

Tribhuvan University Journal
Vol. 36, No. 1: 173-186, June, 2021
Research Directorate, Tribhuvan University,
Kathmandu, Nepal
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/tuj.v36i01.43619>

UNDERSTANDING OF PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS AT TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

Purna Bahadur Kadel

*Reader, Department of English Education, Central Department of Education, Kirtipur, TU.
Corresponding author: purna.kadel@tucded.edu.np*

ABSTRACT

This study attempts to investigate the understandings of pre-service teachers towards the importance of employability skills for being employed. It also explores the main causes of the absence of the employability skills of graduate pre-service teachers at Tribhuvan University. I adopted narrative inquiry research design to carry out this study. Using quota sampling technique, four female and four male pre-service teachers were selected through purposive non-random sampling procedure to collect data. In-depth-interview was administered to them as a tool to collect data in this study. The findings of this study show that the pre-service teachers lack higher order thinking skills; there is absence of employability skills in the curriculum of M.Ed. and they lack the personal and social skills and adequate communicative skills. It is concluded that the pre-service teachers are not competent and confident enough to deliver their knowledge and skills to the students due to the lack of employability skills despite the fact that they are bright students in their subject matter.

Keywords: employability skills - pre-service teachers-higher order thinking skills-communicative skills and personal and social skills.

INTRODUCTION

The employability skills are essential for the graduate students to get employment in public and institutional schools, international non-governmental offices (INGOs), non-governmental offices (NGOs), private companies, and government institutions. The learners of graduate level should develop the job-specific trainings, employability skills and professional expertise for their bright careers. Every employer prefers to appoint those employees who possess employability skills in the particular

professions. Every institution and company need reliable and responsible professionally sound employees who can help to uphold the institutions and their professions smoothly and efficiently. Employability skills are essential qualities for Teacher Professional Development (TPD). Information Communication Technology (ICT) embedded English Language Teaching (ELT) is also an integral part of TPD. The independent ICT embedded ELT course should be prescribed in the curriculum of M.Ed. in English Education to uphold the employability skills of the pre-service teachers at Tribhuvan University.

The graduate level learners have to be developed the basic academic skills, higher order thinking skills, and personal qualities to be saleable in the academic workplace locally, regionally, nationally and globally. The basic academic skills are oral communicative skills and written communicative skills to get enrollment in the university for higher education. The communicative competence is a must for any pre-service teachers to be qualified as prospective English teachers and government officers after being university graduates on the specific subject. Besides, they can be qualified in the public service commission if employability skills have been developed in them. The sound knowledge in the particular subject matter is also the domain of the employability skills. The higher order thinking skills are critical thinking skills, creative thinking skills, decision making skills, and problem solving skills which are given due priorities for getting jobs in government offices, international companies, and getting enrollment in the prestigious and esteem international universities. Furthermore, the students need to develop the personal qualities, such as, responsibility skills, self-confidence, punctuality, honesty, efficiency, self-direction, flexibility, computer literacy and communicative competence in English language.

English language is the international language and official and medium of transaction in the outer circle and expanding circle countries (Kachru 2005). The students of graduate level should develop academic critical reading and writing skills during their study in the college. The academic critical reading and writing expertise are essential to carry out any given task in the institution. They have to develop the comprehensible skills, communicative skills, and productive skills to get good scores in the examination as well as to get a job. They can comprehend any complex reading text from which they are able to scan and skim desirable information from it, if they have developed comprehensible skills. The academic writing skills help them get score good grades in the formative and summative

assessment. More importantly, the oral communicative skills can facilitate them develop interpersonal relationships between their colleagues and themselves in the workplace. Unless the graduates have developed the communicative competence orally and in writing, they are hardly ever be qualified to get jobs as bona fide students in the college. Communicative competence plays a significant role in getting golden opportunity to get a job for graduate pre-service teachers.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Employability skills are essential for the pre-service teachers besides their core knowledge of subject matter. "Employability is about a person's ability to get a job, maintain a job or change a job, an ability determined by individual characteristics and circumstances as well as by broader external factors, such as social, institutional and economic" (Sin & Amaral 2017). Employability skills are the personal assets for any graduates to get a job. The qualities to be employable are the basic characteristics to get a job. In fact, employability skills designate a graduate's potential to obtain a job and capacity to function in it.

