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POTENTIAL GRADUATES' KNOWLEDGE, READINESS, AND DISPOSITION TO 21ST CENTURY EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN, IBADAN NIGERIA

BY

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Abstract

The interplay between knowledge acquisition, readiness for practical application, and the disposition of graduates towards developing and utilizing these skills is of paramount importance in the 21st century world of works. This study assessed potential graduates' knowledge, readiness, and disposition to 21st century employability skills at the University of Ibadan (UI). The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population comprised all undergraduate students in the university. Out of 17 faculties, balloting mechanism was used to select 12 faculties, in which 12 departments were also selected. Purposive technique was used to select 590 students. A validated Potential Graduates Employability Scale (PGES) with four sub-sections, was used for data collection. Data were collected through Survey heart link sent to WhatsApp platform designed for the research. A descriptive statistic of percentage, frequency count, mean and standard deviation were used to analysed data collected. Result revealed that potential graduates' knowledge was average, readiness level was high and disposition to 21st century was positive. The findings shed light on the significance of cultivating a proactive mindset, adaptability, and a commitment to continuous learning as potential graduates of the 21st century. Furthermore, there is need for educational institutions and policymakers to prioritize the integration of 21st century employability skills within curricula, foster culture that encourages graduates' development of these skills. Critical curriculum reforms and pedagogical innovations to enhance students' knowledge, readiness and foster a positive disposition towards acquiring the essential skills demanded by the modern workforce is necessary at this material time.

Keywords: Knowledge, Readiness, Disposition, Employability Skill, University of Ibadan

Introduction

Unemployment rates in Africa vary widely among countries and regions due to diverse economic, social, and political factors. Generally, many African countries struggle with high levels of unemployment, particularly among youth populations. It is remarked that factors contributing to this include limited job opportunities, inadequate infrastructure, skills mismatches, and economic instability. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the overall unemployment rate for Africa was around 6.1% in 2020. However, youth unemployment rates tend to be much higher, often exceeding 20% in many countries. Additionally, underemployment and informal employment are prevalent issues, with many people working in low-paying, insecure jobs that do not provide adequate livelihoods. It is important to note that these statistics can vary widely among countries and regions within Africa. Specifically, Nigeria as a country is facing significant unemployment challenges, with rates

fluctuating but generally remaining high (Omoniyi & Oderinde, 2022).

Nigeria's unemployment rate fluctuates around 27% to 33% (Omoniyi 2022). However, these figures change over time due to various economic, social, and political factors. Several factors have been attributed to this which include rapid population growth, limited job opportunities, and economic instability. The University of Ibadan (UI), Nigeria's premier institution of higher learning, has undertaken several initiatives to address unemployment and enhance the employability of its students. Some of these efforts include curriculum review and skill development; entrepreneurship and innovation programmes; internship and industrial attachment programmes; career services and job placement support; research and innovation; continuing education and professional development, among others. These initiatives enable professionals to enhance their qualifications, stay competitive in the job market, and pursue career advancement opportunities (Okay–Somerville & Scholarios, 2015). Based on this, it is believed that the University of Ibadan is committed to equipping its students with the knowledge, skills, and experiences necessary to succeed in a dynamic and competitive labor market.

Through its various initiatives and collaborations, UI strives to empower graduates to make meaningful contributions to society and drive positive change in their communities. However, the problem of skill gap persists. The skill gap crisis refers to the mismatch between the skills possessed by job seekers and those demanded by employers. This disparity lead to difficulties in filling job vacancies, hindered productivity, and increased unemployment rates (OECD, 2013). Several factors contribute to the skill gap crisis includes technological advancements, changing industry needs, globalization and market dynamics, demographic shifts, educational and training systems (Garba, Yusuf & Busthami, 2015).

