

Strategic Training for Future Career: The Analysis of Employability Skills of College Students in Cirebon

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Abstract—In 2030, automation is projected to displace 23 million jobs in Indonesia, while simultaneously creating 27 to 46 million new jobs. Consequently, college students must enhance their employability skills to meet the demands of the evolving job market. This study aims to analyze the employability skills of college students in Cirebon and identify their training needs to prepare for future careers. Utilizing a qualitative research approach with purposive sampling, the findings reveal that college students in Cirebon possess high levels of employability skills, including fundamental skills, teamwork, and personal management skills. Additionally, students recognize the importance of training in soft skills such as communication and negotiation, critical thinking, data visualization, and entrepreneurship to prepare for their careers. The study concludes that a collaborative effort among educational institutions, industries, and the government is essential to implement effective training programs, ensuring that college students become a skilled and adaptable workforce for future career success.

Keywords— *employability skills; soft skills; strategic training; future career*

I. INTRODUCTION

In terms of job seeking, college graduates must equip themselves with a variety of skills. These skills should align with market or industry demands. However, the current workforce faces an era of automation, where repetitive tasks are vulnerable to being replaced by robots or automation. This is consistent with research conducted by McKinsey (2019), which states that by 2030, approximately 23 million jobs will be replaced by automation. Nevertheless, 27 million to 46 million jobs will emerge, 10 million of which will be new types of jobs. To leverage the upcoming era of automation, the Indonesian population, including college

students, must prepare themselves adequately. The OECD Skills Outlook 2017 highlights the growing importance of skill mixes, in the context of the transition to a digital world of work (OECD, 2017b). The skill mix is a collaboration skill among general cognitive, analytical skill, and complementary skill. General cognitive skill consist of numeracy and literacy, that can be a basic skill to reach lifelong learning. Meanwhile complementary skills are creativity, problem-solving, and critical thinking. Interpersonal and communication skills, as well as emotional skills like self-awareness and the ability to manage stress, are also increasingly important. Based on those explanation, this study highlight that for future career, college students must have a well preparation involves acquiring employability skills and additional soft skills such as communication and negotiation skills, critical thinking, data visualization, and entrepreneurship.

Employability skills are a set of achievements, skills, understandings, and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupation, benefiting themselves, the workforce, the community, and the economy (Yorks, 2021). Additionally, Finch et al. (2013) define employability skills as including not just higher-order cognitive skills (problem-solving skills, critical thinking skills, creativity skills, analytical skills, etc.), but also behaviors, attitudes, and educational and non-educational experiences. Nirmala and Govindan (2017) explain that employability skills consist of fundamental skills, teamwork, and personal management skills. It can be concluded that employability skills comprise cognitive abilities and soft skills that serve as a foundation for working and adapting behavior according to performance needs.

Soft skills can be described as a combination of skills, ranging from emotional intelligence, which enables wise management of self and relationships with others, to effective communication skills in various contexts (Connell, 1998). Soft skills can affect relationships between coworkers through the ability to work in teams. Moreover, soft skills

also involve problem-solving and adaptability (Meeks, 2017). Based on these definitions, soft skills are essential for job seekers to deliver their best performance, meet job demands, and achieve performance targets within a team.

Before the job-seeking process, the combination of employability and soft skills possessed by students must be implemented through various strategic training programs. Training helps people to develop specific skills that enable them to succeed in their current job and develop for the future (McGraw, 2009). The training cycle begins with a learning process that generates knowledge, which can be applied in relevant fields. If this cycle aligns with students' interests and talents, it becomes a platform for sharpening their skills for future careers. Future careers must be prepared through employability skills, soft skills, and training. Thus, students can achieve their desired careers.

Previous research by Nirmala (2022) revealed that 72.9% of professional college students have average, and 27.1% have high level of employability skills and no one is on low level of employability skills. On the other hand, Erawati (2024) stated that entrepreneur-based training skills are also essential for students. According to the Ministry of Industry, Indonesia needs at least 4 million new entrepreneurs to strengthen the economic structure. The country's entrepreneurship ratio is still around 3.1 percent of the total population. Therefore, the data obtained will serve as a reference for implementing training that aligns with students' interests and talents.

