

The Role of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills in Undergraduate Employability: An Investigation of Students' and Employers' Perceptions in Indigenous Related Disciplines

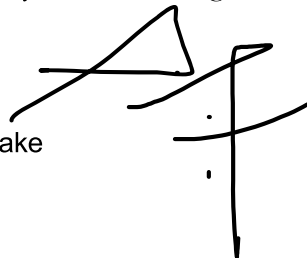
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**Abstract**

The rapid growth of technology industries has led to a demand for new skill sets, but education and job training have struggled to keep up, creating a skills gap. To address this, universities must focus on developing 21st-century skills to better prepare students for the evolving workforce. This study aims to investigate the critical role that 21st-century skills play in improving undergraduate students' employability. This study used a quantitative research method. Data for the structural questionnaire were gathered through social media platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, and Telegram. The study used a multi-stage sampling technique, beginning with purposive sampling to select 61 employers from various indigenous-related institutions. In the second stage, 108 second-year undergraduates were chosen through simple random sampling to ensure a representative student sample of Gampaha Wickramarachchi University of Indigenous Medicine. Descriptive analysis was the data analysis method. The findings illuminate that the most important 21<sup>st</sup> century employability skills are teamwork, communication, and interpersonal skills. Additionally, data literacy has come to be recognized as a critical skill for success in the modern workplace. Overall, the study shows a discrepancy between the competencies employers demand and the skills taught in universities highlighting the significance of incorporating these competencies into curricula to improve employability. Furthermore, to prepare students for success in a workforce that is changing quickly, it will be crucial for educators to continue their professional development and to support lifelong learning. Moreover, the need for university courses to be updated to better reflect the changing needs of the labor market.

**Keywords:** *Employability, University, 21st-century skills, Undergraduates, Indigenous related disciplines, Stakeholders' perceptions*

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