

Bridging the Gap between the Employability Skills of the Fresh Business Graduates and the Prospective Employers in Oman

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to identify the skills required for hiring business administration graduates as well as to providing an understanding of the recruitment process involved in hiring these business administration graduates based on the perceive of human resource managers. To achieve these objectives, primary data was collected through a questionnaire with a sample of 35 human resource managers working in different companies in Oman. The analysis and examination of the data revealed that communication skills were the most important soft skill, followed by teamwork, time management, self-management and flexibility. Among hard skills, technical skills were the most important skills. The findings also revealed that employers used advertising as their main source of recruiting candidates. Employers mostly used three stages in the recruitment process, along with personal interviews being the main test used in recruitment. Human resource managers suggested implementing programs in universities to develop communication skills and practical experience for students. The study recommended doing further research into the recruitment process and the factors which influence it and concluded with some implications for hiring fresh business administration graduates.

Key words: *Business management graduates, employability, hard skills, human resources, soft skills, recruitment,*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The transition from higher education to employment can be challenging for fresh business graduates, particularly in Oman, where the job market is highly competitive. As there is a big demand for new graduates, there is also a pressing need for understanding their skills which are required by their prospective employers (Pang et al, 2019). With youth unemployment (between the age of 15–24) being a global issue (Teng et al, 2019), it is important to understand the reason for unemployment. In the present study, we will only focus on business graduates. According to Al-Shehab et al (2020), employees who add value and are able to make a difference in the workplace are those who employers look for. Since the number of business graduates is increasing, it is becoming more difficult for business graduates to find a job. Rowe and Zegwaard(2017) conducted a study in economic and IT sectors which showed that employers, compared to graduates, consider generic employability skills more important than discipline-specific skills (such as punctuality, time management, responsibility, communication, and a positive approach).

Naveed et al (2014) and Hodge and Lear (2011) identified a gap in the perception of business faculty and students of important skills required for employment. They found that the most valued skills for human resource professionals were interpersonal skills, critical thinking, problem solving, and teamwork. Despite having a solid educational foundation, many fresh graduates face difficulties in securing employment, due to a lack of essential employability skills required by prospective employers. As such, there is a need to bridge the gap between the employability skills of fresh business graduates and the requirements of prospective employers in Oman. According to Pang et al (2019), employers prioritize skills such as communication, teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving when hiring fresh business graduates. However, graduates tend to have lower levels of proficiency in these skills compared to employers' expectations. This finding is particularly relevant to Oman where there is a high demand for graduates who possess these skills. Furthermore, Edwin and Sabura (2019) found that there is a gap between the skills that employers value and those that are taught in universities, highlighting the need for closer collaboration between academia and industry. This is relevant in Oman where the education system may not be aligned with the needs of the labor market. As such, there is a need for academic institutions in Oman to work more closely with prospective employers to identify the skills that are in demand and to tailor their programs accordingly.

In Adams' and Freedman's Equity Theory (1967), the authors acknowledge that workers' evaluation and perception of their relationship with their job and employer are influenced by subtle and unpredictable

factors. The theory is predicated on the idea that when workers feel their inputs outweigh their outputs, they lose interest in their work and their employer. Employees may react to this in a variety of ways, such as demotivation (generally to the extent that the employee believes there is a discrepancy between the inputs and the outputs), decreased effort, becoming displeased, or, in more severe situations, perhaps even becoming disruptive.

Another human resource theory was introduced by Edwin Locke. It is called goal-setting theory. In essence, goals outline what needs to be done and how much more effort should be put forth for employees. The level of performance expected is typically higher the more challenging the goal. Employees and managers can work together to develop goals or managers can set objectives for their team members. One benefit of involving employees in goal setting is that they might be more motivated to work toward a goal they helped create. The desired goals should be specific and not general, and managers should provide feedback on performance.

Moreover, Briones et al (2021) found that there is a mismatch between the skills that employers value and those that are taught in universities. They highlighted the skills that are most valuable to employers: leadership, communication, and interpersonal skills. This necessitates the need for further research to explore the extent of this mismatch in Oman and to identify ways to bridge the gap between the skills of fresh business graduates and the needs of prospective employers. The aim of this study is to bridge the gap between the employability skills of fresh business graduates and the expectations of prospective employers in Oman. Specifically, this study seeks to identify the employability skills required by employers in Oman and to assess the extent to which fresh business graduates possess these skills. The expected outcomes of this study include a better understanding of the employability skills required by employers in Oman, an assessment of the skills gap between fresh business graduates and employer expectations, and recommendations for bridging this gap. Ultimately, this study aims to identify the skills needed for hiring business administration graduates and to provide an insight into the recruitment process in Oman. Further research is needed to identify the specific skills that are in demand and to develop programs that can equip graduates with the necessary skills to succeed in the competitive job market in Oman.

1.1 Problem statement

There are a growing number of business graduates in Oman who are unemployed. According to Al Shehab et al (2020), the increasing number of unemployed business graduates is attributed to their lack of employability competencies and knowledge expected by the potential employers. The industry requirements and the skill set of fresh graduates are still not identified clearly (Gibbs, Steel, & Kuiper, 2011; McCracken, Currie & Harrison, 2015; Yorke, 2006). In Oman, the government has prioritized increasing the number of job opportunities for Omani nationals, particularly in the private sector. However, the issue of a skills gap between fresh business graduates and the expectations of employers has become a major obstacle to achieving this goal. This skills gap is characterized by a mismatch between the skills possessed by fresh business graduates and the skills required by employers. As a result, fresh business graduates face difficulties in finding suitable employment opportunities, leading to underemployment or unemployment.

