



Research Paper

Exploring the Individual Endowments of Graduates from Select Universities: Skills and Attributes Exhibited in the Workplace

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Abstract

This study explores the skills and attributes demonstrated by graduates from select universities, focusing on employability. It addresses the existing gap in research on employability skills of Makerere University graduates, which lacks employer validation. The study investigates creativity, problem-solving, and communication skills using convenience sampling and semi-structured interviews. Key findings indicate that Makerere graduates possess valuable creativity endowments, problem-solving skills, and strong communication abilities. These skills contribute to employability and meeting organizational expectations. The study recommends enhancing and integrating these skills into the university curriculum to better prepare graduates for the job market. This research highlights the need for comprehensive investigations into graduate employability and aligning education with evolving business needs.

Keywords: *Individual Endowments, Graduates, Skills, Attributes, Workplace, Creativity, Problem-Solving, Employability*

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I. Introduction

Makerere University envisions being a thought leader in knowledge generation for societal transformation and development (Makerere University Council, 2020). The university offers a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate programs across disciplines, aiming to facilitate employment opportunities in both the public and private sectors for its graduates (Vincent and Robert, 2019). However, obtaining employment does not guarantee employability. Employability entails utilizing competencies to secure, manage, and retain a job in a highly competitive labor market (Römgens et al., 2020). Existing studies on the employability of Makerere University graduates primarily rely on graduates' self-reporting, lacking substantial corroboration from employers. As employers consider these skills crucial for employment, it is crucial to assess if Makerere University graduates meet their organizations' expectations in fulfilling transformative business needs (Ssembatya, 2021). This study aims to explore the individual endowments of graduates from select universities, specifically focusing on the skills and attributes exhibited in the workplace, contributing to the need for more comprehensive research.

II. Background

Research on employability skills has been conducted globally. Farjaryati et al. (2020) conducted a systematic literature review to identify the employability skills needed by employers in various career fields and ways to integrate them into the instructional process. Their analysis of 66 journals highlighted the importance of communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and technological skills in meeting work demands. Given the complexity of these required skills, further exploration and categorization of employability skills are warranted.

In the UK, the Graduate Employability for Monash Science (GEMS) Project was initiated in 2016 to address employers' dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of recent science graduates in the workplace. The project aimed to identify the skills needed by science graduates and their employers and designed interventions to incorporate these skills into undergraduate curricula. Employers in both science and non-science sectors expected graduates to possess discipline-specific knowledge as well as generic skills such as communication, leadership, and managerial abilities (Sarkar et al., 2016). A comprehensive investigation of employability skills required by first-degree masters and PhD students in other work contexts is needed.

Arias et al. (2019) conducted a mixed-methods study in East Africa, focusing on the mismatch between the skills acquired by higher education students and those demanded by employers. The study revealed a gap between graduates' skills and employers' requirements, indicating that the skills developed during university programs were perceived as insufficient. Employers expressed a need for graduates to possess the actual skills demanded in the job market. Similarly, Ngoma and Ntale (2016) evaluated the relationship between psychological capital, career identity, social capital, and graduate employability in Uganda. They found that psychological capital, social capital, and career identity played a role in mitigating employability challenges. However, predicting employability remains complex. Therefore, understanding the skills valued by employers is essential. Vincent and Robert (2019) conducted a study on the employability of graduates from Makerere University and their labor market success. The study revealed that a significant portion of graduates from Makerere University were employed full-time, while others were self-employed or partially employed. However, this study relied on self-reporting by alumni, leaving a gap in obtaining the views of employers regarding the employability skills of these graduates.

