

Challenges Faced and Employability Skills that Employers Seek in Fresh Graduates in a Third World Country

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Abstract--*The aim of this study was to find out what kind of skills fresh graduates need to have when entering the job market in a third world and high risk country. In addition, this study also explored the challenges faced by HR managers in a war torn country. The research was carried out by using the qualitative research method. The data was gathered by using semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions designed to answer to the research questions. Nine Human Resource managers were interviewed based on a list of questions. The key finding was that soft skills that encompass communication and problem solving are the most sought after in the workplace. It is suggested that the Higher Education Institutions collaborate and work closely with employers to minimize the skill gap. Having the knowledge of what employability skills that are key for HRM graduates can help minimize the skills gap and assist educators in producing employable graduates.*

Keywords-- Gender digital divide, motivation, gender gap, IT sector

I. INTRODUCTION

Third World encompasses economically poor and non-industrialized countries, as well as newly industrialized countries (World Population Review, 2019). Afghanistan is categorized as a third world country that is landlocked, multi-ethnic and located in the heart of south-central Asia. The size area of Afghanistan is total around 652,230 sq.km. Afghanistan's population is estimated at 37.21 million in 2019 and it includes the Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks and others (World Population Review, 2019). Around 10% of the population lives in the capital city, Kabul. Kabul's 2015 population is estimated at 3.1 million (World Population Review, 2019). Afghanistan is extremely poor, landlocked, and much of the population continues to suffer from shortages of housing, clean water, electricity, medical care, and jobs. Corruption, insecurity, weak governance, lack of infrastructure, and the Afghan Government's difficulty in extending rule of law to all parts of the country pose challenges to future economic growth (Central intelligence Agency, 2019). In 2019, the security situation has worsened and Afghanistan today faces numerous political challenges as it fights the insurgency. Only 54 percent of young Afghans are literate. Progress with education is threatened by the security situation (The World Bank, 2019).

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Few Afghans have access to productive or remunerative employment. A quarter of the labour force is unemployed, and 80 percent of employment is vulnerable and insecure, comprising self or own account employment, day labour, or unpaid work. Young Afghans (age 15–24) are also burdened with a high unemployment rate of 31 percent, while 42 percent are neither in employment, education, or training (The World Bank, 2019). In addition, many qualified jobseekers are in the process of returning from neighbouring countries and looking for employment opportunities (International Labour Organization, 2019). The formal labour market in Afghanistan is very thin and dominated by the public sector. The public sector represents 20 percent of total employment in Afghan cities and twice the number of salaried jobs in the private sector (ACAPS, 2019). The education system accommodates increasing demand for higher education and every year, about 4,000 university graduates will enter the labour market and will look for good quality jobs (ACAPS, 2019). Progress in educating new generations need to be supported and encouraged through interventions that direct education choices towards areas of skill shortages of specific sectors crucial for growth (ACAPS, 2019). The current low levels skills in the adult population are not compatible with sustained growth. Therefore, there is a need to study the skills that employers seek in fresh graduates in Afghanistan.

Human capital is a key factor for growth, development and competitiveness. Afghanistan have yet to reach the 60% threshold with regard to developing their human capital (World Economic Forum, 2017). The Fourth Industrial Revolution is creating disruptions and changes in all industries and this has resulted in major disruptions to labour markets around the world (World Economic Forum, 2018). As stated in the report, the skill sets required will change in most industries and transform how and where people work (World Economic Report, 2018). Therefore, businesses will need to recognize human capital investment as an asset rather than a liability (World Economic Forum, 2018). Employees need to have the appropriate skills enabling them to thrive in the workplace of the future and the ability to continue to retrain throughout their lives.

