

BUILDING RESILIENT CAREERS: FUTURE-READY BUSINESS GRADUATES IN THE UAE

Mehrdad Mohasses ¹ and Dr. Harsh Purohit ²

^{1,2} Banasthali Vidyapith, India.

DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.13734751](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13734751)

Abstract

This research examines the perspectives of final-year business students in the UAE regarding their preparedness for the labor market, with a focus on the key skills and learning approaches they consider essential for employability. Through an exploratory descriptive research approach, the study surveyed 156 students across two universities, focusing on their readiness to enter the UAE labor market. The findings indicate that communication, adaptability, and learning skills are deemed the most critical employability skills, with significant differences noted across departments. Students expressed confidence in their academic skills, particularly discipline competency, yet identified IT literacy as an area needing improvement. Experiential learning methods, such as internships and industry placements, were rated as the most effective for acquiring employability skills, surpassing traditional lecture-based approaches. The study highlights the need for UAE universities to align curricula with industry demands and emphasize practical, hands-on learning to ensure graduates are well-prepared for the evolving job market.

Keywords: Employability, UAE Business Students, Experiential Learning, IT Literacy, Academic Skills, Curriculum Alignment.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The UAE is in the midst of a transition towards a knowledge-driven economy, driven by strategic initiatives such as Vision 2021 (Bayut, 2010) and the Centennial 2071 Plan (Ministry of Cabinet Affairs and the Future, 2020). which aim to foster innovation and economic growth. These initiatives aim to make the UAE a global leader by promoting innovation and economic growth. A crucial aspect of this vision is developing a highly skilled workforce that can drive progress in key sectors. As the UAE advances towards these goals, ensuring business graduates are ready for the job market has become a major focus for both educational institutions and employers.

The UAE's labor market has distinctive features, including a large expatriate population and a focus on Emiratisation, which aims to increase the number of Emiratis in the workforce, especially in the private sector. This creates both opportunities and challenges for business graduates. While there are many job prospects in the growing economy, graduates must have both technical skills and soft skills to navigate the multicultural business environment.

In this rapidly changing context, business graduates must be prepared to meet the demands of the UAE's job market. Employers want graduates who are adaptable, innovative, and able to work in a diverse workplace. So, developing employability skills like communication, problem-solving, cultural intelligence, and teamwork is crucial in higher education. Universities have the task of providing students with these skills to ensure they transition smoothly from school to work.

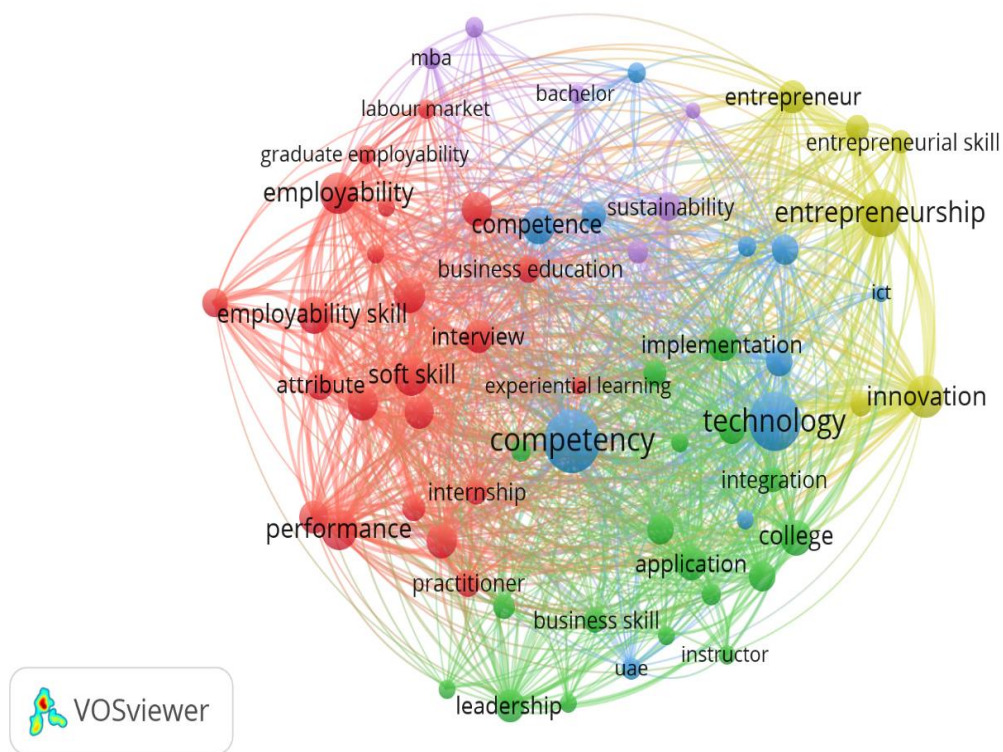
This study focuses on how business students in UAE universities perceive their employability skills as they graduate. Gaining insights into their viewpoints enables us to pinpoint discrepancies between students' existing abilities and the competencies employers seek. This knowledge can help improve educational programs and

curricula. It's important to regularly assess and update university programs to align with industry needs, ensuring graduates are well-prepared for today's business world.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

