



EMPLOYABILITY OF INDIVIDUALS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS: TEACHERS' VIEWS

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Abstract:

Individuals with special needs often face challenges in finding and maintaining employment. One of the biggest obstacles to the successful placement and retention of these individuals is the lack of employability skills. This study aims to identify the employability skills that employers and job providers consider important. In the study, the research conducted between 2002 and the present, which reveals the views of employers and job providers, was analyzed. The employability skills mentioned in these studies and given importance by the participants are responsibility, technology, adaptability, teamwork, mental thinking, communication, academic processing and self-management skills, basic work ethics sub-skills, interpersonal skills, social skills, personal care and hygiene, adaptability, teamwork, academic skills, respect for others, following instructions, following safety procedures, attitude, reliability, resilience, flexibility, respect for others, asking for help, ability to prepare a well-prepared job application, quality of work (speed, stamina, competitiveness), job completion, self-control, self-advocacy, self-determination, safety skills, travel skills. The importance of these skills for the employer is explained, and implications for further research are discussed.

Keywords: employability, teacher opinion, special education, students with special needs

1. Introduction

Since the early 1980s, focusing on the transition of individuals with special needs from school life to work life has become one of the most important processes for individuals with special needs to achieve a better quality of life after school (Halpern, 1985; Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997).

One of the most important elements in employment preparation programs is teaching employability skills. These are prerequisites for job readiness, and employers

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value these skills more than job-specific technical skills, demanding that schools teach them (Cotton, 2008).

Employers have expressed concerns about hiring individuals with intellectual disabilities because they think that employability skills such as lack of job/occupational skills, low participation, problem behaviors, refusing instructions, and safety are lacking in individuals with intellectual disabilities (Chadsey & Beyer, 2001; Olson, Cioffi, Yovanoff, & Mank, 2001). Therefore, teaching employability skills should be an important component of the vocational preparation programs offered by vocational training practice schools. Attention should be paid to whether this type of skills training aligns with the employer's demands. Therefore, there is a need to reveal employers' views and expectations regarding employability skills. To better prepare individuals with intellectual disabilities to meet the labor demands of employers, it is also necessary to identify the specific employability skills employers expect (Wehman, 2011).

2. Employability

Employability is a complex and multidimensional term that is challenging to define and measure accurately (Tymon, 2013). There are differences between employment and employability. Employment refers to an individual having a job and working, whereas employability encompasses the non-technical skills, beyond vocational skills, that enable job retention.

According to various definitions, employability refers to an individual's ability to find and maintain a job that is suitable to their level of education, and, if necessary, to find an alternative job (Oliveira & Castro-Guimaraes, 2010). It is the placement of the individual in the job of his/her dreams and the maintenance of this job by fulfilling its requirements (Rotwell & Arnold, 2007). Sustainability and continuity of employment (Das & Subuthi, 2015). Non-technical job skills (Cotton, 2008). Although these skills have different definitions, they are generally presented with some classifications.

3. Employability Skills

The Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS), established by the US Department of Labor after the development of the industry in the USA, conducted a study that revealed the skills employees should possess to enhance their qualifications. As a result of these studies, SCANS published the report "What Works Requires of School," and in this report, employability skills emerged. In 1991, the report identified 36 employability skills under eight main headings. The first three main headings were on basic classification: basic skills, thinking skills, and personal qualities. The other five classifications were resource, interpersonal relations, knowledge, system, and technology. SKILLS: Basic skills: literacy, numeracy, speaking, listening, thinking skills: creative thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, learning, personal qualities: self-esteem, empathy, responsibility, assertiveness, honesty, integrity, interpersonal skills: team member, service provider, collaborator, negotiator. In addition to the US

Department of Labor, many countries and organizations have included these skills on their agendas and developed their classifications of employability skills tailored to their specific working conditions. Examples of these include the OECD (The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) and the Conference Board of Canada (The Conference Board of Canada's Employability Skills 2000+). In our country, the Ministry of National Education has named these skills as common skills that need to be learned. These skills *include critical thinking, creative thinking, communication, research and inquiry, problem-solving, information technology, entrepreneurship, and the ability to use Turkish correctly, effectively, and beautifully* (Primary Education 1-5 Grade Programs Introduction Booklet, 2006: 11, 12).

According to the literature, Cotton (2008) categorized employability skills under three main headings: Basic Skills, Thinking Skills, and Sensory and Characteristic Traits. Many employability skills fall under these main skills.