There are several studies which looked at employability skills of graduates. The employability skills of fresh graduates vary across industries and different levels of jobs (Sherer and Eadie 1987). Continuous changes in the work environment which is due mainly to new disruptive technologies requires new skills. As presented by Gray (2016) at the World Economic Forum, over one-third of skills (35%) that are considered important in today's workforce will have changed in five years from now. As highlighted by El Mansour and Dean (2016), the world of employment is changing and the technology is impacting the future skills required. Employers need employees with both soft skills in addition to hard skills. Therefore, the skills of graduates that meet the needs of employers raises questions, a need to be continuously studied. Past research has shown that employers prefer to recruit graduates based on their soft skills and other positive attributes rather than their academic achievement and technical skills (Winterbotham et al., 2001). Andrews, and Higson (2008) highlighted that employers perceive the importance of problem solving abilities, critical thinking skills, discipline, specific skills and interpersonal and communication competencies. Similarly, the study by El Mansour and Dean (2016) found several skills sought by employers that encompass creativity, problem solving, interpersonal skills and strategic planning. Creativity will become one of the top three skills workers will need. At the World Economic Forum, Gray (2016) stated that due to changes, employees need to become more creative in order to benefit from these changes.

Therefore, there is a debate regarding which graduate employability skills and attributes are required to improve the employability in graduates. Due to changes that is shaped by technology and other market demands, there are gaps regarding the conceptions and understanding of graduate employability skills between employers and other stakeholders. Moreover, most of the studies on graduate employment skills is done in developed countries. There is a paucity of in-depth research in a third world and high risk countries like Afghanistan. The employability skills required in a third world country like Afghanistan can differ from other developed countries. The skills which are required in third world countries may be different compared to developed countries. Perceptions towards the skills that enhance graduate employability can differ among employers and students (König, Juric, and Koprivnjak (2016). As such, there is need to explore the graduate employability skills in a third world country. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to explore the challenges faced by human resource managers and the skills they require in fresh graduates. Most importantly, this research provides implications for the institutions of higher learning, government and business organizations the perception of skills that employers seek in fresh graduates. With this understanding, policy makers can plan interventions to understand, collaborate and to enhance the development of graduate employability in the context of a third world country. The study was guided by the following questions:

- 1.What are the challenges faced by employers today in hiring fresh graduates?
- 2.What the employability skills that employers seek in fresh graduates?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of 'employability' plays a crucial role and several scholars and researchers have used several definitions to explain the concept of employability. Based on a practical approach, employability was defined as the possession of capability by an individual to obtain and maintain work that is fulfilling (Hillage and Pollard, 1998). In other words, an individual's employability refers to the capability of employees to use their attitude, knowledge and skills effectively and realize their potential (Hillage and Pollard, 1998). Other researchers have pointed out that the definition by Hillage and Pollard (1998) is too simplistic. According to Harvey (2002), the outcome approach results in employability as being construed as an institutional achievement rather than the propensity of the individual student to get employment. McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) also pointed out that scholars used a narrowed definition where employability refers to skills and attributes. Yorke (2006) argued that employability is not just skills and knowledge but a more complex concept. According to Yorke (2006), employability encompasses skills, achievements and personal attributes that are sought by employers in graduates. McQuaid (2005) stated that the differences in definition of employability relates to whether the focus is upon the person's characteristics or on the factors that affect a person chance of getting a job. McQuaid et al. (2005) pointed out that employability encompasses individual factors, personal circumstances and external factors. Harvey (2002) also suggested that the concept of employability must consider areas for internal improvement. According to McQuaid et al. (2005), researchers need to consider several factors that affect the ability of individuals to attain 'the character or quality of being employable'.

Researchers and scholars have identified several skills that employers need in today's knowledge driven and technology driven economy. To explain graduate employability, Clarke (2017) developed a framework that included six key dimensions namely human capital, social capital, individual attributes, individual behaviours, perceived employability and labour market factors. Thinking skills, basic skills and personal qualities were identified as the foundation skills by Nash and Korte (1997). The Employability Skills Framework developed by the Australian Education Council (1993) specified skills that include communication skills, team work skills, problem-solving skills, initiative and enterprise skills, planning and organizing skills, self-management skills, learning skills and technology skills. Bridgstock (2007) argued that for better graduate employability, focus should be placed on a wider skill set than the narrow generic skills. As stated by Bridgstock (2007), graduates must be able to proactively navigate the world of work and self-manage the career building process.