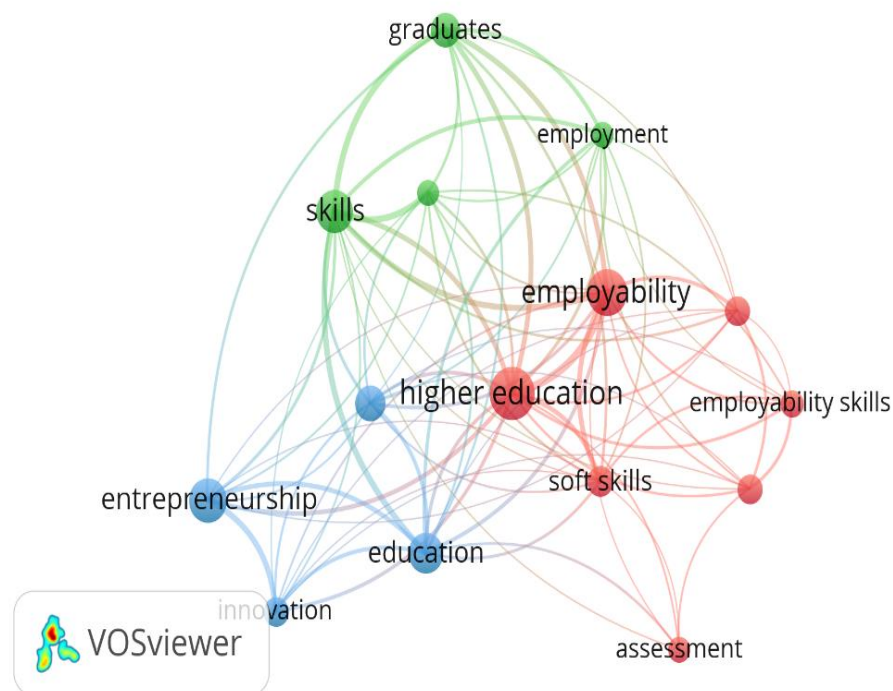
Literature Search and Selection Process

The literature search commenced in January 2023 and included all articles published up until July 2024. Initially, the search involved identifying keywords and broadening the search by retrieving relevant documents. Boolean search strings were employed in the Scopus index for key terms such as "Business Graduates Skills," "Higher Education in UAE" "UAE Future Competencies" "UAE Employers Perception" "Business School Curriculum" and "UAE Business Graduates Employability" (Aliyu, 2017). The above search identified 2,893 research papers that were then exported to VOSviewer to visualize the research landscape, identifying key themes, trends, and relationships between concepts. This process guided your literature search, allowing you to focus on the most relevant areas.



VOSviewer identified five clusters, with the "Business Education and Employability" cluster in red containing 22 keywords. The second-largest cluster, "Higher Education and Professional Skills Development," in green, comprised 18 keywords. The subsequent clusters included "Competencies and Resources in Higher Education" in blue and "Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Education" in yellow. The fifth cluster was "Key Concepts in Business Administration and Sustainability" in purple color.

In another analysis by the VOSViewer the following 15 items were clustered in three categories.



UAE Building a Competitive Workforce

The UAE's vision and plans have long included developing a skilled workforce as a key component. The share of "knowledge workers" in the workforce, for instance, was mentioned as one of the key performance indicators for the creation of a "Competitive Knowledge Economy" in the UAE government's UAE Vision 2021 document, which was published in 2010 (Bayut, 2010).

40% of the UAE workforce has good digital skills but it is lower most comparison with developed countries such as the UK where the rate is 56%. This is less than the 56% of people with good digital skills in the UK, the top rated-nation in the AI-Readiness Index. (Minister of State for Artificial Intelligence Office, 2018). In comparison to the global average of 47.42, the UAE government scored 71.60 on the Government AI Readiness Index. This demonstrates the government's commitment to mobilizing investment in artificial intelligence (Oxford Insights, 2021).

The UAE government is fully aware that skilled human capital is extremely important for economic growth and global competitiveness. According to Minister of State for Foreign Trade Dr. Thani Al Zeyoudi, attracting skilled foreigners to reside, work, and retire in the United Arab Emirates has become essential to driving economic growth since the outbreak (The National, 2021). The 10-year golden card visa program for investors and exceptional talent, as well as the implementation of a residency permit for remote workers in March 2021, are examples of the government's numerous initiatives that demonstrate how adamant the decision-makers are to increase the number of domestic talent pools. (The Policy Times, 2021)

The private sector needs to pay closer attention to competency development. A recent survey of more than 300 employees in large companies in UAE and Saudi Arabia indicated that there is inconsistency in training in data analytics and AI strategies and 97% of respondents said that data training should be expanded to all data workers (Parks, 2022).

