



Assessment of Employable Skills of Management Students in University of Cape Coast

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Abstract

Graduate employability has become a rising concern among stakeholders. The study assessed final year management students' level of employable skills in University of Cape Coast, Ghana, to determine whether they were able to acquire the required employable skills by the end of their study. The study adopted a quantitative approach to research and descriptive survey research design to find out the perceptions of supervisors and employees regarding the employable skills that are important for management graduates and thereafter measured the level of importance the students attached to those employable skills and their self-perceived level of possession of those employable skills. Proportionate stratified sampling technique was adopted. In all, 64 supervisors, 64 employees and 89 final year management students responded to the survey. Data were collected using questionnaires on a 5-point Likert scale. Mean, standard deviation and Mann- U test were used to analyse the data. The study found that both supervisors and employees attached a high level of importance to the employable skills even though there was a statistically significant difference in perceptions between the supervisors and students. The study also found that the students' level of possession of those skills was high. The study concluded that the management students' level of employable skills was high. Stronger partnerships between academia and industry geared towards curriculum development to further enhance students' employability was recommended.

Keywords: *Perception; Employable Skills and Management Studies*

1.0 Introduction

The development of various dynamics including information technology, that has occurred within the world of business has necessitated changes in the nature and number of available jobs. These rapid changes have caused a new dimension in the skills set desired by employers. Thus, employers

now expect employees as well as graduates to possess and exhibit key competencies such as leadership, communication, team work, problem solving and technological skills (Reddy, 2019; Nesaratnam, Karan & Von, 2018; Abas & Imam, 2016; Ekpoh, 2015). The notion and meaning of employability thus have, over a span of time, been mentioned due to the increasing interest in enhancing employability of graduates. Graduate employability has therefore sparked a growing interest over the last decade. Several researchers have developed targeted and specific competencies and traits expedient to advance the employability of graduates. Some of these traits and competencies have been referred to in different ways such as core skills, key skills, transferable skills, essential skills and universal capabilities.

As national boundaries get blurred as a result of the swiftness that comes with the transfer of information, knowledge has become a powerful resource by which organizations conduct their businesses. This places a great responsibility on education institutions, as a source of knowledge, to meet the challenges presented by this new dimension. The consensus theorists have it that higher education institutions bear the responsibility of integrating universal competencies in their curriculum so as to turn out graduates who meet the demands of the society (Williams, Hesketh & Brown, 2003). According to Reddy (2019), an integral part of good education is ensuring that students are employable after they graduate and is therefore one major performance indicator of education institutions. This assertion supports the human capital theory which argue that education is a form of investment and that the higher an individual climbs the education ladder, the more productive that individual becomes. This should result in higher chances of the individual getting employed after graduation (Schultz, 1961). According to Lisá, Hannelová and Newman (2019) who conducted a study among Slovak employers, the latter expressed the lack of appropriate skills by graduates to be a major hindrance to graduate employability. The role of education in higher institutions in equipping graduates with employable skills is therefore getting attention.

Among the various disciplines in business education, the teaching and learning of management is one that has received a lot of criticisms regarding graduate employability. According to Mintzberg (2003), the problem that goes with management education is that it is just management schooling, and does not give a holistic apprehension and view of management as a function. He further argued that management activities require a need to harmonize a good deal of craft with an adequate level of art and science and that management education overemphasizes the science and does not create a balance between management theories and practice. Akpor-Robaro (2018), also argued that some management theories do not work, particularly in the African society. He further argued that some management theories are alien to African society and are not appropriate to the context of Africa. These assertions imply that the study of management in business schools is likely not to equip the students with the necessary skills needed for the job market (Boateng & Ofori-Sarpong, 2002).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The teaching and learning of management, which is a distinct academic discipline within business education is one that has received a lot criticisms regarding how well it is able to equip management students with desired employable skills (Mintzberg, 2003; Geel, 2015; Akpor-Rabaro, 2018). However, there are several other studies that have presented a contrary indication that business students, including management students, are able to acquire relevant employable skills by the end of their study (Abas & Imam, 2016; Wongnaa & Boachie, 2018; Reddy, 2019). It therefore appears that there are opposing views regarding how well the study of management is able to equip students with relevant employable skills. Studies have also indicated that employers, employees and students often have different perceptions regarding the quality of skills needed for graduate employability (Muyako & Seedwell, 2015; Damoah, Pephrah & Brefo, 2021).

According to Baah-Boateng and Twum (2020), managers of some surveyed firms in Ghana have expressed dissatisfaction towards graduates with background of humanities and business administration from various tertiary institutions in Ghana recruited for administrative task, stating that some of these graduates are not able to exhibit simple communication skills. The managers further claimed that inappropriate teaching methods as well as insufficient exposure may be the causes for poor quality of education and skills training. The call for stronger linkages between business education in higher institutions and industry in Ghana to enhance graduate employability (Damoah, Peprah & Obrafo, 2021; Wongnaa & Boachie, 2018) has given rise to the need to assess how well management studies prepares students in Ghana for the job market.

