# Employability skills of university alumni

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**Abstract**

Employability of graduate has become an issue in Pakistan since various university graduate students do not meet the prerequisites of employers. The focus of this study was to analyse the employability skills of graduates of the University of Gujrat (UOG). The objectives of the study were; to determine the area in which alumni were employed, to determine employer's perception about alumni employability skills, to determine the alumni's perception about their employability skills. The study was conducted by using mixed methods techniques. The study was exploratory in nature and survey questionnaire was used to collect the data. The sample of the study was graduate students from University of Gujrat of year 2017-18. The data was collected from 1600 graduates enrolled in bachelor, masters and PhD degree programs of 36 departments of UOG whereas 50 employers responded the questionnaire about the employability skills. Data was analyzed by using descriptive statistics. The alumni were least satisfied about their knowledge skills and Employers were least satisfied about the communication skills of UOG graduates. The employers perceived that the interpersonal skills of their employees were very good. Similarly, the graduates affirmed that they have very good interpersonal skills.

**Key words:** *Employability skills, alumni, employers*

## 1.    Introduction

Higher education is most important standard for economic and social progress to meet the requirements of the knowledge economy (Phago & Thwala, 2015). The main objective of the higher education is to prepare alumni to chase different professions in a country. Thus there is a need to develop employability skills among university graduates (Davies et al., 2012). Therefore employers have expectations that graduate students will have the employability skills. Many universities are doing efforts to enhance the employability skills among their graduates. Employability of graduates has become an immense issue in various developing countries like in Pakistan, since many graduate students do not meet the

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prerequisites of employers. Employability skills are a set of skills that are required for a job or defined as the skills required not only to obtain employment, but also to develop one's potential, personal habits and attitudes. Hooley in 2017 discussed that employability skills provided an opportunity to graduates to be aware of their potential, knowledge and attitudes to become effective workers and citizens of a country. According to Haque (2013), the difference between employability and employment is that the employability is associated with having the abilities that help and increase the chances of employment while employment is identical with having an occupation. The employability skills adopted in the study are categorized as knowledge, communications skills, interpersonal skills, and management/leadership skills. Rest of the paper is organized as: In section 2, Research purpose and objectives were defined, Methodology was presented in Section 3. In Section 4 Results were reported whereas in section 5 concluding remarks were presented.

## 2.    Objectives
The objectives of the study were to:
a)   Determine the area in which alumni of university of Gujrat were employed,
b)   Determine employer's perception about graduate employability skills
c)   Determine the alumni perception about their employability skills.

So, the basic purpose of this study was to determine the alumni and employers' perception about the employability skills from a sample of university alumni and employers.

## 3.    Methodology
The study was conducted by using mixed methods techniques. The study was exploratory in nature and survey questionnaire was used to collect the data. The sample of the study was alumni and employers from University of Gujrat of year 2017-18, who responded the questionnaire about the employability skills. Data was analyzed by using descriptive statistics. Respondents were asked to respond on 4-point Likert scale questionnaire. The scale ranged as 4 = Excellent, 3 = Good, 2 = Fair and 1 = Poor.

### 3.1    Employer Questionnaire
The study is based on two survey questionnaires, first one is related to employer while other is related to alumni of UOG. The Questionnaire of Employer Survey consisted of 24 items in four dimension; Knowledge skills, Communication Skills, Interpersonal Skills and Work Skills. An open ended question was also included in the survey. This question

provided an opportunity for employers to write their recommendations about employability skills.

Employer survey was conducted through "Google Form". The Google Form was sent to employers through email. Various emails were sent to participants as reminders. A total of 50 employers participated as respondents of the survey. Data was analyzed by using descriptive statistics.

### 3.2    Alumni Questionnaire

The Questionnaire of Alumni's Survey consisted of 16 items in four dimensions; Knowledge skills, Communication Skills, Interpersonal Skills and Management/Leadership Skills. An open ended question was also included in the survey. This question provided an opportunity for alumni to write their suggestions about employability skills.

The sample of the study was alumni from University of Gujrat for the year 2017-18. A total of 1600 alumni responded the questionnaire about the employability skills. A comparison was carried out in this study between the perceptions of employers and graduates of UOG about the employability skills.