Robinson (2000) argues that employability skills are necessary for getting, keeping, and doing well on job. He further states that the employability skills can be categorized into three skills viz. basic academic skills, higher order thinking skills, and personal qualities. According to Yahaya 2005 as cited in Husain, Mokhtar, Ahmad & Mustapha (2010), employability skills incorporates cooperating with others, working in a team, possessing honesty, integrity and personal ethics, following instruction given, and interacting with others. In addition, the pre-service teachers should develop system technology skill, interpersonal skills, information skills, thinking skills, resource skills, and basic skills (Husain, *et al.* 2010). In this regard, information communicative technology (ICT) embedded English language teaching (ELT) skills are inevitable for the prospective English teachers to be selected as qualified ELT teachers.

Canale and Swain (1980) and later Canale (1983) state that communicative competence of ESL learners can be developed through the grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence to develop their oral and written communicative skills. However, linguistic knowledge and understanding of the core subject matter do not only help pre-service teachers to get employment. Every employer expects employability skills with the

prospective employees who should have critical thinking skills, decision making skills, conflict resolution skills, and leadership and metacognitive skills (Jackson 2013). Metacognitive skills are very important for any prospective teacher to develop their self-monitoring skills which help them enhance self-esteem in the work place. Furthermore, Adaptability, flexibility and ability to learn and work with strong academic spirits and technical skills are the main keys and principles to open the employability opportunities in the workplaces for any pre-service teachers. Faerch and Kasper (1983) assert that communicative strategies are essential to develop oral and written skills. The categorization of the communicative strategies is three types which are: formal reduction strategies, functional strategies, and achievement strategies (Faerch & Kasper 1983). The achievement strategies can be further subdivided into non-linguistic strategies, cooperative strategies, interlanguage-based strategies, inter-intra-language transfer, and code switching. Moreover, Oxford (1990) argues that language learning strategies are essential to develop communicative competence for the learners. He categorizes language learning strategies into six types which are: memory, metacognitive, cognitive, compensation, social, and affective strategies.

Higher order cognitive abilities are thinking, analyzing and problem solving skills which are to be developed for the employees in their workplaces since higher order thinking skills are essential for them. The employees need people skills (social and interpersonal skills, helping others, teamwork skills, and conflict resolution), work attitudes, and behaviors (discipline, hard work, time management, and leadership), basic academic skills (speaking, reading, writing and specific technical/computer skills), analytic skills (ability to reason, critical and analytical thinking, understanding issues and creativity) (Krahn, Lowe & Lehmann 2002). Moreover, college education can increase students' fund of knowledge, intellectual skills and prospects for a better paying job (Hirsch & Alliance 2017). Soft skills are called as 21st century skills or non-cognitive skills (Hirsch 2015, Murnane & Levy 1996, Pellegrino & Hilton 2012 as cited in Hirsch & Alliance 2017) which are the supportive additional abilities for any employees in the workplace. The pre-service teachers have the lack of 21st century skills because of which most of them are unemployed though they have good content knowledge with acceptable grades in their certification. The employability skills are as important as the core knowledge on his/her particular realm of the study. Due to the lack of communication skills,

interpersonal skills, critical thinking, problem solving and entrepreneurial skills, most of graduates from the esteem universities are employed despite the fact that they have adequate knowledge on their particular area of the study.

The main problems of increasing unemployment condition with degree in science, literature, education, and social science are due to the lack of appropriate employability skills (Husain *et al.* 2010). There are different types of skills, such as generic skills, core skills, basic skills and employability skills (Hager & Holland 2006 as cited in Barth, Thomas & Day 2013). The pre-service teachers need to develop thinking skills, such as logical and analytical reasoning problem solving and intellectual curiosity, effective communicative skills, teamwork skills and capacities to identities, access and manage knowledge and information. Communicative skills are employability skills which are absence in job seekers. Employability skills incorporate problem solving and analysis, decision making, organization and time management, risk taking, oral communication, written communication, listening, interpersonal relations, managing conflict, supervision, coordinating, creativity, innovation and change, visioning, ability to conceptualize lifelong learning, and motivation skills (Evers *et al.* 1998, Robinson *et al.* 2007 as cited in Robinson 2009). The pass-out graduates from Tribhuvan University have very poor communicative skills and employability skills owing to the traditional method of teaching, lack of professionally sound teachers, poor classroom setting in teaching and environment.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