Over the years researchers, have shown that several undergraduates exhibit low employability competence as evident in the skill gap statistics provided by Clarke (2018), Tan, Choo, Kang & Liem (2017) and Moore & Morton (2017). In today's rapidly changing world, UNESCO (2015) stated that it is essential for graduates to possess a strong foundation in 21st-century skills. These skills go beyond traditional subject knowledge and are crucial for success in the modern workplace and society. It is believed that graduates who are equipped with 21st century skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, communication, and digital literacy are better prepared to navigate complex challenges, adapt to technological advancements, and contribute meaningfully to their professions (Belwal, Priyadarshi & Al-Fazari, 2017). With a solid understanding of these skills, graduates can analyse information critically, approach problems creatively, and work effectively in diverse teams. They are equipped to communicate their ideas clearly and persuasively, both in traditional and digital mediums as well as enabling them to collaborate across boundaries and engage with global issues (Gonzales, 2017). Moreover, graduates with 21st century skills can adapt to changes, embrace new technologies, and continuously learn and up-skill themselves. They possess the entrepreneurial mindset necessary to identify opportunities, take risks, and innovate in their chosen fields. Furthermore, graduates with a strong ethical and moral reasoning foundation are better positioned to make responsible decisions, act with integrity, and contribute positively to society (Low, Hui & Cai, 2017).

Employability skills are a group of essential abilities that involve the development of a knowledge base, expertise level and mindset that is increasingly necessary for success in the modern workplace (World Bank, 2022). It is typically considered essential qualifications for many job positions and have become necessary for an individual's employment success and even in business environment. According to the Herbert (2020), employability skill attributes such as

critical thinking and problem-solving, creativity and innovation, collaboration, and communication skills. Employability skills are considered one missing link between education and training and the world of work (Manoharan & Arockiam, 2017). This is because the importance of employability skills is increasingly emphasised in recent times. Employability skills become a very important issue at the national, regional, and international labour market (Abayadeera & Watty, 2016). They are considered one missing link between education and training and the world of work.

A survey by Holmes, Sheehan, Birks & Smithson, (2018) indicates that diploma, degree, and occupation-specific skills are no longer sufficient for graduates to meet the needs of national labour markets but are not necessary. In addition to basic and specific knowledge and skills, workers are nowadays expected to have an additional set of employability competences. These are several skills and attributes which are required by students to prepare themselves to meet the needs of various occupations after graduation. These are becoming increasingly important in today's global economy. Other research also shows the employability skills essential for the career success of graduates in the workplace (Abayadeera, & Watty, 2016). Some of these skills are communication, problem-solving, decision-making, analytical and critical thinking, synthesizing information, teamwork, interpersonal, and continuous learning. They are some of the employability skill attributes required by graduates in entering the workforce, and prerequisite for professional recognition. It is to be noted that the quality of education and training policy can help drive the acquisition of these skills. By implication, these skills traditionally represented by the subject and practical degree classes help in the manifestation.

The primary goal of the higher education system is to provide the nation with a quality education that meets the requirements of the 21st century with graduates prepared for employability and competencies (Adnan, Daud, Alias & Razali, 2017). The graduates are expected to carryout services, diagnose, tests and repairs personal and societal problems. The speedy growth and changes taking place across the industrial sector has brought about competitions and challenges in today's economy in high-tech technology, information system, marketing, manufacturing, and services. It is given that for potential job seeks or workers to effectively function in these areas, they need to be highly knowledgeable and skilled in the 21st century global employability competence in both hard and soft calibration (Anastasiu, Anastasiu, Dumitran, Crizboi, Holmaghi, & Roman, 2017). This is necessary for productivity and the attainment of organisations goals and objectives (Holmes, Sheehan, Birks & Smithson, 2018). The challenges of access to quality education and skills training for the younger generation in 21st century is increasingly growing over the years, especially in the developing countries (Weninger, 2017).

No doubt, quality education and training enhance the productivity of students in the higher education, and, thus, create better chances to secure decent employment or create job opportunities for others in the labour market. Several studies like Vanhercke, De Cuyper, Peeters & De-Witte (2014) have affirmed the position of several industries and recruitment agencies that some of the graduates are unemployable. Several factors tend to improve employability competences. In the university context, the higher education system has increased significantly, still there is crises as per the type of skills students are imbued with upon graduation. According to Omoniyi (2022), potential graduates should have a set of achievements such as skills, knowledge, and other competences which will allow them to expand their employment and success in their work. It will give benefits to themselves, the organization in which they serve, and to the country's economy (Clarke, 2018). It is now critical for universities to produce manpower

which can compete favourably with contemporaries at a global level.

