

Factors Affecting Employability of Private University Graduates in the Private Job Sectors of Bangladesh: A Gap between Expectation and Reality

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Abstract

Graduate employability has become a crucial issue among employers in many places around the world. There are several studies where it is found that some factors are very significant in enhancing graduate employability. Several studies have been conducted considering the situation in Bangladesh also where a large number of students graduate from public and private institutions every year. This study attempts to find the important factors of employability of private university graduates in the private job sectors in Bangladesh. Study has been conducted from both employers' point of view and graduates' point of view. This paper also tries to find the gap between expectation and reality where employers' perception is considered as expectation, as it reveals the demand of the organization, and graduates' perception is considered as the reality. Data has been collected through stratified sampling technique using self-administrated questionnaire from a sample of 384 fresh graduates from different private universities who are preparing themselves for job interviews and 100 employers from different private organizations in Bangladesh. Paired sample t-test has been done to find if there exists significant difference between employers' perception and graduates' perception. Result shows that both group of respondents strongly agreed on the importance of some factors like academic performance, IT Skills, job experience, communication skills. But most of the cases there exist noticeable gap between the perception of employers and graduates. From the gap it is summarized that graduates should more focus on factors like general knowledge, emotional intelligence, leadership skill, smart CV, technical skill, critical thinking and problem solving skill, personality, adaptability, job hunting etc. Through a Radar Diagram the gap between expectation and reality is shown at the end of the study. Finally it is recommended that by minimizing the gap between expectation and reality the employability of graduates will get higher and unemployment problem will be gradually solved.

1. Introduction

Every year, a significant number of students graduate from private universities in Bangladesh. Many of them struggle to secure employment in the private sector. This disconnect between education and employment is often attributed to gaps in essential employability skills. Despite of possessing very good academic qualifications, graduates frequently find themselves ill-equipped for the competitive job market as the employability of fresh graduates in the private sector in Bangladesh is influenced by several factors, and there often exists a gap between the perspectives of employers and graduates. This research paper tried to find the gap by studying these employability factors from both employers' point of view and graduates' point of view. Employers report that many candidates lack critical soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities, leadership skills which are crucial for thriving in dynamic professional environments. Additionally, deficiencies in practical experience, industry-specific knowledge, and adaptability to technological advancements further hinder their job prospects. The curriculum at private universities, though comprehensive in theoretical aspects, often fails to align with the practical demands of the job market. This misalignment results in graduates who are theoretically proficient but practically underprepared, leading to a challenging transition from academia to employment. Even employers notice that many graduates from private universities in Bangladesh overlook the importance of crafting a strong CV and remain unaware of job circulars and effective job-hunting strategies. This lack of emphasis on resume writing results in poorly structured and unimpressive CVs that fail to capture potential employers' attention. Additionally, graduates often miss out on job opportunities due to their unawareness of job postings and the latest trends in job hunting. This negligence not only diminishes their chances of securing interviews but also reflects a broader unpreparedness for the competitive job market, highlighting the need for better career guidance and training in job search techniques. Addressing these employability factors through curriculum reform, enhanced industry-academia collaboration, and targeted skill development programs is imperative for improving the employment outcomes of private university graduates in Bangladesh. By bridging these gaps, educational institutions can better equip students with the competencies required to excel in the private job sector, ultimately contributing to a more robust and capable workforce.

2. Literature Review

Chowdhury, MD (2023) in the study “Determinants of Employability of Fresh Business Graduates: A Statistical Analysis on Perspective of Different Private Universities in Bangladesh”, empirically investigated to find the determinants of employability of fresh business graduates of private universities in Bangladesh. Study has been conducted on business graduates' perspectives. Employers' perceptions were not taken.

Tran, Thi Tuyet (2019), in the study “Graduate Employability” attempted to forward the message that the process of enhancing graduate employability should go beyond the instrumental approach of equipping students with the knowledge and skills that employers require. Researcher suggested

for a meaningful dialogue between Govt. employers' and universities to identify collaborated roles and responsibilities.

Mamun, Z Muhammad, at Conference: 12th South Asian Management Forum 2013, in his paper titled "JOB-ATTRACTIVENESS VERSUS KEY EMPLOYABILITY FACTORS FOR FRESH BUSINESS GRADUATES IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR OF BANGLADESH" tried to determine the factors that influence business graduates' job-attractiveness and their employability in non-governmental organizations of Bangladesh. Study was fully on business graduates and no comparison was done on employers' and graduates' perspectives.