I have been teaching in the Department of English Education, University Campus at Tribhuvan University for more than two decades. In my reflection, the university graduates seem to have lack of fundamental employability skills, such as ICT embedded ELT skills, academic leadership skills and communicative competence in English which are the globally acknowledged 21st century soft skills for the would be ELT teachers. The learners lack of adequate exposures of spoken and written materials due to the lack of classroom management, unmanageable classes due to the excessive number of students even in the semester system and lack of innovative, creative and curriculum in the Department of English Education at the University Campus, Tribhuvan University. The Dean's office of

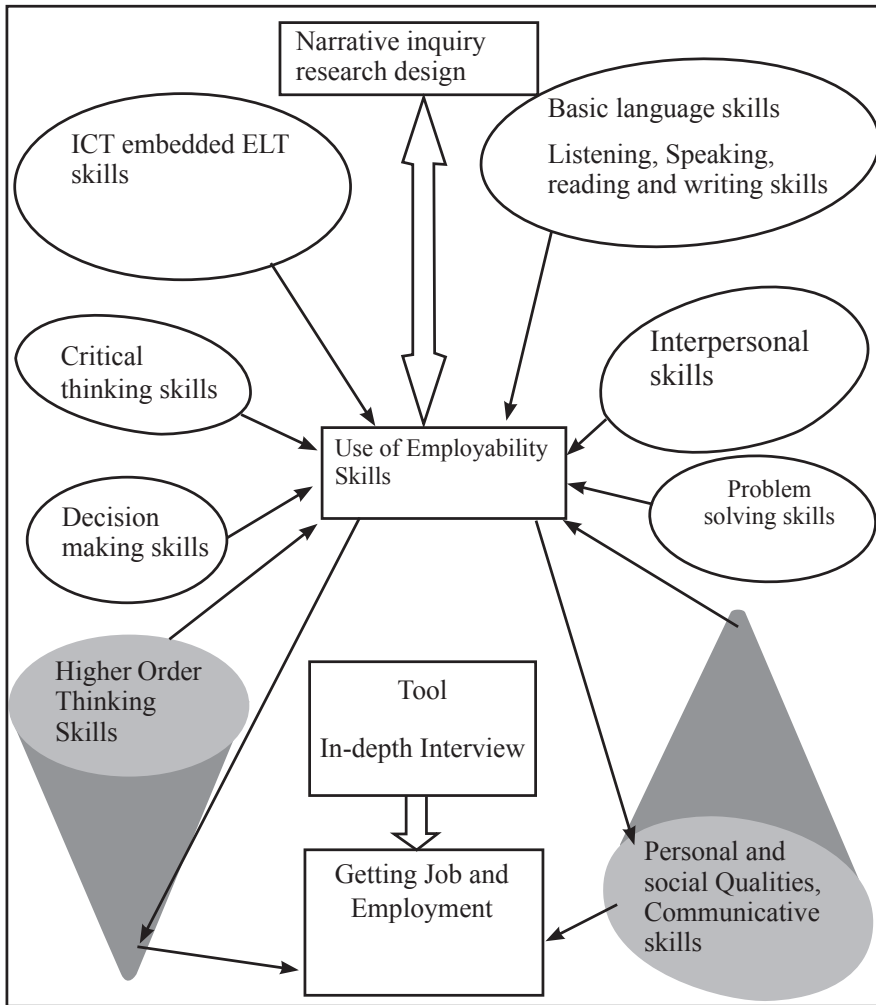


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Faculty of Education should take initiation to modify the curriculum of English Education completely; however, it attempted to implement recently changed curriculum of each department including English Education from the 8th batch, 2021. Most of the pass-outs from this department are unable to communicate orally and in writing accurately and appropriately due to the lack of communicative competence over English language. Despite the fact that they have good knowledge in grammar, vocabulary, phonology, and syntax of English, they are very poor regarding the use of language functions contextually. Hence, they are very poor in academic writing and oral communicative skills. This study can help me to find out the main

causes of the absence of employability skills of the pre-service teachers in the Department of English Education. This section of the study helps me to find out the gap between the existing literature on the exploration of employability skills of the pre-service teachers in the Department of English Education at Tribhuvan University and the present study. From the gap, I found that this study is very original and genuine to explore the causes of the absence of employability skills of pre-service teachers who were pass-outs from the Department of English Education, Tribhuvan University. This study has the following objectives:

- To investigate the understandings of pre-service teachers towards the importance of employability skills for being employed ;
- To explore the main causes of the absence of the employability skills of pre-service teachers;
- To explore the importance of employability skills for them.