Labour market as one of the driving forces of the content and quality of education attributes high value to employability skills (Low, Botes, Dela Rue & Allen, 2016). No doubt, labour market requires that graduates apply learning outcomes into real life situation. This also implies that the pressure of global competition requires that graduates need to offer employer more than just academic prowess but 21st century skills to assuage the challenges of production, manufacturing, service rendering and delivery (Evans, Davis & Wheeler, 2017). Specifically, studies like Weninger (2017) and UNESCO (2015) have identified poor tertiary institution curricula and inadequate collaboration between tertiary institutions and employers of labour as the two critical factors responsible for graduates' unemployability (Klibi & Oussii, 2013). This has made graduates of many developing countries today to be half-baked, skill deficient, and unfit for 21st century jobs as against jobs of 20th century (Jacob, 2021). The wide gap between the work system of the 20th century and the 21st century has clearly shown that wide range of skill sets are required by potential employees to be employable.

According to Clarke (2018), part of the problem of employment has always been the result of a mismatch between qualitative aspects of the supply and demand of labour. By implication, demand has remained unfulfilled due to non-availability of workers with requisite 21st century employability skills and workers have remained unemployed or underemployed as they have little or no 21st century employability skills which are on demand (Tan, Choo, Kang, & Liem, 2017). This mismatch seems to have grown in recent years due to fast changes in production technologies and structures to which the skill supply mechanisms and institutions have not been quick enough to respond (Holmes, Sheehan, Birks & Smithson, 2018). Thus, it is necessary to analyse the extent to which potential graduates are knowledgeable, ready and disposition to employability skills during their course of study (Belwal, Priyadarshi & Al Fazari, 2017). It is believed that this will make them industry-ready and equipped with the necessary 21st-century employability competence that is pertinent to getting placement in a job suited to their competence and generally to their area of study (Omoniyi, & Oderinde, 2022). Thus, the need of the hour is to assess the level of these identified variables among potential graduates.

According to Hack-Polay, Igwe, and Okolie, (2020), employability has three major aspects, which include career identity, personal adaptability, and social and human capital. It is said that the main barriers to graduates entering the world of work comprised several factors among which are acquired skills and required skills (Tan, Choo, Kang & Liem, 2017). By implication, there is a disconnection between graduate employability competences and requisite skills needed in the workplace. The workforce in the 21st century requires more than certificates to skills and attributes such as critical thinking, communication expertise, creativity, problem-solving, perseverance, collaboration. Information literacy, technology, and digital literacy (UNESCO, 2020). UNESCO recognises the importance of 21st-century skills in preparing individuals for the challenges and opportunities of the modern world. These skills go beyond traditional academic knowledge and focus on developing competencies that are essential for success in the 21st century (Abayadeera & Watty, 2016).

Over a long period of time, there were numerous reports from government, industry, higher education agencies and researchers urging the higher education sector to bring employability skills into the students' learning experience (Sally, 2016). The reports suggest that universities and colleges should plan to support graduates in developing the skills of employability, which represent graduates' work readiness. In a 21st-century workplace, it is critical for higher education institutions to design and implement programmes that are

appropriate to the missions and goals to supply the workforce relevant to the needs of stakeholders or employers (Belwal, Priyadarshi & Al Fazari, 2017). Higher education has the responsibility to provide graduates with knowledge in the professional field with intellectual skills and the ability to apply theory to practical situations. These skills are considered essential for individuals to thrive in the rapidly evolving digital age and navigate the complexities of an interconnected world (Abayadeera & Watty, 2016). UNESCO encourages educational systems and institutions to incorporate these skills into their curricula and teaching practices to prepare individuals for a successful future.