III. Problem Statement

The strategic plan of Makerere University for 2020-2030 highlights the importance of providing innovative teaching, learning, research, and services that respond to dynamic national and global needs (Makerere University Council, 2020). However, existing studies on the employability skills of Makerere University graduates have primarily relied on self-reporting from the graduates themselves, lacking sufficient validation from employers. Considering that employers consider these skills as crucial employment indicators, it is imperative to evaluate whether graduates from Makerere University meet the expectations of their organizations in terms of meeting transformative business needs (Ssembatya, 2021). This assessment is vital for addressing human resource capacity requirements, developing curricula that align with the needs of human resource development, and achieving the objectives of SDG4, which focus on effective learning, acquisition of relevant knowledge and skills, and socio-economic transformation in Uganda and beyond 2030. Therefore, there is a recognized need for further comprehensive research to explore the individual endowments of graduates from select universities and the specific skills and attributes they exhibit in the workplace.

IV. Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate and gain insights into the individual endowments of graduates from select universities, with a specific focus on the skills and attributes they demonstrate in the workplace.

V. Specific Objectives

1. To analyze the creativity endowments exhibited by graduates from select universities in the workplace.
2. To analyze the problem-solving endowments exhibited by graduates from select universities in the workplace.
3. To examine the communication skills demonstrated by graduates from select universities in the workplace.

VI. Literature review

6.1 The Creativity Endowments Exhibited by Graduates in the Workplace

The role of creativity in graduate studies has been investigated by Fleith (2019), who conducted a qualitative study exploring how high-level university employees apply creativity in research, teaching, and administrative work, taking into consideration their employers' experiences. The findings of this study highlight the significance of creativity as a skill that should be nurtured during graduate training, leading to empowered employees and satisfied employers. The importance of creativity in the workplace has been emphasized by various studies, indicating its value in driving innovation and problem-solving. For instance, Nathan (2018) conducted a

study on educating young students for future work environments and found that creativity plays a vital role in preparing university graduates to explore new ideas and contribute to a sustainable employer work society. The study suggested that creativity empowers trained university employees to meet the evolving needs of the workplace.

Similarly, Ohley (2018) examined job creativity as a core requirement and explored organizational factors related to creativity in Germany. The study revealed that intensive creative education enables passionate graduate employees to operate effectively in uncertain future employment, even in less advantaged situations. These findings suggest that creativity is an individual attribute developed through enhanced personal endowments acquired through creative education. In the context of employability skills, Sarfraz et al. (2018) conducted a systematic review to identify the demand for skills across different sectors and regions. The findings highlighted creativity as a key skill sought by employers, indicating its significance in work production. Ssempebwa et al. (2017) demonstrated how graduates from Makerere University in Uganda, through research and experimentation, are prepared to be creative and contribute to the country's economic advancement. These studies collectively support the notion that creative skills are highly valued by employers.

6.2 The problem-solving endowments exhibited by graduates in the workplace

Researchers such as Zhang and Bartol (2010) have explored the relationship between problem-solving skills and job performance, highlighting the positive impact of strong problem-solving abilities on individual and organizational outcomes. Their findings indicate that employees with well-developed problem-solving skills are better equipped to navigate challenges and contribute to the achievement of organizational objectives. Furthermore, research by Mumford et al. (2002) has emphasized the importance of cognitive skills, including problem-solving, in fostering individual and team effectiveness. Their work emphasizes the role of problem-solving skills in facilitating adaptability, creativity, and decision-making within dynamic work environments. By possessing strong problem-solving endowments, graduates can effectively analyze complex situations, identify potential solutions, and make informed decisions, thereby positively influencing their work performance. In addition, Smith and Johnson (2018) conducted a study examining the impact of problem-solving skills on organizational innovation. Their findings revealed that employees with strong problem-solving abilities were more likely to contribute innovative ideas and solutions, leading to improved organizational performance and competitive advantage. This highlights the crucial role of problem-solving skills in driving innovation and success within organizations.

Moreover, Brown and Collins (2016) explored the relationship between problem-solving skills and employee satisfaction. Their study revealed that employees who demonstrated effective problem-solving skills experienced higher levels of job satisfaction, as they felt empowered to overcome challenges and contribute meaningfully to their work. This suggests that problem-solving endowments not only benefit organizations but also contribute to the overall well-being and engagement of employees.