METHODOLOGY

The narrative inquiry research design was adopted to conduct this study. Interpretive paradigm has been used to analyze and interpret the understandings of the pre-service teachers on the importance of employability skills and their impacts to get jobs. In interpretive approach, reality (ontology) would be multiple perspectives of the respondents regarding the impacts of employability skills. Quota sampling procedure was adopted to select the participants in this study. I selected 4 male and 4 female pre-service teachers from sixth batch students who have been studying in the fourth semester of M.Ed. in the Department of English Education to collect required data at University Campus. The conceptual framework (Figure 1) has shown the blueprint as a roadmap to conduct this study.

In-depth- interview was used as a tool to collect the data in this study. Having had the friendly rapport with them, I administered in-depth-interview to collect their stories on the importance of employability skills for them to be employed in the workplace. I collected and recorded the stories of the respondents from one to one interviews (Creswell 2013). Subsequently, I transcribed their verbatim properly without losing the main essence of the verbatim. In order to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity, respondents were given pseudonyms as T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7, and T8. I assured them that their confidentiality and privacy will

be maintained ethically. I prepared the guideline questions for employing in-depth- interview to the respondents. To maintain the trustworthy and authenticity of the raw data, member check was used (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2018). I respected the human rights of each respondent in course of administering interview.

RESULTS

To address the objectives of this study, I collected data from 8 pre-service teachers of M.Ed. who have been studying fourth semester with majoring English Education through in-depth-interview. Four global themes were developed out of 10 basic themes which have been analyzed and discussed thematically as follows:

Higher order thinking skills

In order to be selected and qualified in oral viva-voce examination in Teacher Service Commission (TSC), the prospective pre-service teachers should perform the higher order thinking skills in course of holding interaction between the candidate and interviewers. The higher order thinking skills are to be reflected even in the interview. The experts of TSC try to excavate the higher order thinking skills, such as analytical skills, critical decision skills, and conflict resolving skills. One of the respondents T2 argues

the tutors of each subject did not teach them such higher order thinking skills during the classes. I usually ask the teachers how to get A, and A- grades in the examination only but not to discuss regarding the soft skills. More importantly, I ask for each subject teacher to award them good grades instead of the teaching them higher order thinking skills in the class in each semester.

In fact, the most of the pre-service teachers are not familiar with the employability skills while studying in the class. They are to be motivated towards the employability skills like higher order thinking skills which are one of the employability skills without which it is very difficult to get good jobs at home and abroad. Unless the prospective teachers perform the higher order thinking skills in front of the experts while holding interview, there are very negligible chances of being selected of the pre-service teachers who lack higher order thinking skills. The respondent T3 states that "I never think of developing higher order thinking skills while studying in the graduate level but I realize that we are not made aware of the higher

order thinking skills to be a successful teacher of English. In this regard, Jackson (2013) states that the prospective employees should have critical thinking skills, decision making skills, conflict resolution skills, leadership and metacognitive skills. Higher order thinking skills are essential for the teacher professional development. The novice pre-service teachers can be very smart and qualified teachers due to the higher order thinking skills.

Absence of employability skills in the curriculum

The curriculum of Master of English Education in the semester system must be revamped absolutely since there is not prescribed the course of employability skills in it. The authority of the university particularly, the Dean's office of the Faculty of Education has to revisit whole curriculum of department of English education rigorously. One of the respondents T4 argues that

ICT embedded English language teaching (ELT) syllabus has to be prescribed in the curriculum of English education to make the department of English education modern and sophisticated ICT embedded ELT teachers to address the issues of ELT pedagogy. We, pre-service teachers do not have ICT embedded ELT knowledge so we cannot teach using ICT tools in the ELT class. Due to the lack of ICT skills, we are deprived from golden opportunities to be employed in the sophisticated esteem institutional and public academic institutions at home and abroad.