Government Initiatives and Skill Development

To support this economic transition, the UAE government has launched several initiatives aimed at enhancing the skillsets of its workforce. Among these, the National Program for Advanced Skills (NPAS) (National Program for Advanced Skills, 2024) stands out as a key effort to bridge the skills gap by equipping graduates with the competencies required for success in the evolving job market. NPAS is designed to ensure that UAE graduates are not just knowledgeable but also adaptable and capable of continuous learning—a necessity in a rapidly changing economy. Through targeted training, workshops, and mentorship programs, NPAS emphasizes the development of essential soft skills such as communication, problem-solving, and cultural intelligence, which are critical for success in both traditional and emerging industries. The program's focus on these competencies reflects the UAE's broader economic strategy, which prioritizes the creation of a versatile and resilient workforce capable of sustaining the nation's competitive edge on the global stage (Mainga et al., 2022).

Educational Context in the UAE

In response to the evolving demands of the labor market, universities in the UAE have increasingly sought to align their curricula with industry needs. This alignment is achieved through the integration of practical experiences and the fostering of collaborations with leading companies. Recognizing that traditional, theory-based education alone is insufficient, UAE universities have incorporated internships, cooperative education programs, and real-world projects into their curricula. These experiential learning opportunities are designed to provide students with hands-on experience, bridging the gap between academic knowledge and practical application. By immersing students in authentic industry settings, universities not only enhance the employability of their graduates but also ensure that they are better prepared to meet the challenges of the modern workplace (Mainga et al., 2022).

Partnerships between universities and the private sector are crucial in this context. Sectors such as finance, logistics, and technology actively collaborate with academic institutions to facilitate knowledge exchange, research collaboration, and curriculum development. These partnerships ensure that academic programs are continuously updated to reflect current industry practices and emerging trends, thereby enhancing the relevance of the education provided. Moreover, by involving industry experts in course design, universities can better tailor their programs to meet the specific needs of employers, thus increasing the employability of their graduates (Fakunle & Higson, 2021).

Curriculum Development and Soft Skills Integration

The rapid pace of economic and technological change in the UAE requires that universities maintain a high degree of agility in their curriculum development processes. Regular curriculum reviews, informed by feedback from employers and benchmarking against global standards, are essential to ensure that educational programs remain relevant and effective. These reviews often lead to the incorporation of new content that addresses emerging industry needs, such as digital literacy and data analytics, alongside traditional business disciplines. However, beyond these technical skills, there is a growing recognition of the importance of soft skills—such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability—which are increasingly seen as indispensable in the modern job market (Tushar & Sooraksa, 2023).

UAE universities have responded by placing a stronger emphasis on the development of these soft skills within their curricula. This is achieved through various pedagogical strategies that encourage active learning and student engagement. A prime example is the shift towards project-based learning at many universities. This approach immerses students in real-world challenges within a collaborative setting, fostering not only their technical prowess but also their teamwork, communication, and critical thinking skills. The integration of soft skills training into the curriculum is essential for preparing students to navigate the complexities of a multicultural and dynamic business environment, which is characteristic of the UAE's economy (Lam & Tang, 2021).

Challenges in Pedagogical Approaches

Despite the progress made in integrating practical and soft skills into business education, UAE universities continue to face significant challenges. Traditional teacher-centered methods, such as lectures, remain prevalent across many institutions. These methods are often criticized for focusing on content delivery and memorization rather than developing practical, transferable skills. As a result, students may graduate with a strong theoretical foundation but cannot apply this knowledge effectively in real-world situations. This disconnect between academic training and workplace expectations has led to growing concerns about the employability of graduates, particularly in a highly competitive job market where employers prioritize adaptability, creativity, and problem-solving abilities (Hossain et al., 2020).

To address these concerns, there is an increasing push towards student-centered learning approaches that place greater emphasis on experiential and interactive learning. These approaches include case studies, simulations, and team-based projects, which not only engage students more deeply in their learning but also help them develop the skills needed to thrive in today's workplace. By actively participating in these learning activities, students can better understand the complexities of real-world business problems and learn how to work collaboratively to solve those (Wilson. Et.al, 2022). However, the implementation of these innovative pedagogies is often hampered by challenges such as large class sizes, limited faculty training in new teaching methods, and the time constraints faced by both students and educators (Frick et al., 2020).

The Role of Continuous Professional Development

As the UAE economy continues to diversify, the importance of lifelong learning and continuous professional development has become increasingly evident. Graduates must be prepared to engage in ongoing education and skill development to remain competitive in the job market. This need for continuous learning is reflected in the UAE's educational policies, which encourage graduates to continually update their skills in response to changing industry needs. The emphasis on lifelong learning is particularly important in a globalized job market, where the ability to adapt and innovate is highly valued (Soares & Mosquera, 2020).

