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Fit or Unfit? Perspectives of Employers and University Instructors of Graduates’ Generic Skills

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Abstract

Despite all the mechanisms introduced by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) and the universities to ensure that graduates leave the institution fit for employment, the fact remains that many employers decry the quality of fresh graduates, particularly in the area of generic or soft skills (Morshidi Sirat et al., 2008). This study was undertaken to identify areas of consonance (and/or dissonance) in the perceptions of instructors and employers with regards to the generic skills that graduates should possess upon leaving the university (Ministry of Human Resource, 2009). The findings of such a study would reveal if universities were emphasizing the skills that the employers looked for in their employees. Using a questionnaire, the study sampled 124 employers and 126 instructors in the Klang valley. The findings reveal that there is some degree of consonance in the generic skills perceived as important for employability by instructors and employers, with communication skills taking pole position, followed closely by integrity and professional ethics, and teamwork. Interestingly, critical thinking and problem solving skills, highly regarded in the educational arena was not deemed as vitally important by the employers. Although this study shows that the university curriculum is aligned to the needs of the industry in terms of the top three generic skills demanded by employers, the question remains as to why a large number of graduates remain unemployed. Are the skills being adequately deployed by the graduates themselves? In attempting to transform local higher education to meet world-class standards, graduate (un)employability is a high-stake issue which demands immediate redress. This study attempts to throw some light on this contentious issue.

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Keywords: Employability skills; Graduates; Employers; Instructors; Universities

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1. Background

In recent decades, the graduate employment landscape has been drastically transformed. The parameters constraining employability have expanded beyond mere academic qualifications and working experience, to embrace more non-technical or practical work-related skills that facilitate the work process of the establishment. These non-technical or work-related skills have been referred to by many terms but are most familiar as soft or generic skills, comprising a “a set of achievements skills, understandings and personal attributes that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy. They are generally skills that cut horizontally across all industries and vertically across all jobs” (Yorke, 2008; Sherer & Eadie, 1987 cited in Nik Hairi, Azmi, Rusyda, Arena & Khairani 2012, p.103). Nik Hairi et al (2012) also cite Mason (2006) that “from the employers’ perspective ‘employability’ seems to refer to ‘work readiness’, that is, possession of the skills, knowledge, attitudes and commercial understanding that will enable graduates to make productive contributions to organizational objectives soon after commencing employment.” (p.103)

These generic skills, once considered value-added, are no longer an addendum to a graduate's transcript but have become integral to graduate employability. "Like icing on a cake, these soft skills are now expected to complement current undergraduate education which can then be applied across a variety of system domains such as work productivity and community life" (Parmjit, Roslind, & Adlan, 2012, p.1) Naturally, the subsequent concern is whether the Malaysian Higher Learning Institutes (HLIs) are capable of furnishing university students with such skills. This question is certainly not a trivial one, economically at least, given the overwhelming volume of graduates produced each year by Malaysian public and private institutions alike that has reached as many as over 100,000 graduates per year (Agus, Awang, Yussof, & Makhbul, 2011). Leading from this is an even more worrying trend that is the increasing number of unemployed graduates as disclosed by reports compiled by the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) that reveal that out of 155, 278 graduates, only 45% were employed in 2009 (Ministry of Human Resource, 2009). Even as recently, as late 2011, 40,000 graduates remained jobless, having to resort to part-time, freelance, and odd jobs. (Bernama, Education Transformation Needful, 2012). The predicament is thus clear and neither the government nor the employers are holding back the truth: many of the graduates are simply unwanted. The usage of the word 'unwanted' is most appropriate here, as, the lack of job opportunities is not the primary reason for such a disturbing trend. There is overwhelming evidence that the root of the problem seems to point to the graduates themselves (Education Malaysia, 2006, cited in Worran, Bernadette and Ramamilah, 2009; Malhi, 2009). In attempting to rectify this issue, the Prime Minister in his Budget address last year said “Every year about 180,000 students graduate with diplomas and degrees from institutions of higher learning. The Government will launch the Graduate Employability (GE) Blueprint to assist unemployed graduates by the end of 2012. The GE Blueprint focuses on strengthening the employability of graduates. The Government will establish a Graduate Employability Taskforce with an allocation of RM200 million.” (National Graduate Employability Blueprint, 2012). This highlights the intensity of the efforts made by the government to overcome this issue.