This research not only focuses on measuring employability skills but also assesses the extent training skills needs as a foundation for realizing future careers. The training skills needs in this study consist of communication and negotiation skills, critical thinking, data visualization, and entrepreneurship.

Effective communication and negotiation are crucial for successful interactions and conflict resolution. Giles (2008) stated that communication accommodation theory posits that individuals modify their communication styles to either align with or distinguish themselves from their conversation partners, thereby enhancing social approval and mutual understanding.

Critical thinking is a disciplined process involving the active and skillful conceptualization, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of information (Paul and Elder, 2012). Critical thinking framework emphasizes the importance of clarity, accuracy, precision, relevance, depth, breadth, logic, significance, and fairness in thinking.

Deekshith (2024) defines data visualization in the AI era as the use of sophisticated graphical methods to interpret and convey complex insights produced by AI systems. These AI-enhanced visualization tools utilize machine learning algorithms to automate the detection of trends, anomalies, and correlations, thereby simplifying the analysis of large datasets. This approach allows users to discover previously hidden patterns and relationships, making data more

accessible and actionable for both technical and non-technical users.

Entrepreneurship skills refer to the abilities and competencies required to identify opportunities, innovate, and manage business ventures effectively. These skills encompass a range of capabilities, including risk-taking, strategic planning, and resource management. According to Diandra and Azmy (2020), entrepreneurship involves the application of entrepreneurial skills, innovations, and management practices to drive business success. Similarly, Liu and Enz (2025) describe entrepreneurship as the process of discovering, evaluating, and exploiting opportunities to create future goods and services.

The aim of this research is to analyze the employability skills and training needs of students in Cirebon. Thus, the data obtained will serve as a basis for creating strategic training that aligns with students' interests and talents, facilitating their job search and achieving career success.

In the era of automation, college graduates in Indonesia must develop a diverse set of employability and soft skills to meet industry demands and secure future careers. Despite the emergence of new job opportunities, there is a critical need for strategic training programs that equip students with essential skills such as communication, negotiation, critical thinking, data visualization, and entrepreneurship.

II. METHOD

The research methodology of this study employed a qualitative research strategy. With a qualitative approach, researchers can explore the meaning contained in problem phenomena, aiming to explain, describe, and understand the issues currently occurring (Creswell, 2002). Specifically, a descriptive research strategy is adopted in this research. The descriptive method is chosen because it can illustrate data by providing detail and depth in understanding phenomena, and is not limited by numerical representations.

Purposive sampling is used in this study, involving college students from Universitas Swadaya Gunung Jati (UGJ), Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Siber Syekh Nurjati Cirebon, and Universitas Islam Bunga Bangsa Cirebon (UIBBC). The criteria for selecting participants include being enrolled as a full-time student, having completed at least one year of study, and being willing to participate in the research. This ensures a diverse and representative sample of students who are likely to have developed some employability and soft skills.

Data is collected through a questionnaire distributed to college students. The questionnaire uses a Likert scale to determine students' reflections on the questions, with scores ranging from 1 to 5. Scores of 1 to 2 indicate a low level, 3 indicates a medium level, and 4 to 5 indicate a high level. The questionnaire consists of sections on employability skills and skill training needs. The employability skills section measures students' abilities in fundamental skills, teamwork, and personal management skills. The skills training needs section includes questions on communication and negotiation skills, critical thinking, data visualization, and entrepreneurship.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot test is conducted with a small group of students who are not part of the main study sample. Feedback from the pilot test is used to refine the questionnaire items for clarity and relevance. Additionally, expert reviews are sought from faculty members specializing in education and workforce development to ensure the content validity of the questionnaire.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of the study

The questionnaire of this study consist of sixteen questions. There are 164 participants who answered the questionnaire from Universities in Cirebon. The respondents of this study was the 7th semester students regardless the gender.