Several studies have highlighted the issue of a skills gap between fresh graduates and employer expectations in different parts of the world. For instance, Tyrańska et al (2021) found a significant gap between the employability skills of graduates and the expectations of employers in Poland. Similarly, Edwin and Sabura (2019) found evidence of a skills gap between university education and employability skills in Oman. However, there is limited research on the specific case of Oman and the employability skills required by employers in the country. The skills gap between fresh business graduates and the expectations of employers is a multifaceted problem that requires a comprehensive solution. The problem can be attributed to several factors such as a mismatch between the curricula taught in universities and the skills required by employers, lack of practical experience and insufficient soft skills. Moreover, there is a lack of understanding of the employability skills required by employers in Oman which contributes to the skills gap. Therefore, it is important to conduct a study that identifies the employability skills required by employers in Oman and assesses the extent to which fresh business graduates possess these skills. This study aims to bridge the gap between the employability skills of fresh business graduates and the expectations of prospective employers in Oman.

1.2 Objectives of the study

This study aims to:

- 1- Identify the set of skills required for hiring Business Administration graduates in order to help them find a suitable job;
- 2- Provide an understanding of the recruitment process from the perspective of Human Resource Professionals in Oman.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, the researchers provided a critical review of relevant studies from which they have gathered knowledge of, and insights into, their project. They have reviewed many papers and included the ones that were relevant to their study. It should be acknowledged, however, that the researchers could barely find any paper that is related to their topic in Oman, which makes their study significant and beneficial to Omani scholars and decision-

makers.

2.1 The recruitment process

Hamzaetal (2021) stated that recruitment is the most essential function of human resource departments, and the recruitment process comes as the first step towards creating a competitive advantage. The researchers used a quantitative method to collect their data and distributed a questionnaire. The study highlighted the importance of the recruitment process in human resource departments. It also showed the steps involved in the recruitment process and the methods of recruitment and how important recruitment is for human resource professionals. The above study examined the recruitment process for human resource departments without addressing the skills required by these departments when recruiting fresh graduates. The present study, however, identified these skills and got insights into the recruitment process from human resource professionals in some Omani companies.

In a study made by Mary (2022) on the effectiveness of the recruitment process, the researcher stated that the recruitment process plays a very important role in organizations and that human resource professionals have a big responsibility to hire the best from existing talents. Convenience sampling was used and the primary data was gathered from 110 respondents through a questionnaire. A pilot study was also used, and it was conducted with 11 participants through a questionnaire as well. Mary found that 42% of the respondents considered qualification to be the most important factor in employee recruitment. The present study did not examine qualifications as a factor in employability because it targeted fresh graduates in business management who have already graduated with a BA degree.

Liang (2020) conducted a study on recruitment and selection and mentioned that a successful recruitment strategy will help organizations develop sustainability along with finding talented employees quickly, and that the purpose of recruitment is to select the required talented employees who meet the job description and expectations. Liang stated that it is required to build two channels: a talented recruitment channel and a self-training channel to help solve the problem of rapid talent import. The above study focused on recruitment and selection of prospective employees, while the present study sought to identify skills required by companies and the perceptions of human resource professionals of the recruitment process.

Kohnováand Papula (2019) conducted a study on the skills required in recruiting new employees. The study shows the perspective of human resource professionals and the way they decide to recruit new employees. The research examines the skills and abilities required in recruiting and selecting employees. The researchers used a sample of 200 businesses and distributed a questionnaire directly to human resource professionals as well as conducting personal interviews. The researchers found 67% of the companies value the ability to think as the main skill, while teamwork and analytical skills came right after that. One surprising result was that IT skills were the least required in recruitment and selection, with 13%. How fast employees can obtain new knowledge and adapt to change was highlighted as a sustainable factor for businesses in the long term. With regard to the importance of learning, organizations regardless of the sector or size, considered this skill the most valued one. The above study and the present study shared some aspects such as the skills required for employing new staff and the perceptions of human resource professionals of the recruitment process. Yet, the findings arrived at in both studies were quite different as the geographical context and the participants in each study were different.

Wardlaw (2019) conducted a case study on human resource practices for recruitment and how they are necessary for the success of any organization. Wardlaw interviewed four human resource and recruitment professionals from a vegetation company which has a well-developed recruitment system with the aim of diving deeply into effective recruiting practices used by human resource professionals. In the above study, it was found that effective human resource practices are very important for achieving the organization's goals and showing how human resource professionals' characteristics can affect the recruitment process as well as recruiting the best talents who could increase and improve the organization's capabilities. Wardlaw explained how human resource professionals use effective recruitment and that some practices are hard to implement because they can be costly and require a big workforce for a large amount of labor, depending on their capability to assess work cycles. The above study focused on talent management strategies and how human resource professionals use them. The talent management process consists of human resource professionals who seek to hire skilled and talented workers who bring about the best outcomes possible. The above study and the present study used different data collection tools to address somewhat different topics and achieve different objectives.