The differences between this study and other review studies can be summarized as follows: (a) Unlike other review studies, this study examined current studies, encompassing those from 2000 to the present day. (b) It examined the studies that included the opinions of employers, job developers, and job coaches about employability skills. (c) It examined the studies that revealed which employability skills employers, job developers, and job coaches attach importance to. In addition to contributing to the literature, this study is also important for examining the employability skills essential for the sustainability of employment for individuals with special needs. Although these skills may seem insignificant at the beginning of the job, they are crucial for the individual with special needs to maintain their job sustainability. Even if individuals with special needs acquire job skills in the workplace, they may still struggle to continue working because employability skills are also necessary for job sustainability, in addition to job or occupational skills. Research in the literature reveals that employers consider employability skills as important as academic and job/vocational skills. Therefore, examining which skills employers, job providers, and job coaches attach importance to in terms of employability skills will shed light on the literature, as well as on teachers and in-service training providers who prepare individuals with special needs for work and vocational life. Additionally, acquiring these employability skills during the school period will contribute to the sustainable employment of individuals with special needs. (Bibliography)

4. Aims of the review

This review study aims to provide information about employability skills and to examine studies that investigated teachers' opinions on employability skills for students with special needs.

Accordingly, this review study a) explained employability skills and b) examined the views of employers, job providers, and job coaches on employability skills. To achieve these aims, the following research questions were addressed.

- 1) Which skills are addressed within the scope of employability skills in the literature?
- 2) What are the characteristics of research participants?
- 3) What are the methodological characteristics of research?
- 4) Which are the most frequently mentioned employability skills in research?
- 5) What skills are considered most important by the participants?

5. Method

5.1 Literature review process

The studies in the literature were searched using various educational databases. These databases were Ebscohost, Jstor, Google Scholar, OECD iLibrary, Sage, Scopus, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis, and Web of Science. Various keyword combinations, such as "employability," "opinion," "teacher," "employability skills," "individuals with intellectual disabilities," "employability of individuals with intellectual disabilities," and "teacher views on employability of individuals with special needs," were used to search for studies. The literature review was conducted between 2000 and 2025.

5.2 Selection criteria

The decisions regarding the inclusion of the studies in this study are as follows;

- 1) The study should include research on employability skills in teachers' opinions.
- 2) The study should examine the research conducted between 2002 and 2025 that includes teachers' views on the employability of individuals with special needs.
- 3) At least one of the concepts of Employability, Individuals with Special Needs, Teachers, and Opinions, should be included in the study.
- 4) The study can include both qualitative and quantitative approaches that reveal teacher views.

5.3 Exclusion criteria

- 1) Theses, books, book chapters, news, and unpublished articles were not included in the study.
- 2) Not included in the study, includes views on job/vocational skills.
- 3) Research on teacher views that did not include employability skills was excluded from the study.
- 4) A study was excluded if it included an intervention and its effects.

6. Reliability

The reliability of the study will be ensured by a researcher who works in the field of special education related to work or occupational skills and holds a doctorate in this field. After determining the topic, preparing the research questions, and reviewing the literature, the studies were examined in terms of the six parameters shown in Table 1: participant, design, data collection tool, purpose, skill, and outcome. Among the 8 studies

that met the inclusion criteria, those selected will be examined by the independent researcher according to the six parameters. At the beginning of this process, the independent researcher was provided with detailed information, both verbally and in writing, by the author. The independent researcher will examine eight studies among 8 studies in terms of five parameters and code them into 40 items. Afterwards, the evaluations of the two researchers were compared. In the first part, different opinions emerged on a total of four items in four studies. The reliability of these different opinions was calculated as 90%. The author provided a detailed explanation to the independent researcher regarding employability and employability skills, and reliability was calculated as 100% by reaching a consensus on the items with differing opinions.

7. Results

In this review, the employability skills that support the sustainability of business life for individuals with special needs, as well as the skills that teachers attach importance to, were examined.

All the studies presented in Table 1 involve teacher opinions on employability skills. The studies identified in the literature review that met the search criteria were conducted between 2002 and 2024, and all participants in these studies were teachers. In some of these studies, the views of employers and teachers on employability were examined simultaneously, while in others, only teachers' views were included.

To answer the first research question, the literature was reviewed, and the concept of employability skills in the literature was explained. The study emphasized the importance of employability skills in individuals with special needs, as well as their significance in job placement and job retention. The research on employability skills from teachers' perspectives was examined, and teachers' views on employability skills, their thoughts, and the employability skills they attach importance to were explored.