A dismal catalogue of graduate deficiencies has emerged from a survey from a major online employment agency that reveals that the top reasons for graduates being rejected by employers are the lack of proficiency in English (56%) followed by bad social etiquette (36%), demanding exorbitant salaries (32%), possessing irrelevant qualifications (30%), and being overly choosy about jobs (23%) (Salina, Nurazariah, Noraina, & Rajadurai, 2011). Similarly, a study conducted by the Stanford Research Institute and Carnegie Melon Foundation involving Fortune 500 CEOs revealed that 75% of getting and maintaining a job successfully is supported by individual’s generic/soft skills, while only 25% accounts for hard skills or technical knowledge (Malhi, 2009). Although the issue has long been discussed, debated upon, and worked into ministerial and university policies, this disturbing trend still persists with recent research pointing to a worrying dissonance between the HLIs’ and employers’ expectations of graduate competencies (Pandian, 2010; Ramakrishnan & Mohd Norizan, 2011). The MoHE’s National Graduate Employability Blueprint 2012-2017, details the agenda and transformation plan to address policy as well as curricular and pedagogical shortcomings in HLIs with regards to the equipping of graduates with the relevant employability skills. This blueprint takes note that “there are significant shortcomings that HLIs need to address urgently to enhance GE. Industry players are the employers and as such, they are the “buyers” who seek value for
their money. It is therefore the responsibility of the HLIs, who produce the “products” to meet the expectations and demands of the “customers” (the employment market).” (p.12)

Since the main reasons for unemployability are strongly related to the lack of generic skills, it can be assumed that the pattern may be strongly correlated to some form of dissonance between the employers’ expectations and what the HLIs are offering the students.

In acknowledging this trend and attempting to arrest it, the MoHE (now dissolved and merged into the Ministry of Education since early this year), has, since 2007, pushed the HLIs in Malaysia to stress on seven generic skills identified by the Ministry as most salient and necessary for graduates to become employable. These comprise Communication Skills, Critical Thinking and Problem Solving Skills, Teamwork Skills, Lifelong Learning and Information Management, Integrity and Professional Ethics, Entrepreneurship Skills, and Leadership Skills (Ministry of Higher Education, 2007). The current methodological concern thus, is no longer whether these skills should be considered as necessary, but rather, how and to what extent these skills could be implemented in all HLI curricula.

It is also interesting to note that to date, although all HLIs have been instructed to ensure the generic skills are inculcated among university students, there are no actual hard and fast regulations as to the manner in which these generic skills are embedded into the curriculum. The HLIs are free to impart these skills in the manner each sees fit which means that there is no centralized and standardized means to implement or assess the generic skills in place at the moment. Australia, on the other hand, has in place a centralized generic skills assessment tool called the Graduate Skills Assessment or the GSA (Hambur, Rowe & Luc, 2002). Other instances include England, with the Cambridge Thinking Skills Assessment (TSA Cambridge, 2008), and the Work Keys System assessment conducted by the American College Testing Center for Education and Work (Satterfiel & McLarty, 1995). The lack of a standardised implementation and assessment of generic skills in Malaysian HLIs could be one reason for the recurring unemployability trend.

Looking at the aforementioned local researches and overseas practices, there is a pressing need to investigate what Malaysian employers seek in their future employees as opposed to what is being implemented in the universities. Subsequently, this need to know would also uncover mismatches, if any, between market needs and graduate preparation.