Among the tertiary institutions in Ghana, University of Cape Coast (UCC) is the oldest traditional university with management as a distinct academic programme with a distinct department and teaching faculty designed to equip students to provide administrative support to higher level management. Although the claim by the managers in Ghana as indicated by Baah-Boateng and Twum, (2020) may not relate solely to management students from UCC, it appears that no research has actually been done regarding the study of management in UCC and its ability to equip students with employable skills. Therefore, the question as to whether management students in UCC are able to acquire the needed employable skills by the end of their studies has become a debate on the minds of many.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The study will through publication bring to bear employers' perception of the employable skills students should possess and students' perceived level of those employable skills. With these findings, factors that lead to the grey area between education and practice and more importantly the competency gap in the field of management studies will add to the existing knowledge of how management studies ought to reflect the real world of business practice. Thus, business educationists will be able to draw on these findings to reform the content of business curriculum, improve skills of content delivery and create a more effective blend between academia and industry.

1.3 Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following specific questions:

1. What employable skills do supervisors perceive to be important for the success of administrators at the workplace?
2. What employable skills do employees perceive to be important for the success of administrators at the workplace?
3. What is the students' self-perceived level of employable skills needed for the success of administrators at the workplace?

1.4 Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

H₀: There is no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of supervisors and employees regarding the employable skills they perceive to be important for the success of administrators at the workplace.

Hypothesis 2

H₀: There is no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of supervisors and students regarding the employable skills they perceive to be important for the success of administrators at the workplace.

1.5 Limitation of the Study

The use of survey design relies on self-reported data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). This means that the students provided data based on their personal belief of the level of their employability skills. The risk is that the answers provided may be socially acceptable responses and therefore may not exactly reflect their true level of employability skills. However, it was expected that the respondents provide objective responses especially because of the researcher's appeal for objectivity in responses.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Employability and Employable Skills

Employability can be viewed from diverse perspectives. Wickramasinghe and Perera (2010), viewed employability from the perspective of fresh graduates and stated that it is the ability of an individual to get a job according to his or her educational status. This definition, although seems

simplicistic, suggests however that an individual's employment should match his or her educational standard before it can be considered as employability. Although this may be criticized by many, the relationship between employability and education is drawn from this argument. In the context of graduate employability, consensus theory researchers argue that the integration of universal competencies in the curriculum of universities will promote the employability of graduates and assist them in future prospects in the corporate world (Selvadurai, Choy & Maros, 2012). Many individuals therefore graduate from school and expect to gain employment in their field of study and of their educational level. Therefore, to draw the relationship between employment and educational standard can indeed be said to be true in the case of fresh graduates.

Bennett (2016) defined employability in similar context to that of Hillage and Pollard (1998) referring to the concept as the ability to gain and keep employment. In recent times however, the concept of employability has taken a more dynamic toll. Some researchers have propagated that the concept of employability should be realigned to meet the needs of today's dynamic business world. According to McIlveen (2018), an individual's perception of and interaction with the opportunities available in their economic environment have a reflection on their employability. Therefore, employability refers to the ability of an individual to deploy consciously career adaptability to actively secure work in which they feel a sense of reward for their attributes, skills and knowledge that really are in demand in a given environment. A number of graduates seem to leave universities without acquiring the needed and adequate skills that are pivotal for entering the world of work. According to Segbenya and Baafi-Frimpong (2021), skills mismatch exists between the acquired skills of tertiary graduates and skills required by employers in Ghana. Employability skills are described as competencies required not solely to achieve employment, but also to progress within an organization so as to reap one's potential and make a contribution successfully to enterprise strategic directions.

In Nigeria, Ekpoh's (2015) conducted a study that covered the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria, with respondents as final year students drawn from four universities in the region during the

2013/2014 academic year The researcher employed the use of ‘Employability Skills Questionnaire’ which measured the following variables: communication, team work, integrity, self-confidence, planning, writing, ICT, problem solving, analytical skills, leadership skills, critical thinking skills, decision making skills and initiative skills. Ekpoh (2015) concluded that the employable skills assessed were important for management graduates to be employed and to remain in employment and further suggested that employable skills should form a central part of the programme of study for university students and that there should be an organized linkage and cooperation between universities and labour market.

In more recent years, Nesaratnam, Karan and Von (2018) conducted a study on graduate employability. According to the study, the researchers stated that skills shortage among graduates in Malaysia has become a serious constraint and represents a 23 per cent of total youth unemployment. Therefore, the study investigated the causes of graduate employability in Malaysia by involving a key stakeholder group, which is the employer. Nesaratnam, Karan and Von (2018)

employed a qualitative research approach by interviewing ten employers to explore and enrich the graduate employability framework. The study affirmed and validated the ‘soft skills’ construct indicated by literature, that is, communication, teamwork, problem solving and leadership skills. The study gave an insight into the perspective of employers regarding graduate employability and further indicated that the concept of graduate employability has become more complex now than ever considering the dynamism that exists in the business community.

