
**Assessment of Employable Skills: A Comparative Study of Employers and
Graduates in the Field of Education**

BY

Donald M. DONALD, *Ph.D*
Department of Vocational Studies
Faculty of Education
Harper Adams University
United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

An enormous change has occurred in the professional world of learning. In order to develop a knowledge-based economy, awareness has been given not only to hard but also to soft skills. Nowadays employers consider soft skills a very important attribute in job applicants. It is known that employers in United Kingdom seek strong soft skills, as well as hard skills in their new employees. But do students have this awareness? The main goal of this research was to establish which skills are more sought for by employers and if they match the skills that students ending their degree consider most important when applying for a job. In the present study we focused on education graduates and employers in the field of education. In the research, we used the mixed qualitative-quantitative methodology. After analysing the data, we were able to conclude that both employers and employees' perspectives considering the importance of soft and hard skills tend to match.

KEYWORDS: Assessment, graduates; employable skills, employers; education; comparative study.

Introduction

It has become obvious that the days of dropping off your resume at a prospective company to “show initiative” are long gone. In today’s society the job market is more competitive and tech-driven than ever before. Nowadays, employers seek out a wide range of skills even before reaching out for an interview. After an interview, they may even contact multiple references to validate your skills and proficiencies. But building a robust skill-set doesn’t end once you get the job. In order to advance your career, you’ll need to identify the important soft and hard skills and sharpen them often, so it’s very important that you are conscious of them. This brings us to some very valid questions: what’s the difference between hard and soft skills? Are soft skills more important than hard skills, or is it the other way around? Do the skills valued by employers match those that graduates consider most important? In this work, we’ll try to give an answer to these questions.

The concept of employable skills

Over the years there has been a growing unemployment rate, especially among young adults. Regardless the economic situation, one of the main reasons for this problem is that professional competencies are not suited to the labour market (Taylor, 2005; Sgobbi and Suleman, 2013).

According to a work by Garcia- Aracil et al. (2004), skills are grouped into hard and soft and are defined as the level of performance of an individual on a particular task or the capability to perform a job well which can be divided into technical elements and behavioural elements (Noe, Hollenbeck & Gerhart, 2015). Whereas hard skills are easier to quantify and consist of the technical expertise and knowledge needed for a job, the achievements that are included on a résumé, such as education, work experience, knowledge, and a level of expertise, soft skills are interpersonal qualities, also known as people skills or personal attributes that one possesses. These career attributes are difficult to master and measure. In today's competitive marketplace not only hard skills should be considered but soft skills as well mainly because an organization's image is reflected through the image presented by the employees of that company (Nair & Mukherjee, 2015).

Along with hard skills, soft skills have gained power because employers want their employees to have a harmonious relationship with their co-workers and customers. According to Truong and Laura (2015), soft skills are seen as a set of personal skills such as the ability to communicate, and problem-solve, leadership qualities, the ability to work well in a team, be amicable and a good listener. Han defends that in order to be considered a soft skill, the skill must have three features: it must be portable and valuable to any job, rules for mastering this skill are not black or white and mastering it is an ongoing journey.

There are studies that show a gap between academic acquired skills and practical skills knowledge needed by the companies and sought for by the employers (Alsafadi & Abunafesa, 2012; Radermacher, Walia & Knudson, 2014). In this context, students should be aware of the market needs and relate their abilities to be able to meet the requirements of their future employers. The main goal of education should be to prepare the instilling graduate appropriate skills for the tasks they will be performing in their future jobs. A mismatch between the required skills and the skills a graduate actually possesses has a significant contribution in their productivity, wages and probability to get a job. This way, it becomes easy to understand that the skills required by employers must be equivalent with the skills of graduates (Patacsil & Tablatin, 2017).

Objective, Sample and Methodology Study Objective

The objective of this study was to assess, through the application of a questionnaire to education graduates and employers in the field which skills are most valued, soft or hard, and if the opinions of the graduates combine with those of the professionals on the field. This study is justified by allowing to understand which skills are most valued when applying for a job and if the graduates have that same perception, in addition to highlighting the 8 soft and hard skills most valued.

Methodology

The design adopted in the present investigation is of the exploratory-descriptive type with a qualitative approach based on the application of a questionnaire. Our aim was to assess which skills do employers in the field of education in United Kingdom value the most and if they match the opinion of the graduates on the subject. The study population was directed to graduates in education and employers in the same field. A questionnaire consisting of two parts was applied: I

- Sociodemographic data, and II - Specific questions in order to obtain information considering the object of study of the present investigation.

Sample Characterization

In the present study, a non-probabilistic or non- random sampling process was used, using convenience sampling, focusing on the study of education graduates and employers in the field. The individual characteristics of the respondents can be seen through the figures below.