This study was structured along a dual track of outcomes as it aims to firstly, investigate the employers' and instructors' perceptions on the top generic skills that fresh graduates should have in order to be employable. Secondly, the study aims to identify which skills are being prioritised in the university curriculum according to the instructors' perceptions. A comparison of this data would then identify any areas of dissonance between the two ends of the graduate educative process, that is, the instructors' views of important generic skills as compared to the employers' view of important generic skills, and the skills being prioritised in the HLI curriculum. In this way, an overview can be obtained of the skills deemed necessary for employment and whether those skills are being prioritised in the HLIs. In achieving these goals, the findings would be able to shed some light as to why so many graduates are being eschewed by the employers.

2. Literature Review

This section presents a brief overview of employability and the overriding concern with generic skills among higher education stakeholders. The premise of this discussion and the justification for the concern about graduate work-related competencies is clearly supported by Yorke (2006) who contends that

“When trying to appreciate higher education’s potential for contributing to economic wellbeing it is helpful to distinguish between the formation of subject-specific understandings and skills, and the promotion of other valued skills, qualities and dispositions. Whereas the world of employment has, by and large, been satisfied with the disciplinary understanding and skills developed as a consequence of
participation in higher education, it has been less happy with the development of what have been termed ‘generic skills’, such as communication, team-working and time-management.” (p.4)

2.1. Employability

The notion of employability has been thoroughly researched and well-documented by many researchers in this area. Indeed, the far-reaching repercussions of (un)employability, as it took its toll on nations’ economic systems, began to resonate as the doors of once elite HLIs were thrown open to accommodate the immense numbers of both young and not-so-young people eager to better themselves academically following the massification and democratization of higher education (Asnida, (2003); Chiam, (2005); Hesketh, (2000); Hinchliffe, (2002); Holmes, (2001); Gibbons, (2000); Knight & Yorke, (2004); Leon, (2002); Morley, (2001); Pierce, (2002); Purcell & Elias, (2002); Stephenson, (1998); Wolf, (2002); Yorke & Knight, (2006); Ong, (2006); Norizan, et al.,(2006)). The works cited represent only the tip of the iceberg as far as research in this area is concerned which reflects the importance attached to the issues related to employability and the immense effort undertaken to pin down and remedy the root causes of unemployability. Before we seek to identify the generic skills that complement employability, it is necessary to be clear about what the notion of employability entails.

The definition provided by the United Kingdom Institute of Employment characterizes employability as having the capability to acquire, maintain and seek for newer (if necessary) employment or a job and that such capabilities include:

“their assets in terms of the knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess; the way they use and deploy those assets; the way they present them to employers; and crucially, the context (e.g. personal circumstances and labour market environment) within which they see work” (Hillage & Pollard, 1998 p.1).

Yorke (2006) sums up the tenets of employability as

“A set of skills, knowledge and personal attributes that make an individual more likely to secure and be successful in their chosen occupation(s) to the benefit of themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.” (p.21)

This goes to show that discipline-specific knowledge per se contributes to only a small portion of the understanding of employability while the rest include personal attitudes and the ability to manipulate and use the knowledge in creative and practical ways (Orr, 1991). This underscores the premise that knowledge is only part of a package deal comprising skills and specific work-related capabilities which should reflect the employers’ needs.

It appears from the definitions provided that the inclusion of “soft skills” or “generic skills” into the employability equation becomes indispensible. Ian Hampson and Anne Junor (2010) for example, contend that “soft skills” have been under-rated until lately and that this does not encompass merely the technical content of the students’ knowledge, but how these are used in the social context of the working environment.