Globalization and Its Impact on Employability

Globalization has further intensified the demand for a broad set of skills that are applicable in a global context. As the UAE positions itself as a global business hub, graduates must be equipped to compete not only locally but also on an international stage. This has led to a greater emphasis on developing skills such as cross-cultural

communication, digital literacy, and global awareness. These competencies are essential for graduates who wish to succeed in a globalized job market, where the ability to adapt to different cultural contexts and technological environments is increasingly important (Hossain et al., 2020).

The literature on employability in the UAE underscores the need for a multifaceted approach to preparing business graduates for the workforce. While technical skills are important, the ability to adapt, communicate, and work effectively in a diverse environment is equally critical. UAE universities are making strides in incorporating these elements into their curricula, but ongoing efforts are needed to ensure that graduates are fully equipped to meet the challenges of a rapidly evolving job market. This research aims to tackle these issues by exploring three core inquiries:

- 1) **Employer Perspective:** From the viewpoint of UAE business graduates, which employability skills are deemed most crucial by employers when hiring recent graduates for entry-level roles?
- 2) **Student Self-Assessment:** Which academic skills do business students in the UAE believe they have fully developed by the time they graduate?
- 3) **Learning Effectiveness:** In the UAE context, which learning approaches do students consider most beneficial for acquiring pertinent knowledge and employability skills?

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In pursuit of our research objectives, we will explore the following questions, seeking insights from both UAE business graduates and students:

- 1) Which employability skills do UAE business graduates consider most critical from an employer's standpoint when hiring for entry-level positions?
- 2) Upon graduation, which academic skills do business students in the UAE feel they have fully mastered?
- 3) In the UAE, which learning approaches do students find most effective for gaining relevant knowledge and employability skills?

4. METHODOLOGY

This study employs an exploratory descriptive research method, utilizing a triangular design approach to gather insights into the employability skills of final-year business students. The primary focus of this investigation is to examine the perceptions of final-year business students across diverse universities in the UAE regarding their employability skills and preparedness for entering the UAE labor market. The selection of universities encompasses both public and private institutions renowned for their emphasis on business education, ensuring a comprehensive representation of the UAE's higher education landscape.

Adhering to the methodological approach employed by Kenayathulla et al. (2019), the viewpoints of final-year students will serve as a representation of the perspectives held by actual graduates. The rationale behind this approach stems from the recognition that at this juncture in their academic journey, most final-year students are on the cusp of completing their studies, and consequently, concerns about securing their first employment opportunity are likely to be at the forefront of their minds. The research

instrument employed in this study is a meticulously crafted questionnaire, designed and implemented through the Microsoft Form platform. The questionnaire comprises seven distinct sections, each serving a specific purpose in data collection. A comprehensive assessment of final-year students' job readiness, encompassing Demographics, employability skills, academic proficiency, teaching methods, and self-perceived employability, aligning with Kenayathulla et al. (2019)'s methodological approach are provided in this section.

The following sections delve into the fundamental aspects of employability. In the “Employability Skills” section, we highlight crucial soft skills drawn from the literature. These include effective communication, problem-solving abilities, adaptability, positive attitudes, interpersonal skills, and teamwork. Meanwhile, the “Academic Skills” section encourages students to assess their proficiency in critical and analytical thinking, business communication, lifelong learning, and subject-specific expertise. The teaching/learning methods section investigates the perceived helpfulness of various methods, including lectures, assignments, pre-graduation employment, internships, group case studies, guest speakers, and university career services. Finally, the perceived employability section gauges students' confidence in their skills, the relevance of their degree to their desired career, the quality of their academic work, and their overall optimism about securing graduate-level employment.

The questionnaire items were meticulously crafted, drawing upon a comprehensive review of pertinent literature and incorporating valuable insights from research by Finch et al. (2013). Moreover, a thorough documentary analysis was performed on a range of secondary sources, encompassing journal articles, books, and articles obtained from various online databases.

Data collection was conducted using convenience sampling. Upon uploading the survey to Microsoft Forms, a link was disseminated to senior business students at the participating universities. To further encourage participation, some lecturers also utilized group emails. Data collection spanned two semesters, from the autumn of 2023 to the spring of 2024, allowing for a wider timeframe for student participation. Subsequent data analysis was conducted using SPSS (V22), employing statistical methods to uncover meaningful patterns and insights within the collected data.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis begins with an examination of the demographic profiles of the survey participants, offering insights into the diversity of the student body. The data was gathered from final-year business students enrolled in various universities across the UAE, encompassing a diverse range of institutions, including both public and private, all recognized for their strong emphasis on business education. The students surveyed were pursuing a variety of business-related majors, such as Business Administration, Marketing and Entrepreneurship, Finance and Accounting, Logistics, and Business Analytics, reflecting the multifaceted nature of business education in the UAE. The demographic data reveals that the respondents were nearly evenly split by gender, with 52.9% female and 47.1% male. This gender distribution reflects a more balanced representation in UAE universities, which contrasts with the broader trend where female enrolment often surpasses that of males. Additionally, a significant portion of the respondents (73.7%) were already engaged in some form of employment, highlighting the prevalence of part-time work and internships among

students in the UAE. The age distribution of the respondents indicates that the majority (60.9%) fell within the 20-24 age range, which is typical for final-year undergraduate students. The remaining respondents were distributed across older age groups, with 35.9% aged 25-29 and a small percentage (3.2%) being 30-34 years old, possibly pursuing higher education alongside their careers or other commitments.

