

# Marketability Dimensions of University Graduates for various Professions in Saudi Arabia: A study of Alkharj Governorate

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## Abstract:

The present research is highly motivated to gauge the existing skills in the university students to meet the requirement of employer in the market. We investigate the level of personal skills, academic skills, professional skills, knowledge and information, applied and practical skills, skills to deal with others, communication skills and technology and success skills. We also investigate the gap between university output and employer requirement. To serve purpose, we circulate a well-structured questionnaire to the 130 sample respondents and apply the descriptive analysis to find the level of skills and gaps. We find that university students have satisfactory level of skills except academic skills as most of averages of constructs and items related to skills are found more than at least 3. Further, all items related to gap between university output and employer requirement also showed average response of more than 3. Therefore, all selected items in this domain express that gap is significant, and universities need to improve the education systems to put more skills in the students to meet the employer requirements in the market.

**Keywords:** Personal skills; Academic skills; Professional skills; Communication skills; Employer requirement

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The problem of exactly pinning down the requisite dimensions of marketability of graduate students is complex and grabbed attention of researchers as research gap exists between the views of final year graduate students of the university and the requirement of the industry. This research is a study to understand various dimensions of marketability of graduate students for various professions in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with special emphasis to Al Kharj governorate. It is also to come out with recommendations which would enhance the marketability of graduate students in various professions. The population of this research would constitute of final year students from various professional courses and professionals from various industries.

Higher education lays on the basic foundation of coming times. The future of a country would be depended upon how well today's students are groomed up and how well they perform in their fields of expertise when they take on the inheritances from their predecessors. As Kingdom of Saudi Arabia looks forward to ushering into a new era of diversified sustainable growth and development. It envisions creating knowledge society through its educated citizens and

employable youngsters. The employable youngsters form the backbone of any economy. To get them employed, they need specific skills, abilities and knowledge to perform well in their area of expertise. These specific skills, abilities and knowledge and also the requirements from industry need to be understood to increase the possibility and probability of the youngsters getting employed and hence helps in increasing the marketability of graduate students. This research is aimed at to find out the marketability aspects for graduate students from professional courses like Engineering, Medicine, Business, Education, Applied Medicine etc. The scope of the study is limited to the governorate of Alkharj in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

This study is also an effort to support the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. The optimum level of an economy would function when the country's young population are all employed. The unemployment rates among young males and females are very high. Saudi Arabia undergoes transformation and transition to becoming a strong economic force, the youngsters are the pushing force and hence their marketability for employability and better scope of career is a must and is of high significance to achieve the strategic goals of the country.

Saudi Arabia is a young-boom country because more than 65% of its population is in the age group between 15-54 years. They are the backbone of the country's economy. Their employability and marketability form the foundation for not only vision 2030 but also for continued long term sustainable growth and development. To identify the marketability dimensions of graduate students for various professions and to use the same for effective and efficient contribution to achievement of country's strategic aims, we need to create knowledge society and also to create a perpetual economic engine which would place the Kingdom as a global economic power. Then, the community can be benefited in terms of very high quality of life and happiness index would also be increased. Based on the above arguments and discussions, our objectives include to identify the most significant marketability factors in Saudi labor market and to measure the marketability factors which graduate students already possess.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The educational sector is fast and vast expanding leading to large quantum of graduate output. There are concerns about unemployment in any economy. The graduate output should be absorbed by the industry but when there is a skill mismatch, the problem of unemployment is created. The once considered "social elite" now stand challenged (Kelsall et al., 1972). This is raising concerns regarding the quality of graduate output and the higher education system's ability to adapt to the dynamic business environment and thereby making economic opportunities irretrievable for the graduates (Scott, 2005). Higher education has always been seen as ways and means to get employment. Through times the concept of being a graduate to get employed changed to being a employable graduate and hence the perception of graduates towards higher education has now changed attributed to mass access to higher education which seems to have limited its role (Tomlinson, 2007; Brooks and Everett, 2009, Little and Archer, 2010). As not only with the above changes but also social and cultural changes, graduates possess an inappropriate notion about opportunity structures (Bowman et al., 2005).