2.2. Generic Skills and its Relation to Employability

What are “generic skills” and how do they figure in the employability equation? Generic skills are not technical skills (also termed “hard skills”) or the content knowledge of a certain discipline or specialized area. The employability equation is made up of two factors; one factor is the technical knowledge or hard skills while the other factor comprises the soft skills or the generic skills. These generic skills support the hard skills in the work place as they deal with those capabilities that employees would need to function competently in any organisation. First and foremost, it is important to note that the nomenclature for generic skills is varied, depending on contextual application, and among the terms referred to include: “key competencies”, “core skills” and “employability skills” (Md. Yunus et al., 2005). These skills encompass a broad spectrum of competencies ranging from reading, writing and math; communication; critical thinking; group interactions; personal development; computer skills; technical
systems; leadership; and team work (Leon and Borcehrs (2002) cited in Agus et al., 2011). Koo (2007, pp.39), on the other hand, suggested a "pluriliteracy" related to employability skills that included linguistic proficiency, communicative literacy, cultural awareness, content literacy, sustainable citizenship, attitudes and mindset, vocational literacy, and critical literacy.

Returning to the issue of unemployability of Malaysian graduates, the importance of generic skills has been acknowledged by the government. In 2006, the higher education minister suggested a model of generic skills that comprised “communication skills; critical thinking and problem solving; teamwork; lifelong learning and information management; ethics and professional morals; entrepreneurship; and leadership skill.” (Yassin et al., 2008) to be implemented in the curricula of all HLIs in the country. Now that universities have become accountable for producing employable graduates, the emphasis on the attainment of generic skills is understandable. Among the reasons for this emphasis are:

“(1) the requirements of the knowledge-based new economy and continuing impact of globalization and new information technologies; (2) the exponential pace of change; (3) the consequent pressures of life-long learning; (4) the need for individuals to maintain employability; (5) changes in the workplace; (6) requirement to foster enterprise skills and innovation culture in some countries, among the few” (Shyamal, 2009 p. 2).

The discussion above explicitly states that “in today’s highly globalized and increasingly competitive world where work places and opportunities are no longer physically constrained, the adaptability and transference of skills and competencies is highly prized and coveted by employers seeking to reap the optimal economic rewards from their choice of employees” (Parmjit, Roslind, & Adlan 2012 p.7). It is no wonder then that generic skills have significantly become the determining factor of employability (Othman, 2012).

3. Objectives

The objective of this paper is to investigate and report the findings of an ongoing study to examine employers’ and instructors’ perceptions of graduate generic skills as reflected in both groups’ modus operandi in selecting and hiring graduates (for employers) and in preparing university students for work (for instructors). The specific objectives of the study are to determine:

- the perceptions of employers (gleaned from both multinational and local employment sectors) of the most important generic skills that university graduates should have;
- the perceptions of instructors (gleaned from both sciences and non-sciences) of the generic skills that university graduates should have; and
- the generic skills offered in HLI curricula ranked in order of importance by instructors.

4. Methodology

This is a descriptive study that utilizes quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. Survey instruments in the form of two questionnaires were utilized to elicit the employers’ and instructors’ perceptions on the generic skills that graduates should have, as well instructors’ perception of the skills being prioritised in HLI curricula. Stratified random sampling was utilised to select the sample groups. Employers from both multinational and local organisations were selected with priority given to top-level management especially in the human resource departments as it would reflect the employment trends and preferences of the industry. As for the instructors, a good mix of instructors from science and non-science backgrounds was represented with priority given to those involved in academic policy making.

In this study, two versions of a questionnaire was used to elicit the data for the first two objectives. One set was mailed to the selected employers with a return rate of approximately 65%. 124 employers were involved altogether,
in which 107 (86.3%) were from the private sector while 17 (13.7%) were from the public sector. For the instructors’ version of the questionnaire, 126 instructors from three public universities in the Klang valley were sampled where 74 (58.7%) were from a science background and 52 (41.3%) were from the non-science background. The seven generic skills, outlined by the MOHE, were utilized as constructs in this questionnaire. For the third objective, a questionnaire adapted from the study conducted by Parmjit, Imran, Roslind, Adlan, and Zamaliah (2012) was used to glean information on the skills that instructors perceived were prioritised in the HLI curricula. These were ranked by the sample groups according to priority so that a stratified and hierarchical analysis could be obtained to differentiate the generic skills that graduates should have according to employers and instructors, and to find out which skills were being emphasized in HLIs. The sample were required to rank the skills using a Likert scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being the least important and 5 the most important. The data obtained was analysed using the SPSS software and tabulated for convenient viewing.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1. Employers’ and Instructors’ Perceptions of the Generic Skills Fresh Graduates Should Have