Yahya (2005) examined the skills incorporated into educational programs and the importance of such skills to employers. They found some differences where the skills incorporated into educational programs, include cooperating with others, working in a team, possessing honesty, integrity and personal ethics, following instructions given and interacting with others. However, the skills that were important to employers include honesty, integrity and personal ethics, cooperative with others, using technology, instrument and information systems effectively, making decisions and managing time. Another study by Husain et al., (2010) revealed that employers placed higher emphasis on certain employability skills as must have skills from graduates. Furthermore, the study by Husain et al. (2010) showed no differences between the size of company and employability skills. AsmaakShafie, and Nayan (2014) examined the gender differences and found that employability skills perceived by male and female students were personal attributes, team work and self-management. However, both genders differed in skills such as technology, learning, initiative and enterprise and communication. Another study by Singh and Singh (2008) studied the ranking of employability skills by graduates and employers. The study found that both graduates and employers placed similar importance to employability skills. In addition, both employers and graduates perceived the order of importance of employability skills to be the same. However, a difference was noted where the employers rated the graduates much lower on the employability factors. There can also be differences based on job position. The study by Singh and Singh (2008) revealed that the expectations of graduates by employers will be higher for higher job positions compared to lower job positions.

Questions have been raised about the 'soft skills' versus the 'hard skills' of graduates to meet the needs of employers. Hard skills refer to the technical expertise and knowledge, and soft skills are people skills that an individual possess (Robles, 2012). Employers want new employees to have strong soft skills, as well as hard skills. According to Parsons (2008), the traits of an individual that contribute positively towards his or her interactions and job performance are referred to as soft skills. Researchers have stated that soft skills are interpersonal or people skills that enhance an individual's relationship with other people (Parsons, 2008; Smith, 2007). Parsons (2008) added that soft skills include personal qualities that encompasses personality, likeability, time management prowess, and organizational skills. Personal attributes might include one's personality, likeability, time management prowess, and organizational skills (Parsons, 2008) Some of the 'soft skills, stated by Andrews and Higson (2010) encompasses professionalism, reliability, the ability to cope with uncertainty, the ability to work under pressure, the

ability to plan and think strategically, the capability to communicate, creativity, self-confidence, self-management and time management. Researchers have stated that soft skills are a very important attribute of employees to many business organizations. However, the study by Andrews and Higson (2010) found similarities from graduate and employer perspectives. The study by Andrews and Higson (2010) concluded that the key component of employability includes both hard business-related skills and the need of soft business-related skills. Similarly, the study by Robles (2012) concluded that both soft skills and hard skills are good predictors of job performance. Therefore, employability skills include both the hard skills and soft skills must complement each other.

In the past 50 years, employability skills needed and used in several professions have fundamentally changed. There are shifts in skills needed in the workplace arising from automation, artificial intelligence and other technology advancements. A report by McKinsey Global Institute (2018), stated that technological skills will have the strongest growth. In addition, social skills, emotional skills and creativity skills will rise sharply (McKinsey Global Institute, 2018). The future demand for physical and manual skills will fall but skill shifts will play out differently across sectors (McKinsey Global Institute 2018). A report presented at the World Economic Forum by Gray (2016) looked at the employment, skills for the future. The report stated that problem solving, critical thinking and creativity will become the top three skills employees will need in 2020. A report by Jezard (2018) that was presented at the World Economic Forum also predicts a sharp rise in the demand for higher cognitive skills, social and emotional, or so-called “soft skills” and technological skills that encompasses basic to advanced IT skills, data analysis, engineering and research skills. Later another paper presented at the World Economic Forum stated that employers are looking for a combination of both hard and soft skills, with creativity topping the list of desired attributes (Charlton, 2019). The report presented at the World Economic Forum concluded that “human” skills like originality, initiative and critical thinking are likely to increase in value as technology and automation advances (Charlton, 2019). Due to the shifts in skills required in workplace, there is a growing body of evidence suggests a mismatch between the skills the workforce has and the skills employers are looking for (McKinsey Global Report, 2018).