Scholars like Omoniyi & Oderinde (2022) and Moore & Morton (2017) have remarked that potential graduates' readiness in terms of 21st-century employability skills varies depending on the education system, institution, and personal development. While some graduates may possess a strong foundation in these skills, others may require further development and support. Several educational institutions have recognised the importance of 21st century skills and have incorporated them into their curricula and teaching methodologies (Weninger, 2017). Hence, graduates from such institutions may have been exposed to project-based learning, critical thinking exercises, collaborative group work, and opportunities for digital literacy development (Schleicher, 2018). These experiences can enhance their readiness in terms of employability skills. However, it is important to acknowledge that not all graduates have equal access to high-quality education and training that fosters these skills. In some cases, graduates may lack the practical application of these skills or have limited exposure to real-world scenarios. Additionally, the fast-paced nature of technological advancements may pose challenges for graduates to stay updated and adapt to emerging trends.

The disposition of potential graduates towards 21st century employability skills can greatly influence their readiness for the job market (Low, Hui & Cai, 2017). A positive disposition involves a mindset that values and embraces these skills as essential for personal and professional success. Graduates with a strong disposition to 21st century employability skills tend to be proactive, adaptable, and open to continuous learning and growth (Neisler, Clayton, Al-Barwani, Al Kharusi & Al-Sulaimani, 2016). Such graduates demonstrate a willingness to develop their critical thinking abilities, seeking opportunities to analyse information, evaluate different perspectives, and apply creative problem-solving techniques. They are motivated to collaborate with others, recognising the value of teamwork and the benefits of diverse perspectives. Their communication skills are effective, both in traditional and digital formats, enabling them to articulate their ideas clearly and engage with others (Al-Azri, 2016).

Furthermore, graduates with a positive disposition towards 21st century employability skills are often self-directed learners who take initiative and seek out opportunities for personal and professional development (Moore & Morton, 2017). They understand the importance of digital literacy and are comfortable using various technologies and tools to enhance their productivity and effectiveness. Their adaptability and resilience enable them to navigate uncertainty and embrace change, while their ethical and moral reasoning guides their decision-making and ensures responsible and ethical behaviour (Weninger, 2017). It is critical to state that the knowledge, readiness, and disposition of potential graduates regarding 21st century employability skills are essential factors in determining their preparedness for the job market (Belwal, Priyadarshi & Al-Fazari, 2017). This is because graduates equipped with a strong foundation in these skills, coupled with practical application and real-world experience, are better positioned for success (Neisler, Clayton, Al-Barwani, Al-Kharusi & Al-Sulaimani, 2016).

Statement of the problem

The state of unemployment in Nigeria and some of the world is alarming. This has been traced to several factors including lack of employability skills among graduates which is required in the world of jobs. It is discovered that some students are not aware while others are not ready for fulfilling the requirements of industry and the 21st century job market. It is believed that students, especially graduates should demonstrate a positive disposition which is characterized by a proactive mindset, adaptability, and a commitment to continuous learning to further enhance their employability. However, a sizeable percent of graduates have not shown the capacity required to favourably compete in the world of jobs. Previous studies have worked on students' employability competence, school-to-work readiness, graduate attributes and perspectives on employers' expectations, and perceptions towards business management and administration. Some scholars have worked on graduates' soft skills identification and utilisation, creative capacity of undergraduate students, market orientation and entrepreneurship intention, among others. None of these have been able to assess potential graduates' knowledge, readiness, and disposition to 21st century employability skills. In addition, this study was carried out in the University of Ibadan, Ibadan Nigeria.

Research Questions

Through a comprehensive review of literature, the study highlights the following research questions which were answered in this study.

1. What is potential graduates' knowledge to 21st century employability skills?
2. What is the level of potential graduates' readiness to 21st century employability skills?
3. What is the level of potential graduates' disposition to 21st century employability skills?