Wittekind, Anette in her 2010 work "A longitudinal study of determinants of perceived employability," conducted an empirical investigation to identify the factors that influence employability in Switzerland. Analyzing fundamental factors that influence perceived employability is the goal of this long-term study. A sample of 465 employees (time 1) from four Swiss organizations were used to test these; they were surveyed three times.

According to UKCES (2009a), certain vocations require particular traits, abilities, and expertise in addition to IQ. Combinations of transferable skills like problem-solving, teamwork, self-management, business knowledge, literacy and numeracy appropriate to the position, ICT proficiency, strong interpersonal and communication skills, the capacity to act independently while also adhering to instructions, and, when needed, leadership abilities are also crucial. Employers emphasized the necessity for specific attitudes and outlooks, such as motivation, persistence, and dedication, in addition to these talents. In the end, the study took into account 41 variables that were discovered in the literature and may be crucial for hiring business graduates. Study conducted only on business graduates.

Archer and Davison (2008) found that 86% of employers consider good communication skills to be important, yet many employers are dissatisfied that graduates can express themselves effectively. It was also found out that 'soft' skills such as team working are also vital and even more important than most 'hard' skills, although numeracy and literacy skills are considered essential by 70% of employers. Employers expect graduates to have technical and discipline competences from their degrees but require graduates also to demonstrate a range of broader skills and attributes that include team-working, communication, leadership, critical thinking, problem solving and managerial abilities. This study is based on employers, not on graduates.

After doing research, Kubler and Forbes (2005) discovered that employability was made up of specific degrees of cognitive skills, personal capabilities, technical competence, generic competencies, business/organization awareness, and critical evaluation, reflection, and review abilities.

Singh and Singh's, 2008 paper found that a number of reports issued by employers have urged universities to make more explicit efforts to develop the 'key', 'core', 'transferable', 'soft', 'employable' and/or 'generic skills' needed in many types of employment.

According to Bunt et al. (2005), two of the most important soft skills that employers look for throughout the hiring process are communication and interpersonal abilities. Interpersonal or

communication skills are, in general, personal abilities that enable one to engage with others both inside and outside of an organization. It demonstrated the worker's capacity to work well with coworkers and people from various backgrounds while completing tasks.

3. Objectives of the study

This study aims to measure the importance of factors related to the employability of private university graduates in Bangladesh. The specific objectives are outlined below:

- To find the factors of employability of fresh graduates in Bangladesh from both employers' and graduates' perspectives.
- To find the gap between employers' and graduates' perceptions.
- To provide a clear picture that would help the graduates to prepare themselves for the job market as per the employers' requirements.
- To put forward recommendations to bridge the gap which would enhance the employability and hence reduce the unemployment problem in Bangladesh.

4. Methodology

The study is descriptive as well as exploratory in nature and based on both primary data and secondary data. The sample population for this study is composed of 384 fresh graduates from different private universities and 100 employers from different private job sectors in Bangladesh. A stratified sampling technique was used to collect primary data by means of a survey, using self-administrated questionnaires from 384 respondents. Appropriate statistical analyses were used to satisfy the major objectives of the study such as radar diagram, bar diagram, weighted average, paired sample t-test etc with the help of standard statistical applications such as SPSS and MS Excel.

4.1. Research Hypothesis

There are several factors those influence the employability of graduates of private universities in the private job sectors in Bangladesh. This study attempts to project the importance of those factors from both employers' perspective and graduates' perspective. Thus the research hypothesis is, there is no difference between employers' perceptions and Graduates' perceptions. A paired sample t-test would be used to test this hypothesis.

4.2. Determination of sample size

The sample respondents can be determined by using the following formula suggested by Cochran. The formula used in this study is shown below:

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 pq}{e^2}$$

Where:

e is the desired level of precision (i.e. the margin of error),

p is the (estimated) proportion of the population which has the attribute in question,

q is $1 - p$.

The z-value is found in a Z table.

Sample size for 95% confidence interval thus determined is 384. So sample size is 384.

After collecting data appropriate statistical analyses were used to satisfy the major objectives of the study.

To project the importance of factors concerning both employers' and graduates' perspectives a structured questionnaire was administered with the following 5 point Likert scale: 1=not important, 2=less important, 3=moderately important, 4=very important, 5= most important.