2.2 Employability and Management Studies

Management studies has been defined as an educational programme which provides students with knowledge, skills and understanding needed to perform management functions successfully in the business world as a producer or consumer of goods and services (Abdullahi, 2002). The business world is usually controlled by two key players, that is, producers and consumers. The ability to effectively belong to either of these two parties requires the possession of some skills and knowledge specific to the business industry. The role of management studies therefore is to help students acquire these necessary skills expected of key players in the industry. Some researchers such as Osuala (2004) are of the view that management studies deals with a broad area of knowledge concerned with the economic system of a nation and also brings to bear the rate of

business contentment and experience that prepare individuals to become effective participants in the economy. Therefore, according to Osuala, management studies is not only concerned with preparing students to become effective key players in the industry but also to become effective citizens within the society.

To this assertion, the question then asked is whether or not business education is nurturing enough successful and motivated business graduates to manage and coexist with these challenges. The notion that management creates an especially essential connection among individual’s performance at the organizational level, organizational effectiveness and economic development is everyday belief. With this commonly believed notion, managers ought to play an extra great function in the improvement and success of corporations and the nation as a whole (Analoui &

Hosseini, 2001). Management studies is about helping university business students to strengthen job-related behaviours that will enable them enhance performance at the individual and corporate level (Krishman, 2008). Baah-Boateng and Twum (2021) indicated that, managers in Ghana claim

that fresh graduates with backgrounds in management and administration often exhibit poor skills due to low quality of education and skills training. Mintzberg (2003) similarly argued that management is

an exercise that has to blend an appropriate deal of craft with a certain amount of art and science however, management studies often overemphasizes the science and does not create a good blend between management theories and practice. Clearly, there has been a gap between management education and management practice over the years.

2.3 Employability and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

HEI refers to education beyond senior high school particularly one that is offered by business schools. According to Ekpoh (2015), higher education plays a pivotal role in equipping youths for employment. Higher education institutions are generally seen as major players in the development of human capital. It is therefore expected of higher education institutions to reform themselves to be able to develop the human capital needed in the present day. There has been frequent discussion in the academic community regarding the relationship between higher education (HE) and employability. Both government and employers have placed enormous pressure on higher education to produce graduates with adequate and relevant attributes, knowledge and capabilities needed to be employable and to work successfully. The nature of the relationship between higher education and employability has raised concerns among many regarding the readiness of business graduates to enter into the world of business and to function effectively and efficiently. Higher education institutions are therefore facing intense pressure to produce employable graduates (Crayford, Fearon, McLaughlin, & van Vuuren, 2012).

The human capital theory as propounded by Schultz (1961) and Becker (2009) argues that an individual's productivity is increased by the individual's level of education and this contributes to job performance subsequently. Therefore, the end result of education is to equip its products with skills, knowledge and abilities that are marketable and are relevant to the performance of a job function. The implication thus is, there are high chances of success for people who are highly

educated in the job market in terms of opportunities and income. It is therefore expected that as students go through education at the higher level, they ought to be able to acquire and possess the needed attributes that will assist them with increased chances of employability and productivity. There have however been some conflicts between academia and employers as educators in HEIs express their concern regarding the discontentment of employers with respect to the skills and qualities they inculcate in students. This is because employers increasingly voice concern of the quality of product the universities channel out as graduates. According to Baah-Boateng and Twum (2020), managers of some surveyed firms in Ghana have expressed dissatisfaction towards graduates with background of humanities and business administration from various tertiary institutions in Ghana recruited for administrative task, stating that some of these graduates are not able to exhibit simple communication skills.

2.4 University Students' Level of Possession of Employable skills

In Ekpoh's (2015) study, the researcher concluded that the level of acquisition of skills in terms of employability among the students were significantly high only in terms of communication skills, integrity skills and self-confidence skills, with the other skills not significantly high. Similarly, Castillo (2014) indicated that the level of the students' employable skills was above average and

that among the skills that were measured, personal management skills was the highest. However, Geel (2015) concluded that students were not fully equipped to demonstrate, at the end of their study, the employable skills that were measured. Geel further stated that this indication placed some burden on universities and their teaching staff to equip students with employable skills. Geel mentioned that although it might appear that employers do expect highly of graduates they do not expect graduates to be completely competent when they are employed. Graduates are expected to adapt and develop skills

needed for specific work. Just as Epkoh (2015), Geel recommended that close relationships be established between universities and private sector in order to bridge the gap between education and practice.

Jovina, Ab Rahim and Shamsiah (2014) assessed selected factors that influence students' acquisition of employability skills. The main purpose of the study was to assess the acquisition of employable skills by vocational students in Malaysia. The students were requested to rank their self-perceived level of those skills. The study concluded that the students' employable skills were moderate. Students had high mean scores in only two aspects: personal qualities and interpersonal skills and had moderate scores in the other five aspects. Measuring similar attributes as that of the researches discussed already, Orji (2013) conducted a related study. The researcher employed the use of descriptive survey design to assess chemistry students' employable skills at the secondary school level. Data were collected from 200 students and 40 chemistry teachers by way of questionnaire. The result of this study showed that the students were competent with numeracy, independent study and team work skills being ranked the highest. Other skills such as problem solving, ICT skills and time management were ranked low.