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2.2 Employability skills

In a study done by Osmani et al (2019) on graduates' employability skills in the United Kingdom, the researchers mentioned that graduates' education and employability are the main structure of social and economic development of any country. The methodology adopted in the above study was a combination of literature review and scanning of recent adverts with A&F and ICT fields. The outcomes of both were compared against each other. However, the study found that most companies favor "teamwork" and "communication", and they would hire candidates who contribute to team success. One interesting finding is that some skills such as creativity and personal skills which were highly demanded were not mentioned in the job market. The researchers suggest that the focus should be on how employability is instilled and not what skills are taught. They also suggest that the focus on creating job-ready graduates should be shifted to teaching students how to develop new skills.

Teng et al (2019) conducted a study on soft employability skills. The purpose of their study was to examine

undergraduate students' perspectives on their soft skills that are obtained during university, and how prepared those students were for the future job. The study was conducted on 361 students from two different universities; one is Chinese and the other is Malaysian using an online survey. The researchers found that the university curriculum develops the students' soft skills as well as supporting the connection between soft skills and student readiness for the future job. The above study is different from the present study in its focus and participants.

In a study conducted by Pollard et al (2015) on the approach used by employers to recruit graduates, the researchers aimed to explore graduates' recruitment. Their qualitative study used a number of (76) telephone interviews and two workshops with graduates' recruiters to understand their perspectives. Employers argued that there is a shortage in some skills such as technical skills which graduates cannot apply because of the lack of experience and practice. Employers were also concerned about the high-quality applicants which have a balance of skills and aptitudes as well as work experience. However, when it comes to skills, employers put high priority on interpersonal and communication skills. Employers were interested in finding graduates who would be a fit for their organization, especially in terms of the values and attitudes they have towards work. Employers were extremely interested in such attitudes and put their main focus on candidates who had them. The researchers listed four main causes for unsuitability of graduates, which were (Pollard et. al, 2015, p. 217).

"1- Poor interpersonal skills such as communication (both writing and speaking) and team-working, 2- A lack of commercial orientation, 3- A lack of positive work attitudes or unethical workplace behaviors, like timekeeping and 4- Weak career management and employability skills."

Pang et al (2019) conducted a study on graduates' skills that would help new graduates succeed in the workplace. The study used a questionnaire to gather responses from business employees. The sample consisted of 289 full-time employees from different organizations in Hong Kong. The study aimed to explore the importance of specific skills that would lead to the success of fresh graduates. The researchers found that there are five high-ranking competencies, "ability and willingness to learn", "teamwork and cooperation", "hard work and willingness to take on extra work", "self-control" and "analytical thinking". These five skills were the highest ranking measured. The researchers also stated that hard and soft skills are equally important for business employers.

In a study done by Lisá, et al (2019), the researchers demonstrated the importance of understanding both employers and students' perspectives on employability skills. The study was conducted on 27 companies which hire graduates and a total of 534 students. Employers believe that there is a lack of skills which is the biggest barrier to employing graduates. When it comes to the most important skills, students considered only three skills to be important: experience, leadership, and knowledge of the field. On the other hand, employers considered engagement and willingness to take extra work as the most important skills. The present study focused on the perceptions of employers on the recruitment process and the skills required for recruiting new employees, unlike the above study which focused on the perspectives of both students and employers.

In their study on employability skills in the global business world, Bhagra and Sharma (2018) state that soft skills form a very important aspect of management graduates' employability. It was found that business administration students needed to acquire certain skills in order to be recruited; personal attributes, workplace skills, and how they apply the knowledge and skills they obtained in the corporate environment. Developing these skills would make business administration graduates valuable assets to organizations. The researchers suggest that management graduates need to focus on developing the above-mentioned skills so they can sustain their relevance in the changing employment field. The above study and the present study both examined skills required for recruiting business management graduates, but the present study aimed to identify the skills required for recruiting fresh graduates in business management from the perspectives of human resource professionals.

In a study carried out by LīceandSlok (2019) on the skills and attitudes employers look for in the recruitment process in Latvia, the researchers investigated the opinion of employers on the value of

employability skills in the recruitment process. A total of 750 companies participated, and a set of 17 skills and attitudes were listed. Based on their evaluation and findings, it was found that employers value skills and attitudes that enable people to adapt flexibly to changes in the labor market, especially emotional, self management, and social skills. Employers highly valued the attitude to work, the ability to work autonomously and work enthusiasm. On the other hand, some employers value academic skills which 60% of employers find important. The topic and objectives of the above study are similar to those of the current study. However, the number of participants in the above study is substantially bigger and the context is different. The skills identified in the present study were different from the pre-set skills tested in the above study.

In a study conducted by Al-Shehab et al(2021) on employability skills for business graduates, the researchers found out that employers value teamwork, risk management and decision-making skills. The researchers also suggested that employers should develop bonds with universities in order to improve employability skills. The above study is similar to the present study in terms of some of the skills which are deemed important to recruitment or employability. Besides, both studies suggested forging strong relationships between companies and universities to boost employability.

Marimuthu and Raja (2019) conducted a study on "Employability skills among fresh graduates: Perspectives of employers and graduates" and found that employers prioritize skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability when hiring fresh graduates. They also found that graduates tend to overestimate their proficiency in these skills, highlighting a potential skills gap. The present study is different from the above study in terms of topic and participants as the present study had human resource professionals as its participants, while the above study surveyed employers and graduates for its data.

Lee et al(2020) conducted a study on "Employer preferences for soft skills in the recruitment of fresh graduates" and found that employers value soft skills such as communication, teamwork, leadership, and emotional intelligence over technical skills. They also found that there is a mismatch between the skills that employers value and those that are taught in universities. The above study focused more on soft skills than skills in general, unlike the present study which sought to identify skills required for recruiting fresh graduates. Both studies, however, seemd to arrive at a similar finding with regard to the existence of a gap between the skills taught at universities and the ones required by employers.