4.3. Sample Distribution

Three hundred eighty four graduates were interviewed from twelve private universities of Bangladesh.

The sampled universities are: Asian University of Bangladesh, Dhaka International University, World University, City University, IUBAT, American International University Bangladesh, North South University, Northern University, Daffodil International University, Eastern University, University of Liberal Arts, and Manarat International University. Details are given below.

Table-1: Distribution of sample graduates from different private universities in Bangladesh

No.	Name of the University	No. of Students Interviewed	Percentage (%)
	Asian University of Bangladesh		
	World University of Bangladesh		
	IUBAT		
	City University		

	orthern University		
	merican International University-Bangladesh		
	ffodil International University		
	stern University		
	iversity of Liberal Arts Bangladesh		
	aka International University		
	orth South University		
	anarat International University		
	total Sampled Students	4	0%

Table-2: Distribution of sample employers from different private job sectors in Bangladesh

No.	Job sectors	No. of employers	Percentage
	Private Banks		%
	firms		%
	Real estate company		%
	Multinational company		%
	GO		%
	Private Ltd company		%
	Consultancy firms		%
	Educational Institutions		%

4.4. Implications

This study is highly significant for both educational institutions and employers. For educational institutions, the findings underscore the need to broaden curricula to include not only the academic but also technical skills and soft skills such as critical thinking, teamwork, leadership, and emotional intelligence. This will better prepare graduates for the job market. Employers, on the other hand, can use these insights to develop more comprehensive recruitment and training programs that bridge the existing skill gap. By aligning educational outcomes with industry expectations, the employability of graduates can be enhanced, leading to a more competent and job-ready workforce.

4.5. Limitations

- The main limitation of this study is data has been collected only from Dhaka City, and the respondents are from different private universities in Dhaka.
- Another limitation of the study is that it is based on the graduates of the private universities in Bangladesh. It did not include the government universities and the other disciplines. So, there is an ample scope to conduct further study by taking more samples with the inclusion of the government universities of Bangladesh and other disciplines in future for obtaining more accurate results in this regard.

5. Data Analysis, Findings and Discussions

5.1 List of Factors

Employability of private university graduates is influenced by various factors from both employers' and graduates' perspectives. Here are the list of factors considered in this study with their descriptions:

Factor	Description
Academic Performance (AP)	Academic results typically measured by assessing students' grades.
General Knowledge (GK)	Information on different subjects collected gradually, from reading, television, internet etc.
Communication Skills (CS)	Communicate effectively with others through writing, orally etc
Technical Skills (TS)	Specialized knowledge and expertise required to perform specific tasks and use specific tools and programs.
IT Skills	Combination of Computer literacy, technical and some soft skills.
Critical Thinking Skills (CTS)	Critical thinking is the ability to interpret, evaluate, and analyze facts and information that are available, to form a judgment or decide if something is right or wrong.
Teamwork and Problem Solving Skills (TPSS)	It enables individuals to work effectively and efficiently in a group setting.
Personality (PE)	Collection of interrelated behavioral, cognitive and emotional patterns that comprise a person's unique adjustment to workplace.
Leadership Skill (LS)	Refers to a set of abilities that help professionals guide teams, projects, and organizations.
Emotional Intelligence (EI)	Refers to the ability to perceive, understand, and manage one's own emotions and relationships.
Adaptability (AS)	The quality of being able to adjust to new office environment.
Job Experience (JE)	Job experience refers to the knowledge, skills, and expertise an individual has developed through their work history.
Job hunting and Job preparation (JP)	It's a procedure of searching job and preparing themselves for job interview.

Smart CV	Very smartly summarized person's career, qualifications, and education for a particular job.
Workshop, Seminar or club activities (WSCA)	Experience of attending workshop, seminar or different club activities in the university.