Table 1: Demographic Data

Age	
20-24	95
25-29	59
30-34	2
Total	156
Sex	
Male	73
Female	83
Employment status	
Employed	115
Not employed	38
Missing	3
Business Administration (General)	55
Marketing and Entrepreneurship	43
Finance and Accounting	23
Logistics	21
Business Analytics	10
Missing	4

The study rigorously evaluated the reliability of six pivotal variables: Employability Skills, Study Skills, Self-Management, Teamwork, Learning Styles, and Job Confidence. As detailed in Table 2, Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all variables exceeded the benchmark of 0.6, spanning from 0.690 to 0.875. This firmly establishes the robust internal consistency reliability of each variable, rendering them highly suitable for an exploratory investigation within the realm of social sciences, aligning with established standards (Taherdoost, 2016). The reliability of these constructs is particularly significant in the context of UAE higher education, where understanding the alignment of business graduates' skills with workplace demands is essential.

These findings provide a robust foundation for further data analysis, allowing us to address the research questions posed in this study. Specifically, the reliability measures validate the constructs used to evaluate how effectively UAE business graduates' skills meet the expectations of employers. As we continue our data analysis, we will examine the relationships between these variables to better understand how UAE business schools can enhance their curricula and teaching methods to produce graduates who are well-prepared for the challenges of the contemporary workplace.

Table 2: Internal Consistency

Indicators/Factors	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
Employability Skills	0.690	41
Study Skills	0.720	30
Self-Management	0.810	26
Teamwork	0.855	12
Learning Styles	0.875	35
Job Confidence	0.815	8

Employability Skills

Table 3 provides a comprehensive overview of the employability skills that graduating students consider most crucial from an employer's perspective when hiring for entry-level positions. These insights were gathered through the survey question: "Which of the following factors do you consider key or most important in securing an initial graduate-level job? (please rank in order of importance, i.e., 1–14 with 1 = most important)." In line with established research practices, the study employed mean scores to pinpoint the skills that students believe employers value most when recruiting new business graduates. (Strong et al., 2020).

The analysis commenced with a comprehensive examination of the most sought-after skills among employers when hiring recent business graduates for entry-level roles. The initial phase involved a holistic assessment of the responses, followed by a more granular investigation of the results, categorized by individual departments. This two-pronged approach aimed to provide both a broad overview and specific departmental insights into the skills employers prioritize. As shown in Table 3, the top skills identified by students include communication skills (Rank 1), adaptability skills (Rank 2), learning skills (Rank 3), and problem-solving skills (Rank 4). Time management skills and teamwork skills were considered moderately important, ranked 6th and 7th, respectively. On the other hand, self-management skills (Rank 9), positive attitudes and behaviors (Rank 8), and interpersonal skills (Rank 5) were viewed as relatively less important.

When comparing the views of students from different departments, the overall ranking showed slight variations. However, communication skills remained the highest-rated skill across all departments. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether there were significant differences in how students from the three major departments (Business Administration, Marketing and Entrepreneurship, and Accounting and Finance) prioritized these employability skills. The results indicated significant differences in the importance of certain skills, particularly problem-solving skills ($p = 0.025$), positive attitudes and behaviors ($p = 0.002$), and self-management skills ($p = 0.005$), suggesting that students from different departments may value these skills differently when considering entry-level job requirements.

Table 3: Employability Skills Attributes

	Totals Mean	Totals SD	Rank	BA General Mean	BA General SD	Marketing and Ent Mean	Marketing and Ent SD	Accounting /Finance Mean	Accounting /Finance SD	F-value	p-value
Communication skills	8.865	3.542	1	9.104	2.966	8.722	4.266	8.379	4.428	0.628	0.536
Adaptability skills	8.418	3.787	2	8.750	3.829	9.500	2.872	7.180	3.966	2.411	0.096
Learning skills	8.324	3.472	3	8.585	3.469	7.833	4.500	7.923	3.075	0.555	0.576
Problem-solving skills	7.640	3.714	4	7.543	3.575	8.944	3.358	7.315	4.179	3.859	0.025
Interpersonal skills	7.274	3.179	5	6.883	3.097	7.389	3.333	7.700	3.416	1.426	0.246
Time management skills	6.988	2.305	6	6.926	2.393	6.625	1.959	7.167	2.457	0.630	0.535
Teamwork skills	6.277	3.033	7	6.075	3.167	5.500	2.211	6.860	3.211	1.157	0.319
Positive attitudes and behaviours	6.167	2.783	8	6.604	2.912	4.250	2.121	6.020	2.679	6.532	0.002
Self-management skills	5.076	3.126	9	4.563	2.690	6.500	3.621	5.260	3.503	5.550	0.005