III. METHODOLOGY

The exploratory, interpretive research paradigm used a qualitative method that focusses on meaning in context (Merriam, 2016). In this interpretivism philosophy, the researcher assumed that access to reality was through social constructions and the depth of discussion with the respondents through interviews provided rich data (Saunders et al., 2012). This is a basic research that was motivated by intellectual interest in employability of graduates and its main goal was extension of knowledge (Merriam, 2016). This study is categorized as a basic qualitative research where the primary goal of the researcher was to uncover and interpret these meanings (Merriam, 2016). In this qualitative study, the researcher utilized an inductive process to gather data through interviewing the participants and interpreted the findings inductively derived from the data in the form of codes, categories and themes (Merriam, 2016). In this qualitative study, the researcher was interested in understanding the phenomenon of interest from the respondents’ perspectives. This refers to how the respondents in this study make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world (Merriam, 2016). A semi-structured interview method was used to

collect data. The semi-structured interview method provided the researcher with a deeper understanding of phenomena of interest by taking into account the perspective of the study population and the context in which they live (Saunders at al., 2012).

In this study, the study population were Human Resource Managers of business organizations in Kabul, Afghanistan. As recommended by Creswell (2013), the target sample size was between 5 to 25 respondents. The researcher stopped at 9 participants as the saturation point was hit after the eighth respondent. As stated by Merriam (2018), reaching a point of saturation means the interviewer begin hearing the same responses to his or her questions and no new insights are forthcoming. Therefore, in this study, nine respondents were sufficient because the point of saturation was reached at which the data gathered began to be redundant (Cresswell, 2013). There were nine participants in this study. The participants profile is shown in Figure 1 below. To select the participants, judgemental sampling was utilized. In this basic qualitative research, nine Human Resource Managers from business organizations in Kabul were interviewed through a semi-structured interview process. The interviewer worded the questions more flexibly prior to the interview process and probing questions were asked to get more in-depth data from the participants. Probes were questions that follow up on the questions that were already asked. The interviewer used open-ended questions to collect data relating to the challenges faced and the employability skills that human resource managers seek in graduates. Consent was obtained from the participants to record the voices of the participants.

Table1 Respondent Profile Table

No	Name	Position	Gender	No. of employees	Marital Status	Qualification
1	HR1	HR Manager	Male	700+	Married	Bachelors
2	HR2	HR Manager	Male	500+	Married	Masters
3	HR3	HR manager	Male	700+	Married	Bachelors
4	HR4	HR Manager	Male	3000+	Married	Masters
5	HR5	HR Manager	Male	2000+	Married	Masters
6	HR6	HR Manager	Male	600+	Single	Masters

7	HR7	HR Manager	Male	300+	Single	Masters
8	HR8	HR Manager	Male	400+	Married	Bachelors
9	HR9	HR Manager	Male	800+	Married	Phd

All of the data in this study was collected through interviews. In the data analysis, the researcher made judgements about coding, identified themes, decontextualized and recontextualized the data (Starks and Trinidad, 2007). The verbatim transcription of recorded interviews provided the researcher the best database for analysis (Merriam, 2016). In this study, data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data that encompass consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what the participants said (Merriam, 2016). The thematic analysis was used as this is a highly recommended method as it allows for thorough data analysis (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). As stated by Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set. In this study, the themes were generated inductively from the raw data. As stated by Braun and Clarke (2006), the themes identified were strongly linked to the data themselves and this form of thematic analysis is data-driven. In the ‘manual thematic coding analysis’ process of data analysis, the researcher began by identifying segments or codes in the data set that were responsive to the research questions. This was called open coding because the researcher was open to anything possible at this point. The next step is the process of breaking data down into bits of information and then assigning “these bits to categories or classes (Merriam, 2016). The categories were bits or units of the data that the researcher previously identified. The next step was to construct categories or themes that capture some recurring pattern that cuts across the data (Merriam, 2016). These findings themes were in effect, answers to the research question of this study. Once the researcher established the final themes, the report was written.