As one of the objectives of this study is to identify those generic skills that render a graduate employable according to the perceptions of employers and instructors, the data obtained was tabulated according to the mean scores and standard deviation generated through the Likert responses to the items in the questionnaire. The table below (Table 1) presents both the employers and instructors’ perceptions ranked in order of importance to facilitate comparison of the findings, with 1 being most important and 7 the least important. This table presents the findings which cover the first and second objectives of this study. The two top generic skills have been highlighted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generic Skills</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employers’ Perception</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Skills</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving &amp; Critical Thinking</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifelong Learning &amp; Information Manage</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity &amp; Professional Ethics</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurship</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructors’ Perception</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is indeed remarkable that both employers and instructors concur on the top two generic skills that graduates should possess in order to be employable. These are Communication Skills with a mean of 4.44 (employers) and 4.53 (instructors), followed by Integrity & Professional Ethics with a mean of 4.44 (employers) and 4.47 (instructors) respectively. In fact, the employers sample group ranked both Communication Skills and Integrity & Professional Ethics as equally important with a mean of 4.44. This means that apart from communication skills, employers prioritise integrity and professional ethics as a vital attribute in their employees. This comes as no surprise as integrity and professional ethics can make or break any organisation financially. Additionally, the standing of the organisation in the business community is dependant of the credibility of its employees’ integrity and professional ethics. Hence, the emphasis placed on this attribute by the employers. Fortunately for HLIs, this is also similarly reflected in the instructors’ perceptions of top generic skills for their students and in fact, the instructors ranked these attributes at higher mean scores than the employers with Communication Skills at the highest mean score of 4.53 which augurs well for the curricula and pedagogical emphasis of these skills at the HLIs. The other skill on which both employers and instructors agree is Teamwork at 4.21(employers) and 4.35 (instructors). Teamwork was ranked as the fourth important skill by both groups. The third important skill for the employers was Lifelong Learning and Information Management at 4.27 while the instructors put Problem Solving & Critical Thinking in third rank at 4.43. It is surprising to note that employers placed Problem Solving & Critical Thinking at fifth place considering that this is the current ‘buzz phrase’ with everyone talking about the importance of critical thinking skills as the cornerstone of economic success.
Conversely, it is interesting to note that both employers and instructors also agreed that the two least important generic skills are Leadership and Entrepreneurship. This is a significant point to note because leadership and entrepreneurship are currently being heavily emphasised in the HLI curricula with students being made to attend leadership courses and encouraged to operate stalls at particular times during the semester to foster entrepreneurial skills. While this effort is laudable in and of itself as part of holistic student development, the HLIs need to take note of the fact that, according to the findings of this study, employers do not consider these skills crucial for graduates to get or keep a job.

5.2. Instructors’ Perceptions of the Generic Skills Taught in the University

Table 2. Instructors’ Perception of Generic Skills Taught in the University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written Communication</td>
<td>4.03 (.776)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral Communication</td>
<td>3.89 (.828)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving Skill</td>
<td>3.74 (.875)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking Skill</td>
<td>3.69 (.859)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Decision Making &amp; Planning</td>
<td>3.88 (.813)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability &amp; Flexibility to Work in Groups</td>
<td>3.75 (.787)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Relations</td>
<td>3.79 (.816)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eager to Continuously Learn Something New</td>
<td>3.75 (.863)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to Manage both Old and New Knowledge</td>
<td>3.63 (.815)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Ethics</td>
<td>3.78 (.786)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Integrity</td>
<td>3.73 (.840)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business, marketing &amp; Branding &amp; Knowledge</td>
<td>3.39 (.891)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exemplary Characteristics, Confidence &amp; Management Skills</td>
<td>3.65 (.791)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Low - 5 High;