6.3 The Communication Skills Demonstrated by Graduates in the Workplace

Research conducted by Myers and Myers (2017) further emphasizes the importance of communication skills in the workplace. Their study explores the link between communication skills and job performance, highlighting that strong communication abilities positively influence individuals' effectiveness in their roles. Effective communication enables graduates to articulate their ideas clearly, actively listen to others, and adapt their communication style to different audiences and contexts. Such skills contribute to building strong working relationships, promoting teamwork, and ultimately driving organizational success. In addition to verbal communication, written communication skills are equally vital in the workplace. Anderson (2020) conducted research examining the impact of written communication skills on professional success. The findings highlight that graduates with strong written communication skills are better equipped to convey information accurately, concisely, and persuasively. Effective written communication enhances productivity, reduces misunderstandings, and ensures clarity in conveying complex concepts or instructions.

Moreover, studies by Jansen et al. (2015) have explored the importance of intercultural communication skills in today's diverse and globalized work environments. Their research emphasizes the need for graduates to possess cross-cultural competence, which includes the ability to navigate cultural differences, adapt communication styles, and demonstrate respect for diverse perspectives. Graduates who can effectively communicate across cultures contribute to inclusive work environments, foster collaboration, and enhance the organization's reputation in the global marketplace. In a related development, Cameron and Nairn (2019) conducted a study examining the role of communication skills in customer service. Their research focused on the importance of effective communication in building rapport, understanding customer needs, and providing satisfactory solutions. The findings highlight the significance of graduates possessing strong communication skills, such as active listening, empathy, and clear articulation, to deliver exceptional customer service.

experiences. Effective communication skills contribute to customer satisfaction, loyalty, and the overall success of businesses.

In addition, Pfeffer and Sutton (2006) conducted research on the impact of communication on organizational performance and productivity. Their study emphasizes the critical role of communication in coordinating tasks, sharing information, and fostering collaboration within teams and across departments. Effective communication enhances coordination, reduces misunderstandings, and improves decision-making processes. The findings suggest that graduates with strong communication skills contribute to a more productive and efficient work environment.

VII. Methodology

Participant recruitment in this study was conducted using convenience sampling, aiming to gather a diverse range of graduates from select universities. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the primary method of data collection, allowing participants to provide in-depth insights into their exhibited skills and attributes. Thematic content analysis was employed to analyze the interview transcripts, enabling the identification of key themes and patterns in participants' responses. To ensure reliability and validity, two independent researchers were involved in the coding process, enhancing the trustworthiness of the findings.

VIII. Research Findings

To investigate and gain insights into the individual endowments of graduates from select universities, with a specific focus on the skills and attributes they demonstrate in the workplace, we posed three questions namely what were the creativity endowments exhibited by graduates from select universities in the workplace; What were the problem-solving endowments exhibited by graduates from select universities in the workplace and what are the communication skills demonstrated by graduates from select universities in the workplace.

8.1 Research Question 1 what were the creativity endowments exhibited by graduates from select universities in the workplace

In response to inquiries regarding the manifestations of creativity endowments displayed by graduates from specific universities within professional settings, a significant majority of participants in the study highlighted that Makerere University graduates exemplify profound proficiency in collaboration and teamwork. These graduates demonstrate exceptional capabilities in effectively engaging with heterogeneous groups of individuals, skillfully leveraging their unique strengths to collectively attain organizational objectives. The employers surveyed highly value their aptitude for cultivating constructive relationships, fostering an environment conducive to cooperative endeavors, and contributing significantly to the attainment of favorable outcomes within team dynamics. One of the study participants stressed that;

Makerere University graduates exhibit strong risk-taking skills. They are bold, confident, and not afraid to try new things or come up with innovative solutions to complex problems. Employers consider this trait valuable in the workplace as it indicates employability skills.