In this study, trustworthiness is important to ensure the findings are worthy of attention (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). On trustworthiness, Lincoln and Guba (1985) introduced the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In accordance with the techniques provided by Guba and Lincoln (1989), the credibility of this research was addressed through prolonged engagement with the respondents. In addition, the researcher, addressed credibility through the process of member checking to test the findings and interpretations with the participants (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). To demonstrate the dependability of this study, an audit trail was maintained (Koch, 1994). To achieve dependability, the researcher kept records of the raw data, field notes, transcripts and reflectivenotes. These activities enabled the researcher with ease of reporting and the ability to systemize, relate, and cross reference data (Halpren, 1983). Confirmability is concerned with establishing that the

researcher's interpretations and findings are clearly derived from the data (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). As recommended by Koch (1994) the researcher included markers such as reasons for analytical or methodological choices to ensure readers can understand why and how decisions were made throughout the study (Koch, 1994).

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Data analysis was done to determine the themes that emerged from the information that was collected from the participants. The first research question was to find out the challenges faced by employers today in hiring fresh graduates in a third world country. The themes that emerged from the data include diversity, skill gap, and external interference.

1. Diversity and communication

Participants recognized that communication skills and ability to communicate in multiple languages is an important skill in Afghanistan. Participants stated that Afghanistan is a vastly diverse country and there are two main languages namely Pashto and Dari. The English language is widely used by foreigners but foreigners also speak other languages like Hindi and Turkish. Therefore, employees need to be fluent in multiple languages. The excerpt from interview:

‘Our country is a multi-ethnic and multi-language country. There are a large number of foreigners here. To be effective, fresh graduate should have the ability to communicate in different languages’ (HR3).

“We emphasize development of soft skills that include ability to communicate and only a handful of graduates possess such skills (HR2).

Communication skills and the ability to communicate in multiple languages in today's globalized environment is growing in importance. Similar to Afghanistan, India is a multi-ethnic country and a research by Ram and Mukesh (2017), found that graduates with multi language proficiency were given priority by business organizations. Similarly, Watson and Bervchik (2017) found that multi-language proficiency was an advantage. A standard corporate language policy should be part of MNCs strategy but research on language diversity in MNCs showed that what is good in theory is often more difficult in practice (Van den Born and Peltokorpi, 2010). Employees can differ in terms of their proficiency in the official corporate language and their native language. A low level of proficiency in the corporate language in MNCs can hinder effective communication. Therefore, language training can be an important strategy to improve communication in a standard corporate language. In addition, increasing language policies and practices can further help to reduce communication difficulties (Van den Born and Peltokorpi, 2010).

2. Skills Gap

Generally, the participants indicated that they value both soft skills and specific technical skills that are relevant. The participants pointed out that soft skills were more important to employers than basic knowledge and technical skills but many of such skills were not taught in universities. The participants pointed to the difference

between skills perceived by the employer as a measure of the employability skills and the skills evident in graduates. The excerpt from interview:

“Soft skills are important to execute tasks but many fresh graduates lack such skills. The main reason is that they do not learn such skills in Universities and they may end up being un-employed” (HR4).

“Our fresh graduates learn basic knowledge in university and they acquire soft skills through practice. This makes it difficult for them to get a job” (HR3)

“Fresh graduates do not have the complete or up to date knowledge of the skills and knowledge required” (HR1)

“The subjects which are taught during their studies are not compatible with the business sectors need and result in their unemployment” (HR2 and HR5)

Results of this research indicate that employers value soft skills credentials and most of them indicated that development of a soft skills is an important task. A study by Collet et al. (2014) provided insights into the value of skills and their application from the perspective of the organization. The study also indicated that in today’s digitalized and knowledge intensive world, the perceptions of the importance of skills in demand by employers is higher than the skills evident in graduates. In addition, the changes due to digitalization and other technology advancements, new skills are being proposed as important in today’s working environment such as action orientation, leadership, executive function, communication and service orientation (Pellegrino and Hilton, 2012). The skills mismatch can lead to a disparity in the employment rate for fresh graduates. To overcome this problem, policymakers and the government must intervene to address the issue, which includes, identifying skills needed by employers.