In one of the research findings it was seen that the working-class graduates felt the need for more social and cultural assets for some types of jobs (Greenbank, 2007). More emphasis has been put to skill graduates from the supply side perspective which may lead to problematizing the graduate skills (Holmes, 2001; Hinchliffe and Jolly, 2011). There are evidences to show that employers place more value on soft skills (Hinchliffe and Jolly, 2011). It is also revealed by researches that there is a bias towards graduates graduating from prestigious higher education institutions (Harvey et al., 1997; Hesketh, 2000). The discrepancies in changing dynamic environment and higher education was highlighted the cultural and structural inequalities among various levels in higher education and across the varied industrial sectors (Kupfer, 2011). It has also been observed that employer's inclination towards recruiting employees are cost based and short-term approach is followed rather than

developing human resources. The graduates also face initial problems in transiting from higher education to be an employee in a workplace and has issues to work identities (Holden and Hamblett, 2007).

Al-Sarhan (2013) found several important results like emphasizing and stressing the care of Saudi universities to the standards set by accreditation agencies in addition to the care of social responsibility, employees of the university with focus on elements of organizational culture of universities and improving the educational process as well as the higher authority should adopt the concept of total quality. He recommended that the Saudi universities should adopt all elements of total quality management in all components of university education system and not only in three elements mentioned in the results of the study to market a comprehensive quality learning outcomes.

Noor (2005) claimed that strategic objectives of the country could be achieved at three levels which are social, economic and political. This may maximize the return on investment in cognitive capital. This study was aimed at putting a guiding framework for faculty members and researchers to inform the most appropriate techniques to achieve efficiency and effectiveness under the factors affecting that process. It also motivates to make a simultaneous development of shifting from memorization and indoctrination to create an innovative thinking through developing the performance methods and supporting the distance learning using appropriate techniques. This would be done taking into account the standards of accreditation agencies and making efforts to develop and improve the efficiency of educational performance. It is the focal point to achieve the final objective i.e. preparing the qualified human cadres to serve the community who can understand the scientific principles and concepts and can implement it efficiently and effectively through developing their creative thinking. It requires a shift from traditional methods of performance to benefit from the enormous and huge energies inherent in the modern techniques/technologies. It has the ability to develop and improve the elements which composite the foundations of educational process (faculty member, book, curriculum, student and environment surrounding the educational process).

Fargli (2010) used the analytical descriptive method in the study which enabled to produce several important results such as (1) the Egyptian universities have a number of competitive opportunities at regional, local and international level but these opportunities were not exploited yet as the Egyptian universities lack the administrative and marketing efficiencies, (2) there is absence of culture of marketing ideology as the professors and academicians believe firmly that the universities are not subject to the commercial marketing laws and (3) the researcher stressed that the relation between business and universities is marginal as the businessmen prefer to deal with the energies and experiences of international companies. Therefore, the researcher recommended implementing a successful marketing strategy for Egyptian universities and there should

be financing formarketing centres of Egyptian universities so that they can prepare the servicesand units in a way that is consistent with expectations and aspirations ofbeneficiary customers. The culture of marketing of university services should bedisseminated in Egyptian universities and there should be revision of rules andregulations with the aim to provide feasibility to the units and centres in dealingwith different productive bodies.

After investigating the need of labor market, Al-Otaibi (2010) suggested to provide incentivesfor the specializations which correspond to the needs of labor market, to care thequality for students by producing capable and skilled graduates to revise andparticipation of private sector in specifying the current curriculums in universities,to develop the concept of university education by revising the units of educationoutputs and shifting it to the more developed practical methods and to build a bondof cooperation between the institutions of higher education and labor market to exchange the experiences. AiwaJ and Bodyaar (2014) claimed that the educationalinstitutions should welcome the community partnership in decision makingrelated to the planning of study programs, performance evaluation, financing theprograms and research projects. In the end, it was suggested to innovate new types ofeducation which can deal with the new changes with the aim to increase its effectiveness in the comprehensive development like distance education andopen education program.