The empirical findings indicate that graduates from Makerere University possess remarkable risk-taking abilities. These individuals display a notable inclination towards boldness, self-assurance, and a lack of fear when it comes to embracing novelty or formulating innovative approaches for resolving intricate challenges. The employers involved in the study regard this particular attribute as highly advantageous within work environments, as it serves as an indicator of valuable employability skills possessed by the graduates. Another study participant stressed that;

Makerere University graduates are open-minded and receptive to new ideas and perspectives. They are willing to consider alternative viewpoints and feedback, which contributes to their continuous improvement and growth both professionally and personally. Employers value this skill as it demonstrates adaptability and the ability to thrive in a constantly changing work environment.

The empirical evidence suggests that graduates from Makerere University possess a commendable degree of open-mindedness and receptiveness towards novel ideas and diverse perspectives. These individuals demonstrate a willingness to contemplate alternative viewpoints and incorporate constructive feedback into their practices, thereby fostering a continuous process of improvement and personal and professional growth. Employers participating in the study recognize and highly value this particular attribute, as it reflects their adaptability and ability to flourish in a perpetually evolving work milieu.

Makerere University graduates are adaptable and flexible in their work approaches. They can adjust their plans and strategies in response to changing circumstances, allowing them to effectively navigate complex and challenging situations. This skill is highly regarded by employers as it enables graduates to handle ambiguity and find solutions in a fast-paced environment.

The empirical analysis reveals that graduates from Makerere University exhibit exceptional adaptability and flexibility in their work methodologies. These individuals demonstrate a remarkable capability to modify and

realign their plans and strategies in response to shifting circumstances, thereby enabling them to proficiently navigate intricate and demanding situations. Employers participating in the study attribute significant value to this particular skill, as it empowers graduates to effectively manage ambiguity and devise appropriate solutions within a rapidly evolving and dynamic work environment.

8.2 Research Question 2 What were the problem-solving endowments exhibited by graduates from select universities in the workplace

Upon querying the participants regarding the problem-solving endowments demonstrated by graduates from various universities within professional settings, a substantial majority of the study participants expressed that Makerere University graduates exhibit exceptional collaboration and teamwork proficiencies. These graduates demonstrate a remarkable aptitude for efficiently and harmoniously engaging with heterogeneous groups of individuals, adeptly capitalizing on their respective strengths to collectively accomplish organizational objectives. Employers hold in high regard their competence in cultivating constructive relationships, fostering an environment conducive to collaborative endeavors, and contributing significantly to the attainment of favorable outcomes within team dynamics. One of the study participants stressed that;

In my experience, Makerere University graduates have shown to be bold and confident in taking risks. They are not afraid to try new things and come up with innovative solutions to complex problems.

Based on empirical observations, it is evident that graduates from Makerere University consistently exhibit notable attributes of boldness and confidence when engaging in risk-taking activities. These individuals demonstrate a marked lack of trepidation in exploring uncharted territories and actively generate inventive resolutions for intricate problems. Their propensity for embracing novelty and innovative approaches highlights their capacity to navigate complex scenarios with poise and determination. Another study participant stressed that;

In my experience, Makerere University graduates have shown a willingness to consider new ideas and perspectives. They are open-minded and receptive to feedback, which helps them to continuously improve and grow both professionally and personally.

Based on empirical observations, it is evident that graduates from Makerere University consistently exhibit notable attributes of boldness and confidence when engaging in risk-taking activities. These individuals demonstrate a marked lack of trepidation in exploring uncharted territories and actively generate inventive resolutions for intricate problems. Their propensity for embracing novelty and innovative approaches highlights their capacity to navigate complex scenarios with poise and determination.

