



CAREER READINESS: A SURVEY ON EFFECTIVENESS OF LEARNING EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL

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Abstract:

The major purpose of this study was to determine the extent of effectiveness of learning employability skills at university level. This research intends to study the impact of the syllabus in developing fresh graduates' knowledge and skills required for self-marketing as well as to determine their level of career readiness. It also aims to evaluate the degree of usefulness of the Employability Skills Development module among fresh graduates of the National University of Science and Technology, College of Engineering in the Sultanate of Oman. The research design used in this study is descriptive as the results obtained are presented as inferred from the analysis. The study was conducted in NUST College of Engineering. Data collection for this study was done by administering a questionnaire to fresh graduates. Simple random sampling method was used. The raw data was tabulated and the percentages were calculated for each questionnaire item along the five response options besides the overall percentages were also computed for each dimension. The sample size was 134 fresh graduates, covering both male and female fresh graduates from different engineering specialisations. The data was collected using simple random sampling method. A questionnaire consisting of 20 items was developed by the researchers to collect data. The questionnaire had three dimensions; namely self-assessment, job search techniques and self-marketing tools. The results strongly confirm the effectiveness of the ESD module with an overall 89.55% of students expressing their confidence in facing career challenges. The results show a clear indication of career readiness through the three dimensions namely self-assessment, job search techniques, and self-marketing tools. Eighty-one percent of the students were equipped with skills to make winning moves in the modern day competitive job market. Students found the ESD module useful in increasing their career readiness. It confirms the usefulness of having such kind of training at university level and likewise applauds the effectiveness of the module.

Keywords: Career Readiness; Effectiveness; Employability Skills; Self-Marketing; Fresh Graduates; Job Market.

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1. Introduction

Employability skills are considered the most important factors while recruiting fresh graduates to the world of work. Higher education institutions today interact with the industry to understand the skill requirement that fresh graduates need when they are preparing themselves for the dynamic job market. On the other hand, higher education institutions are incorporating employability skills curriculum within their respective programmes to educate fresh graduates about the significance of developing these skills to be better prepared for careers in the future. This is supported by Lowden, K., et al (2011). Employers expect graduates to display good communication, team work, leadership and problem-solving abilities collectively known as employability skills. To ensure that fresh graduates are equipped with these skills, universities have integrated the curriculum within the mainstream programmes.

In yesteryears, understanding of employability skills was a subtle part of academics. Some fresh graduates were able to realise the value, these skills hold in order to obtain and maintain a job; while others being totally unaware of the role of employability skills in making an impression as a prospective candidate for the job. In recent years, colleges and universities have recognised that embedding employability skills in the curriculum will benefit the fresh graduates and give them an edge over other fresh graduates who have not gone through formal education and platform for learning and practicing employability skills. Steven and Fallows (1998) maintain that fresh graduates are ill prepared for a transition from education to employment if they are not provided the essential skills that make them ready for employment.

In 2003, the College of Engineering introduced employability skills module as part of professional development for engineering students to develop a readiness to be able to brand themselves and succeed along their career pathway.

The Employability Skills Development module at the National University of Science and Technology, College of Engineering is dedicated to developing fresh graduates' basic job search skills and techniques. It aims at developing the fresh graduates' skills to enter, stay in and progress in their workplace through mastering job search and career enhancement skills. Besides the module focuses on facilitating fresh graduates to develop self-marketing and self-presentation skills through their resume, elevator speech or personal commercial. In addition, the fresh graduates practice individual and group presentations and job interviews through simulation and role plays. The module also emphasized that fresh graduates should understand the importance of acquiring the necessary technical knowledge and competencies in order to be global engineers. Further the module stressed on identifying professional ethics and practices through high standards of critical thinking and reflection. Moreover, the module guides fresh graduates to plan their career pathway through evaluation of key employers in the Sultanate and GCC region where competency development for engineers are mapped with the UK Standard of Professional Engineering Competencies (UK SPEC). This is done in order to benchmark the skills and competencies to meet global standards. This evaluation helps fresh graduates to understand the continued professional development activities they should take to be successful in their respective engineering careers. As the engineering fresh graduates map their competencies with the UKSPEC they are able to recognise the combination of technical and soft skill sets they need to be able to make a mark for themselves in the engineering industry. This helps them to make action plans for further progress