Academic Skills

In addressing research question 2, the analysis focuses on students' self-assessment of their academic skill development upon graduation. Participants were prompted to evaluate their proficiency across various skills, using a 5-point Likert scale (5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree) to respond to the statement: "Which of the following skills do you perceive as fully developed in you, now that you have completed your degree program?" This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of graduates' self-perceived preparedness to specific academic competencies.

The findings suggest that students generally felt their academic skills were adequately developed upon graduation. The mean scores for most skills hovered around 4.0, reflecting a consensus (4 = agree). Notably, discipline competency received the highest mean score of 4.46, while academic performance and communication skills were also seen as relatively strong. However, IT literacy skills, despite their importance in today's job market, were rated lower with a mean score of 3.88, suggesting these skills were perceived as less well-developed. The differences in mean scores across various academic skills were not statistically significant ($F = 0.998$, $p = 0.311$), indicating no substantial variation in how students rated these skills. This lack of significant difference implies that the observed rankings might not reflect genuine disparities but could instead be due to chance.

When we look at the mean scores across the three departments—BA General, Marketing and Entrepreneurship, and Accounting/Finance—none reached the 4.5–5 range, which would signify a strong agreement that specific skills were fully developed at graduation. This suggests that while students from all departments generally felt that academic skills were adequately developed, there is still room for improvement. One-way ANOVA results showed no significant differences in how students from different departments rated these skills (F values ranging from 0.101 to 1.709, all $p > 0.05$). This consistency across departments suggests that students shared similar views on the extent to which various academic skills were developed in business graduates.

Table 4: Academic Skills

Skill Type	Mean	SD	Rank	BA General Mean	BA General SD	Marketing and Ent Mean	Marketing and Ent SD	Accounting/ Finance Mean	Accounting / Finance SD	One Way ANOVA F	One Way ANOVA
Discipline Competency	4.464	0.668	1	4.751	0.8756	4.010	0.583	4.630	0.548	1.709	0.169
Academic Performance (GPA, exams)	3.887	0.627	2	3.927	0.8756	3.609	0.821	4.125	0.507	0.101	0.715
IT skills	3.875	0.790	2	3.930	1.0127	3.925	0.574	3.770	0.670	0.998	0.311
Communication skills	3.847	0.536	3	4.246	0.6597	3.606	0.537	3.690	0.416	1.108	0.282
Problem-solving/ Math skills	3.600	0.600	4	3.550	0.8412	3.450	0.716	3.800	0.480	0.964	0.320
Critical and analytical thinking skills	3.546	0.650	5	3.540	0.6718	3.219	0.756	3.879	0.530	0.063	0.953
Decision-making skills	3.435	0.740	6	3.500	0.8699	3.179	0.746	3.625	0.620	1.090	0.153

Learning Methods

This analysis pertains to research question 3, which asked students: "Which of the following learning methods did you find most helpful in facilitating/enabling you to acquire 'employability skills'? (please rank in terms of most important, i.e., 1–12, with 1 = most important)." Higher mean scores indicate methods perceived as more helpful.

According to the data presented in Table 5, students favored experiential and interactive learning approaches, with **internship/industry job placements** (mean = 8.0125) ranked as the most effective method for acquiring employability skills. This was followed by **interdisciplinary projects/project-based learning** (mean = 7.1967), which underscores the importance of integrative and practical learning experiences that mimic real-world work environments.

Group case studies (mean = 6.3157) and **simulation/game-based learning** (mean = 6.2018) were also rated highly, further emphasizing the value of active engagement in learning. Traditional lecture-based methods, while still important, were rated lower in comparison, with **lectures** (mean = 5.9579) and **assignments** (mean = 5.9339) occupying mid-level positions in the ranking.

More traditional assessment methods like **tests and quizzes** (mean = 5.7191) were seen as moderately helpful but were not as impactful as more interactive or experiential methods. The inclusion of reflective practices, such as **writing a 'Reflective' Learning Portfolio** (mean = 5.2543), indicates some appreciation for reflective learning, though it ranks lower than other methods.

Industry/company guest speakers (mean = 5.1370) and career fairs and workshops (mean = 5.1342) were perceived as less effective compared to the more hands-on learning methods. Industry tours (mean = 4.5400) were ranked lowest, suggesting potential underutilization, possibly due to logistical or financial constraints.