To answer the study’s third objective, data was also obtained from instructors who rated the skills being implemented in the HLIs in order of importance. The table (Table 2) above indicates the order of importance (indicated by the numbers next to the mean scores) of the skills reflected in the HLI curricula. It can be seen that the two top skills are written communication at 4.03 and oral communication at 3.89. This clearly highlights that HLIs are aligned to the market requirements for communication skills. Numerous studies have emphasised the importance of communication skills in determining the employability of a graduate (Ken & Cheah, 2012; Syed Hassan, Kamarudin, Noor Rajikon, Saadan, Yunus ,Mustapha 2009; IPPTN, 2007). This has been corroborated by the findings of this study with both employers and instructors rating it as the top skill that graduates should have in order to be employable. Unfortunately, the other attribute prioritised by the employers, integrity & professional ethics, was ranked eighth and fifth respectively in the ranking of skills being taught in the HLIs. In contrast, apart from communication skills, the other skills being prioritized in the HLI curricula are Group Decision Making and Planning as well as Adaptability & Flexibility to Work in Groups which are related to Teamwork, followed by Interpersonal Relations. Teamwork was identified as important by the employers in this study so here there is some consonance. The instructors may have given higher scores to the skills related to teamwork and interpersonal skills as they are closely related to teaching and assessment modes commonly used in higher education which rely heavily on group work like project-based learning and case studies. Furthermore, it can be posited that as integrity & professional ethics is an entirely work-related attribute, the HLIs may not really focus on it as a vital component of student development as it would be difficult to generate authentic hands-on work-related scenarios within the curricula, except when students go for industrial attachments. Additionally, integrity and professional ethics, being intangible entities subject to fine distinctions of personal beliefs and situational variables, are not discrete testable
items and as such do not figure significantly in the HLI curricula. This could be one reason why this was ranked low in the instructors’ perception of generic skills taught in HLIs. Hence, the question of which skills are prioritised in the HLI curricula appears to be based more on the practicality of how these skills can be embedded and evaluated as part of the teaching and assessment processes, rather than their direct bearing on the employability of the students. This could explain the discrepancy between the instructors’ perceptions of the top skills required by graduates and those that are actually emphasised in the HLIs.

6. Conclusion

This study has looked at the employers’ and instructors’ perceptions of graduates’ employability as indicated by the generic skills they should have. The findings conclusively state that both the employers and instructors concur in terms of the top skills that graduates should possess in order to be employable. However, the dissonance appears in the ranking of the skills as taught in HLIs according to the instructors. Apart from the most important skill, communication, it appears that employers and instructors part company on the other skills which should be focused on. Despite the fact that the instructors rated integrity and professional ethics as crucial, this stand is not reflected in the HLI curricula, which does not bode well for the inculcation of the appropriate skills in the students to render them employable. This dissonance is all the more striking when the first set of findings reveal that instructors and employers agree on the important skills, but when it comes to the actual teaching of these skills, it is another story. So, although it appears that the criteria for graduate ‘fitness’ for work is clear, at the actual implementation level at the HLIs, the students are losing out as the important skills are being side-tracked in favour of those skills that are more geared to teaching and assessment. It is indeed a startling revelation and one that should be taken seriously by higher education policy-makers and the university academic administration. Although there may be institutional variables prohibiting or constraining the instructors to practice what they preach, there is a dire need, as highlighted by the findings in this study, to focus on those skills that the employers have identified as crucial to employability. Employers have made their views very clear about they are looking for in graduates and now the ball is in the court of the HLIs to ensure that they hold up their end of the graduate employability bargain because in the end, if dissonance is not rectified, the students will be the ultimate losers. This loss is reflected in the large number of graduates who remain unemployed. As to the question of whether the skills are being adequately deployed by the graduates themselves, the answer could lie in this clear dissonance of instructor beliefs and actual practices of inculcating those skills employers want, which leaves the students, when they graduate, to flounder helplessly, as they try to satisfy employer needs with skills they do not possess.

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