Theoretical framework

Human Capital Theory

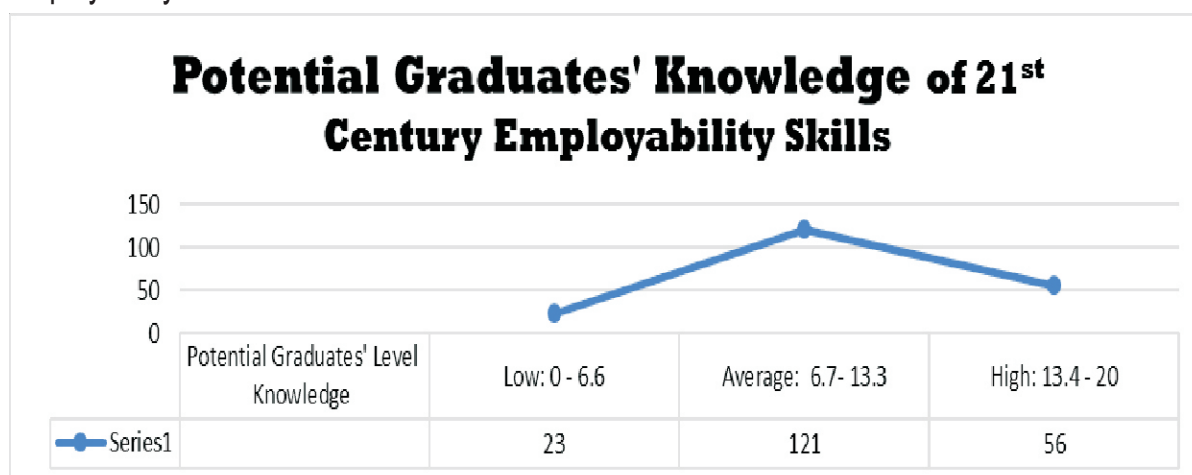
It is widely used to examine the association and link which connect higher education (HE) and career from 1960 onward. The theory was first deployed by Mincer and Schultz while its improvement was carried by Gary Becker. Thus, by subsidizing HCT, debates that “future social and economic development and growth of any country rely on the skills and knowledge, gained from education and work placement” which indicates the expectation of its Human Capital. The theory tries to examine the financial benefits resulting from investments in people's skills and resources. Such investment would result in having highly skilled labourers placed in highly skilled careers, which could improve the nation's economy and prosperity. It is believed that human resources can distinguish the efficacy readiness of employment seekers.

To strengthen the validity of the Human Capital theory in the direct relationship between education and its primary role in providing skillful graduates. Applications of Human capital theory to potential graduates' knowledge, readiness, and disposition to 21st-century employability skills can offer valuable insights and guidance in understanding their development and effectiveness in the modern workforce. Human capital theory focuses on the idea that individuals are valuable assets and investments, and their skills and abilities contribute to economic growth and productivity. In terms of knowledge, Human capital theory emphasizes the acquisition of relevant and up-to-date information and expertise. Potential graduates need to possess not only technical knowledge but also a broad understanding of the industry, market trends, and emerging technologies. They should continuously engage in lifelong learning and develop a growth mindset to stay competitive in the dynamic job market.

Regarding readiness, Human capital theory emphasizes the importance of being prepared for the demands of the workplace. Graduates should possess the necessary skills and competencies required for their chosen field. This includes not only technical skills but also critical thinking, problem-solving, adaptability, and teamwork abilities. They should be ready to apply their knowledge effectively in practical scenarios and collaborate with diverse individuals and teams. In terms of disposition, human capital theory recognizes the significance of individual attributes. Potential graduates should possess a strong work ethic, self-motivation, and a positive attitude toward continuous improvement. They should demonstrate resilience, flexibility, and a willingness to embrace change and innovation. Additionally, they should exhibit strong interpersonal and communication skills, as well as ethical behavior and professional integrity. It helps shape people's understanding of the importance of investing in their own development. It encourages graduates to actively seek opportunities to enhance their skills, adapt to new challenges, and contribute to the growth and success of their organizations. By considering the principles of Human capital theory, graduates can align themselves with the evolving demands of the 21st century job market and enhance their employability prospects.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the level of potential graduates' knowledge of 21st century employability skills?



Research Question 2: What is the level of potential graduates' readiness to 21st century employability skills?

