within Groups	487.698	844	.578		
	Total	497.752	846			
Adaptability and Versatility	Between Groups	9.982	2	4.991	6.794	.001
	Within Groups	620.018	844	.735		
	Total	630.000	846			
Domain Knowledge	Between Groups	16.303	2	8.151	9.662	.000
	Within Groups	712.044	844	.844		
	Total	728.347	846			

The ANOVA results indicate that age significantly affects students' confidence levels in specific employability skills such as communication, decision-making, adaptability, and domain knowledge, with p-values under 0.05. However, no significant age-related differences are found in confidence levels for decisive reasoning/critical thinking and confidence itself, with p-values of 0.189 and 0.229, respectively. Thus, the hypothesis that age influences confidence in employability skills is only partially supported, depending on the skill considered.

Hypothesis: Students do not have a certain level of confidence in their employability skills, varying across different skill sets on the basis of gender.

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Decisive reasoning/ Critical Thinking	Between Groups	61.795	1	61.795	106.141	.000
	Within Groups	491.957	845	.582		
	Total	553.752	846			
Communication Skills	Between Groups	5.009	1	5.009	6.293	.012
	Within Groups	672.545	845	.796		
	Total	677.554	846			
Confidence	Between Groups	42.134	1	42.134	62.814	.000
	Within Groups	566.808	845	.671		
	Total	608.942	846			
Decision Making	Between Groups	4.321	1	4.321	7.400	.007
	Within Groups	493.431	845	.584		
	Total	497.752	846			
Adaptability and Versatility	Between Groups	9.947	1	9.947	13.556	.000
	Within Groups	620.053	845	.734		
	Total	630.000	846			
Domain Knowledge	Between Groups	6.618	1	6.618	7.748	.005
	Within Groups	721.729	845	.854		
	Total	728.347	846			

The ANOVA results reveal that gender significantly influences students' confidence levels across all examined employability skills, with all p-values being less than 0.05. This includes decisive reasoning/critical thinking, communication, confidence, decision-making, adaptability, versatility, and domain knowledge. Therefore, the hypothesis that gender does not affect confidence levels in these skills is rejected, indicating clear gender-related differences in how students perceive their employability skills.

IV.   RESULTS & DISCUSSION
Discussion on Employability Skills: Perception and Self-Assessed Proficiency Among Business School Students in Bhopal

- **Perception of Skill Importance**

The earlier data analysis indicates that Communication Skills are regarded as the most crucial, closely followed by Confidence and Decision Making. This suggests that students place a high value on interpersonal skills and personal efficacy in the workplace. Critical Thinking and Adaptability also rank high, underlining the importance of cognitive flexibility and problem-solving abilities in today's dynamic business environments. Domain Knowledge, though rated lowest, still shows significant recognition among the skills essential for employability.

- **Self-Assessed Proficiency Levels**

On the proficiency front, the students' self-assessment reveals confidence in their Critical Thinking and Decision-Making skills, with about half considering themselves very proficient in these areas. This aligns with the perceived importance of these skills, indicating a strong foundation in analytical tasks and strategic decision-making. However, there appears to be a gap in Communication Skills and Confidence, where fewer students feel "Very Proficient." This discrepancy suggests areas where educational institutions could focus more intently to enhance training and support.

- **Alignment Between Skills Importance and Proficiency:**

For skills like Decision Making and Critical Thinking, there is a good alignment between their perceived importance and the students' confidence

in their capabilities. This suggests that the current educational approaches in fostering these skills are effective, though there is always room for improvement, especially to elevate everyone to a level of proficiency.

- **Curriculum Adaptation:**
The insights from this study could be used by business schools to adapt their curriculum and training programs. Ensuring that students not only understand the importance of key skills but are also given ample opportunity to develop these skills can be a strategic focus. For example, more practical, real-world projects could be introduced to enhance domain knowledge and adaptability.

- **Personal Development Programs:**
Beyond academic knowledge, fostering personal growth through self-awareness workshops, confidence-building activities, and communication excellence classes can help bridge the gap between skill importance and proficiency.

- **Career Services Enhancement:**
Finally, business schools could consider enhancing their career services offerings to include more comprehensive career coaching sessions that focus on developing a rounded set of employability skills, reflecting the needs highlighted by students in the survey.

V.   CONCLUSION

The survey among business school students in Bhopal about their perceptions and self-assessed proficiency in various employability skills reveals significant insights for educational policy and curriculum development. It highlights a critical gap between the importance attributed to interpersonal skills like communication and confidence and the students' own evaluations of their abilities in these areas. This disparity suggests that while students recognize the critical role these skills play in the workplace, they may not feel adequately prepared to meet these demands, indicating a potent area for curriculum enhancement.

Importantly, students feel confident in their decision-making and critical thinking abilities, which aligns well with their perceptions of these skills' importance. This suggests that current educational approaches in these cognitive domains are effective but might be complemented with increased focus on developing soft skills, which are equally essential for career success but currently underemphasized in student training.

The findings also underscore the necessity for business schools to foster adaptability and versatility among their students to prepare them for a dynamic global job market. Educational strategies that incorporate practical experiences like internships, real-world projects, and case studies could be particularly effective in enhancing these skills. Moreover, there is a pressing need for continuous learning opportunities that allow students to stay updated with industry trends and technologies, thereby maintaining the relevance and applicability of their education.

Career services play a crucial role in translating educational competencies into successful employment outcomes. Enhanced career counseling, tailored workshops, and robust networking opportunities could bridge the existing gap between student skills and market requirements. This comprehensive support system would not only improve employability but also ensure that students can navigate the competitive job landscape more effectively.

In conclusion, this survey serves as a call to action for educational institutions to reassess and potentially revamp their curriculum and support services to align better with the evolving needs of the workforce. By focusing on a balanced development of both hard and soft skills and ensuring that students receive practical, up-to-date training, business schools can significantly boost their graduates' readiness for professional challenges, enhancing both their career prospects and their ability to contribute meaningfully to their professions.

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