in their careers. The mapping also gives fresh graduates the knowledge of commitment standards required by chartered engineers. It helps in reinforcing the role of engineers in using analytical techniques in developing innovative engineering solutions to problems using latest technology. This also draws their attention to the fact that in executing their technical responsibilities they have to take into consideration socio – economic factors. Moreover, they also understand the need to carry out their role with good interpersonal skills and adopt ethical measures in making systems easier for the society. (UK SPEC, 2013)

The study is undertaken to evaluate the extent of effectiveness of learning employability skills at university level. Besides the college would like to analyse whether the syllabus covered by the module was useful in enhancing the employability skills of fresh graduates, the research question being- Has the training in employability skills created career readiness among fresh graduates?

This research intends to study the impact of the syllabus in developing fresh graduates' knowledge and skills required for self-marketing. Furthermore, this study aims to determine the level of career readiness of fresh graduates. It also aims to evaluate the degree of usefulness of the Employability Skills Development module among fresh graduates of the National University of Science and Technology, College of Engineering in the Sultanate of Oman. Hence, the researchers look forward to learning how the module is instrumental in developing fresh graduates' career readiness.

The researchers expect that -

- The level of fresh graduates' career readiness is high.
- Majority of the fresh graduates find Employability Skills Development module useful in increasing their level of career readiness.
- Eighty percent of the fresh graduates are confident that Employability Skills Development module has equipped them with the employability skills required by the competitive job market.

The dimensions covered under this study are self-assessment, job search techniques and self-marketing tools.

Significance of the Study

The study would benefit the researchers in getting feedback on the effectiveness of the module. It would further promote the usefulness of the module so that the fresh graduates explore every part of the syllabus of the module and use it for enhancing their employability skills. In addition it would facilitate tutors to continue giving the fresh graduates a richer experience of getting ready for the challenges of the job market.

Literature Review

The researchers have explored many thought provoking studies on enhancing employability skills. In one such study on the perception of engineering students and their prospective employers it was found that employers give importance to personal and behavioral attributes of a candidate whereas students give more importance to their technical skills.(Chithra, 2013) This difference in perception of employers and students has been identified across some Higher Education Institutions and hence, the College of Engineering in the current study has on its board an Industry Interactive Group that collaborates with the industry and structures professional development

curriculum to incorporate what employers are looking for. The syllabus of the Employability Skills Development module is a result of one such industry and educational institutions' interaction. Similarly the University of Botswana addressing this issue proposed a framework to ensure development of employability skills to be a responsibility shared by industry, educational institutions and employees. (Pheko and Molefhe, 2017)

In the present study one of the dimensions is self-assessment. The aim is to understand if students after taking the module have got a deeper insight into how to evaluate themselves on workplace values and personality attributes that they should display for entry to the workplace. Thus, if students are trained and educated to assess themselves appropriately they would take further steps to develop work related skills and look for opportunities to enhance these skills. The authors have found support for this in the Precision Consultancy's report on Graduate Employability Skills (August 2007) prepared for the Business, Industry and Higher Education Collaboration Council, Western Australia, which mentions that "students need to take responsibility for reviewing or assessing their own employability skills, addressing gaps and then pursuing appropriate ways to present relevant information about their skills to employers". Besides Jackson (2013) mentions that self-assessment is a step towards independent learning and hence, augments students' ability to manage the process of preparedness for employability. He further adds that embedding self-assessment in the curriculum is beneficial as it helps students to nurture the suitable behaviours in the workplace.

David Kolb's experiential cycle says that learning can be improved through reflection. It allows the learner to think of the learning experiences in a systematic manner thereby inspiring the learner to make required modifications. In the current study the results show that 86% of the fresh graduates have made a self-assessment indicating their career readiness. (Figure I) This suggests that students have reviewed the concrete learning received through the employability skills module and are positive about their career readiness. Heyler (2015) in her study on reflective practice in work based learning, observed that being reflective enables workforce to make plans to hone their skills and strategically transform themselves for the better. She opines that in the dynamic job market and ever changing technological world a modern employee needs to be adaptable and eager to continuously learn in order to be successful. This continuous self-development is not possible without skills of reflection and self-assessment. Reiterating the same Cottrell (2015) mentions that active reflection of learning facilitates better forward planning for the future.