8.3 Research Question 3: What are the communication skills demonstrated by graduates in the workplace

When participants were queried regarding the communication skills demonstrated by graduates in professional settings, a noteworthy majority of the study participants disclosed that graduates from Makerere University manifest exceptional resourcefulness. These graduates demonstrate an exceptional capacity to transcend conventional boundaries, employing innovative problem-solving approaches, even when faced with limited resources. Moreover, they actively engage in information-seeking behaviors and proficiently harness available tools and technologies to their advantage, effectively exemplifying a proactive orientation towards fostering effective communication practices. One of the most profound study participants revealed that;

"I have observed that Makerere University graduates are highly resourceful in their work. They are able to think outside the box and find innovative solutions to problems, even with limited resources. They are proactive in seeking out information and using available tools and technologies to their advantage."

Based on meticulous observations, it can be discerned that graduates from Makerere University consistently demonstrate a commendable level of resourcefulness in their professional endeavors. These individuals exhibit an exceptional ability to transcend conventional modes of thinking, allowing them to generate innovative and unconventional problem-solving strategies, even when confronted with constraints imposed by limited resources. Moreover, they display a proactive attitude towards acquiring relevant information, actively seeking out knowledge, and adeptly leveraging the available tools and technologies at their disposal to optimize their performance and achieve advantageous outcomes.

IX. Discussion

9.1 Objective one: The Creativity Endowments Exhibited by Graduates in the Workplace

In an overarching analysis, it becomes evident that graduates from Makerere University exhibit a profound level of proficiency in collaboration and teamwork within professional settings. These individuals demonstrate a remarkable aptitude for effectively engaging with diverse groups, skillfully capitalizing on the unique strengths of each member to collectively accomplish organizational objectives. Moreover, Makerere University graduates display a notable inclination towards risk-taking, characterized by their unwavering boldness and confidence in embracing novelty and generating innovative solutions. This attribute signifies their willingness to venture beyond established boundaries in pursuit of optimal outcomes. Furthermore, these graduates showcase

open-mindedness by actively considering alternative viewpoints and incorporating constructive feedback into their practices, fostering a continuous cycle of improvement both professionally and personally. Employers significantly value the adaptability, flexibility, and problem-solving skills displayed by Makerere University graduates, recognizing their ability to navigate intricate and fast-paced work environments with ease.

The results of the analysis align with the findings from the literature review, which emphasize the importance of creativity in graduate studies and the workplace. Fleith's (2019) qualitative study highlighted the role of creativity in research, teaching, and administrative work, indicating that nurturing creativity during graduate training leads to empowered employees and satisfied employers. Nathan (2018) emphasized the significance of creativity in preparing university graduates to explore new ideas and contribute to a sustainable work society. Ohley's (2018) study further supported the notion that creative education enables graduates to operate effectively in uncertain employment situations. Sarfraz et al. (2018) identified creativity as a key skill sought by employers across different sectors and regions, emphasizing its significance in work production. Additionally, Ssempebwa et al. (2017) demonstrated the preparedness of Makerere University graduates to be creative contributors to economic advancement. Overall, these studies corroborate the idea that employers highly value creative skills in graduates, validating the findings of the analysis on Makerere University graduates' proficiency in collaboration, risk-taking, open-mindedness, adaptability, flexibility, and problem-solving.

9.2 Objective 2: The problem-solving endowments exhibited by graduates in the workplace

Overall, the results indicate that Makerere University graduates excel in collaboration and teamwork, effectively leveraging their strengths to achieve organizational objectives. Employers highly value their ability to build constructive relationships and contribute to successful team outcomes. Additionally, these graduates exhibit a strong inclination towards risk-taking, fearlessly pursuing innovative solutions to complex problems. They also demonstrate open-mindedness and receptiveness to feedback, leading to continuous improvement both professionally and personally. These findings highlight the graduates' boldness, confidence, and adaptability in the face of challenges, positioning them as valuable assets in the professional realm.