2.5 Differences in Perceptions on Graduate Employability among some Stakeholders

Lisá, Hannelová and Newman, (2019) studied the expectations of employers and employees regarding employability skills of university graduates. The researchers indicated that employability is predominantly conceptualized as the skills and personal attributes considered important by industry and needed by graduates in order to secure employment. The study was aimed at comparing the expectations of Slovak employers and students in terms of employability skills. Twenty-seven companies which employ university graduates working in the manufacturing and financial sectors, represented by a Managing Director or Human Resources Director and 534 university students in the Bratislava region completed a questionnaire that evaluated the perceived importance of and satisfaction with generic employability skills. Employers perceived a lack of appropriate skills as the biggest barrier to employing graduates. With regard to the importance of skills, students considered only three skills to be more important than employers did; experience in the field, leadership and authority, and field knowledge. Compared to students, employers regarded engagement and willingness to take on extra work as the most important.

A similar study was conducted by Succi and Canovi (2020) where the researchers compared perceptions of employers and students regarding employable skills of university graduates. The study sought to examine and compare students' and employers' perceptions regarding the importance of soft skills in different European countries. Results showed that 86% of respondents indicated an increased emphasis on soft skills over the last 5 to 10 years and that companies consider soft skills more important than students or graduates. Furthermore, major differences were also identified in the employers' and students' ranking of the 20 soft skills assessed the researchers, indicating different levels of priorities. The researchers suggested that companies and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) need to work together not only to increase students' awareness of the importance of soft skills but also to guide them in taking individual responsibility to acquire and develop these essential skills in order to continuously adapt to the changing labour market and improve their employability.

3.0 Materials and Methods

3.1 Research Design

Descriptive survey research design was used for the study. This type of research design is a survey that aids in describing the characteristics of a sample at a point in time and as well as

aids in calling for answers relating to questions that are raised. Descriptive surveys are very much suited to positivist approaches in exploring the social world for which reason the design was chosen for the study (Rahi, 2017). The outline of the study followed the classic format of the design which is it to derive hypotheses from theory, collect data in the form of responses to standardised questions that are designed to test the hypotheses, code the data in numerical format, analyse the data statistically and on a probability basis confirm or deny the hypotheses thereby, supposedly, confirming or amending the theory.

3.2 Sampling and Sampling Procedure

The target population for this study comprised the heads of academic department and their administrators and level 400 management students of the School of Business all in University of Cape Coast. The heads of department of the university were chosen for this study because the daily management tasks and supervisory role of the heads of department require close working relationship with the administrators of their respective departments and therefore were in position to identify the employable skills which ought to be possessed by the administrators. The Heads of department are in this study referred to as supervisors. The study of management as a programme is intended to equip students with skills needed to perform managerial and administrative tasks, hence, the choice of administrators to indicate the employable skills that are required for the success of their work. The administrators that formed the population for the study were one main administrator for each of the heads of department. The administrators are in this study referred to as employees. The level 400 management students were then chosen for the study because they had acquired enough educational experience and were preparing to enter the job market. The total number of heads of department within the target population was 99. The total number of administrators within the target population was 99 and students within the target population was 136. Proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to sample the students, administrators and the heads of department. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), for a population of 334, a sample size of 181 is adequate. However, to increase the response rate, the sample size was increased by 20% to get a sample size of 217 and stratified proportionately across the groups. The study sort responses from 89 students, 64 heads of department and 64 administrators.

3.3 Data Collection Instrument

The research instrument used in the study was questionnaire. Questionnaire was chosen because it takes less time to administer and also ensures the anonymity of respondents (Fraenkel & Wallen,

2000; Muijs, 2004). The researcher employed three separate questionnaires for the three categories of respondents: questionnaire for heads of department, questionnaire for administrators and questionnaire for management students. The questionnaire for the heads of departments was a 14-item questionnaire divided into two sections. The first section measured the level of importance they attached to each of the employable skills listed on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important). The second section measured the degree to which they rate their administrators' level of possession of those employable skills. This was also measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (do not possess) to 5 (fully possess). The questionnaire for the administrators in like manner was a 14-item questionnaire divided into two sections. The first section measured the level of importance they attached to each of the employable skills listed on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important). The second section measured the degree to which they perceive themselves to possess those employable skills. This was also measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (do not possess) to 5 (fully possess). The questionnaire for the students was a 31-item questionnaire divided into five sections. The first section requested that they indicate their gender, age, programme and their level. The second section measured the level of importance they attached to each of the employable skills listed on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important). The third section measured the degree to which they perceived those employable skills to be integrated throughout the business

curriculum on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not integrated) to 5 (fully integrated). The fourth section measured the degree to which they perceived themselves to possess those employable skills on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (do not possess) to 5 (fully possess). Lastly, the fifth section measured the degree to which they perceived a number of teaching methods were applied by their lecturers also on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never applied) to 5 (fully applied).