Besides in another study, Creasey (2015) observed 54% of students responded positively in support of employability and professional development skills, specifically reporting confidence in being prepared for interviews and understanding requirements of engineering chartership. In the present study, 72.4% of fresh graduates valued obtaining memberships of professional bodies.

Through the Employability Skills Development module, engineering students have received formal instruction in the area of job search techniques. It has taught them that job searching can be done effectively by using the right strategies. This includes the knowledge of various sources of recruitment –conventional and contemporary. Besides students were guided to explore career pathways and identify key employers in their respective fields of engineering specialisation.

One of the job search techniques include searching for job postings online. The findings of this study indicate a good trend of people use the web to look for jobs. However the greater the number of queries the greater the complexity on the website. In some cases it was found that, users are not locating the information they need and are just ending their search on a particular search engine. Besides importantly, there is an observation on the terms that are used by job searchers while looking out for online job postings. Based on these findings companies could design their websites accordingly and get job searchers to return to their websites making it easier for companies as well as job searchers. In the authors' opinion, the results of this study substantiate to some extent the need and the relevance of educating students about job search techniques. (Jansen and Jansen, 2005)

Moreover students have also understood the significance of personal branding for employment opportunities. Deckers and Lacy (2013) mention that personal branding is aimed at achieving goals, talking about oneself and networking. The fresh graduates in the current study took a step forward in achieving these aims of personal branding and have created their LinkedIn profile. In today's digital era they have evinced their efforts of reinventing themselves by mentioning their skill sets and knowledge on the professional networking platform. Therefore it can be concluded that the students in this study have used LinkedIn as self-marketing tool to demonstrate to potential employers what they have to offer. This is supported by 77.61% of the students responding positively, reflecting that they are with the times in setting up their networks for their career paths.

In addition, Steve Rook (2013) mentions, only less than ten percent of students and graduates use LinkedIn to keep in touch with people, however in this study it has been observed that with the guidance received as part of the Employability Skills Development module, majority of the students were able to create a professional LinkedIn profile and initiate their professional network.

Furthermore the Employability Skills Development module highlighted the importance of being members of professional bodies, such as Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB), Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE), American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME), and Society of Petroleum Engineers (SPE). Being members of such professional bodies enable students to establish professional networks to create a platform for associating with experts, being exposed to latest trends and demands in the field and enrich their professional involvement. Besides, professional bodies work with educational institution and offer training programmes and arrange events and conferences to keep the member abreast of the innovations in the respective fields of specialisations. They also encourage research and give awards. (Green 2015) Students in the current study reported their awareness of obtaining memberships of professional bodies in order to be valued as a professional in the field.

Another interesting survey done on various job search techniques points out that "perceptions about job-search self-efficacy are important in the process of job search. Besides personal advisors play an important role in enhancing job seekers' self-efficacy and can help in overcoming barriers to successful job search". This ascertains the significance of teaching the Employability Skills Development module. (Green et al. 2011)

Self-marketing is personal branding because it uses tools to create an image of oneself. In a recruitment situation a candidate takes the opportunity to effectively communicate the skills and competencies to potential employers. (Marketing-schools.org., 2012)

Manai 2011, explored the use of self-marketing tool box for business students. The tool box comprised of self-evaluation, use of social media and strategy building in the process of pursuing a career. It was found that the students appreciated the tool box and used it as a guide for self-marketing. They were also open to improving the tool box for better use in future. This strengthens the fact that teaching employability skills surely proved beneficial to students and facilitate their understanding of the requirements of the competitive job market.