Li et al (2022) conducted an empirical study on "Employability Skills Required for Fresh Graduates in China" and found that employers value skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability when hiring fresh graduates. They also found that the demand for skills such as creativity and innovation is increasing, reflecting changes in the job market. The general findings of the above study agree with the some of the findings of the present study on the skills required for recruiting fresh graduates in business management.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized quantitative and qualitative data. The study used a questionnaire as its main data collection method. The researchers used closed-ended statements as well as some open-ended questions in the questionnaire in order to collect the data from the participants. The data collected from the participants was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively in order to achieve the objectives of the study.

3.1 Data collection

The researchers used a structural questionnaire as their main collection data tool. The researchers used two ways for collecting their data from the target companies. First, they went to some companies in Oman to distribute the questionnaire in person, specifically human resource departments. Second, they also generated a link to the questionnaire and shared it with some human resource managers through their interaction with them.

3.2 Population

Since the study depended on receiving answers from employers themselves, the researchers found that in order to achieve the objectives of the study, the data collection should be from human resource managers as they were the employers hiring potential candidates and dealing with the recruitment process. Hence, the population of this study comprised human resource managers working in different private companies in Nizwa and Muscat.

3.3 Sample

35 human resource professionals working in different companies represented the sample of this study. They were of both genders, and they were members of recruitment committees in their companies. A non probability convenient sampling technique was used because the study depended on qualitative and quantitative data. Since the population is not random, the researchers used non-probability convenient sampling due to its practicality, accessibility, suitability for exploratory research, cost-effectiveness, and ability to target specific

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subgroups. However, it is important to acknowledge limitations such as potential selection bias and limited generalizability of findings.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section provides the findings which the researchers have arrived at after analyzing the data they have collected. It also presents a discussion of these findings in comparison with the findings of the previous studies which were discussed in the literature review.

4.1 Discussion of the findings

After analyzing the data which were collected from the twenty-one questionnaires, the researchers have identified the findings and classified them according to the four items of the questionnaire which were demographic information, employability skills required for hiring business administration graduates, recruitment questions and suggestions. The researchers will present and discuss the findings on each of these four elements in detail in the following subsections.

4.2 Findings on demographic information

In this section, the researchers will discuss the responses of the participants to the demographic information provided in the questionnaire. The data in this section was analyzed quantitatively because the graphs include statistics and numbers. It is worth mentioning that the researchers concealed the names of the companies which were under the first question to protect their privacy and meet research ethical standards.

2. Your organization is engaged in:
21 responses

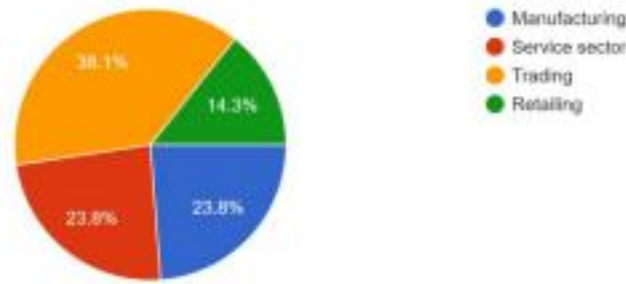


Figure 1 shows the business activities which the participants in the study engaged in. As the chart shows, 38.1% of the participants were engaged in trading, 23.8% of the participants were engaged in manufacturing and the service sector, while the lowest percentage went to retailing with 14.3%

3. The organization is:
21 responses



Figure 2 :Participants' responses to their business sector

Figure 2 shows the sector of the business the participants were engaged in. As the chart shows, 100% of the participants were in the private sector.

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4. The organization is:
21 responses

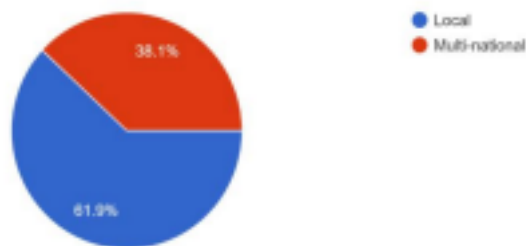


Figure 3: Participants' responses to the company's structure (local, multi-national)

Figure 3 illustrates the participants' responses to whether their company was local or multi-national. As the graph shows, 61.9% of the participants were local companies, while 38.1% were multi-national companies.

4.3 Findings on employability skills required for higher business administration graduates In this section, the researchers will discuss the responses of the participants to the employability skills required for hiring business

administration graduates. First, findings on soft skills will be interpreted, and then findings on hard skills will be interpreted.

1- The ability of communicating and delivering the desired information to others is important (Communication).
21 responses

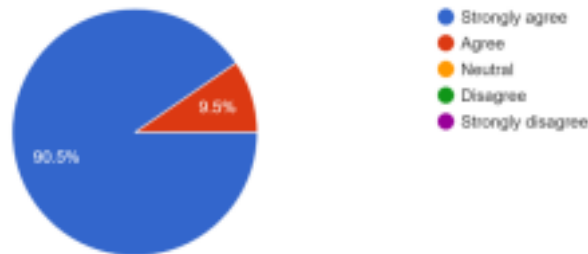


Figure 4: Participants' responses to communication

In Figure 4, we can see that 90.5% of the participants strongly agreed with the statement, and 9.5% agreed. This means that all the respondents agreed with the statement. In a study made by Osmani et al (2019) and other studies, one of their findings was that communication skills were the most important ones. In the present study, communication skills are also the most important among the others.