3.4 Data Processing and Analysis

The data was organized, coded and inputted into Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS) version 22 program for analysis. The responses were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Research question 1 was analysed using mean and standard deviation. The mean was used to determine the degree to which they perceived the employable skills to be important. The standard deviation provided information on the congruence of the responses given by the supervisors. A mean value below 3.00 indicated the supervisors attached a low level of importance to the employable skill. Research question two was analysed using mean and standard deviation. The mean was used to determine the degree to which they perceived the employable skills to be important. The standard deviation provided information on the congruence of the responses given by the employees. A mean value below 3.00 indicated the employees attached a low level of importance to the employable skill. Research question three was also analysed using mean and standard deviation. The mean was used to determine the degree to which they perceived themselves to possess the employable skills. The standard deviation provided information on the congruence of the responses given by the students. A mean value below 3.00 indicated the students possessed low level of the employable skill. The hypothesis had two variables, that is, employable skills as dependent variable and status (supervisor and employee) as the independent variable. In order to obtain the employable skills variable, the data on research questions one and two were transformed into a single variable known as employable skills and thereafter difference between perceptions of supervisors and employees analysed using Mann-Whitney U test at a 0.05 significant level.

3.5 Validity and Reliability of Survey Instrument

Validity of survey instrument: The degree to which a test measures what it is meant to measure is known as validity (Lameck, 2013). The researcher ensured the validity of the instruments by reviewing the items on the questionnaire with the assistance of the supervisor and experts in management and graduate employability. According to Lameck (2013), consistency of the research instrument is referred to as reliability. This pertains to the fact that the research instrument should be able to produce the same results over repeated measures. The reliability of the instrument was conducted to ensure the study can be replicable. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was used to measure the reliability of the research instrument. The Cronbach's Alpha values were considered reliable as their reliability values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978)

4.0 Results and Discussions

4.1 Demography of Management Students

The management students were required to indicate some of their characteristics. The characteristics will provide understanding to readers as to the nature of students who were involved in the study in relation to their gender, programme offered, level and age. The male students dominated (58.43%) the study. 37 of the respondents were female students representing 41.57%. The dominance of the male students in the study has been a usual phenomenon experienced in our educational settings. From time immemorial, males in Ghana have had the opportunities to enroll in educational institutions

whilst more of their female counterparts remain at home. This is perceived to have been caused by how the formal traditional parents viewed the position of the girl child. Ultimately, more of the male students occupy positions in the world of work due to the increasing number of male students graduating from educational institutions as compared to that of the female students. With regards to the programme of study and level, all the student respondents were management students and in their final year and therefore were expected to acquire some employable skills. The study was dominated by management students between the ages of 20-28 (91.01%) whereas 8.99% of the management students were above 29 years. This indicates that majority of the students started the programme not as mature students who perhaps may have had working experience prior to the beginning of the programme. These are indicated in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Demography of Management Students

Variable	Sub-Scale	N	%
Gender	Male	52	58.43
	Female	37	41.57
Programme	B.Com (Management)	89	100
	Others	0	0
Level	400	89	100
	Others	0	0
Age (in years)	20-28	81	91.01
	29 & above	8	8.99

Source: Field Data (2020)

4.2 Main Results and Discussion

This section deals with the results of the data that were collected and presents the discussion of the results in relation to determining whether final year management students were able to acquire the needed employable skills by the end of their study. The results of the study were discussed in line with the research questions and hypothesis.

Research question was necessary to confirm the relevance of the employable skills indicated in literature. The response to this research question was solicited from the 64 heads of academic department who play key roles in managerial functions.

Table 2: Employable skills supervisors perceive to be important for the success of administrators at the workplace

Rank	Employability skills	N	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)
1	Written communication skill: ability to express effectively one's thoughts, information and messages in writing	64	4.99	.121
2	Oral communication skill: ability to clearly express one's thoughts, information and messages in speaking	64	4.78	.452
3	Problem-solving skill: ability to identify and critically assess problem and devise a plan of action for its solution	64	4.59	.553
4	Interpersonal skill: ability to interact effectively with others with sensitivity and skill	64	4.57	.527
5	Computer technology skill: ability to generate spreadsheets, graphs, flowcharts and tables useful in business/industry.	64	4.47	.701
6	Teamwork skill: ability to work collaboratively with others from diverse background	64	4.46	.633
7	Leadership skill: ability to influence and inspire others in ways that enhance their productivity and satisfaction	64	4.21	.724
	Mean of Means/Average Standard Deviation		4.58	.530

Source: Field data (2020)

Table 2 shows the level and rank of importance attached to each of the employable skills as indicated by supervisors. The written communication skill ($M = 4.99$, $SD = .121$) was given the highest priority followed by oral communication skill ($M = 4.78$, $SD = .452$), problem-solving skill ($M = 4.59$, $SD = .553$), interpersonal skill ($M = 4.57$, $SD = .527$), computer technology skill ($M = 4.47$, $SD = .701$) and team work skill ($M = 4.46$, $SD = .633$). The least important employable skill according to the

supervisors was leadership skill ($M = 4.21$, $SD = .724$). The mean of means and average standard deviation were 4.58 and .530 respectively. These results were discussed concurrently with research question 2.