Table 1: Mean Response of Potential Graduates' Readiness to 21st Century Employability Skills

Sn	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std
1	I do not think employability skills are necessary	208 35.3	250 42.4	80 13.6	52 8.8	3.0407	.91676
2	Until I am paid, I can 't learn any employability skills to encourage	253 42.9	192 32.5	85 14.4	60 10.2	3.0814	.98727
3	I like to venture into some business oriented activities	218 36.9	221 37.5	94 15.9	57 9.7	3.0169	.95735
4	I have groomed myself for the job am pursuing	201 34.1	164 27.8	140 23.7	85 14.4	2.8153	1.05925
5	I feel confident in my ability to communicate in a clear language	162 27.5	137 23.2	207 35.1	84 14.2	2.6390	1.03266
6	I have a strong work ethic and I am dedicated to meeting deadlines and completing tasks	160 27.1	187 31.7	127 21.5	116 19.7	2.6627	1.07754
7	I am comfortable working in a team and collaborating with others	295 50.0	154 26.1	85 14.4	56 9.5	3.1661	.99891
8	I have undergone several capacity buildings to enhance	207 35.1	193 32.7	114 19.3	76 12.9	2.9000	1.02523
9	I am proficient in using relevant computer software and technology	179 30.3	205 34.7	132 22.4	74 12.5	2.8288	1.00060
10	I am open to criticism	86 14.6	107 18.1	335 56.8	62 10.5	2.3678	.85759
11	I have learnt to manage my time effectively and prioritize tasks	206 34.9	186 31.5	113 19.2	85 14.4	2.8695	1.04966
12	I am confident in my ability to lead and take on leadership roles when necessary	201 34.1	156 26.4	156 26.4	77 13.1	2.8153	1.04635
13	I possess excellent interpersonal skills and can build relationships with co workers and clients	84 14.2	164 26.5	265 44.9	77 13.1	2.4322	.89023
14	I cannot work independently without constant supervision	192 32.5	146 24.7	155 26.3	97 16.4	2.7339	1.08487
15	I am open to learning and acquiring new skills to stay updated in my field	184 31.2	174 29.5	149 25.3	83 14.1	2.7780	1.03906
16	I like to pay close attention to issues	181 30.7	172 29.2	160 27.1	77 13.1	2.7746	1.02517
17	I have learnt to manage conflicts and resolve issues effectively	187 31.7	143 24.2	136 23.1	124 21.0	2.6661	1.13085
18	I already have a good understanding of the industry and the trends affecting it	213 36.1	166 28.1	141 23.9	70 11.9	2.8847	1.03106
19	I possess strong written and verbal communication skills	183 31.0	179 30.3	146 24.7	82 13.9	2.7847	1.03394
20	I am confident in my ability to adapt to a diverse and inclusive work environment	257 43.6	169 28.6	106 18.0	58 9.8	3.0593	1.00333
Weighted Average:		2.81	Threshold: 2.5				

Table 1 revealed that the level of potential graduates' readiness for the 21st century employability skills was high skills as evident in a weighted average 2.81 which is greater than the threshold of 2.5. This implies that they are ready to be taught the 21st century employability skills.