2- The ability of working with others and motivating them is important (Teamwork).
21 responses

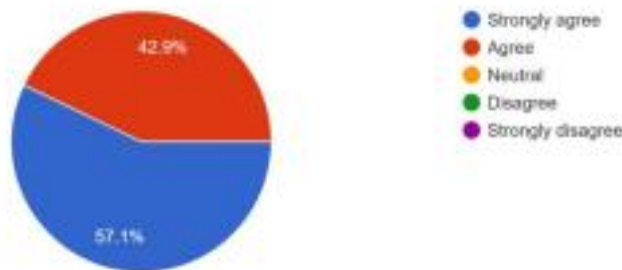


Figure 5: Participants' responses to teamwork

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Figure 5 illustrates the participants' responses to teamwork: 57.1% strongly agreed, and 42.9% agreed. This means that all the respondents agreed with the statement. Osmani et al (2019) found out that teamwork was the second most important skill, and in the present study, teamwork is also the second most important skill.

3- The candidate's ability to solve sudden or predicted problems is important (Problem solving).
21 responses

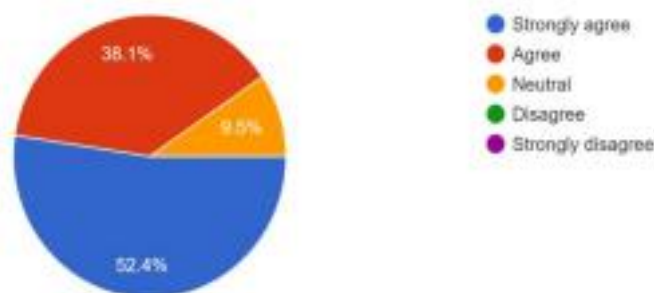


Figure 6: Participants' responses to problem solving

In Figure 6, we can see that 52.4% of the participants strongly agreed, 38.1% agree and only 9.5% were neutral. This means that the majority of the participants agreed with the statement.

4- The ability to analyze objectively and evaluate an issue in order to form a judgement is important (Critical thinking).
21 responses

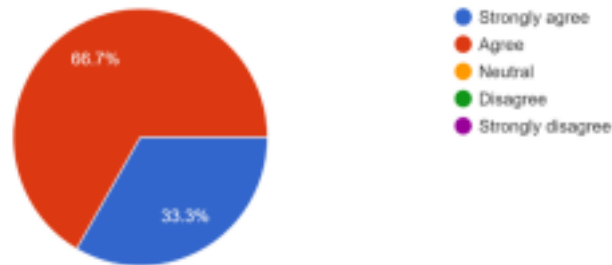


Figure 7: Participants' responses to critical thinking

In Figure 7, we can see that 66.7% of the participants selected "agree", while 33.3% chose "strongly agree". This means that all the respondents agreed with the statement about the importance of critical thinking to recruiting new employees. This is in agreement with the findings of some studies reviewed above in the literature review section.

5- The thinking outside the box and generating new ideas is important (Creativity).
21 responses

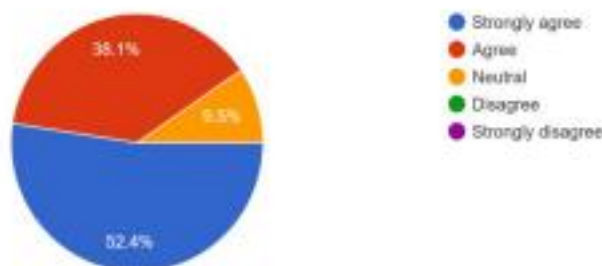


Figure 8: Participants' responses to creativity

Figure 8 shows the participants' responses to creativity: 52.4% of the participants strongly agreed, 38.1% agreed and 9.5% were neutral. This finding indicates that the majority of the respondents agreed with the statement, making this skill a very important skill.

6- The desire to learn and acquire new knowledge is important (Willingness to learn).
21 responses

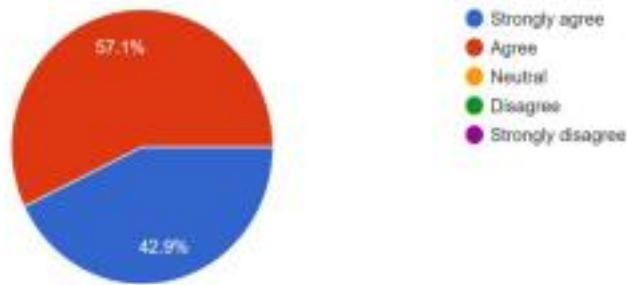


Figure 9: Participants' responses to willingness to learn

In Figure 9, we can see that 57.1% of the participants agreed, and 42.9% strongly agreed. This indicates that all the respondents agreed with the given statement. In a study made by Pang et al (2019), willingness to learn was one of their main five most important skills; however, even though it is important in the present study, it was not one of the top five skills.