Statistical analysis has unveiled a striking disparity in how students evaluate various learning methods ($F = 7.775, p < 0.0000$). This underscores that students hold distinct perspectives on the efficacy of different approaches. Notably, the findings emphasize a clear inclination towards methods that offer hands-on experience and active engagement, as these are deemed pivotal in cultivating the skills essential for thriving in the professional world.

Table 5: Learning Methods

Learning Methods	Mean	Standard Deviation
Internship/Industry job placements	8.013	2.713
Interdisciplinary project/ Project-based Learning	7.197	1.473
Group Case Studies	6.316	3.154
Simulation/Game-based learning	6.202	2.804
Lectures	5.958	2.603
Assignments	5.934	2.467
Tests and quizzes	5.719	2.442
Writing a 'Reflective' Learning Portfolio	5.254	1.967
Industry/Company guest speakers	5.137	2.544
Career fairs and workshops	5.134	3.399
Industry tours	4.540	2.010

6. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Employability Skills:

Communication skills emerged as the top priority for UAE business students, consistently ranked as the most important skill across all departments for securing entry-level positions. Adaptability and learning skills followed closely, indicating their perceived importance in the fast-paced and multicultural business environment of the UAE. Problem-solving skills were also valued, particularly by students from the Marketing and Entrepreneurship department, who rated them higher than their peers in other departments.

This difference suggests that certain employability skills may hold varying levels of importance depending on the students' academic focus and career aspirations. Skills such as self-management and interpersonal skills were ranked lower in importance, reflecting areas where students may feel less confident or deemed less critical for initial job entry. However, these skills remain essential for long-term career success and should not be overlooked in curriculum design.

Academic Skills:

The survey revealed that students in the UAE generally felt well-prepared academically by the time they graduated. Discipline competency was rated the highest among academic skills, with a mean score of 4.46, reflecting strong confidence in their subject-specific knowledge.

However, IT literacy skills, despite their growing importance in the modern job market, received a lower mean score of 3.88. This suggests that students perceive a gap in their IT competencies, which could hinder their competitiveness in a technology-driven business environment.

Communication and problem-solving/math skills were also identified as important but with slightly lower mean scores, indicating some room for improvement. The data showed no significant differences in how these academic skills were rated across the three departments, suggesting a consistent perception of skill development across different academic disciplines.

Learning Methods:

Experiential learning methods, such as internships and industry placements, were overwhelmingly favored by students as the most effective way to acquire employability skills. With a mean score of 8.01, these hands-on experiences were seen as critical in bridging the gap between academic theory and practical application. Interdisciplinary projects and group case studies also ranked highly, reinforcing the value of collaborative and project-based learning approaches that simulate real-world business challenges.

Traditional lecture-based methods were rated lower in effectiveness, with students indicating a preference for more interactive and practical learning opportunities. The significant differences in how students rated these methods suggest that while traditional teaching has its place, there is a clear demand for more engaging and applied learning experiences in the UAE's higher education system.

In the UAE, perceived employability among business graduates is shaped by several key factors, including the reputation of their university, the alignment of their skills with industry demands, and their ability to navigate a multicultural work environment.

The UAE's emphasis on innovation and technology further influences students' perceptions of their employability, as they recognize the importance of digital skills and the ability to adapt to rapid technological changes.

The survey results indicate that UAE business students generally feel confident in their academic achievements and technical skills. However, there is a noticeable concern about their readiness in areas such as leadership, cultural intelligence, and problem-solving in diverse teams. Students who have participated in internships or industry placements report higher levels of confidence in their employability, highlighting the value of practical experience in the UAE job market.

Overall, the findings highlight the importance of aligning academic programs with the practical demands of the business world, ensuring that students not only excel in academic skills but also develop the employability skills and personal management capabilities necessary for success in the UAE's dynamic and multicultural work environment.

7. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings highlight the critical need for UAE business education to be closely aligned with the evolving requirements of the local labor market, ensuring that graduates possess both the technical and soft skills necessary for success.

UAE universities need to focus on developing technical and soft skills critical for success in a multicultural and rapidly evolving business environment. There is also a need for stronger partnerships between universities and industries to ensure that graduates are well-equipped to meet the demands of the UAE economy.

UAE educational institutions should consider revising their curricula to include more opportunities for experiential learning, such as internships and industry-led projects. Additionally, there should be an increased focus on developing soft skills, particularly cultural intelligence and leadership, which are crucial in the UAE's diverse workplace.

Policy and Institutional Recommendations

To enhance the employability of business graduates in the UAE, universities should consider several key policy changes. First, there should be a greater emphasis on integrating soft skills development into the curriculum. This could include mandatory courses on leadership, cultural intelligence, and communication skills, as well as opportunities for students to develop these skills through practical experiences such as internships and industry collaborations.

Second, universities should strengthen their ties with the private sector to ensure that their programs are aligned with the needs of the UAE economy. This could involve partnerships with leading companies to offer internships, guest lectures, and real

8. CONCLUSION

As the UAE continues to implement its ambitious economic and educational strategies, the role of universities in preparing graduates for the workforce becomes increasingly critical.