Razi and Ibrahim (2010) argued that there isneed to rely on the modern methods in the field of planning and developing theservices in a way that can achieve the comprehensive quality, to make promotionpolicies internally and externally in order to build a network of extensiverelationship with the national institutions, to increase organizing seminars andto meet with the employees, administration and students, to direct thescientific research to address and solve the issues of community and to start the programs of parallel education.The mismatch between higher education and labour requirements may lead to varied outcomes (Cranmer, 2006). It's also seen that there exists a gap between qualification and skill and a variable among graduates and across nations (Edvardsson and Alves, 2010; Puhakka et al., 2010).

It is clear from previous studies that most of these studies has presented severalresults and recommendations, but nostudyis matched with theobjectives of our study. Weclaim for an empirical contribution while achieving the main objectives to our study.

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is a study to understand various dimensions of marketability of graduate students for various professions in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with special emphasis to Alkarj Governorate to come out with recommendations which would enhance the marketability of graduate students in various professions. The population of this research would constitute of final year students from various professional

courses including engineering, medicine, applied medical sciences, science, business, education and pharmacy and professionals from various industries. We distributed 200 questionnaires to the sample students which have been selected through random sampling. But, 130 valid filled questionnaires were received. We targeted the respondents for the survey through a well-structured questionnaire with different constructs of students' skills and gap of required and existing skills. We applied the descriptive analysis approach including athematic mean, standard deviation, t-value to find the average response and to validate the statistical significance of the estimated averages. We belief that more than 3 of average of response would be sufficient to conclude a satisfactory agreement of respondent about any item and/construct and less than 3 would be counted for disagreement.

### IV. RESULTS

In this section, we report the results of estimated athematic mean, standard deviation, t-value of single item of every targeted construct to inquire the skills requirement for employability and employer's requirement as well. We investigate the constructs related to Personal skills, Academic skills, Professional skills, Success skills, Knowledge and information, Applied and practical skills

Skills to deal with others, Communication skills and technology and university output and employer requirement. We investigate all the constructs with reasonable number of items to cover the maximum aspect of the construct. At first, we report the results of personal skills in the table 1.

Table 1  
Personal Skills

Item No	Item Description	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-Value
1	Ability to communicate effectively.	3.23	0.68	54.43
2	Having language skills efficiency (speaking-writing)	2.59	0.90	33.01
3	Ability to solve problems in a scientific manner.	3.08	0.73	48.42
4	Ability to develop oneself continuously.	3.18	0.84	43.10
5	Effective collaboration within a team	3.17	0.83	43.63
6	Enjoying a number of entrepreneurial skills.	2.97	0.83	40.87
7	Enjoy appropriate personal skills	3.26	0.74	50.04

8	Having a number of management skills such as planning, organization and others	3.02	0.84	40.72
9	Has the ability to encourage	3.26	0.80	46.33

Table 1 shows that average of personal skills and all items are showing more than 3 average except items 2 and 6. Moreover, averages of all items are statistically significant. Therefore, most of items are showing at least satisfactory personal skills involvement. Items 7 and 9 are showing highest average score which shows that "Enjoy appropriate personal skills" and "Has the ability to encourage" play better role in building the personal skill. Second highest is "Ability to communicate effectively" which also contribute well in the personal skills. However, lowest average of items "Having language skills efficiency" and "Enjoying a number of entrepreneurial skills" are found hurdle in the way of personal skills.

Table 2  
Academic Skills

Item No	Item Description	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-Value
1	Academically superior	3.01	0.75	45.59
2	Having the ability to achieve or contribute to some research projects	3.01	0.82	41.75
3	Obtain a number of awards and academic honors	2.74	0.92	33.81
4	Having a number of skills and practical experience in his field	2.88	0.90	36.41
5	Holding a number of certificates of appreciation or praise from some recognized academic institutions	2.69	1.01	30.38
6	Extensive knowledge in the field of	3.05	0.83	41.54

	specialization			
	Total Average			

Table 2 shows that average of academic skills and most of items are showing un-satisfactory results as items 3, 4, and 5 show average less than 3. The averages of all items are statistically significant. Highest average is found for item 6 "Extensive knowledge in the field of specialization" but it's average is near to 3 followed by item 1 and 2.