### 4.    Results

The study was conducted by using mixed methods techniques. A qualitative section was composed of an open ended question in both surveys. Firstly the descriptive analysis of three research questions/ objectives were defined. Secondly the analysis of qualitative section was described.

### 4.1     The areas in which UOG alumni were employed:

Following statistics determine the areas in which UOG graduates were employed.

  i.   22% were employed in Government sector
  ii.  20% were employed in Academic Sector
  iii. 12% were employed in UOG (within organization)
  iv.  39% were employed in Industries / Private sector
  v.   5% were employed in non-profit organizations
  vi.  2% were employed in banking sector

### 4.2     Employer's perception about alumni employability skills

As employer survey was conducted to know what skills employers wants in their employees. The comparison of results were carried out by using descriptive analysis.

The mean is a measure of "Central value". Mean value indicates the central response of the respondents for a particular category. Standard Deviation is a measure of dispersion (variation in the response). It is an average absolute distance of response from the central value (Mean). Descriptive statistics of each dimension of survey is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Descriptive measures

|  | Knowledge | Communication Skills | Interpersonal Skills | Work Skills |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Mean Score SD** | 3.05 0.67 | 2.97 0.64 | 3.28 0.70 | 3.16 0.73 |

i. Employers' perception about knowledge of their employees is shown from the above results i.e. mean score 3.05 on the knowledge showed that the University of Gujrat taught a sound knowledge of the subject among their graduates.

ii. Descriptive score of communication skills showed that the there is need to improve communication skills in alumni of UOG.

iii. According to employer's perception, interpersonal skills of their employees are excellent as the descriptive score on interpersonal skills showed that university plays an effective role in developing interpersonal skills among their graduates.

**iv.** The score of Work skills acquired by employer showed great contribution of the University in imparting work skills in alumni.

**Table 2:** Percentages of responses of Employers' Survey

|  | Poor (%) | Fair (%) | Good (%) | Excellent (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Knowledge** | 3 | 16 | 56 | 25 |
| **Communication Skills** | 1 | 21 | 60 | 18 |
| **Interpersonal Skills** | 1 | 14 | 44 | 40 |
| **Work Skills** | 1 | 17 | 49 | 33 |

### 4.2.1 Knowledge

Eighty-one (81) percent respondents perceived that their employees have good knowledge of the subject i.e. (excellent 25%, good 56%), 16 percent respondents identified that their employees have fair knowledge of the subject, and only 3 percent respondents revealed that their employees have poor concerned knowledge.

Employers' view about concerned knowledge of their employees was good and rated them as most skilled in "*computer knowledge*" and rated lowest in "*ability to design a system component or process*".

### 4.2.2 Communication Skills

Seventy-eight percent of the employers supported that their employees have very good communication skills i.e. (excellent 18 %, good 60 %), Twenty one percent employers specified that they observed fair level of communication skills among their employees.

Overall employer's perception about Communication skills was rated as good that is *oral communication"* of their employees was good while their "*report writing skill*s" need improvement.

### 4.2.3 Interpersonal Skills

Eighty-eight percent respondents were satisfied about the Interpersonal skills of their employees (excellent 40%, good 44%), whereas 14 percent respondents specified that they have observed fair level of Interpersonal skills among the graduates.

Employers' opinion about Interpersonal skills was good and rated them as most skilled in "*ability to work in team"*, while improvement is required in "*reliability skill*".

### 4.2.4 Work Skills

Eighty-two percent respondents verified that their employees have desired work skills (excellent 33%, good 49%). 17 percent respondents ensured that they observed fair level of work skills among their employees.

Employers rated that their employees have required work skills and rated them as most skilled in "*discipline"* and need to improve their "*Time management skills".*

### 4.2.5 Qualitative Section:

The following open ended question was included in survey:
Did you know as to what to expect from graduates?

It is found that the responses of employers clustered around the following major themes:

1. Research & practical skills should be improved
2. Communication skills of graduates are not satisfactory, there is need to improve these skills.
3. There is need to improve confidence level of alumni.
4. Analytical skills need improvement.
5. Report writing skills should be improved
6. Innovation skills need improvement.