Regarding the second research question, some studies include only teachers as participants, while others include both teachers and employers as participants. The participants in studies that include views on employability are employers, job providers, and teachers, with employers constituting the most significant number of participants. When these studies are taken into consideration, it becomes apparent that there are primarily studies on the views of employers, while fewer studies have examined the views of teachers and job providers.

Table 1: Overview of the Studies Included in the Review

| Source | | Participants | | | Data Collection Intermediary | Method | Objective | Results |
|--------|--------------------------------|--------------|----------|---------|------------------------------|--------------|--|---|
| | | Total | Employer | Teacher | | | | |
| 1. | Smith & Katz (2005) | 262 | - | 262 | Survey | Quantitative | The level of inclusion of employability standards in the curriculum by teachers | 24% of the participants considered employability as the primary goal in their teaching, while 76% considered it an important goal. |
| 2. | Moon <i>et al.</i> (2011) | 12 | - | 12 | Interview | Qualitative | Beliefs of job providers that can contribute to the employability of individuals with developmental disabilities | According to the participants' responses to open-ended questions, self-defense, self-determination, safety skills, social skills, personal hygiene, communication, and travel skills are important for students with developmental disabilities. |
| 3. | Riesen <i>et al.</i> (2014) | 46 | - | 46 | Survey | Quantitative | Barriers that job providers consider when making decisions about the employability of students with disabilities | Participants stated that for student employment to be successful and sustainable, skills such as job completion, punctuality, social skills, self-control, self-advocacy, and soft skills are necessary in addition to job-specific skills. |
| 4. | Agran <i>et al.</i> (2014) | 651 | | 491 | Survey | Quantitative | Collect data on the skills valued by special education teachers, transition coordinators, vocational rehabilitation counselors, and other professionals involved in the transition education process for students with special needs | The skills rated as most important included asking for clarification on unclear instructions, arriving at work on time, avoiding inappropriate touching, following instructions that require immediate attention, notifying a supervisor when help is needed, responding appropriately to critical feedback, and interacting well with customers or clients. |
| 5. | Ju, Pacha, Moore, Zhang (2014) | 283 | 168 | 115 | Survey | Quantitative | To reveal employers' and educators' perspectives on employability skills for people with and without disabilities | Both trainers and employers agreed that punctuality, respect for others, honesty, following instructions were important. In disagreement, trainers considered asking for help and social skills as important, while employers considered adherence to safety procedures and job skills as important. |
| 6. | Pickens (2015) | 7 | 4 | 3 | Interview | Qualitative | To investigate job providers' perceptions of heavy transition-age VET in helping them to secure employment in a competitive business environment | According to the job providers, the most important skills are soft skills, professionalism, work ethic, and quality of work (speed, resilience, competitiveness). Additionally, the experience of working in paid employment emerged as a motivating factor for students. |
| 7. | Bonner, V. K. (2017) | 7 | 4 | 3 | Semi-structured Interview | Qualitative | To compare the I.E.B. taught by high school special education teachers who teach vocational skills to ZYOB with the I.E.B. emphasized by employers in fast food restaurants | According to the results, there are differences between the I.E.s valued by employers and the I.E.s taught by teachers. In addition, skills and teachers emerged under four themes: (a) E.C.s to be demonstrated in the workplace, (b) E.C.s to be avoided in the workplace, (c) personal characteristics related to E.C., (d) the importance of teaching job skills to LLSS. |
| 8. | Dulas & Gilson (2024) | 173 | | 173 | Survey | Quantitative | To evaluate how educator role perceptions differ according to years of experience and gender. | Participants indicated that student independence in the workplace is an extremely valuable trait and that their students should demonstrate more independence in both employment skills and soft skills. |

When research methods are examined to answer the third research question, the following types of research are included: qualitative, quantitative, mixed, and review. The reason for this methodological diversity is that no criterion methodologically excludes research. The inclusion criterion for determining the studies is to examine those that involve teachers, employers, and students together in studies on employability. Eight of the studies included in the study collected data through qualitative methods (Walsh, 2010; Baran & Cavkaytar, 2007; Andrew, 2017; Vint, 2017; Naime & Güneş, 2014; Lindsay *et al.*, 2014; Pickens, 2015; Moon *et al.*, 2011). Six of the included studies used quantitative methods (Arie & Rimmerman, 2009; Ju, Zhang, Pacha, 2011; Ju *et al.*, 2014; Riesen *et al.*, 2014). In one study included in the study, a mixed design (Ünal, 2003) was used. In one study included in the review, research was conducted, and the studies from the last ten years were analyzed.