5.2. Weighted Average of the Factors

To project the importance of factors a structured questionnaire was administered with the 5 point Likert scale: 1=not important, 2=less important, 3=moderately important, 4=very important, 5=most important. Data has been collected from both employers and graduates. After collecting data weighted average was taken for each of the factors and from both employers' and graduates' perspectives. Result is shown as follows:

Table 3: Weighted average from both employers' and graduates' perspectives

Factors	Employers	Graduates
Academic Performance (AP)	4.25	4.47
General Knowledge (GK)	4.5	4.12
Communication Skills (CS)	4.5	4.16
Technical Skills (TS)	4.25	3.29
IT Skills	4.25	3.90
Critical Thinking Skills (CTS)	4	3
Teamwork and Problem Solving Skills (TPSS)	4.5	3.12
Personality (PE)	4.75	4.12
Leadership Skill (LS)	4.50	3.44
Emotional Intelligence (EI)	4.50	3.12
Adaptability (AS)	4.25	3.19
Job Experience (JE)	4	3.90
Job hunting and Job preparation (JP)	4.5	3.12
Smart CV	4.5	3.59
Workshop, Seminar or club activities (WSCA)	4	3.26

From the above data it is shown that graduates put highest emphasis on academic performance, communication skill, general knowledge where employers focused on their personal attitude, job hunting, leadership skill, smart cv and emotional intelligence.

Result can be also shown through the following bar diagram

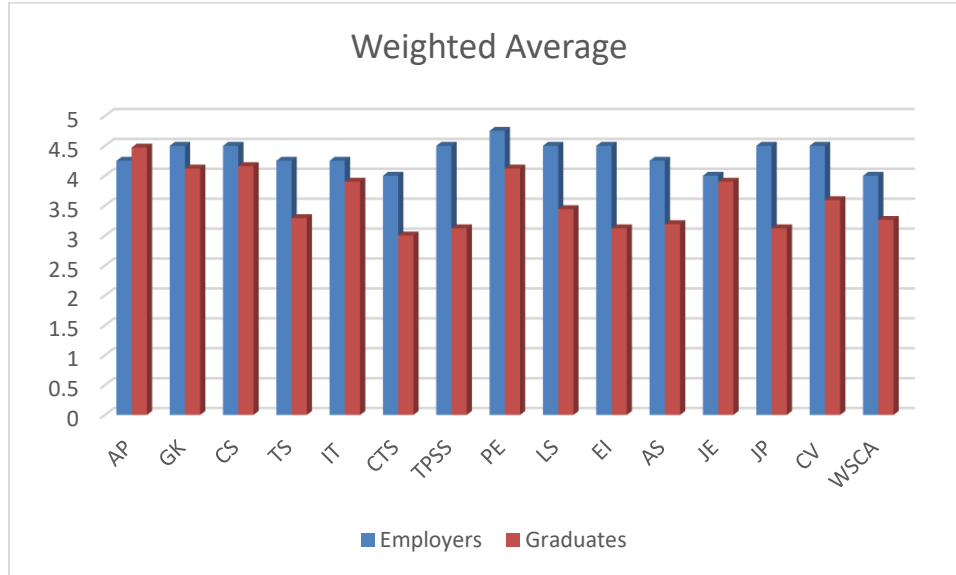


Fig: Perception gap between employers and graduates

Where, Academic Performance =AP, General Knowledge =GK, Communication Skills =CS, Technical Skills =TS, IT Skills=IT, Critical Thinking Skills =CTS, Teamwork and Problem Solving Skills =TPSS, Personality =PE, Leadership Skill =LS, Emotional Intelligence =EI, Adaptability =AS, Job Experience =JE, Job hunting and Job preparation =JP, Smart CV=CV, Workshop, Seminar or club activities =WSCA

5.3. Factor wise Discussions

Academic Performance: Both employers and graduates agree that academic performance is crucial for employability. . In the present study the weighted average projecting the importance of this factor is 4.25 from employers’ responses and 4.47 from graduates’ responses. So graduates are more focused on this factor. Employers often view strong academic records as indicators of a candidate's knowledge, discipline, and dedication. Graduates, on the other hand, recognize that high grades can open doors to job opportunities and provide a competitive edge in the job market. This shared perspective underscores the importance of academic achievement in securing employment, as it reflects a candidate's ability to learn and excel in their field. Consequently, maintaining good academic performance is seen as a key factor in enhancing employability prospects for graduates.

General Knowledge: General knowledge is also a very important factor for employability, but employers place more emphasis on it than graduates do as the weighted average for graduates is 4.12 and for employers it is 4.5. Employers believe that general knowledge demonstrates a candidate's awareness of the world, critical thinking skills, and adaptability to diverse work environments. While graduates recognize its importance, they may not prioritize it as highly as their academic performance. This difference in emphasis highlights the need for graduates to

develop a well-rounded skill set that includes both strong academic achievements and a broad understanding of general knowledge to meet employers' expectations and enhance their employability.