Table 3  
Professional Skills

Item No	Item Description	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-Value
1	Having a number of technical skills	2.85	0.89	36.55
2	Having high precision and high sense	2.97	0.84	39.99
3	Disciplined in his work	3.35	0.78	48.62
4	Participating effectively in the preparation of training programs	2.91	0.87	38.12
5	Having the necessary functional skills to do business efficiently	3.11	0.78	44.86
6	Striving to develop performance at work	3.20	0.83	43.97
7	Having knowledge of modern practices in his specialization and related concerned disciplines	2.95	0.92	36.60
8	Capability of linking the theoretical aspects with the applied aspects in his field of work	2.93	0.87	38.26

9	Capability of analytical, objective and critical thinking	3.12	0.86	41.33
10	Having the ability to manage crises and solve problems	2.98	0.84	40.43
11	Having efficient oral & written communication skills	3.18	0.80	45.66
12	Having high ethical and behavioural skills	3.33	0.75	50.56
13	Having high time management and prioritization	3.13	0.87	41.21
14	Having language speaking skills that are related to the nature of his work	3.13	0.87	40.79
15	Having entrepreneurial spirit	3.08	0.79	44.64
16	Having the ability to develop himself professionally and scientifically	3.24	0.73	50.27
17	Withstanding work stress and adaptation to different conditions	3.26	0.76	48.74
18	Having positive attitudes towards his colleagues in the work environment	3.32	0.67	56.34
19	Having ability to assess alternatives and participate in decision-making	3.16	0.81	44.25

Table 3 shows that average of professional skills and 13 out of 19 items are showing more than 3 average. Moreover, averages of all items are statistically significant. Therefore, most of items are showing at least satisfactory level of professional skills. Items 3 and 12 are showing highest and second highest average scores which shows that "Disciplined in his work" and "Having high ethical and behavioural skills" are playing a major role in building the professional skill. Third highest is "Having positive attitudes towards his colleagues in the work environment" which also contribute well in the professional skills. However, lowest average of item "Having a number of technical skills" is foundas a hurdle in the way of professional skills.

Table No 4  
Knowledge and information

Item No	Item Description	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-Value
1	Knowledge of the foundations, concepts and theories in the field of specialization	3.43	0.50	53.93
2	Knowledge of modern practices in his field and related disciplines	3.29	0.75	49.94

Table 4 shows that average of knowledge and information skills which contains only two items, and which showed average more than 3.25. Moreover, averages of both items are statistically significant. Therefore, the level of knowledge and information skills are found very well in the employability. In comparison, knowledge of fundamental is found better performer in comparison of modern practices. Moreover, it is also evident from the above table that deep knowledge in the concept and theories is the major demand of employers. The in-depth knowledge is the expectation of industry people from the graduates in the university.

Table No 5  
Applied and practical skills

Item No	Item Description	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-Value
1	Applies professional knowledge and skills in the field of specialization efficiently and effectively	3.23	0.78	47.05
2	Having the ability to solve problems in a creative way	3.28	0.68	54.70
3	Investigating, conducting research and studies, drawing conclusions and writing recommendations	2.94	0.84	39.64
4	Creative and innovative in his field	3.08	0.88	39.93
5	Having high productivity in his field	3.16	0.77	46.47
6	Having high quality in the outputs of his work	3.19	0.79	45.60
7	Characterized by high professional ethics	3.45	0.67	58.62
8	Manages his time efficiently and effectively	3.26	0.80	46.31

Table 5 shows that average of applied and practical skills. All items of this construct are showing more than 3 average except the item No. 3 “Investigating, conducting research and studies, drawing conclusions and writing recommendations” which is not desired for practical skills as per respondents’ responses and research skills are found lesser in the respondents. Further, averages of all items are statistically significant. Item No. 7 “Characterized by high professional ethics” showed the highest average score 3.45 which displays that professional ethics are playing a major role in building the applied and practical skills. Highly ethical graduates are the major demand of employers. The students with high degree of ethics are expected to show high practical skills. Second and third highest scores are 3.28 and 3.26 for items 2 and 8 respectively which are “Having the ability to solve problems in a creative way” and “Manages his time efficiently and effectively” respectively. So, these also contributed well in the applied and practical skills.