Similar to research question one, research question two was also necessary to confirm from employees, the relevance of the employable skills indicated in literature. The response to this research question was solicited from the 64 administrators of the heads of academic department who play key roles in administrative and managerial functions.

Table 3: Employable skills employees perceive to be important for the success of administrators at the workplace.

Rank	Employability skills	N	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)
1	Written communication skill: ability to express effectively one's thoughts, information and messages in writing	64	4.78	.484
2	Oral communication skill: ability to clearly express one's thoughts, information and messages in speaking	64	4.72	.542
3	Interpersonal skill: ability to interact effectively with others with sensitivity and skill	64	4.62	.599
4	Computer technology skill: ability to generate spreadsheets, graphs, flowcharts and tables useful in business/industry.	64	4.49	.680
5	Teamwork skill: ability to work collaboratively with others from diverse background	64	4.46	.679
6	Problem-solving skill: ability to identify and critically assess problem and devise a plan of action for its solution	64	4.41	.717
7	Leadership skill: ability to influence and inspire others in ways that enhance their productivity and satisfaction	64	4.24	.883
	Mean of Means/Average Standard Deviation		4.53	.655

Source: Field data (2020)

Table 3 shows the level and rank of importance attached to each of the employable skills as indicated by employees. The written communication skill ($M = 4.78$, $SD = .484$) was given the highest priority followed by oral communication skill ($M = 4.72$, $SD = .542$), interpersonal skill ($M = 4.62$, $SD = .599$), computer technology skill ($M = 4.49$, $SD = .680$), team work skill ($M = 4.46$, $SD = .679$) and

problem-solving skill ($M = 4.41$, $SD = .717$). The least important employable skill according to the employees was leadership skill ($M = 4.24$, $SD = .883$). The mean of means and average standard deviation were 4.53 and .655 respectively.

The results shown in Tables 2 and 3 indicate that among the employable skills, written communication was ranked the highest by both supervisors and employees. Moore and Morton (2017) indicated such topics that business students rate highly to include writing memos, letters, business reports and screen presentations. The results also agree with Martyn (2005) who made an assertion to the fact that the ability to communicate clearly in writing has been requested by employers repeatedly.

In like manner, Mascle (2013) as well as Towers-Clark (2015) indicated that employers have over time placed high value on those who have quality written communication skills. It can therefore be noted that assertions on the importance of written communication skills in early years for example, Bhatia and Hynes (1996) as already cited and that of those in recent years such as Mascle (2013), Towers-Clark (2015) and Moore and Morton (2017) have remained emphatically the same and have equally been supported by the results indicated in the Tables 2 and 3.

Following written communication skills, the results indicated that the second highest priority was given to oral communication skills by both supervisors and employees. The unanimity between both parties indicates the level of importance oral communication is to the success of management graduates in the workplace. As indicated by Omar, Bakar and Rashid (2012), oral communication is an essential competency expected of graduates in the workplace. It is a skill that is even required at entry level to be able to pay attention to instructions and provide feedback. The results of the study are also in agreement with CIHE (2008) who revealed that employers consider good oral communication skills to be an important requirement. Towers-Clark (2015) emphasized the need of oral communication and how it is required to express ideas with clarity and force. Garwood (2012) as well noted that oral communication is expedient for presenting ideas and especially motivating a group of employees who form a team.

The results indicated by both supervisors and employees in Tables 2 and 3 respectively support these assertions and indicate that in today's business world, oral communication is equally an essential employable skill for management graduates. To this effect, oral communication as well as written communication were both assessed on management students to determine their own perception on their level of competency.

Amongst the interpersonal, computer technology, teamwork and problem-solving skills, supervisors and employees ranked them differently. However, it was noted that the means of these skills by both supervisors and employees remained high with the employees' mean of problem-solving skill being the lowest at 4.41. Teamwork skill although ranked differently by both supervisors and employees scored an equal mean of 4.46. The means of the interpersonal, computer technology, teamwork and problem-solving skills although vary, indicate that they are important to the success of management graduates in the workplace. These results authenticate what has been discussed in literature regarding the importance of the said skills.

A study by Awayiga, Onumah and Tsameny (2010), found that analytical and critical thinking which were traits of problem-solving skill were rated as one of the most important skill of professionalism by both graduates and employers. With regards to teamwork, the results of the study agreed with Brock, McAloney, Ma, & Sen, (2017), who indicated that the ability to participate in teamwork was often cited as a critical criterion for hiring. In terms of interpersonal skill, the findings of this study concurred with Chaturvedi, Yadav and Bajpai (2011) who noted that the soft skill of interpersonal relations is equally important to be considered a good manager. According to Workforce Development Agency, Singapore (2006), ICT skills as well has become integral among the graduate

employable skills due to emerging globalization and digital technologies characterizing the business world today.