7- The thinking proactively of tasks and getting them done well is important (Initiative taking).
21 responses

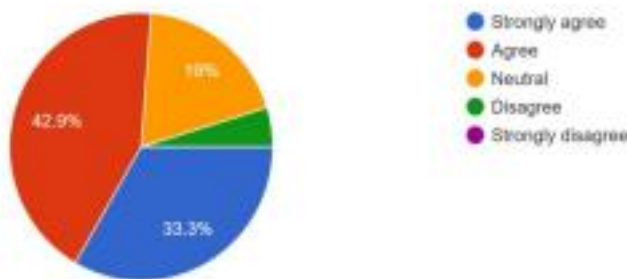


Figure 10: Participants' responses to initiative taking

As Figure 10 shows, 42.9% of the participants agreed, 33.3% strongly agreed, 19% were neutral and only 4.8% of the participants disagreed. This shows that mostly all the respondents agreed with the statement.

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8- The ability to adapt to changes and different situations is important (Flexibility/adaptability).
21 responses

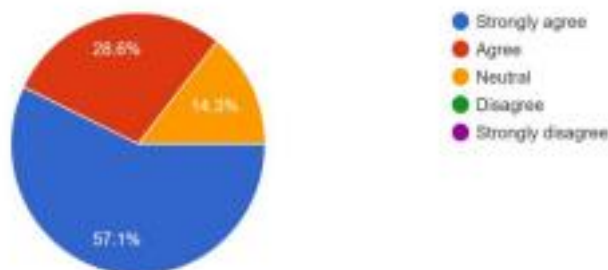


Figure 11: Participants' responses to flexibility/adaptability

In Figure 11, the graph shows that 57.1% of the participants strongly agreed, 28.6% agreed and 14.3% were neutral. This shows that more than 80% of the respondents agreed. In previous studies, it was also shown that

flexibility was an important skill. In the present study, flexibility is the fifth most important skill, according to the respondents.

9- The candidate's ability to lead others, direct them and motivate them is important (Leadership).
21 responses

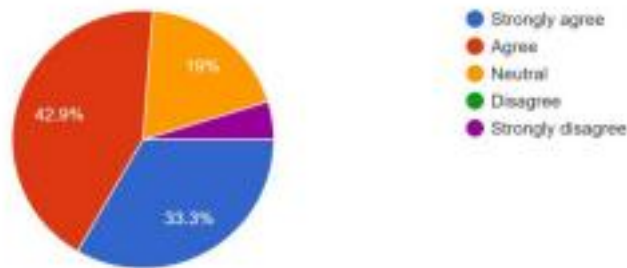


Figure 12: Participants' responses to leadership

In Figure 12, 42.9% of the participants agreed on the importance of leadership to the recruitment of new employees as the graph shows. 33.3% strongly agreed, 19% were neutral, while only 4.8% strongly disagreed. This indicates that the majority of the respondents agreed with the statement.

10- Independence and self-control with positive ego is important (Self-confidence).
21 responses

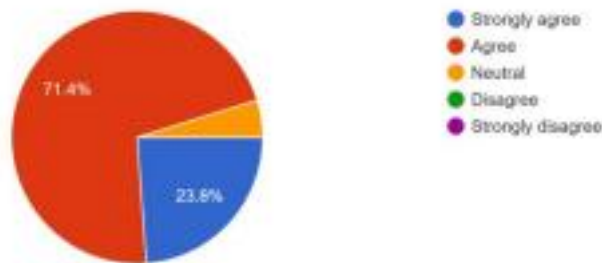


Figure 13: Participants' responses to self-confidence

In Figure 13, we can see that 71.4% of the participants agreed, 23.8% strongly agreed and only 4.8% were neutral. This shows that most of the respondents agreed with the above statement.

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11- The ability to be on time whether in performing tasks or in being physically present is important (Time management).
21 responses

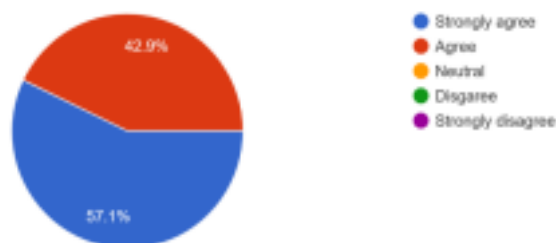


Figure 14: Participants' responses to time management

In Figure 14, 57.1% of the participants strongly agreed and 42.9% agreed which means that all the respondents agreed with the statement of time management which was also highlighted by the previous studies as an important skill. In

the present study, time management is the third most important skill, according to the respondents.

12- The thinking of accomplishing tasks, as well as the competitive thinking and the aim of having an impact is important (Achievement orientation).
21 responses



Figure 15: Participants' responses to achievement orientation

As Figure 15 shows, 47.6 of the participants agreed, 42.9% strongly agreed and 9.5% neutral. This shows that almost all the respondents agreed with the statement. Previous studies have mentioned that achievement orientation is an important skill. However, in our study even though the participants agreed, it is still not extremely important, compared to the other skills.

Figure 16: Participants' responses to planning

In Figure 16, 42.9% of the participants agreed, 33.3% strongly agreed, 14.3% disagreed, and 9.5% were neutral. This indicates that most of the respondents agreed with the above statement. In previous studies, it was not mentioned that planning was an important skill for graduates, and in the present study planning was not one of the main important skills, either.

Figure 17: Participants' responses to stress management

Figure 17 illustrates the participants' responses to stress management. The figure shows that 61.9% agreed, and 38.1% strongly agreed. This means that all the respondents agreed with the given statement.

Participants' responses to self-management

Figure 18:

In Figure 18, 57.1% strongly agreed, and 42.9% agreed. This means that all the respondents agreed with the statement. In a study made by Pang et al (2019), self-management was one of the five most important skills, and in the present study, it is also the fourth most important skill, according to the respondents.

