

A study on Accounting students' perception on employability skills in University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Muscat

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Abstract: Universities are expected to contribute the economic growth of the country by preparing the graduates with necessary academic skills. Students are focusing more on knowledge or the course contents but put less effort on the skill that are inevitable for them to master in their chosen field. This study is focusing on the perception of accounting graduates of UTAS about employability skill that they should possess. The study found that the students feel Learning and Development skills are not necessary for employability irrespective of gender or the year of study. Learning and Development skills include working in teams, able to adapt technology, communication skills, lifelong learning and problem solving skills. When subject knowledge is compared with the year of study, the authors found that the students did not give importance to subject knowledge as well. However, Life/Career skills are considered to be valuable skills by the students whether it is compared with gender or year of study. The authors recommend that the students must be educated on the importance of Learning and development skills and subject knowledge, which will help them in securing a good job in the future. It will also help to solve the unemployment problems in the society.

Keywords: Employability skills, subject knowledge, students, University, Accounting, Unemployment problems.

1. INTRODUCTION

Universities are expected to contribute to the economic growth of the country by preparing the graduates with necessary academic skill. (Loyalka *et al.*, 2021). The objective of accounting education is to make industry ready professional accountants who can take up any challenge in the assigned field (Maali and Al-Attar, 2020). In the beginning of this decade, academicians and industry leaders discussed the ways to reduce the skill gap and ensure imparting of the right skills among accounting graduates (Elamer and Alshbili, 2020). The students need to be aware of the fact that employers are expecting certain basic skills from them at the time of employment offer such as communication skill, analytical skill, professionalism, teamwork etc. In addition, employers are looking for accounting skill, strong analytical skill and business awareness skill among the graduates (Aryanti and Adhariani, 2020).

In the past, employers felt that most of the graduates lack the basic skills and knowledge of accounting and this has resulted in a skill gap among graduates (Aryanti and Adhariani, 2020). The expectation gap arises between the perception of students and expectation of employers with regards to the key skill mainly because the accounting educators are not in line with the perception of employers (Aryanti and Adhariani, 2020). Studies among employers suggested that the accounting graduates do not fulfill non-technical skills. Non-technical skill that are not possessed by accounting graduates are teamwork skill, interpersonal skill, communication skill etc. (Elamer and Alshbili, 2020). Students are focusing more on knowledge or the course contents but less stress on the skill that are inevitable for them to master in their chosen field. Students feel that skills such as honesty, continuous learning, and works ethics are essential qualities looked forward by employers but the reality is different (Aryanti and Adhariani, 2020).

In many countries, there has been continuous complaint aimed at accounting education for being too academic and not concentrating on labor market requirement. Many researches show that accounting education in many universities across the globe does not prepare the students for practicalities of the business world (Low *et al.*, 2016).

Hence, this study is undertaken to understand the perception of students on the key individual and business skills required by employers in Sultanate of Oman or elsewhere. This study also aims to discover whether the university is catering to the needs of potential job markets.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Soundararajan *et al.* (2020) is of the opinion that higher educational institutions act as middlemen between the job seeker and job provider. Higher educational institutions teach the importance of employability skills and help in increasing the opportunity for the job seeker. It helps the job provider in finding skilled employees.

According to Soundararajan *et al.* (2021), Employability does not depend on a degree alone. It depends on general and non-technical skills as well. Students' ability to find a job depends on employability skills, students' attitude, values, information and ethics. Majority of the students are not able to find suitable jobs due to lack of these skills.

Leong (2013) identified that WIL (work-integrated learning) narrow down the expectation gap between the academia, industry and students. It also support the development of graduates who can respond to rapidly changing environment and adaptable towards various circumstances.

Soundararajan *et al.* (2020) pointed out that graduating students should develop the practical application of technical talents like designing, testing, configuration management tools, personal abilities involving communication skills, teamwork, etc. and professional qualities which includes ethics, values, etc.

Ahmed (2020), investigated the importance of vocational skill and how the educators in the UK inculcated this in their accounting curricula. The data was collected from the educators and final year students. The results show that the accounting employers are looking for not only technical and cognitive skills but also transferable skills like communication, self-reflection, teamwork and organizational skills.

Aryanti (2021), studied the perceptions of accounting students and expectations of employers towards the knowledge required by accounting students in Indonesia. The result shows that the students perceived honesty, continuous learning and work ethics as important skills required. The skills required as per employers are work ethics, teamwork, time management. The study also shows that there is an expectation gap between the student and that of employers.

Mali (2020) investigated the current accounting curricula is suitable for Jordanian job market for accountants. The study found that there is significant skill gap between courses offered by the Jordanian universities in accounting curricula and markets requirements and needs.

Ali (2016) studied the perception of employees and educators on the importance of skill incorporated in higher education and soft skill embedded in accounting students in Pahang, Malesia. He concluded that the employers wanted the graduates to place higher values on taxation rather than auditing which educators perceived. The educators believe that there is too much reliance on memorization but employers feel that graduates should learn faster in their career.

Leong (2015) studied the importance of Information and communication technology (ICT) in education. He studied how Information system (IS), social networking technology (SNT) and web 2 is changing the learning outcomes of universities Malaysia. The study concluded that different patterns of technology like digital library, Web 2, office application, Mind map tools and mobile phone technology tools widely used by varsities for better delivery of academics in higher education institutions.