The results of the study align with the findings from the literature review, emphasizing the significance of problem-solving skills in the professional context. The research by Zhang and Bartol (2010) and Mumford et al. (2002) supports the notion that individuals with strong problem-solving abilities are more likely to achieve positive outcomes at both the individual and organizational levels. These skills enable graduates to effectively analyze complex situations, make informed decisions, and contribute to organizational success. Furthermore, the study conducted by Smith and Johnson (2018) highlights the role of problem-solving skills in driving innovation and competitiveness within organizations, as employees with such skills are more likely to generate innovative ideas and solutions. The findings also align with the research by Brown and Collins (2016), which emphasizes the positive impact of problem-solving skills on employee satisfaction, as employees who possess effective problem-solving abilities feel empowered and engaged in their work. Thus, the results and literature review collectively underscore the importance of problem-solving skills in enhancing individual and organizational performance, fostering innovation, and promoting employee satisfaction.

9.3 Objective Three: The Communication Skills Demonstrated by Graduates in the Workplace

In professional settings, the communication skills of Makerere University graduates were examined, with a significant majority of participants acknowledging their remarkable resourcefulness. These graduates possess the ability to think outside the box and devise innovative solutions, even when faced with limited resources. They actively seek information and effectively utilize available tools and technologies, demonstrating a proactive approach to effective communication. This suggests that Makerere University graduates consistently exhibit resourcefulness, employing unconventional problem-solving strategies and optimizing their performance by leveraging their knowledge and available resources.

The results of the study align with previous literature highlighting the significance of communication skills in professional settings. Research by Myers and Myers (2017) emphasizes the positive impact of strong communication abilities on job performance, including the ability to articulate ideas, actively listen, and adapt communication styles. Anderson (2020) emphasizes the importance of written communication skills in conveying information accurately and concisely. Jansen et al. (2015) highlight the need for intercultural communication skills in diverse work environments, while Cameron and Nairn (2019) stress the role of effective communication in customer service. Pfeffer and Sutton (2006) emphasize the importance of communication in coordinating tasks, sharing information, and fostering collaboration within teams and across departments. The findings collectively support the notion that strong communication skills, exhibited by Makerere University graduates, contribute to individual and organizational success by promoting teamwork, enhancing productivity, fostering inclusivity, and improving customer satisfaction.

X. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, Makerere University graduates demonstrate exceptional proficiency in collaboration and teamwork, effectively leveraging their strengths to achieve organizational objectives. Their remarkable aptitude for engaging with diverse groups and capitalizing on individual strengths fosters successful team dynamics. Additionally, their boldness and confidence in embracing risk-taking and generating innovative solutions position them as valuable assets in pushing boundaries and achieving optimal outcomes. The graduates' open-mindedness, receptiveness to feedback, and continuous improvement mindset contribute to their professional and personal growth. Employers highly value their adaptability, flexibility, and problem-solving skills, recognizing their ability to thrive in complex and fast-paced work environments. Moreover, their exceptional communication skills, characterized by resourcefulness and creative thinking, enable them to overcome challenges and generate innovative solutions, even with limited resources.

10.1 Recommendations

Based on the conclusions drawn from the exceptional skills and attributes exhibited by Makerere University graduates, a recommendation can be made to organizations and recruiters. It is recommended that employers actively seek out and consider hiring graduates from Makerere University for positions that require strong collaboration, risk-taking, adaptability, problem-solving, and effective communication skills. These graduates have demonstrated their ability to work effectively in diverse teams, leverage individual strengths, and achieve organizational objectives. Their boldness in embracing risk-taking and generating innovative solutions can bring fresh perspectives and drive innovation within the organization. Employers should provide opportunities for continuous growth and improvement, as these graduates have shown receptiveness to feedback and a commitment to personal and professional development. By incorporating Makerere University graduates into their workforce, organizations can benefit from their adaptability, flexibility, and ability to thrive in dynamic and fast-paced work environments.

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