In the studies examined to answer the fourth research question, the employability skills related to employability that were mentioned in the studies in which teachers and teacher employers participated together were; responsibility, technology, adaptability, teamwork, mental thinking, communication, academic processing and self-management skills, basic work ethics sub-skills, interpersonal skills, social skills, personal care and hygiene, adaptability, teamwork, academic skills, respect for others, following instructions, following safety procedures, attitude, reliability, resilience, flexibility, respect for others, requesting help, ability to prepare a well-prepared job application, job quality (speed, endurance, competitiveness), job completion, self-control, self-advocacy, self-determination, safety skills, travel skills (Walsh, 2010; Baran and Cavkaytar, 2007; Andrew, 2017; Vint, 2017; Naime and Güneş, 2014; Lindsay *et al.*, 2014; Pickens, 2015; Moon *et al.*, 2011; Arie and Rimmerman, 2009; Ju, Zhang, Pacha, 2011; Ju *et al.*, 2014; Riesen *et al.*, 2014; Ünal, 2003).

Skills considered important by employers in surveys with only employers as respondents: responsibility, technology, adaptability, teamwork, mental thinking, communication, academic processing and self-management skills, basic work ethics, interpersonal skills, basic academic skills, communication skills, social skills, personal care and hygiene, taking responsibility, adaptability, using technology, teamwork, honesty, respect for others, following instructions, punctuality, adaptability, reliability, resilience, flexibility and social skills (Baran & Cavkaytar, 2007; Andrew, 2017; Bonner, 2017; Naime & Güneş, 2014; Lindsay *et al.*, 2014; Arie & Rimmerman, 2009; Ju, Zhang, Pacha, 2011; Ju *et al.*, 2014; Ünal, 2003).

The employability skills that are found to be important in the studies whose participants are job providers and teachers are punctuality, respect for others, honesty, following instructions, requesting help, completing work, punctuality, social skills, self-control, self-advocacy, self-determination, safety skills, social skills, personal hygiene, communication and travel skills, professionalism, work ethics, work quality (speed, resilience, competitiveness skills (Riesen *et al.*, 2014; Moon *et al.*, 2011; Ju *et al.*, 2014; Bonner, 2017; Smith & Katz, 2005).

The employability skills that are seen to be important in the studies whose participants are both teachers and employers are appearance, reliability, attitude,

communication, eye contact, interpersonal relations, job skills, calculation, task awareness, task completion, teamwork, punctuality, requesting half-time, following safety procedures, self-control, self-defense, self-determination, and travel skills (Moon *et al.*, 2011; Ju *et al.*, 2014; Bonner, 2017). According to Ju *et al.* (2014), although there is agreement between employers and teachers on many skills, there are also skills on which there is disagreement. According to the results of this research, both educators and employers considered punctuality, respect for others, honesty, and following instructions as important. However, teachers considered asking for help and social skills important, while employers considered adherence to safety procedures and job skills important.

All the research explained above has revealed the importance of employability skills, showing that individuals with special needs or those with typical development should possess these skills to start and maintain employment. Additionally, it has been demonstrated that employers expect individuals to exhibit these skills. The common feature of the opinions in these studies is that individuals should have employability skills; the importance and number of these skills vary according to the occupations of the participants and the types of participants. The common points of the opinions are that (a) these skills should be present in individuals, (b) skills should be acquired during the school period, and (c) employability skills should be taught in addition to vocational skills.

8. Discussion

In this review, employability skills are defined, and teachers' views on these skills are examined. This review aims to reveal teachers' views on the employability skills that individuals with special needs are expected to possess in the workplace. The main conclusion of this review is that employability skills are considered important by employers, job providers, and job coaches, and they ensure the sustainability of the work life of individuals with special needs.

This review study was conducted with eight studies that met the criteria. Initially, 40 studies were accessed; however, 20 of them were excluded from the study because they did not meet the inclusion criteria. After the initial screening, all studies were examined in terms of inclusion criteria. Since the studies primarily focused on intervention programs, they were excluded due to participant characteristics and target skills. The studies conducted on this subject primarily focused on work, vocational, and employment issues. As can be seen in Table 1, when the years and number of studies are analyzed, there is a limited number of studies that reveal employers' views on employability skills.