In the following section, the researchers report the findings on the hard skills which were deemed important to the recruitment of new employees as per the participants' responses.

Figure 19: Participants' responses to pre-graduate work experience

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As Figure 19 shows, 33.3% of the participants agreed, 28.6% were neutral, while 19% disagreed, 14.3% strongly disagreed, and only 4.8% strongly agreed. This means that around 50% agreed with this statement, while 33.3% disagreed. In a study conducted by Pollard et al (2015), the researchers arrived at the finding that candidates lack experience and knowledge before engaging in work activities. However, in the present study, the respondents did not fully agree with the statement, as the graph shows. In fact, the participants were somewhat divided on this statement.

Figure 20: Participants' responses to technical skills

In Figure 20, 47.6% of the participants agreed with the statement, 42.9% strongly agreed and 9.5% were neutral. This means the majority of the respondents agreed with the statement. In previous studies, technical skills were highly highlighted as one of the most important skills. In the present study, even though technical skills are important, they are not one of the five most important skills.

Figure 21: Participants' responses to organizational skills

Figure 21 displays the participants' responses to organizational skills. 42.9% of the participants agreed, 23.8% were neutral, 19% strongly agreed, while 14.3% disagreed. This means that the majority of the respondents agreed with the statement. None of the previous studies mentioned anything about organizational skills. However, in our study organizational skills were also not very important according to the respondents.

Figure 22: Participants responses to administrative skills

In figure 22, “Strongly agree, agree and neutral” have the same percentage of 28.6%, while “strongly disagree” has 9.5% and “disagree” has 4.8%, which is the lowest among the others. This means that most respondents tended to agree with the statement.

4.4 Findings on recruitment questions

In this section, the researchers will discuss the responses of the participants to recruitment questions.

Figure 23: Participants’ responses to female special skills

10 participants out of 21 answered with no, while some others gave different answers. One of the participants suggested practical knowledge, someone else suggested pro-activeness, self-motivation and willingness to learn, another participant suggested proper English language and some other participants suggested data analysis and leadership. The ability to communicate was also one of the suggestions, as well as the ability to make quick decisions was suggested by one of the participants. Some other participants suggested that the candidate should be able to perform tasks in critical hours if required. Dedication to the job, the ability to speak in English and write in English well and time management were also suggested by different participants.

Figure 24: Participants' responses to the source of recruitment

Figure 24 illustrates the data collected from the participants on the source of recruiting candidates. 47.6% of the participants selected advertising as their main source of recruiting, 19% of the participants selected employee referral, 14.3% chose campus recruitment, while recruitment agencies, networking, MOL web and "all" are the lowest, with 4.8%. This indicates that almost half of the respondents use advertising as their main source of recruitment.

Figure 25: Participants' responses to the stages involved in recruitment

As figure 25 shows, 42.9% of the participants selected 3 stages in the recruitment process, 38.1% selected 2 stages, and 19% selected 4, leaving 1 stage with 0%. This shows that human resource managers have selected 2 stages and above only, with the majority being between 2 and 3.

Figure 26: Participants' responses to tests used for recruitment

Figure 26 illustrates the participants' responses to the used tests for recruitment. As the graph shows, 85.7% of the participants use personal interviews, 38.1% of the participants use written tests, 19% of the participants use group discussions as well as an aptitude test, and only 4.8% of the participants use all or none. This shows that the majority use personal interviews as their main test during recruitment.

5- Have you faced difficulties with employees who were hired after their graduation with a business degree? If yes, please explain.

The data collected on this question showed that 21 human resource managers answered the fifth question. However, only 13 participants actually answered this question, whereas 8 participants did not write anything. In response to this question, 6 participants said they didn't face difficulties with employees who were hired after their graduation with a business degree without providing any further explanation. This group of respondents formed almost one third of the sample. Another three participants answered that question by saying that the employees they hired after their graduation with a business degree did not have any experience or practical knowledge to do their tasks properly. One participant said that the candidates did not have proper communication skills or knowledge of English to use in the job. Another participant said that sometimes the candidates were not willing to work on some tasks. One more participant said that there was no collaboration between the employees, and in his point of view, this was a challenge encountered by the candidates. Finally, one respondent said that the candidates were not able to provide solutions to the problems they faced at work.

4.5 Findings on suggestions made by the respondents

The data collected on the responses of the participants to the suggestions for hiring business administration graduates showed that only 18 actually answered this question. 9 participants answered with no suggestions. 3 other participants suggested that universities should implement programs for improving communication skills as well as practical programs to help BA students be able to perform their jobs better. One participant suggested that candidates should be ready and willing to travel to develop business skills. Another participant suggested that candidates need real life experience before graduation. Some other participant suggested that candidates need to understand the core of business in order to improve. One respondent suggested that candidates need to be honest in their job. Some other participant said that candidates need to have proper interview skills practically and theoretically. Lastly, one respondent said that candidates need to search for a job in more than one place, and as soon as they graduate. In a study made by Al-Shehab et al (2021), the researchers suggested that universities should help pre-graduates with developing employability skills. In the present study, some respondents suggested the same thing.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

The researchers would like to make the following recommendations based on the findings they have arrived at: 1- This study used a mixed-methods approach to collect and analyze its data. Other studies can use either a qualitative approach or a quantitative approach.

2- This study used a convenience sampling technique to select its participants. Other studies can use another sampling technique to select their samples.

3- This study used one data collection tool which was a questionnaire. Other studies can use a different data collection tool or more than one tool to collect their data.