TABLE I. BACKGROUND OF RESPONDENTS

University	Amount of Respondent	Percentage (%)
UGJ Cirebon	60	36,5 %
UIN Siber Syekh Nurjati Cirebon	52	31,7 %
UI BBC	52	31,7 %

TABLE II. STUDENTS' PERCEPTION ON FUNDAMENTAL SKILLS

Questions	strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree
	Frequency and Percentage (%)				
I am able to communicate clearly and effectively	0 (0 %)	2 (1.2 %)	28 (17.2 %)	63 (38.7 %)	71 (42.9 %)
I have basic skill to use information and technology	0 (0 %)	2 (1.2 %)	26 (16%)	72 (43.5 %)	64 (39.3 %)
I can solve problem well	0 (0 %)	3 (1.8 %)	29 (17.7 %)	85 (51.8 %)	47 (28.7 %)
I able to think critically and analytically	0 (0 %)	4 (2.4 %)	39 (23.8 %)	78 (47.6 %)	43 (26.3 %)

The first question in the questionnaire concerns students' perceptions of the importance of fundamental skills in preparing for future careers. Four aspects were addressed: effective and clear communication, basic IT skills, problem-solving abilities, and analytical and critical thinking skills. Respondents indicated that they possess high fundamental skills, with an average score of 4.12.

In terms of effective communication, the average respondent score was 4.23, which can be categorized as high. For basic IT skills, the average respondent score was 4.21, also

categorized as high. Regarding problem-solving abilities, the average respondent score was 4.07, indicating a high level. For analytical and critical thinking skills, the average score was 3.98, which is close to a high level. Interestingly, among the four questions assessing fundamental skills, about 1.65% or approximately 3 respondents felt they were at a low level.

TABLE III. STUDENTS' PERCEPTION ON TEAMWORK

Questions	strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree
	Frequency and Percentage (%)				
I can work well as a team	0 (0 %)	2 (1.2 %)	11 (6.7 %)	68 (41.5 %)	83 (50.6 %)
I respect of any opinion and contribution from teammates	0 (0 %)	1 (0.6 %)	9 (5.5 %)	44 (26.8 %)	110 (67.1 %)
I am able to effectively communicate in a team	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	19 (11.6 %)	66 (40.2 %)	79 (48.2 %)
I am able to contribute actively to team discussion	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	21 (12.8 %)	62 (37.8 %)	81 (49.4 %)

The second set of questions in the questionnaire concerns the teamwork aspects possessed by students. These questions address the ability to work collaboratively in a team, respect for differing opinions and contributions, effective communication within the team, and the ability to actively contribute during team discussions. The results for teamwork abilities indicate that respondents are at a high level of teamwork, with an average score of 4.44.

Respondents rated their ability to work collaboratively in a team at a high level, with an average score of 4.42. In terms of respecting differing opinions and contributions, the average score was 4.6, also at a high level. For effective communication within the team, the score was 4.37, indicating a high level. Similarly, the ability to actively contribute during team discussions was also rated at a high level, with an average score of 4.37. Interestingly, the findings related to teamwork show that 0.9% of respondents, or about 2 individuals, were at a low level.

TABLE IV. STUDENTS' PERCEPTION ON PERSONAL MANAGEMENT SKILLS

Questions	strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree
	Frequency and Percentage (%)				
I am able	0	2	35	67	60

to manage time well	(0 %)	(1.2 %)	(21.3 %)	(40.9 %)	(36.6 %)
I am able to set and achieve goals	0 (0 %)	1 (0.6 %)	22 (13.4 %)	76 (46.3 %)	65 (39.6 %)
I am able to manage stress effectively	0 (0 %)	7 (4.3 %)	60 (36.6 %)	54 (32.9 %)	43 (26.2 %)
I have high self-motivation to complete tasks	0 (0 %)	2 (1.2 %)	26 (15.9 %)	51 (31.1 %)	85 (51.8 %)

The third set of questions concerns personal management skills. There are four questions, covering good time management skills, the ability to set and achieve goals, the ability to manage stress effectively, and high self-motivation to complete tasks. The results of the personal management skills assessment show that respondents are at a high level, with an average score of 4.13.