Figure 1: Age

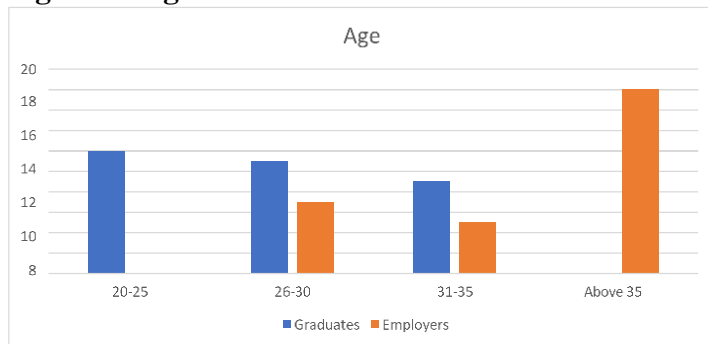
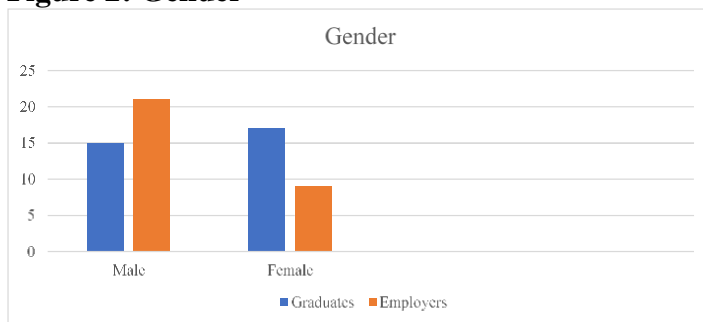


Figure 2: Gender



Data Analysis and Discussion

Employer’s Questionnaires

On the side of employers, when asked about *when hiring an employee, what importance do you attribute to soft skills?* 89% responded they are very important, 11% of the respondents considered them important and none of them considered them not important.

According to the second question, *Do you consider that employers see soft skills as or more important than hard skills?*, 91% of the respondents answered that both skills are equally important; 6% considered soft skills more important and 3% of the respondents said that hard skills were more important.

Regarding the third question, *Which 8 soft skills do you value the most?*, employers overwhelmingly indicated that integrity, communication and responsibility are the top three soft skills needed by employees in today’s workplace. All of the employees (100%) indicated that these three skills were extremely important. These skills were followed by professionalism and

teamwork with (84.2% and 71.8%, respectively). Creativity, interpersonal relationship and persuasion came next with 61.4%, 60.2% and 57.8%.

Concerning the fourth question, *Which 8 hard skills do you think employers value most?*, employers indicated that having a university degree in the field of education, as well as specialization courses in the field are the skills needed by employees in today's workplace (100%). Next, they chose performance improvement, specific certifications and project management (79.6%; 77.4% and 73.6%). Technology domain, proficiency in a foreign language and analytical thinking came next with 66.2%, 62.4% and 56.8%.

Graduates Questionnaires

The same four questions were asked to the education graduates with the respective adaptations.

When asked about *when hiring an employee, what importance do you consider employers attribute to soft skills?* 83% responded they are very important, 17% of the respondents considered them important and none of them considered them not important.

According to the second question, *Do you consider that employers see soft skills as or more important than hard skills?*, 81% of the respondents answered that both skills are equally important; 11% considered soft skills more important and 8% of the respondents said that hard skills were more important.

Regarding the third question, *Which 8 soft skills do you think employers value the most?* Graduates indicated that, communication and responsibility are the top two soft skills more valued. All of the graduates (100%) indicated that these two skills were extremely important. These skills were followed by professionalism, creativity and teamwork with (73.4% and 68.2%, and 66.4%, respectively). Interpersonal relationship and persuasion came next with 64.4%, 62.6%. Positive attitude followed with 53.6%

Concerning the fourth question, *Which 8 hard skills do you think employers value most?*, graduates indicated that having a university degree in the field of education, as well as specialization courses in the field are the skills needed by employees in today's workplace (100%) exactly the same as employers. Next, they chose specific certifications, performance improvement and project management (82.4%; 79.2% and 76.6%). Technology domain, proficiency in a foreign language and analytical thinking came next with 62.6.2%, 59.6% and 54.8%.

Conclusion

After analysing the data obtained, we could conclude that in reality both hard and soft skills are important and needed to be a good employee and drive a high- performing organization. There will always be people who build ground-breaking products and produce unparalleled content, but there will also be people who will need to lead these endeavours. You simply cannot run a successful organization with only hard-skilled or only soft-skilled employees. Finding harmony between the two categories of skills and how they complement each other is crucial.

In this study we could also check that both employers and employees consider soft and hard skills important when applying for a job or hiring an employee. Even though there wasn't a complete match between the top 8 soft and hard skills more important for the educator's job, the match between the perspective of employers and education graduates is almost 100% which means that graduates are conscious about the market needs and what employers want when they're hiring an employee.

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