In fact, the pass-outs from Department of English Education lack of ICT embedded ELT skills without which they cannot become the all-rounder competent teachers in the class in the future. Moreover, even if they are sound in their core areas, they cannot deliver their expertise to the students effectively in the class due to the lack of ICT embedded ELT knowledge and skills. In the similar vein, one of the respondents T5 asserts that "I know general knowledge on ICT; but I am unfamiliar regarding the specific skills and knowledge of ICT for ELT class which is useful for language teacher." The prospective language teachers are to be equipped with the specific technocratic skills of ICT embedded ELT to be qualified competent teachers locally, regionally, nationally and globally. In this regard, Husain *et al.* (2010) argue that the pre-service teachers should develop system technology skill, interpersonal skills, information skills, thinking skills, resource skills and basic skills to be saleable universally and academically. The prospective pre-service teachers should be technocratic English teachers.

Personal and social qualities

In the 21st century, the job-seekers should have human qualities, personal qualities, and social qualities to be qualified English teachers to get jobs in the local, regional, national and international workplaces. Academic certification is only the basic requirement for the particular position either in NGOs/INGOS or government offices in the modern age. In this regard, the T8 asserts that "one of the English teachers from the Department of English Education, Tribhuvan University has been working as a guest faculty in the esteem university in abroad due his personal academic qualities". Specifically, the prospective pre-service teachers should have the qualities of working in a team, a group, and in the collaboration. In addition, they should have conflict resolution skills, prediction skills as per the situation, and quick decision making abilities. The candidates should be social, friendly, integrity, honest, hardworking, and collaborative personalities which are regarded as soft skills or 21st century skills. One of the respondents T5 argues that "In my opinion, academic qualification alone does not work to get through the interview to be selected in any esteem NGOs, INGOS and government offices in this post modern age due to the massive number of unemployed academic candidates in the society". The prospective teachers should have additional social skills, ICT expertise and each basic language skills to get a job.

The personal and social qualities are to be developed." Employability skills are to be developed by the employed candidates besides the theoretical and content knowledge on the core areas of the subject matter to get a job. In the similar vein, the informant, T6 states that "the pre-service teachers have to learn the skills of adaptability, flexibility, professional skills, and diplomatic language skills while dealing with the students in the schools and colleges before starting teaching" In this regard, Krahn, Lowe and Lehman, (2002) argue that the employees need to develop social and interpersonal skills, such as helping others, teamwork skills, and conflict resolution work attitudes, skills of discipline, hard work, time management, and leadership skills, and academic skills of speaking, reading, writing and specific technical/computer skills and analytic skills such as ability to reason, critical and analytical thinking, understanding issues and creativity.

Communicative skills

The communicative skills refer to the interpersonal skills which are required to be qualified to get a job. If the pre-service teachers are

multilingual speakers, there are more chances of getting a job nationally and internationally. The multilingual candidates can definitely have more chances of being selected for a particular job. One of the respondents T8 states that "academic and communicative skills are equally important to get a job. Nowadays multilingual pre-service teachers are much better than monolingual and bilingual ones in the field of ELT at school and college levels". Particularly, the pre-service teachers should have a good command over spoken and written skills which are also regarded the employability skills. They lack the adequate communicative skills that are required for being competent teachers.

The another informants T7 states that "in my realization some of my colleagues cannot speak confidently in front of the learners due to the lack of practice, nervousness, and lack of habit of speaking in the mass." The proverb *practice makes everyone perfect* is very contextual in this regard. Mentorship is necessary for the pre-service teachers to be experienced and reflective teachers for getting jobs. In this regard, Faerch and Kasper (1983) assert that communicative strategies are essential particularly for ELT teachers. The academic soft skills in spoken and written skills are necessary for the pre-service teachers who should have developed the communicative strategies while studying M.Ed. in the department of English education.

DISCUSSIONS

Employability skill is essential for the pre-service teachers for their bright careers and for pursuing TPD effectively. It is very challenging to be adjusted as the sound teachers in the prestigious schools and colleges in the absence of employability skills which are not appropriately acquired by the pre-service English teachers during pre-service education. It is argued in the results section that they could not mastery over higher order thinking skills, personal and social qualities and communicative skills through the pre-service education. They are to be developed while studying in M.Ed. majoring English education. The prospective pre-service teachers should have mastery over the components given in the conceptual framework (Figure 1) to acquire the employability skills. Moreover, the employability skills are not incorporated in the curriculum of M.Ed. in English education appropriately. The prospective English teachers should have critical thinking skills, decision making skills, conflict resolution skills, leadership and metacognitive skills (Jackson 2013).The Dean's office, Faculty of Education, should revisit the curriculum of M.Ed. English Education to

prescribe the course of employability skills effectively. The curriculum of M.Ed. in English education needs to be modified in order to incorporate the employability skills as a subject in the M.Ed. It is proved from the result of this study that the pre-service teachers were deprived from ICT knowledge and skills thereby being failed to get a job in the well-regarded colleges and schools at home and abroad.