Good time management skills have an average score of 4.13, indicating a high level. Next, the ability to set and achieve goals is at a high level with a score of 4.25. Respondents rated their ability to manage stress effectively at a level close to high, with a score of 3.81. Meanwhile, respondents rated their self-motivation to complete tasks at a high level, with a score of 4.34. From these findings, about 1.9% of respondents rated their personal management skills at a low level.

TABLE V. STUDENTS' PERCEPTION ON MIX SKILLS

Skills	strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree
	Frequency and Percentage (%)				
Communication and Negotiation skill	0 (0 %)	3 (1.8%)	29 (17.7%)	85 (51.8%)	47 (28.7%)
Critical Thinking	0 (0 %)	1 (0.6%)	36 (22%)	78 (47.6%)	49 (29.9%)
Data Visualization	0 (0 %)	4 (2.4%)	47 (28.7%)	79 (48.2 %)	34 (20.7%)
Entrepreneurship	0 (0 %)	6 (3.7%)	47 (28.7%)	61 (37.2%)	49 (29.9%)

The fourth set of questions is a combination of soft skills needed to face the job market or to create job opportunities and become an entrepreneur. The average score for these mixed skills is close to a high level, at 3.99. These mixed skills include communication and negotiation skills, critical thinking, data visualization, and entrepreneurship.

Respondents rated their communication and negotiation skills at a high level, with a score of 4.07. Similarly, critical thinking received a score of 4.07, indicating a high level. Data visualization skills were rated close to high, with a score of

3.87. Entrepreneurship skills had a score of 3.92, also close to a high level. Additionally, 2.2% of respondents, or about 4 individuals, were at a low level.

Besides measuring the level of mixed skills possessed by respondents, the researchers also attempted to rank the mixed skills chosen by 164 respondents to be used as training topics. The results are as follows:

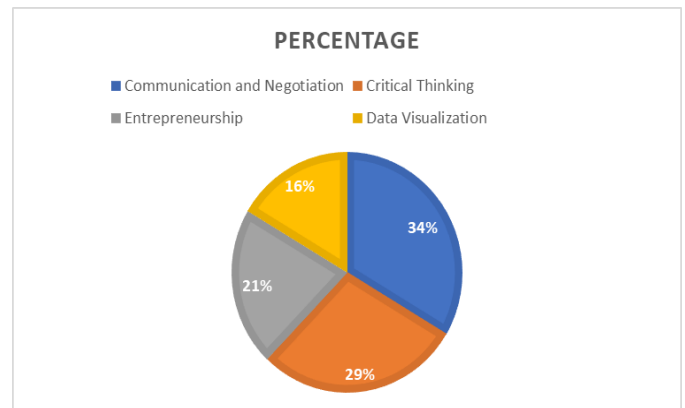


Figure 1. Students' perceptions of training skill ratings

Communication and negotiation skills ranked first, with 34% of respondents, or 55 individuals, choosing it. The second rank goes to critical thinking, selected by 47 respondents, or 29%. Third is entrepreneurship, chosen by 35 respondents, or 21%. The fourth position is data visualization, selected by 27 respondents, or 16%.

Discussion of the study

First, the high scores in effective communication, basic IT skills, problem-solving abilities, and analytical and critical thinking skills suggest a strong foundation for future career success. Effective communication enhances clarity and collaboration, while IT proficiency supports productivity and innovation. Problem-solving skills enable individuals to navigate challenges and make informed decisions, and analytical thinking aids in evaluating information and developing strategic solutions.

These skills are highly valued by employers and contribute significantly to professional growth and advancement. The small percentage of respondents who felt they were at a low level in these fundamental skills highlights the importance of continuous learning and development. Addressing skill gaps through training and education can help individuals enhance their competencies and improve their career prospects.