Table No 6  
Skills of dealing with others and taking responsibility

Item No	Item Description	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-Value
1	Possessing social skills and improves dealing with others	3.48	0.71	55.35
2	Self-learning and personal and academic and professional development	3.16	0.8	44.76
3	Taking responsibility	3.42	0.66	58.34
4	Commitment to ethical and professional values and controls	3.53	0.66	61.07
5	Community participation and attention to issues and community development	3.10	0.86	40.97

Table 6 shows that average of skills of dealing with the others and taking responsibilities. The averages of all items are statistically significant and showing average scores more than 3. Therefore, all items are contributing well in the dealing with the others and taking responsibilities skills. Items 4 and 1 are showing first highest and second highest average scores which shows that “Commitment to ethical and professional values and controls” and “Possessing social skills and improves dealing with others” are playing a major role in building the dealing with the others and taking responsibilities skill. The lowest average score is for “Community participation and attention to issues and community development” which has least contribution. Interpersonal skills are very important aspect for every employer whois looking for the graduates. The graduate with an ability to deal with different people and willingness to take up responsibilities is an important criterionwhich is demanded by the industry. It is clear from the results that graduates who are highly committedwith high professional values and self-control are most important for the organizations.

Table No 7  
Communication skills and information technology

<b>Item No</b>	<b>Item Description</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>t-Value</b>
1	Possessing the elements of effective communication	3.26	0.73	50.76
2	Having openness to others and benefit from their point of view	3.34	0.75	50.57
3	Possessing persuasion skills and dialogue with others	3.29	0.75	49.94
4	Fluency in using computer programs with high efficiency	3.01	0.86	39.86
5	Ability to adapt to the work environment and the technical changes	3.17	0.76	47.53

Communication skills are another important element every employer is concerned about while selecting the graduates for a job. Today technology is the major tool for effective communication, and it may bring in transparency among all the employees in the organization. Table 7 shows that average of items of communication and IT skills. The averages of all five items are statistically significant and showing average scores more than 3. Therefore, all items are contributing well in the communication and IT skills. Moreover, averages of all items are statistically significant. Items 2 is showing highest score 3.34 which shows that "Having openness to others and benefit from their point of view" is playing a major role in the communication and IT skills. Further, items 3 is showing second highest score 3.29 which shows that "Possessing persuasion skills and dialogue with others" is second effective parameter of communication and IT skills. The lowest average score is for item 4 "Fluency in using computer programs with high efficiency" which has least contribution.

Table No 8  
Success Skills

<b>Item No</b>	<b>Item Description</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	
1	Having a clear plan in	3.16	0.74	48.27

	the management of priorities			
2	Disciplined at work	3.13	0.80	44.47
3	Possessing high development ability itself	3.40	0.75	51.51
4	Possessing the ability of motivation and achievement	3.27	0.77	48.04
5	Possessing self-learning skills	3.26	0.75	49.40
6	Having the ability to efficiently utilize available resources	3.10	0.86	41.04
7	Having high self-confidence	3.20	0.82	44.47

Table 8 shows the average of success skills. The averages of all items are statistically significant and showing average scores more than 3. Therefore, all items are contributing well in the success skills. Items 3 is showing highest average score 3.40 which shows that "Possessing high development ability itself" is majorly supporting to the success skills. The items 4 and 5 carry very close average of 3.26 and 3.27 which contribute well in the success skills. The lowest average score is 3.10 for "Having the ability to efficiently utilize available resources" which has least contribution to success skills. Graduates who are interested to learn their own are another set of people highly in demand by the employers. This is pointing to the urge of a candidate to go for life-long learning skill and initiates to self-learning. Self-motivated and achievement-oriented people are the highly demanded graduates in the corporate world. Therefore, success skills are highly demanded by employers and results show a satisfactory level of success skills.