### 4.3    Alumni's perception about their employability skills

To know about the employability skills of alumni, the opinion of alumni is also very useful therefore a survey related to fresh graduates was conducted to know about their employability skills. The comparison of results was carried out by using descriptive analysis. Descriptive statistics of survey is presented in

**Table 3:** Descriptive measures of Alumni Survey

|  | Knowledge | Communication Skills | Interpersonal Skills | Management /Leadership Skills |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Mean Score** | 3.14 | 3.25 | 3.35 | 3.31 |
| **SD** | 0.79 | 0.72 | 0.69 | 0.74 |

I. According to the perception of alumni knowledge needs to be improved while mean score of knowledge skills fall in the good category i.e. mean score 3.14 on the knowledge skills showed a significant contribution of university academia in imparting sound knowledge skills among their alumni.

II. Descriptive score of communication skills showed that the graduates had better communication skills. It is interested to know as employers stated that their employees' communication skills needs improvement while according to graduates their communication skills are strong.

III. Interpersonal skills of graduates fall in excellent category as the descriptive score on interpersonal skills showed that university plays an effective role in developing interpersonal skills among their graduates.

IV. The score of Management /Leadership skills acquired by alumni showed great contribution of the University in imparting these skills among them.

**Table 4:** Percentages of responses of Alumni's Survey

|  | Poor (%) | Fair (%) | Good (%) | Excellent (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Knowledge skills | 1 | 17 | 49 | 33 |
| Communication skills | 0 | 14 | 45 | 41 |
| Interpersonal skills | 1 | 10 | 43 | 46 |
| Management/Leadership skills | 2 | 11 | 41 | 46 |

### 4.3.1 Knowledge
Eighty-two percent respondents ensured that they have good knowledge of the subject i.e. (excellent 33%, good 49%), 17 percent respondents identified that they have fair and only 1 percent respondents revealed that they have poor concerned knowledge.

Alumni judged their concerned knowledge to be good and rated themselves as most skilled in "*computer/IT knowledge*" and rated lowest in "*ability to design a system component or process*".

### 4.3.2 Communication Skills
Eighty six percent respondents supported that they have good communication skills among them (excellent 41%, good 45%), while 14 percent graduates have fair level of communication skills.

Overall alumni judged their Communication skills to be good and rated as they are most skilled in *oral communication"* while rated lowest in "*report writing skill*".

### 4.3.3 Interpersonal Skills
Eighty-nine percent respondents were stated that they have good Interpersonal skills (excellent 46%, good 43%), whereas 10 percent respondents ensured that they have fair level of Interpersonal skills among them graduates only 1 percent respondents did not avail opportunities to develop their Interpersonal skills at University.

Alumni rated themselves in Interpersonal skills as good and assessed as most skilled in "*ability to work in team"*, while lowest in "*ethical values*".

### 4.3.4 Management / Leadership Skills
The data on management/ leadership skills showed that 87 percent alumni satisfied that they avail better opportunities to learn Management / Leadership Skills at the university (excellent 46%, good 41%) however

11 percent respondents stated that they received fair level of Management/ Leadership skills just 2 percent of the respondents had the opinion that poor opportunities provided them for learning management / leadership skills during their stay at university.

Graduates refereed their management skills to be good and rated themselves as most skilled in "*discipline"* and lowest in "*Judgement".*

### 4.3.5    Qualitative Section:
The following question was included in survey: Please make any additional comments or suggestions. It is found that the responses of alumni assembled around the following major themes:

1. Almost 25 percent suggestions were related to research and practical work. Students suggested that there is need to improve their practical skills.
2. According to alumni their communication skills were not satisfactory, there is need to improve these skills.
3. Management/ leadership skills should be improved
4. There is need to improve interaction between faculty & students.
5. Report writing skills of alumni needs to improve.

### 5.    Conclusion
The theoretical knowledge of academic subject is not sufficient for alumni to survive in the information market. The alumni will have to improve their skills to meet the needs of employers. As the employability skills of UOG graduates in the perspectives of Alumni and Employers were highlighted and concluded from the above discussion that alumni will have to improve their communication skills, problem-solving skills, good knowledge of computer/IT, practical and presentation skills. These features will increase their employability skills. Whereas the employers think that their employees perceived good interpersonal skills. Similarly, the graduates affirmed that they have very good interpersonal skills.

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