3. Nepotism and favouritism

One of the big problem of employability in Afghanistan is the selection of employees, is sometimes based on references and recommendations from people in high positions. Often the choice of candidate is based on influential links instead of preference being given to graduates with good employability skills. Therefore, highly skilled graduates without influential links may not be chosen and remain unemployed. Several interviewees in the group also cited domestic racism that was openly practiced in the selection of employees. The excerpt from interview:

” In our country it is very obvious that tribalism is at its peak and they only prefer people who belongs to a particular race” (HR6, HR7).

“We prefer to choose those fresh graduates who has some higher soft skills which are needed in our organization but in some cases we hire them based on recommendations from powerful people” (HR8)

As stated by Van Hooft and Stout (2012), nepotism a process associated with some observed phenomena with respect to family membership or the bestowal of patronage by reason of relationship regardless of merit. This encompasses favoritism based on kinship and relationships such as friendship. Van Hooft and Stout (2012) asserted

that nepotism and cronyism have effects on employment outcomes such as job attainment and employment quality. Such practices can affect the performance and commitment of employees, and a study by Lokaj (2015) indicated that nepotism in an organization brings negative outcomes and it negatively influence the performance of the employees and organization.

The second research question was to find out the employability skills that HR managers seek in fresh graduates today. This includes “soft skills’ and “hard skills”. The themes that emerged from the data include several skills, but most of the participants emphasized the importance of communication skills, problem solving skills and technical skills.

4. Communication skills

The participants placed high priority on communication skills. Oral communication and listening skills were emphasized more compared to written communication skills. They emphasized that fresh graduates need a strong command of oral communication skills for interaction with customers, colleagues and supervisors. The excerpt from interview:

“We choose those fresh graduates who has a higher soft skill especially communication skills which are needed in our organization” (HR4).

“Universities placed more emphasis on written communication skills through assignments and less focus on to speaking and listening skills,” (HR9).

Researchers, scholars and educators have stressed the importance of communication skills. A study by Pritchard (2013) found that employers listed communication as a priority skill. Similarly, Robles (2012) also found that integrity and communication were the top two soft skills needed by employees in today’s workplace. In the survey by Robles (2012), executives indicated that integrity and communication were very important. Similarly, another study by Mitchell et al. (2010) found that communication skills were very important and 57 percent of the respondents stressed the importance of written communication skills. Heckman (2006) argued that soft skills that include communications skills are a better predictor of success than technical skills. Rosenbaum (2001) further added that certain non-cognitive skills are linked to higher earnings. Most employers today emphasize the importance to have good communication skills and such skills can increase employability of fresh graduates and their career advancement (Ting et al, 2017).

5. Problem solving skills

Problem-solving skills were also mentioned by respondents as lacking in fresh graduates. In today’s changing environment, the respondents placed emphasis on problem skills. The respondents talked about problem solving skills because in Afghanistan, such skills enable employees handle difficult and unexpected situations in the workplace. The employees should be able to handle the problems and difficult situations calmly and build relationships. The excerpt from interview:

“The applicants often only demonstrate low ability of thinking of good alternatives and solutions.” (HR5)

“We emphasise soft skills based on their importance such as communication and problem solving skills which we believe are an important asset for employees in future” (HR6).

