

Soft Skills and Career Readiness of University Students: Employers' Perspectives and Implications for Education Policy

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Graduate employability has become an important concern for higher education institutions as employers increasingly expect graduates to possess not only disciplinary knowledge but also a broad range of transferable skills. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that a gap often exists between university preparation and workplace expectations. This study aims to examine employers' perceptions of university graduates' employability, focusing on interpersonal and communication skills, cognitive and professional competencies, and overall career readiness. A mixed-methods design was employed to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the issue. Quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 134 employers, and descriptive statistics were used to analyse perceptions across three skill domains. In addition, qualitative data were gathered through open-ended questions to capture employers' experiences and perspectives. The qualitative responses were analysed thematically to support the interpretation of the quantitative findings. The results indicate that most competencies fall within the neutrality range, suggesting moderate employer satisfaction with graduates' abilities. Employers generally acknowledge strengths in listening skills, professional behaviour, and initiative. However, lower evaluations appear in areas such as conflict resolution, time management, and particularly graduates' readiness to transition from university to employment. Qualitative findings further highlight limited practical experience and insufficient workplace exposure. Overall, the study concludes that although graduates demonstrate foundational competencies, stronger university–industry collaboration and greater emphasis on experiential learning are necessary to enhance career readiness and employability.

Keywords: career readiness, graduate employability, higher education, interpersonal skills, workplace preparedness

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