4- This study was conducted within an Omani context. Other studies can be conducted within other Arab contexts.

5- The same study can be replicated using a larger sample of participants than the sample used in this study to check if similar or different findings can be arrived at.

6- This study targeted business administration graduates. Other studies can target different graduates from different departments and majors.

VI. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of the study cannot be generalized because the sample was limited to only 35 participants and one data collection tool which was a questionnaire. Another limitation and challenge which the researchers encountered while collecting data was that 35 participants expressed their willingness to participate in the study, but when the questionnaire was distributed to them only 21 filled out the questionnaire voluntarily. It is worth mentioning that while seeking participants, the researchers encountered embarrassing situations such as some employers did not welcome them well and others even rejected them. One more limitation was time. The researchers believed that the time was not enough to contact the potential participants and design the research in a timely manner.

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VII. CONCLUSION

With regard to the demographic questions, the main finding was that most of the participants had a trading business, all the participants worked in the private sector, and most of the companies they worked at were local. With regard to the skills questions, all participants (100%) agreed that the communication skill was the most important soft skill required by human resource managers for potential fresh business graduates, whereas the second most important soft skill for the participants was teamwork. The third most important soft skill for the participants was time management, the fourth most important soft skill for the participants was self management, and finally the fifth most important soft skill according to the participants was flexibility/adaptability.

As for the hard skills, the majority of the participants thought that technical skills were the most important hard skills among the other hard skills. With regard to the recruitment questions, the majority of the participants used advertising as their main source of recruiting candidates, whereas 3 stages in the recruitment process were the most selected number of stages by the participants, and the personal interview was the highest test used during the process of recruitment. Lastly, as for the suggestions made by the participants, almost half of the participants did not suggest anything. However, some participants agreed on the suggestion of implementing programs in the universities for developing communication skills as well as practical experience for students before they graduate.

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APPENDIX

The questionnaire

This survey is intended to help the researchers collect data for their graduation project. The researchers are conducting a research study to explore the set of skills required for fresh business administration graduates to be hired by the prospective employers in Oman.

Dear respondent,

Thank you for your co-operation in completing this survey for us. Please be assured that we respect your privacy, and the given answers are only collected to identify the soft and hard skills required for the business administration

graduates to find a job in Oman. Your identity will be anonymous, and your answers will be kept strictly confidential. Your responses are greatly appreciated.

We would like to extend our thanks and gratitude to all participants for allocating your valuable attention and time needed to complete this questionnaire. We assume you read and select properly a mark (√) in the box that reflects your agreement. This survey may take approximately 10-15 minutes.

Thank you so much for your kind cooperation.

A. Demographic Information

1. Name of the company?
.....

2. Your organization is engaged in:

- Manufacturing
- Service sector
- Trading
- Retailing

3. The organization is:

- Government
- Private

4. The organization is:

- Local
- Multi-national

B. Employability skills required for higher business administration graduates.

The following statements indicate the soft and hard skills necessary for the fresh business graduates to find employment in Oman. Please give your responses by putting tick (√) mark in the appropriate column against statements on a five-point scale ranging from “Strongly agree,” “Agree,” “Neutral,” “Disagree,” “Strongly disagree”.

Graduate Skill		Whether respondents agree or not				
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	The ability of communicating and delivering the desired information to others is important (Communication).					
2	The ability of working with others and motivating them is important (Teamwork).					
3	The candidate’s ability to solve sudden or predicted problems is important (Problem solving).					
4	The ability to analyze objectively and evaluate an issue in order to form a judgment is important (Critical thinking).					

5	The thinking outside the box and generating new ideas is important (Creativity).					
6	The desire to learn and acquire new knowledge is important (Willingness to learn).					

7	The thinking proactively of tasks and getting them done well is important (Initiative taking).					
8	The ability to adapt to changes and different situations is important (Flexibility/adaptability).					
9	The candidate's ability to lead others, direct them and motivate them is important (Leadership).					
10	Independence and self-control with positive ego is important (Self-confidence).					
11	The ability to be on time whether in performing tasks or in being physically present is important (Time management).					
12	The thinking of accomplishing tasks, as well as the competitive thinking and the aim of having an impact is important (Achievement orientation).					
13	The ability to plan and set directions is important (Planning).					
14	The ability to manage stress and pressure without impacting the works' results is important (Stress Management).					
15	The candidates' ability to be able to manage their behavior and be ethical in the work field is important (Self-management).					
Hard skills		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	The candidates having experience before graduating is important (Pre-graduation work experience).					
2	The job technical knowledge and specialized knowledge required to perform specific tasks is important (Technical skills).					
3	The ability to schedule, predict problems, thinking of the future and being systematic is important (Organizational skills).					
4	The ability to manage records, files, and databases is important (Administrative Skills).					

C. Recruitment questions

1- Are there any other skills which can be required for hiring female graduates in Oman?

.....

2- What source do you adopt to recruit candidates?

- oEmployee referral
- oCampus recruitment
- oAdvertising
- oRecruitment agencies

oOther, please specify

3- How many stages are involved in the recruitment process?

o 1

o 2

o 3

o 4

o More, please specify

4- Do you use any of the following tests during the process of recruitment?

o Group discussion

o Personal interview

o Written test

o Aptitude test

o Other, please specify.....

5- Have you faced difficulties with employees who were hired after their graduation with a business degree? If yes, please explain.

.....

D. Suggestions if any (For hiring business administration graduates)

.....

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