Just as both supervisors and employees commonly agreed on the most important skill to be written communication, they both agreed on the least important skill to be leadership skill. Although this skill scored a high mean of $M = 4.21$, $SD = .724$ and $M = 4.24$, $SD = .883$ by supervisors and employees respectively, it was the least scored. This result is in agreement with Hu and Liden (2011) who argued that the integration of leadership training in higher education curriculum has proven to influence positively a student's potential of developing qualities of leadership. However, the importance of this skill does not seem to rise above the importance of other skills as indicated. This may be due to the fact that the exhibition of leadership qualities is more of a conceptual skill (Katz, 2009) and is not immediately required of management graduates at entry level positions but rather expected of them as they rise through the ranks.

The results shown in Tables 2 and 3 provide a firm basis to determine the employable skills that are relevant to the success of management graduates in the workplace. With a 5-point Likert scale with 1 (indicating not important) and 5 (indicating very important), the mean of means scores of all the employable skills by both supervisors (4.58) and employees (4.53) ranged between 4 and 5 indicating a high level of importance being attached to the employable skills. Additionally, to determine the uniformity in the level of importance attached to the employable skills by both supervisors and employees, a test was conducted to compare differences between the perceptions of the two groups. This test was hypothesized as Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 1(H₀): There is no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of supervisors and employees regarding the employable skills they perceive to be important for the success of administrators at the workplace.

Table 4: Differences Between Supervisors' and Employees' Perception on the Importance of Employable Skills.

Status	M	IQ	U	Z	P
Supervisor	32	4.75	2281.500	-.135	.893
Employee	32	4.75			

$P > .05$

Source: Field data (2020)

Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to compare the level of importance attached to the employable skills by supervisors and employees. The results show that there is no statistically significant difference in supervisors' (median = 32.00, IQ = 4.75) and employees' (median = 32.00, IQ = 4.75) perception of importance attached to the employable skills, $U = 2281.500$, $p > 0.05$ (2 tailed). Hence, the null hypothesis failed to be rejected. This means that the supervisors and employees had no significant difference in their perceptions of the level of importance of the employable skills. The synergy in the perceptions of both supervisors and employees could be due to the experiences they gathered over the years regarding the skills involved in getting the work done.

The results in Tables 2, 3 and 4 indicate that the employable skills assessed by the supervisors and employees are satisfactory for use in assessing the level of employable skills of final year management students. These indications concur with Weligamage (2009), who asserted that the most

important employable skills required by employers across different countries in Europe, the United States and Africa include team work skills, leadership skills, problem solving skills and working with diversity. Geel (2015), as well investigated the employability skills of undergraduate business management students. Among the skills that the researcher assessed were communication, problem solving and team work. These skills were the basic skills of employability which were considered important in the business environment. These skills were similar to those assessed by Epkoh (2015).

Having therefore established the importance of these skills, a total of 89 final year management students in School of Business were assessed to determine their level of employable skills. The employable skills confirmed by the supervisors and employees were used to assess the extent to which final year management students of the School of Business were prepared for the job market. Their responses are indicated in Table 5 below:

Table 5: Students' self-perceived level of possession of the employable skills

Rank	Employability skills	N	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)
1	Oral communication skill: ability to clearly express one's thoughts, information and messages in speaking	89	4.28	.905
2	Written communication skill: ability to express effectively one's thoughts, information and messages in writing	89	4.23	1.064
3	Leadership skill: ability to influence and inspire others in ways that enhance their productivity and satisfaction	89	4.18	.975
4	Problem-solving skill: ability to identify and critically assess problem and devise a plan of action for its solution	89	4.16	.763
5	Teamwork skill: ability to work collaboratively with others from diverse background	89	3.99	.859
6	Interpersonal skill: ability to interact effectively with others with sensitivity and skill	89	3.97	1.000
7	Computer technology skill: ability to generate spreadsheets, graphs, flowcharts and tables useful in business/industry.	89	3.80	1.030
Mean of Means/Average Standard Deviation			4.09	.942

Source: Field data (2020)

The results shown in Table 5 reveal the level at which the students perceived themselves to possess the employable skills that have been stated in literature and confirmed by supervisors and employees. The study found that among the top seven skills that were assessed on the final year management students, the ability to clearly express their thoughts, information and messages in speaking was the highest skill possessed by the students than any of the other employable skills. This was followed by the ability to express clearly their thoughts, information and messages in writing. The ability to speak and write clearly has been found to be among the top skills required by supervisors. Epkoh (2015), indicated that communication skill was significantly higher among students than any other employable skill. Castillo (2014) measured communication skills among graduating business and accounting students of Batangas State University in Philippines where the students measured above average.