Table No 9  
University's Outcomes and the Requirements of the Labor Market

	<b>Item Description</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>t-Value</b>
1	Establishing a number of modules dealing with career development for students before	3.55	0.69	58.39

	graduation			
2	Improving the quality of training courses offered to the graduate students	3.51	0.66	60.58
3	Involving a number of case studies while teaching courses	3.29	0.80	46.82
4	Increase the number of workshops and simulations offered to students during their undergraduate level.	3.36	0.79	48.07
5	Implementing a number of field projects with students during their studies	3.34	0.82	46.34
6	Organizing a number of training courses and workshops to raise the efficiency of students	3.39	0.78	49.43
7	Organizing focus groups for graduates and employers	3.15	0.90	39.87
8	Hosting a number of professional guest lecturers from the business sector to educate young people about the needs and requirements of employers	3.25	0.86	42.87
9	Enhancing	3.41	0.79	48.97

	communication with graduates in order to benefit from their experiences after employment			
10	Focusing on practical and applied aspects when teaching courses	3.50	0.73	54.10
11	Supporting communication with employers to integrate their requirements into students' courses	3.61	0.63	64.45
12	Activating field training programs and maximizing the utilization of their outputs	3.41	0.82	47.27

It is evident from the above table 9, that item eleven of our objective 4 is the most important aspect which the universities need to concentrate. It is a way to integrate employer's relevant requirements to students' curriculum. The results show that average scores are more than 3 and are found highest in this domain compare to the skills discussed in tables 1-9. In comparison, item 11 represents "Supporting communication with employers to integrate their requirements into students' courses", it is with highest mean value (3.61) and lowest standard deviation (0.63) which means a significant dispersion i.e. gap between the University outcomes and requirements of the labor market. It is followed by second highest item 1 "Establishing a number of modules dealing with career development for students before graduation" with score 3.55. Therefore, opinion of employers about courses and career development modules are very important to meet the labor market requirement. Another important aspect is improving the quality of training courses offered to the graduate students with a mean value of 3.51. The lowest score 3.15 is recorded for item 7 which is "Organizing focus groups for graduates and employers".

#### V. CONCLUSIONS

The universities need to put the required skills in the students which could help them to get jobs and perform jobs

in efficient way according the employers' requirement. We examine the level and need of personal skills, academic skills, professional skills, knowledge and information, applied and practical skills, skills to deal with others, communication skills and technology and success skills among the university students to support a concept of employability in Alkharj. We also explore the gap between university output and employer requirement. To serve the purpose, we design a well-structured questionnaire and distribute among 130 respondents. Further, we apply the descriptive analysis to find the level of skills and gaps. The most of averages of constructs and items related to skills are found more than 3 except academic skills. Because, the response on the most of items in academic skill are found lesser than 3 which is not satisfactory. Moreover, university outcome and requirements of labor market carry highest average with compare to investigated skills. So, we conclude that most of investigated skills are important for employability concept but requirements of labor market are more important than the investigated skills.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results, we recommend the universities to identify the requirements of labor market before developing the syllabus and road map of learning for the students to meet the employer requirements in the market. While doing that, our estimated items of skills would be very helpful to design the right syllabus to put right skills in the university graduates to raise the employability of their graduates. To remove the gap between university's outcome and labor market requirement, we recommend to supporting the communication with employers to integrate their requirements into students' courses, to establish a number of modules dealing with career development for students before graduation, to improve a quality of training courses offered to the graduate students, to enhance the communication with graduates in order to benefit from their experiences after employment to focus on practical and applied aspects when teaching courses, to activate the field training programs to maximize the utilization of their outputs, to organize a number of training courses and workshops to raise the efficiency of students. Last but not least, our estimated items in all skill constructs can be utilized to frame the local educational policy and to optimize the contribution of university in capacity building of the graduates with an objective of increasing employability among the university graduates. In this regard, the marketability dimensions should also be focused for employability of university graduates.

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