Lim (2019) conducted a study on whether perceptual gap exist between employers and fresh accounting graduates and found that there is no gap exist on personal qualities. Employers rated ability to work in team, ability to handle stress and problem solving skill. They also stressed the importance of basic knowledge of professional standards, auditing, reporting and professional conduct as well. They also wanted the graduates to be responsible, reliable and trustworthy.

Wolcot (2021) recommended that the accounting educators apply a model of cognitive development- the reflective judgmental model for better understanding of students thinking and to design more effective learning activities. The authors suggested for adoption of improved critical thinking education for accounting students.

Anis (2017) explored auditors and accounting educates perception of accounting education gap and its impact on the audit quality in Egypt. The finding shows that there is significant negative relationship between deficiencies in specific skill like decision making, information technology, critical thinking, legal knowledge, problem solving skill, ethical behavior, ambiguity tolerance, presentation skill, cost and managerial accounting skill on audit quality.

Eloff (2017) investigated whether pervasive skill like competency in IT etc. can successfully incorporated with technical core subjects (accounting) to see whether the students' performance is improving due to integration. The result shows that the integration resulted an improvement of students understanding of the core subjects.

Nadia(2016) found that there is a knowledge and skill gap among accounting graduates. The authors advocated for use design based research within the framework of cultural historical activity theory to support the comprehensive structure of University programs. Integrated model through which the planned series of interventions are implemented in accounting education arena.

Senik(2013) found that in UK, the required skill related to accounting, tax and auditing were lacking among accounting graduates. The nature of IT skill, unclear expectation, lack of communication among stake holders are the main reason for this skill gap. The result also indicates that the accounting educations are major players among all stakeholders and should initiate to bridge the gap.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

University of Technology and Applied Sciences is one of the front-runner in the education arena in Sultanate of Oman. It offers accounting program to large number of students in different governorates. In order to find out whether the accounting students are aware of the skills expected by the employers, a structured questionnaire was prepared. Questionnaires were distributed to the Accounting students of the University who are studying in Muscat and data was collected using Google forms, which was sent to their official email addresses. Out of 105 questionnaires distributed, the authors were able to collect 102 responses. After filtering, 97 responses were found to be useful for the study. The responses were analyzed with the help of ANOVA and the results of the analysis are presented below:

4. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1: ANOVA- Relationship between Current year of study and students' opinion on employability skills

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Learning and Development skills	Between Groups	79.171	3	26.390	0.871	0.459
	Within Groups	2846.880	94	30.286		
	Total	2926.051	97			
Life/Career skills	Between Groups	153.015	3	51.005	3.093	0.031
	Within Groups	1549.893	94	16.488		
	Total	1702.908	97			
Subject knowledge	Between Groups	42.103	3	14.034	1.720	0.168
	Within Groups	766.999	94	8.160		
	Total	809.102	97			

Source: Authors Calculation from the survey

Table 1 shows the ANOVA for the current year of study and employability skills expected by the employers. The result reveals that learning and development skills, subject knowledge, and the students opinion about employability skills is not influenced by the year of study. This is proved by the p values of 0.459 and 0.168 respectively of learning and development skills, and subject knowledge, which is more than 5% level of significance. It further reveals that year of study influences life/career skills. This is proved by the p value of 0.031, which is less than 5% level of significance.

Table 2: ANOVA- Relationship between Gender and students' opinion on employability skills

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Learning and Development skills	Between Groups	.758	1	0.758	0.025	0.875
	Within Groups	2925.293	96	30.472		
	Total	2926.051	97			
Life/Career skills	Between Groups	58.500	1	58.500	3.415	0.068
	Within Groups	1644.408	96	17.129		
	Total	1702.908	97			
Subject knowledge	Between Groups	43.337	1	43.337	5.433	0.022
	Within Groups	765.765	96	7.977		
	Total	809.102	97			

Source: Authors Calculation from the survey

Table 2 shows the ANOVA results for the Gender and employability skills. Gender influences life/career skills and subject knowledge with p values of 0.068 and 0.022 respectively, which is less than 5% level of significance. As the p values are less than 5% level of significance, it means that students' opinion about life/career skills, subject knowledge and gender are related, and gender influences their opinion. However, the gender of the students do not influence Learning and Development skills, the p value is 0.875, which is more than 5% level of significance. This shows that gender does not influence Learning and Development skills.

5. CONCLUSION

The study was carried to find out the students' (accounting graduates) perception on employability skills such as Career / Life skills, Learning and Development skills and subject knowledge. It disclosed the fact that the students conveyed that Learning and Development skills are not necessary for employability irrespective of gender or the year of study. Learning and Development skills include working in teams, able to adapt technology, communication skills, lifelong learning and problem solving skills. According to Fajaryati et al (2020), Learning and Development skills are indispensable for employability. When subject knowledge is compared with the year of study, the authors found that the students did not give importance to subject knowledge as well. However, Life/Career skills are considered to be valuable skills by the students whether it is compared with gender or year of study.

The authors recommend that the students must be educated on the importance of Learning and development skills and subject knowledge, which will help them in securing a good job in the future. It will also help to solve the unemployment problems in the society.

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