Findings revealed that some employability skills are valued by both teachers and employers for individuals with special needs (Moon *et al.*, 2011; Ju *et al.*, 2014; Bonner, 2017). Both employers and educators play important roles in increasing and sustaining student employment. While employers make the final hiring decisions, educators provide direct training to students to meet the demands of employers. It is important to identify both groups' perspectives on critical employability skills. This study identified

the employability skills valued by both educators and employers for individuals with and without disabilities and examined the differences between the perspectives of the two groups. The findings revealed that some employability skills are valued by both educators and employers for all workers regardless of the type of disability (Moon *et al.*, 2011; Ju *et al.*, 2014).

These skills include "*the ability to be punctual*," "*the ability to show respect for others*," "*display personal integrity/honesty at work*," and "*the ability to follow instructions*." This finding confirms the results of previous studies, which found that similar employability skills are often valued by employers, for example, punctuality (Blanck, 1998; Kregel & Unger, 1993), work integrity/honesty (Blanck, 1998; Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006; Walsh, 2010) and "*following instructions*" (Baxter & Young, 1982; McCrea, 1991). There are also differences between the employability skills valued by employers and those taught by teachers (Bonner, 2017; Deepa & Manisha, 2013; Ju *et al.*, 2012; Martin, 2011). Based on this finding, there is a need for increased collaboration among employers, job providers, and teachers to unify the expected and taught employability skills (Ju *et al.*, 2014). Ensuring that all stakeholders have clear expectations and that these expectations are consistent across stakeholders is crucial for student success. Suppose job providers, job coaches, and teachers are not prepared and knowledgeable. In that case, the educational process may suffer, and individuals with special needs may face even greater difficulties in finding and maintaining employment. If students are provided with an unqualified service, this will affect not only the relationships between the job provider, job coach, and consumer, but also the employer relationships. Many participants felt that employers would be less likely to work with and hire people with special needs if students are not "*work ready*" when they arrive at the workplace (Pickens, 2015). However, it is known that employers who have previously employed people with disabilities tend to have more positive attitudes than those who have not (Ju *et al.*, 2011). Based on this, increasing the number of successful employment outcomes and ensuring sustainability in employment will contribute to the subsequent employment of individuals with special needs.

When the studies are analyzed, according to the participants' choices and opinions about the importance and ranking of employability skills, the most desired and taught employability skills of individuals with disabilities are; responsibility, technology, adaptation, teamwork, mental thinking, communication, academic processing and self-management skills, basic work ethics sub-skills, interpersonal skills, social skills, personal care and hygiene, adaptation, teamwork, academic skills, respect for others, following instructions, following safety procedures, attitude, reliability, resilience, flexibility, respect for others, requesting help, ability to prepare a well-prepared job application, job quality (speed, endurance, competitiveness), job completion, self-control, self-advocacy, self-determination, safety skills, travel skills (Walsh, 2010; Baran and Cavkaytar, 2007; Andrew, 2017; Vint, 2017; Naime and Güneş, 2014; Lindsay *et al.*, 2014; Pickens, 2015; Moon *et al.*, 2011; Arie and Rimmerman, 2009; Ju, Zhang, Pacha, 2011; Ju *et al.*, 2014; Riesen *et al.*, 2014).

While employability skills are essential for employers and teachers, there is a need for applied research on teaching these skills and examining their outcomes. Therefore, it

can be suggested that future studies should include experimental and single-subject design studies in which these skills are taught. It is seen that the majority of the studies on employability were conducted with employers, teachers, job providers and job coaches (Walsh, 2010; Baran & Cavkaytar, 2007; Andrew, 2017; Vint, 2017; Naime & Güneş, 2014; Lindsay *et al.*, 2014; Pickens, 2015; Moon *et al.*, 2011; Arie & Rimmerman, 2009; Ju, Zhang, Pacha, 2011; Ju *et al.*, 2014; Riesen *et al.*, 2014). There is no study in which the views of students with special needs who are directly affected by the learning, demonstration and generalization of employability skills are taken. To reveal the difficulties experienced by individuals with special needs in learning and practicing these skills, understanding their feelings, and identifying the skills they struggle with, a qualitative study can also be planned. In addition to these, a meta-analysis study can be conducted to examine the studies in which these skills are taught and to reveal the effectiveness of the methods used.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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Oğuz Özdamar, after graduating from the Mentally Disabled Teacher Education, worked as a teacher at the state schools. He completed his MA in Mentally Disabled Teacher Education and is currently a PhD candidate in the same department. He completed qualitative research methods and qualitative data analysis courses. He works as a research assistant in the Department of Special Education at a university.

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