Effective problem solving a soft skill, is considered as one of the valued attributes that employers seek in fresh graduates. A study by Pritchard (2013) stated problem solving skills is among the top priorities and most lacking in fresh graduates. The employees should demonstrate an ability in solving problems and finding alternative solutions. Similarly, Singh and Singh (2008) also stated that to meet the challenges in the current work environment, generic skills such as creative thinking and problem solving skills are highly valued by employers. Therefore, other than specific technical skills, employers are seeking fresh graduates with ability to analyse and respond to problems (Singh and Singh, 2008).

6. Technical skills

Generally, the respondents emphasized the importance of soft skills but most of them agreed that technical skills are important to secure a job”. The requirement for technical skills was more prevalent in organizations that need graduates with technical skills mainly in information, communication and technology. The respondents also indicated that successful employees were those with soft skills and technical skills were also needed for entry level jobs. The excerpt from interview:

“In current environment, employability carries a multitude of different technical and non-technical proficiencies” (HR6).

From the interview, it was concluded that employers require fresh graduates with good soft skills as well as hard skills. In the definition of employability skills, Cleary, Flynn, and Thomasson (2006) included basic or fundamental technical knowledge of the job and hands-on ability. Robles (2012) emphasized that although soft skills are important but hard skills are critical on the job as well. In support, a study by Singh and Singh (2008) indicated that a more flexible workforce with well-developed soft skills such as creative thinking and problem solving skills were important to get a job done but advanced technical skills are also needed by employers to meet the challenges faced by them. Cobanoglu, Dede, and Poorani (2006) also concluded that soft skills were important skills, and the knowledge of information technology is necessary in today’s environment.

V. Implications and Conclusion

From the practical perspective, the findings of this study raised some concerns on the challenges related to the employability skills. Diversity and skill gap were identified as the key challenges. In today’s environment, workplaces are becoming more diverse and there are multiple languages spoken in the workplace. This may lead to difficulties in communication and controversies. Therefore, organizations need to implement policies on addressing multilingual etiquette that covers both work-related and private communication. Skill gap was also noted between what fresh graduates learn and can actually execute and what employers need their employees to be able to do in the workplace. Therefore, efforts should be made by educators and universities to understand and minimize the perceived gaps between employers and education institutions. The education institutions should collaborate with

employers to further understand the employability skills. In addition, employers should provide training to prepare and groom fresh graduates to acquire specific skills.

Communication skills, problem solving skills and technical skills were identified as the key employability skills that employers seek in fresh graduates. This study suggest that soft skills are more important to employers but fresh graduates should possess basic or fundamental technical skills. Therefore, educational institutions need to incorporate soft skills into the education and assessment system. In addition, universities should include basic technical skills in their curriculum and have a clear understanding of what is expected of them regarding technical skills and how these skills are transferable to the workplace. As stated by Singh and Singh (2008), the future workforce should be a more flexible workforce with technical skills as well as soft skills such as creative thinking, problem solving and analytical skills. Business organizations also need to play a role of developing their internal training programs to prepare and continuously upgrade their employees both soft skills and the necessary technical skills. There is a need to integrate the soft skills required for the jobs of fresh graduates with their technical skills. It can be concluded that educational institutions must instill the development of soft skills such as communication skills and problem solving skills in addition to the technical and other skills learned in the specific discipline foundation.

VI. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite the significant implications and contributions of this study, there were some limitations that paved the direction for future research. Firstly, the data for this study was collected from Human Resource Managers only. For future research, it is recommended that data is collected from multiple sources to provide more in-depth understanding of employability skills. The education institutions and education policymakers plays a prominent role in the development of employability skills of fresh graduates. In a comparative study, the similarities and differences between employers and educators will provide better understanding of the employability skills. Secondly, the respondents' demographics were not considered and they were considered a homogenous community. The differences in their education level, age and ethnicity was not explored. The perception and attitudes based on age, ethnicity and education levels may vary. The research also did not take the size of the organization and the nature of business into consideration. Future research should take into consideration the size of organizations and the nature of business. Thirdly, this study used the qualitative method only to collect and analyse the data. A mixed method approach is recommended as it will prove and confirm better results.

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