This study highlights the need for UAE universities to enhance their focus on employability skills, ensuring that graduates are not only academically proficient but also equipped with the soft skills necessary to navigate the challenges of the modern workplace. By aligning educational outcomes with the needs of the local economy, UAE universities can play a pivotal role in achieving the nation's long-term vision of a diversified and sustainable economy.

References

- 1) Aliyu, M. (2017). Efficiency of Boolean search strings for Information retrieval. *American Journal of Engineering Research*, 216-222.
- 2) Bayut. (2010). *All about the UAE Vision 2021*. Retrieved from Bayut: <https://www.bayut.com/mybayut/uae-vision-2021/>
- 3) Fakunle, D., & Higson, H. (2021). Graduate employability in the United Arab Emirates: A critical review of the literature. *Higher Education*, 81(3), 505–524.
- 4) Finch, D. J., Hamilton, L. K., Baldwin, R., & Zehner, M. (2013). An exploratory study of factors affecting undergraduate employability. *Education + Training*.
- 5) Frick, H., Birt, J., & Waters, J. (2020). Enhancing student engagement in large management accounting lectures. *Accounting & Finance*, 60(1), 271-298.
- 6) Kenyathulla, Husaina Banu, Nor Aziah Ahmad, and Abdul Rahman Idris. 2019. Gaps between competence and importance of employability skills: Evidence from Malaysia. *Higher Education Evaluation and Development* 13: 97–112.
- 7) Hossain, M. M., Purohit, H., & Khan, A. (2020). Employability skills of business graduates in the UAE: An exploratory study. *International Journal of Management Education*, 18(2), 100342.
- 8) Lam, T., & Tang, E. P. Y. (2021). Soft skills for employability in the UAE: A qualitative study of Emirati graduates. *Journal of Education for Business*, 96(3), 185–193.
- 9) Mainga, W., Chiyaka, E. T., & Sibanda, K. (2022). Employability skills of business graduates in the United Arab Emirates: An exploratory study. *International Journal of Management Education*, 20(1), 100552.
- 10) Minister of State for Artificial Intelligence Office. (2018). *UAE National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence 2031*. Retrieved from National Programme Artificial Intelligence: <https://ai.gov.ae/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/UAE-National-Strategy-for-Artificial-Intelligence-2031.pdf>
- 11) Ministry of Cabinet Affairs and the Future. (2020). *Future Possibilities Report 2020*. (Centennial Lab) Retrieved May 12, 2022, from 2020 Centennial Lab: National Program for Advanced Skills. (2024, August). *UAE Government Portal*. Diambil kembali dari Human resources development and education: <https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/strategies-initiatives-and-awards/strategies-plans-and-visions/human-resources-development-and-education/national-program-for-advanced-skills>
- 12) Oxford Insights. (2021, January 21). *Government AI Readiness Index 2021*. Retrieved from Oxford Insights: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58b2e92c1e5b6c828058484e/t/61ead0752e7529590e98d35f/1642778757117/Government_AI_Readiness_21.pdf
- 13) Parks, L. (2022, January 11). *Alteryx: Gulf is ripe for AI innovation as 50% of data workers automate tasks*. Retrieved from ITP: <https://www.itp.net/business/alteryx-data-automation-and-ai-potential>
- 14) Soares, F., & Mosquera, F. (2020). Continuous professional development in the UAE: A study of teachers' perceptions and practices. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 75, 102194.
- 15) Strong, T., Hocking, I., & Gardner, K. (2020). Graduate employability: A review of conceptual and empirical themes. *Studies in Higher Education*, 45(11), 2155–2170.

- 16) Taherdoost, H. (2016). Validity and reliability of the research instrument; How to test the validation of a questionnaire/survey in a research. *International Journal of Academic Research in Management (IJARM)*, 5(3), 28–36.
- 17) The National. (2021, May 06). Minister outlines vision to attract global talent to 'live, work and retire' in UAE. *The National News*: <https://www.thenationalnews.com/uae/government/minister-outlines-vision-to-attract-global-talent-to-live-work-and-retire-in-uae-1.1218098>
- 18) The Policy Times. (2021, May 11). *Minister reveals his vision for attracting global talent to 'live, work, and retire' in the UAE*. Retrieved from The Policy Times: <https://thepolicytimes.com/minister-reveals-his-vision-for-attracting-global-talent-to-live-work-and-retire-in-the-uae/>
Tushar, H., & Sooraksa, N. (2023). Global employability skills in the 21st century workplace: A semi-systematic literature review. *Heliyon*.
- 19) Wilson, D., Aggar, C., Massey, D., & Walker, F. (2022). The use of mobile technology to support work integrated learning in undergraduate nursing programs: An integrative review. *Nurse Education Today*, 116, 105451.