More importantly, the technological skills are inevitable for pre-service teachers to make the teaching profession prestigious and up-to-date (Husain *et al.* 2010). Darvin and Norton (2015 as cited in Barkhuizen 2016) claim that the teachers who invested in digital literary practices developed new and valued literary skills for their professional identities. One of the results shows in this study that the pre-service teachers need to develop their social and interpersonal skills, such as helping others, teamwork skills, and conflict resolution work, exchanging attitudes through dialogues, skills of discipline, hardworking, time management, and leadership skills which were not practiced, taught and learnt in any semester of M.Ed. in English education course. The pre-service teachers need to develop their social and interpersonal skills, such as helping others, teamwork skills, computer skills and analytic skills, understanding issues and creativity (Krahn, Lowe & Lehmann 2002).

CONCLUSIONS

Employability skills are essential for pre-service teachers to be qualified for teaching at home and abroad. In my reflection, the employability skills are overshadowed by the excessive contents on the domain of particular subject of each course of M.Ed. in English education. On the basis of results and discussions, the pre-service teachers are not competent and confident to deliver their knowledge to the students due to the lack of employability skills, though they are bright and sound in their subject matter. Main causes of having poor in employability skills of pre-service teachers are due to not incorporating the course of employability oriented skills in the department of English Education. Most of the pass-out graduates from English Education are still unemployed due to the lack of employability skills. More importantly, employability skills are as important as core knowledge of subject matter. The ICT embedded course on employability skills should be prescribed in curriculum of faculty of English education at Tribhuvan University.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very thankful with those respondents who shared their reflections and experiences while collecting data. More importantly, I am very grateful to Prof. Dr. Bal Mukunda Bhandari and Prof. Dr. Tara Datta Bhatta who helped me shape this article in this form.

REFERENCES

- Barkhuizen, G. (2016). A short story approach to analyzing teacher (imagined) identities over time. *TESOL Quarterly*, **50**(3): 655-683.
- Barth, M. Thomas, I. & Day, T. (2013). Education for sustainability, graduate capacities, professional employability: How they all connect. *Australian Journal of environmental Education*, **29**(1): 33-51. <https://doi: 10.1017/ae.2013.14>.
- Canale, M. & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of 1 communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, **1**: 1-47.
- Canale, M. (1983). From communicative competence to communicative language pedagogy. In: J. Richard and R. Schmidt (eds.) *Language and communication*. Harlow, London.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research methods in education*. 8th edition. London and New York, Routledge.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, Sage.
- Faerch, C. & Kasper, G. (1983). Strategic competence in foreign language teaching. In: G. Kasper (ed.) *Learning and teaching communication in foreign language classroom*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press.
- Hirsch, B. J. & Alliance, D. (2017). Wanted: Soft skills for today's jobs. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, **98**(5): 12-17.
- Husain, M. Y., Mokhtar, S. B., Ahmad, A. A. & Mustapha, R. (2010). Importance of employability skills from employers' perspective. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Science*, **7**(c): 430-438. www.google scholar. Accessed: 13.03.2021.
- Jackson, D. (2013). Student perceptions of the importance of employability skill provision in business undergraduate program. *Journal of Education for Business*, **88**(5): 271-279. www.google scholar. Accessed: 13.03.2021.

- Kachru, B. B. (2005). *Asian Englishes: Beyond the canon*. Washington, University of Washington Press.
- Krahn, H., Lowe, G. S. & Lehmann, W. (2002). Acquisition of employability by high school students. *Canadian Public Policy*, **28**(2): 275-296.
- Oxford, R. L. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*. New York, Newbury House.
- Robinson, J. P (2000). The workplace. *Alabama Cooperative Attention System*, **1**(3): 1-3.
- Robinson, J. S. (2009). Assessing the employability skills of University of Kentucky College of agriculture graduates: A comparison of hard and soft science disciplines. *NACTA Journal*, **53**(4): 56-62.
- Sin, C. & Amaral, A. (2017). Academics' and employers' perceptions about responsibilities for employability and their initiatives towards its development. *Higher Education*, **73**(1): 97-111.