Communication Skills: Communication skills are another crucial factor for employability, with employers placing slightly more emphasis on them than graduates. Weighted average for employers is 4.5 and for graduates its 4.16. Employers' view strong communication skills as essential for effective teamwork, client interactions, and conveying ideas clearly. Graduates understand their importance but may not prioritize them as much as their academic performance. This difference highlights the need for graduates to develop robust communication abilities to align with employers' expectations and improve their employability in a competitive job market.

Technical Skills: Technical skills are of huge importance for employability, but graduates place less emphasis showing weighted average 3.29 where employers' weighted average is 4.25. Employers value these skills highly for their practical applications in the workplace, while graduates may focus more on academic achievements and other factors.

IT Skills: IT skills refer to the ability to use, manage, and troubleshoot computer systems, software, and networks. They encompass a range of competencies from basic computer literacy to advanced technical expertise. Employers' opinion shows that this skill is very essential and graduates also think so. Weighted average is 4.25 from employers and 3.90 from graduates.

Critical Thinking Skills: Critical thinking skills are extremely important for problem-solving and decision-making, but graduates tend to be less concerned with developing these skills compared to employers, who highly value their impact on workplace effectiveness. Here weighted average for employers and graduates are 4 and 3 respectively.

Teamwork and Problem Solving Skills: Collaborative skills enhance employability. But graduates put less attention here. Weighted average is only 3.12 where as it is 4.5 from employers' perspective.

Personality: Personality significantly affects employability, influencing teamwork and workplace dynamics. However, graduates are less concerned with this aspect compared to employers, who prioritize personality traits like adaptability, positivity, and interpersonal skills in potential candidates. Employers are very much concerned as the weighted average is 4.75 when graduates' weighted average is 4.12.

Leadership Skills: Leadership abilities matter a lot but graduates are not that much serious about this issue. Weighted average from graduates' point of view is 4.50 and from graduates' it is 3.44.

Emotional Intelligence: Emotional intelligence is increasingly emphasized by interviewers for its role in effective communication and teamwork. However, most graduates are relatively unfamiliar with this concept, highlighting a gap between employer expectations and graduate awareness. Here weighted average is 4.50 and 3.12 respectively for employers and graduates.

Adaptability: Adaptability is the ability to adjust to new conditions and environments quickly and effectively. It involves being flexible, open to change, and capable of handling unexpected challenges. So it has immense importance for employability but graduates are not that much aware of it. So there exists huge gap between employers and graduates showing weighted average 4.25 and 3.19 accordingly.

Job Experience: It is an important factor and both the group of respondents are very serious on this factor as the weighted average for employers is 4 and for graduates is 3.90.

Job Hunting and Job Preparation: many graduates do not frequently search job or prepare themselves for interviews. It is also termed as opportunity awareness. Lacking of it reduces the chance of getting job. Employers put much attention here. The weighted average for graduates is 3.12 only where for employers it is 4.5.

Smart CV: The standard of a CV (Curriculum Vitae) is indispensable for employability. A well-structured and professional CV (Smart CV) always provides an individual's skills, qualifications, and experience effectively. It creates a positive impression, showcases attention to detail, and highlights relevant achievements. A high standard CV increases the chances of getting shortlisted for job interviews, as it shows one's capabilities and suitability for the desired role. It's a way to proliferate a candidate in job market. Many graduates do not very sincere in preparing their CV. So weighted average for graduates is 3.59 and for employers it is 4.5.

Workshop, Seminar and Club Activities: Seminar, Workshop and club activities play a significant role in employability of graduates by offering numerous benefits. Through these activities they learn leadership, teamwork, and project management, developing crucial soft skills. It also expands professional networks, fosters connections with like-minded individuals, and showcases extracurricular activities, making candidates more attractive to employers seeking versatile and engaged individuals. Weighted average from employers' point of view is 4 and graduates' point of view is 3.26. Huge gap is here.

6. Test of Hypothesis

Paired sample t-test has been done to find whether there is significant differences between students' perception and teachers' perception and found the test as insignificant at 5% level of significance.

Paired Sample t-Test		Paired Differences			t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean			
Pair 1	Graduates Employers	-.26897	.61330	.11389	-1.89839	15	.025

Notes: The t-value is -1.89839. The p-value is .067302. The result is not significant at $p < .05$. The Hypothesis may be rejected at 5% level of significance.

So, from the above t-test it is found that there exists significant difference between employers' perception and graduates' perception.