These studies by Epkoh (2015) and Castillo (2014) support the fact that among business students, the level of communication skills is significantly high. However, upon analyzing what has been indicated by supervisors as the most important employable skill for management students, it appears there is a mismatch. Whereas supervisors prioritize written communication skill over oral communication skills, the students perceived themselves as possessing a higher level of oral communication skill over written communication skill. Hence, higher education institutions must take note of this issue as it can create a negative impact on the management students' chances to compete in the competitive job market.

The results in Table 5 also show that, the management students indicated that following communication skills, they possessed a high level of ability to influence and inspire others in ways that enhance their productivity and satisfaction. Leadership skill seems very important but not as the third most important skill. According to the supervisors, although leadership skill was equally important, it was ranked as the least important skill among the seven skills. This was also confirmed by the employees. Jovina, Ab Rahim and Shamsiah (2014) in a similar study confirmed that whereas leadership skill is important it was not among the highest skills that influenced graduate employability.

The indication by the students that the next skill they perceived to possess after communication skills was leadership skills suggest a critical gap between expectations of employers and competency of the students. This critical gap was emphasized by Geel (2015) who stated that management students are not fully equipped to demonstrate the employability skills expected by employers and as well suggested that close relationships be established between institutions of higher learning and private sector to enhance employability of management graduates. It must however be emphasized that this critical gap stems not from the level of possession of leadership skill by the management students but from misplaced priority.

The fourth highest possessed skill indicated by the student was ability to identify and critically assess problem and devise a plan of action for its solution. Just like the supervisors, Weligamage (2009) and Nesaratnam, Karan and Von (2018) affirmed that problem solving skills was critical for the success of management graduates. However, Orji (2013), concluded that students possessed low level of competency in problem solving. Nonetheless, the results in Tables 2 and 5 show that whereas the supervisors ranked it as the third most important skill, the management students as well perceived it to be one of the first four employable skills they highly possessed. Following this, the students ranked the ability to work collaboratively with others from diverse background and the ability to interact effectively with others with sensitivity and skill as the fifth and sixth skills respectively that they possessed. The least possessed skill that was ranked by the students was the ability to use computers to generate spreadsheets, graphs, flowcharts and tables useful in business or industry.

Buarki, Hepworth and Murray (2011) stated that the ability to demonstrate computer technology enables organizations to operate more efficiently, so employing staff with ICT skills is vital for the smooth running of any business. In Table 2, the supervisors ranked computer technology skill as the

fourth most important skill. This supports the assertion that indeed computer technology is critical to the success of management graduates. However, in Table 5, the management students indicated that their least possessed skill was computer technology.

Generally, the management students perceived themselves to possess a high level of employable skills. This was supported by the mean of means score of 4.09. With oral communication skills recording the highest mean ($M = 4.28$, $SD = .905$) and computer technology skill recording the lowest mean ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 1.030$), the level of possession of each of the seven skills was above average. This study therefore revealed that the management students perceived themselves to possess the necessary employable skills and supported the studies conducted by Ekpoh (2015) and Castillo (2014) that the level of employable skills among students and fresh graduates is significantly high. The study however contradicted the conclusion drawn by Geel (2015).

The human capital theory (Schultz, 1961; Becker 2009) argues that the productivity of an individual is increased by the level of education of that individual and this enhances job performance subsequently. As such, education provides marketable skills and abilities relevant to job performance, and thus the more highly educated people are, the more successful they will be in labour markets in terms of both incomes and work opportunities. It is therefore expected that as student go through education at the higher level, they ought to be able to acquire and possess the needed attributes that will assist them with increased chances of employability and productivity. The results of the study clearly indicate that their level of education has provided them with the opportunity to acquire the needed employable skills. Although the students may not have fully acquired the employable skills, their high level of possession as a result of their higher education offers them a high potential to compete successfully in the labour market.

Abas and Imam (2016) stated that graduates could gain due advantage in their place of work if they possess competence in employability skills. Thus, effort must be geared towards developing competence in employability skills by supervisors, higher academic institutions, labor agencies, and policy makers. However, a critical look at the levels of possession in this study (Table 5) further revealed that although they possess the essential skills necessary for employment, there was a difference between the priorities of supervisors and the ranking of possession by the students. This difference becomes critical as supervisors focus on not just demanding that management graduates possess the employable skills but do so in order of priority.

Conclusion

The study found out how supervisors, employees and students regarded skills such as written and oral communication, interpersonal, computer technology, team work, problem solving and leadership as essential employable skills necessary for the management students to be competitive in the job market. The views of the supervisors were not significantly different from that of the employees. The study showed that the students ranked themselves to have possessed the employable skills first in oral communication followed by written communication, leadership, problem-solving, teamwork, interpersonal and lastly computer technology skill. Although the mean scores indicated that their level of possession was high, the order of levels differed from the priorities of the supervisors. Generally, the management students indicated a level of possession of employable skills above average indicating a high level. Oral communication was ranked the highest possessed skill, followed by written communication, leadership, problem-solving, teamwork, interpersonal and lastly computer technology. It was concluded that the management students perceived themselves as not fully possessing the employable skills needed to succeed as administrators at the workplace however, they had a relatively high level of employable skills.

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