Overall, the high scores in these skills indicate a strong potential for career success, emphasizing the need for ongoing skill development to achieve long-term professional growth. Continuous improvement in these areas will help individuals remain competitive and adaptable in an ever-evolving job market.

Second, the data findings indicate that college students possess strong teamwork skills, which are crucial for future career success. High average scores in working collaboratively

(4.42), respecting differing opinions (4.6), effective communication within the team (4.37), and active contribution during discussions (4.37) suggest that students are well-prepared to thrive in team-oriented work environments. These skills are essential in most professional settings, where collaboration and effective communication are key to achieving organizational goals and fostering a positive work culture.

Respecting differing opinions and contributions, with the highest average score of 4.6, highlights the students' ability to create an inclusive and respectful team dynamic. This skill is particularly valuable in diverse workplaces, where understanding and valuing different perspectives can lead to more innovative solutions and better decision-making. Similarly, the high scores in effective communication and active contribution indicate that students are capable of articulating their ideas clearly and engaging meaningfully in team discussions, which are critical for successful project execution and problem-solving.

Despite the overwhelmingly positive results, the 0.9% of respondents who rated their teamwork skills at a low level underscore the need for continuous improvement and support. Addressing these gaps through targeted training and development programs can help ensure that all students are equipped with the necessary skills to succeed in their future careers. Overall, the high scores in teamwork-related skills suggest that college students are well-positioned for career success, emphasizing the importance of fostering these abilities throughout their education.

Third, the data findings suggest that college students possess strong personal management skills, which are crucial for future career success. High average scores in time management (4.13), goal setting and achievement (4.25), and self-motivation (4.34) indicate that students are well-prepared to handle the demands of the professional world. Effective time management and goal-setting abilities are essential for meeting deadlines, prioritizing tasks, and achieving long-term career objectives. Self-motivation further enhances productivity and ensures that individuals remain driven to complete tasks efficiently.

The ability to manage stress, with an average score of 3.81, is close to a high level, indicating that most students are capable of handling pressure and maintaining their well-being. Stress management is a critical skill in the workplace, as it helps individuals stay focused, make better decisions, and maintain a healthy work-life balance. While the score is slightly lower than other personal management skills, it still reflects a commendable level of competence among students. Developing strong stress management techniques can further enhance their resilience and overall career success.

Despite the positive results, the 1.9% of respondents who rated their personal management skills at a low level highlight the need for continuous improvement and support. Addressing these gaps through targeted training and development programs can help ensure that all students are equipped with the necessary skills to succeed in their future careers. Overall, the high scores in personal management skills suggest that college students are well-positioned for career success, emphasizing

the importance of fostering these abilities throughout their education.

Fourth, the findings from the survey indicate that college students possess strong communication and negotiation skills, as well as critical thinking abilities, both scoring an impressive 4.07. These high ratings suggest that students are well-prepared to articulate their ideas clearly and effectively, and to engage in thoughtful analysis and problem-solving. Such skills are essential in virtually any career, as they enable individuals to navigate complex situations, collaborate with colleagues, and make informed decisions.

Data visualization skills, with a score of 3.87, and entrepreneurship skills, scoring 3.92, are also noteworthy. While these scores are slightly lower, they still reflect a solid proficiency. Data visualization is increasingly important in a data-driven world, allowing professionals to present information in a clear and impactful manner. Entrepreneurship skills, on the other hand, indicate a readiness to innovate and take initiative, which are valuable traits in both startup environments and established organizations looking to foster a culture of innovation.

The fact that only 2.2% of respondents, or about four individuals, rated their skills at a low level is encouraging. This suggests that the majority of students feel confident in their abilities, which bodes well for their future career success. Employers highly value the combination of strong communication, critical thinking, data visualization, and entrepreneurial skills. As students continue to develop these competencies, they will be better equipped to meet the demands of the modern workforce and achieve their professional goals.