Sn	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std
1	I believe that having good communication skills is essential for the world of jobs or works	338 57.3	158 26.8	54 9.2	40 6.8	3.3458	.90412
2	I have paid for my personal and professional development	228 38.6	247 41.9	82 13.9	33 5.6	3.1356	.85557
3	I believe that having a positive attitude is crucial for success in the job market	206 34.9	217 36.8	115 19.5	52 8.8	2.9780	.94744
4	I consider problem solving skills to be essential for employability	220 37.3	186 31.5	111 18.8	73 12.4	2.9373	1.02654
5	I think having a strong work ethic is necessary for career advancement	260 44.1	178 30.3	104 17.6	48 8.1	3.1017	.96624
6	I believe that being a team player is important for employability	238 40.3	201 34.1	103 17.5	48 8.1	3.0661	.94897
7	I consider time management skills to be crucial for success in the workplace	203 34.4	207 35.1	127 21.5	53 9.0	2.9492	.95792
8	I am willing to acquire job related skills	206 34.9	183 31.0	134 22.7	67 11.4	2.8949	1.01054
9	I can travel to several places to acquire beneficial employability	219 37.1	178 30.2	140 23.7	53 9.0	2.9542	.98354
10	I have taken time to learn new technologies	215 36.4	181 30.7	137 23.2	57 9.7	2.9390	.99045
11	I like a growth mindset employability	137 23.2	99 16.8	242 41.0	112 19.0	2.4424	1.04527
12	Collaboration is of paramount importance to world of work	138 23.4	116 19.7	225 38.1	111 18.8	2.4763	1.04660
13	I like to improve my capacity through learning new employability skills	107 18.1	122 20.7	232 39.3	129 21.9	2.3508	1.01464
14	problemsolving skills are important for career development	147 24.9	112 19.0	207 35.1	124 21.0	2.4780	1.08173
15	I consider creativity and innovation to be necessary for success in the workplace	134 22.7	145 24.6	189 32.0	122 20.7	2.4932	1.05813
16	I think that being able to adapt to new technologies is crucial for employability	126 21.4	90 15.3	238 40.3	136 23.1	2.3492	1.05701
17	I think that being able to adapt to new technologies is crucial for employability	174 29.5	95 16.1	210 35.6	111 18.8	2.5627	1.10192
18	I am skilled at problem solving and finding innovative solutions to complex issues.	117 19.8	119 20.2	221 37.5	133 22.5	2.3729	1.04074
19	I am open to receiving constructive feedback and using it to improve my performance.	93 15.8	90 15.3	234 39.7	173 29.3	2.1746	1.02351
20	I actively seek out opportunities to develop new skills and enhance my knowledge.	229 38.8	219 37.1	100 16.9	42 7.1	3.0763	.91541
Weighted Average: 2.75 Threshold: 2.5							

Table 2 revealed that potential graduates have a positive disposition to 21st century employability skills as evident in a weighted average 2.75 which is greater than the threshold of 2.5. By implication, they demonstrate a strong resolve to acquire skills that can make them employable in the world of jobs.

Discussion of Results

Level of potential graduates' knowledge to 21st century employability skills

The finding revealed that potential graduates of the university have average knowledge of 21st century employability skills. The result is in line with the works of Manoharan & Arockiam (2017) whose submissions were that deep knowledge in specific domains is essential for individuals to effectively apply critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration skills in real-world contexts. It is also in line with studies by Holmes, Sheehan, Birks & Smithson, (2018) and Evans, Davis & Wheeler (2017) but at variance with (Hack-Polay, Igwe & Okolie, 2020). Belwal, Priyadarshi & Al-Fazari (2017) emphasizes the need for a strong knowledge of 21st century employability for potential graduates across disciplines. It is argued that the ability to navigate complex problems and work collaboratively is essential. This will help potential graduates build a foundation of disciplinary knowledge and expertise. The findings suggest a general trend of increasing knowledge levels among potential graduates. It is believed that the first stage of the cognitive domain is comprehension, hence the knowledge and identification of these skills are of paramount importance to potential graduates' readiness, disposition, and utilisation of the 21st century skills. It is given that the ability to learn new skills is essential for success in the 21st century workplace. Thus, actively seeking out opportunities to develop new skills includes the ability to network with others, attend conferences, and take online courses.

Level of potential graduates' readiness to 21st century employability skills

The result of the study revealed that potential graduates are ready to learn and utilise the 21st century employability skills even before being awarded their bachelor's degree in various fields. The study agrees with the findings of Anastasiu, Anastasiu, Dumitran, Crizboi, Holmaghi & Roman (2017) who stated that students should be ready to embrace 21st century employability skills while also being able to apply their knowledge in a real-world environment by thinking critically, analyzing information, comprehending new ideas, communicating, collaborating in teams, and solving problems, all in the context of modern life. The works carried out by Low, Hui & Cai, (2017) and Adnan, Daud, Alias & Razali (2017) affirmed that learners are ready for 21st century employability skills but cannot decipher if what they are imbued with are the real skills required for the world of jobs. A study by Chan, Fong, Luk & Ho (2017) whose findings revealed that a significant portion of respondents expressed confidence in their skills particularly in areas such as communication, teamwork, leadership, problem-solving, time management, critical thinking, and adaptability, though some are not aware these are the skills for workplace engagement in the 21st century. It is also believed that there are still areas that require improvement among potential graduates and graduates. The report by Fong & Koh (2017) explained that students are not ready but the tools, methodologies and institutional arrangements for engagements are not available. This implies that schools and colleges are lacking basic platform for potential graduates to showcase their capacity. This indirectly makes them not to be ready for the employability skills (Hack-Polay, Igwe & Okolie, 2020). For instance, respondents

identified the need to enhance interpersonal skills, adaptability to diverse work environments, and stay updated with the latest technological trends but these are missing on a global scale because some of the methodologies are orthodox. Nevertheless, there is variability in their readiness to use different skills, with some skills posing more challenges than others. This indicates that while potential graduates may feel generally competent, they may still need further development or support in specific areas, particularly related to soft skills.