This differences are visible in the following radar diagram also. If we have a closer look we can find those differences in the following diagram:

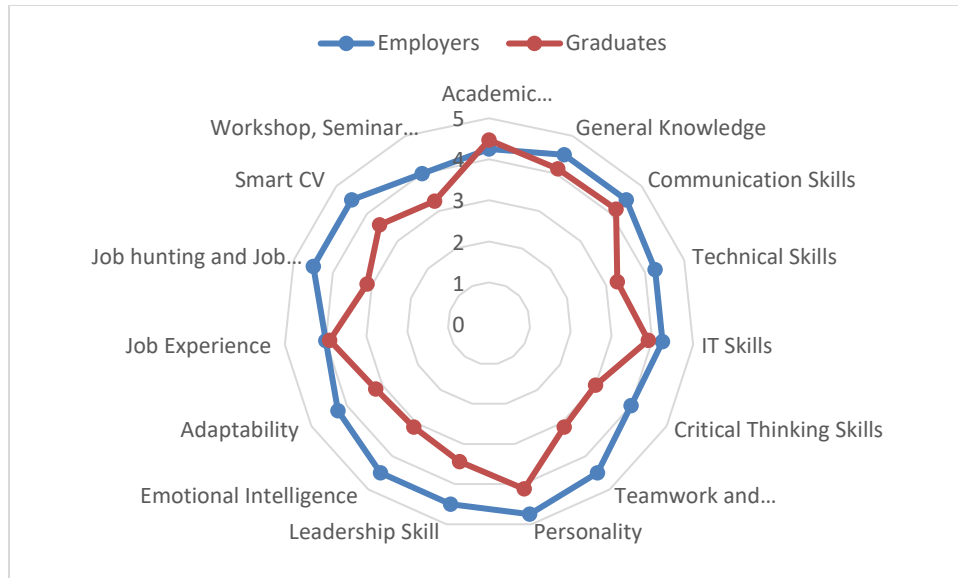


Fig 3: Difference between employers' perception and graduates' perception (Gap between Expectation and Reality)

Based on the findings, it is evident that both employers and graduates place significant emphasis on academic performance, IT skills, communication skills, and job experience. These elements are perceived as critical in shaping a graduate's employability. However, graduates tend to undervalue other essential skills such as general knowledge, technical skills, critical thinking, teamwork, problem-solving abilities, personality traits, leadership, emotional intelligence, smart CV writing, job hunting and preparation skills, and active participation in workshops, seminars, or club activities. In contrast, employers place a higher importance on these additional competencies in the job market.

7. Recommendations

From employers' perspective the study suggests the following recommendations:

- Graduates should consider a broader range of skills that are essential in the job market. While academic performance, IT skills, communication skills, and job experience are fundamental, graduates should also focus on developing their general knowledge, technical skills, critical thinking, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities. Additionally, cultivating a strong personality, leadership qualities, and emotional intelligence is vital for workplace success.
- Educational programs may integrate practical training that enhances smart CV writing, job hunting, and job preparation skills. Encouraging students to participate in workshops, seminars, and club activities can also provide valuable experiences that improve their overall employability.

8. Conclusion

The discrepancy between the skills that graduates from private universities in Bangladesh focus on and those that employers demand is evident. While graduates prioritize academic performance, IT skills, communication skills, and job experience, employers seek a more comprehensive skill set that includes general knowledge, technical skills, critical thinking, teamwork, problem-solving abilities, personality, leadership, emotional intelligence, smart CV writing, job hunting, job preparation skills, and active participation in workshops, seminars, and club activities. Employers recognize that a well-rounded skill set, which includes not only strong academic performance and technical know-how but also soft skills and extracurricular engagement, is crucial for successful job performance. They seek candidates who exhibit critical thinking, effective teamwork, and problem-solving abilities, along with strong leadership and emotional intelligence. They value proactive job preparation and the ability to present oneself effectively through a well-crafted CV. Consequently, there is a disparity between graduates' self-assessment and employers' expectations, highlighting the need for educational institutions to better align their training programs with the broader skill set demanded by the job market. By fostering these additional competencies, graduates will be better equipped to meet the diverse demands of the job market, making them more attractive to potential employers. Therefore, a holistic approach to education and skill development is essential for bridging the gap between graduates' capabilities and employers' expectations.

Conflicts of Interest

The author has disclosed no conflicts of interest.

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