Fifth, communication and negotiation skills ranked first, with 34% of respondents, or 55 individuals, choosing it. The second rank goes to critical thinking, selected by 47 respondents, or 29%. Third is entrepreneurship, chosen by 35 respondents, or 21%. The fourth position is data visualization, selected by 27 respondents, or 16%.

These rankings highlight the priority areas where students feel they need the most training. The high ranking of communication and negotiation skills suggests that students recognize the importance of effectively conveying ideas and reaching agreements in professional settings. This is crucial for career success, as strong communication skills can lead to better teamwork, conflict resolution, and leadership opportunities.

Critical thinking being the second most chosen skill indicates that students value the ability to analyze situations and make sound decisions. This skill is essential in problem-solving and strategic planning, which are key components in many careers. The emphasis on critical thinking training can help students become more adept at navigating complex challenges and making informed choices.

Entrepreneurship and data visualization, while ranked third and fourth, are still significant. The interest in entrepreneurship training reflects a desire among students to innovate and create new opportunities, which is vital in today's dynamic job market. Data visualization training, though chosen by fewer

respondents, remains important as it enables students to present data in a clear and impactful way, a skill that is increasingly valuable in a data-driven world. Overall, these training preferences align well with the skills needed for future career success.

This study makes significant contributions by identifying the essential skills college students possess and the areas where further development is needed. The findings reveal that students have a strong foundation in effective communication, IT proficiency, problem-solving, and analytical thinking, which are crucial for career success. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of teamwork, personal management, and critical thinking skills, emphasizing their role in professional growth. By pinpointing the priority areas for training, such as communication and negotiation skills, critical thinking, entrepreneurship, and data visualization, the research provides valuable insights for designing strategic training programs. These programs can help bridge skill gaps, align with students' interests and talents, and ultimately enhance their employability and career prospects in an evolving job market.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

This research provides valuable insights into the preparedness of students for the workforce. The findings from 164 respondents across three universities (UGJ Cirebon, UIN Siber Syekh Nurjati Cirebon, and UI BBC) indicate that students possess high fundamental skills, and demonstrate strong teamwork abilities. Additionally, personal management skills are also at a high level. These results suggest that students are well-equipped with essential skills that are crucial for their professional success. The high scores in fundamental and teamwork skills highlight the importance of these areas in preparing students for the workforce, where collaboration and effective personal management are key to achieving organizational goals. The average score for mixed skills, including communication and negotiation, critical thinking, data visualization, and entrepreneurship, is close to a high level, indicating that students are developing competencies that are increasingly important in the modern job market.

Despite the valuable insights provided by this research, there are some limitations that should be acknowledged. The study is based on self-reported data from a relatively small sample size of 164 respondents from three universities in Cirebon, which may not be representative of the broader student population. Additionally, the reliance on self-assessment may introduce bias, as respondents might overestimate or underestimate their skills. The study's cross-sectional design also limits the ability to assess changes in skill levels over time. These limitations suggest that while the findings are informative, they should be interpreted with caution and not generalized beyond the specific context of the study.

Future studies could address these limitations by including a larger and more diverse sample size, as well as incorporating objective measures of skill assessment to complement self-reported data. Longitudinal studies could be conducted to track the development of employability skills over time and evaluate

the long-term impact of strategic training programs on career success. Additionally, future research could explore the effectiveness of different training methods and curricula in enhancing employability skills. By addressing these limitations and expanding the scope of research, future studies can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of employability skills training and its implications for student career outcomes.

To maximize the impact of employability skills training, a collaborative approach involving educational institutions, industries, and policymakers or government in Indonesia is essential. Educational institutions should continuously update their curricula to align with industry needs and incorporate practical training opportunities. Industries can support this effort by offering internships, mentorship programs, and real-world projects that allow students to apply their skills in professional settings. Policymakers and government agencies can facilitate this collaboration by creating policies that encourage partnerships between academia and industry, and by providing funding and resources for skill development initiatives. By working together, these stakeholders can ensure that students are well-prepared to meet the demands of the modern workforce and achieve long-term career success.

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