Level of potential graduates' disposition to 21st century employability skills

The result revealed a positive disposition of potential graduates to 21st century employability skills. This is in line with the works of Low, Botes, Dela Rue & Allen (2016) whose submission is that 21st century skills are necessary for the development of the future of graduates. The results of the survey highlight the positive disposition of potential graduates towards key employability skills in the 21st century. Many respondents recognized the importance of communication, problem-solving, a strong work ethic, teamwork, time management, willingness to acquire job-related skills, adaptability to new technologies, creativity and innovation, openness to feedback, and actively seeking opportunities for skill development. These skills are crucial for success in the modern workplace, and the fact that a significant number of respondents acknowledged their significance is encouraging. The findings by Neisler, Clayton, Al-Barwani, Al Kharusi & Al-Sulaimani (2016) and Omoniyi (2023) are at variance with the submission of the study. This is because whether students are positively or negatively disposed, the 21st century employability skills have come to stay. Studies by Vanhercke, De Cuyper, Peeters & De Witte (2014) and Al-Azri, (2016) explained that skills such as critical thinking were not a set of fixed strategies or procedures, but it involve certain dispositions such as being inquisitive, open, and fair minded, as well as being interested in finding evidence. This is also buttressed by the works of Gonzales (2017) and Hack-Polay, Igwe & Okolie (2020).

Conclusion

Potential graduates recognize the importance of 21st century employability skills for achieving success in the workplace. They are also willing to acquire and enhance these skills, demonstrating a positive attitude toward skill development. However, there is variation in the level of value placed on different skills, with technical skills generally being more highly regarded than soft skills. This preference for technical skills might stem from the perception that they are more tangible or directly applicable in certain industries or job roles. Overall, the findings suggest that potential graduates have a decent understanding of employability skills but may require additional focus and support in developing their soft skills, which are equally important in today's professional landscape. Encouraging a more balanced emphasis on both technical and soft skills can help prepare graduates for a well-rounded and successful career. In conclusion, this chapter presented the results and a discussion of the analysis conducted based on the data collected from respondents through a questionnaire. The findings provide insight into potential graduates' knowledge, readiness, and disposition to 21st century skills. The findings of the research suggest that potential graduates' have a good understanding of the importance of 21st century skills, and they are also confident in their ability to use these skills in the workplace. However, there are some variations in the level of knowledge, readiness, and disposition between different skills. This suggests that there is a need for targeted interventions to help potential graduates develop the

skills they need to succeed in the 21st century workplace. It is believed that by addressing the root causes of the skill gap crisis and implementing targeted interventions, stakeholders can work together to build a workforce equipped with the skills and competencies needed to thrive in the 21st-century economy.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made.

- i. There is a need for an established and well-designed assessment framework that aligns with the defined employability skills in the school curricula.
- ii. There is a need for industry and institution arrangements which will allow for collaboration between educational institutions and employers can help align curriculum with industry needs, provide hands-on training opportunities, and facilitate internships and apprenticeships.
- iii. There is a need for lifelong learning and up skilling which will encourage continuous learning and up skilling throughout the graduate's career. This will help them adapt to changing job requirements and bridge skill gaps
- iv. There is a need to provide valuable insights and contribute to evidence-based strategies for preparing graduates for the evolving demands of the job market.
- v. The need for critical investment in vocational training is sacrosanct. Thus, universities must continue to support vocational training programmes and apprenticeship initiatives which can provide pathways to careers in skilled trades and technical fields, helping to fill critical shortages in sectors such as construction, healthcare, and manufacturing.

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