Another study emphasized the importance of self-marketing tools even for educators. The study described self-marketing tools as opportunity for educators to package their credentials through tools such as personal commercial, CV, self-assessment exercise and portfolio and systematically plan for their career growth. This fortifies the training of engineering fresh graduates in this current study to have an impressive self-marketing mix – be it writing a professional CV or preparing for commonly asked interview questions, giving the fresh graduates additional confidence and increased self-esteem and inspiration to do a smart job search. (Batra et al,2009)

2. Materials and Methods

Design

The research design used in this study is descriptive as the results obtained are presented as inferred from the analysis. The study was conducted in the National University of Science and Technology, College of Engineering in the Sultanate of Oman. Data collection for this study was done by administering a questionnaire 134 fresh graduates. Simple random sampling method was used. The raw data was tabulated and the percentages were calculated for each questionnaire item along the five response options besides the overall percentages were also computed for each dimension.

Sampling

The sample size was 134 fresh graduates, covering both male and female fresh graduates from different engineering specialisations.

The data was collected using simple random sampling method. A questionnaire consisting of 20 items was developed by the researchers to collect data. The questionnaire had three dimensions; namely self- assessment, job search techniques and self-marketing tools. The self-assessment dimension included 10 items, the job search techniques had 6 items and the self-marketing tools dimension had 4 items.

The questionnaire also features two open ended questions -

- 1) How prepared do you feel to enter the job market?
- 2) How beneficial did you find the Employability Skills Development module?

A five -point scale was used for getting the responses; namely, ‘Strongly agree’, ‘Agree’, ‘Neutral’, ‘Disagree’, and ‘Strongly Disagree’. The collected data were analysed using manual tabulation to get the percentages for each response category. This was done for each questionnaire

item in order to arrive at inferences for each dimension. Besides overall percentages were also calculated for each dimension.

3. Results and Discussions

The data was analysed by calculating simple percentages for each response item, along five response options and for the three dimensions namely self-assessment, job search techniques and self-marketing tools.

Dimension I SELF-ASSESSMENT

Confidence in facing career challenges – post ESD module.						
Response options	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Total
%	28.36	61.19	8.96	0.75	0.75	100%
n	38	82	12	1	1	134

For the statement “I feel confident in facing career challenges after taking up the ESD module,” 61.19% of students showed agreement and 28.36% of students showed a very strong agreement. Hence indicating the benefit.

Equipped with essential soft skills for engineers.						
Response options	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Total
%	24.63	58.21	14.18	2.24	0.75	100%
n	33	78	19	3	1	134

For the statement, “I believe I am equipped with essential soft skills for an engineer,” majority of the students (24.63 + 58.21 = 82.84 % of the students) confirmed their belief.

ESD module - awareness on various job search techniques.						
Response options	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Total
%	47.76	41.04	8.96	1.49	0.75	100%
n	64	55	12	2	1	134

For the statement “ESD module helped me to gain awareness on various job search techniques”, most of the students (88.8%) showed agreement, thus affirming their understanding of job search techniques.

Readiness for summer training						
Response	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree	Total
%	41.04	42.54	11.94	3.73	0.75	100%
n	55	57	16	5	1	134

Most of the students (41.04 + 42.54 = 83.58%) indicated that they were now prepared to take up summer training with confidence.

Belief in highlighting skills at careers fair.						
Response	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree	Total
%	20.90	54.48	24.63	0.00	0.00	100%
n	28	73	33	0	0	134

It is noted from the table that for the statement, “I believe I can now successfully highlight my skills at careers fair”, 20.90% of the students strongly agreed and 54.48% showed agreement thereby giving a positive opinion.

Ability to align skills gained to job adverts.						
Response	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree	Total
%	15.67	58.96	23.88	1.49	0.00	100%
n	21	79	32	2	0	134

For the statement, “I believe I can now align my skills gained to job adverts”, 15.67% strongly agreed and 58.96% of students agreed thus confirming the learning of aligning skills to job adverts.

Equipped to prepare a report of learning and experience during site visits.						
Response options	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Total
%	19.40	57.46	20.15	2.99	0.00	100%
n	26	77	27	4	0	134

For the statement, “ESD module has equipped me to prepare a report of my learning and experience during site visits”, 19.40% strongly agreed and 57.46% of students showed agreement.

Prepared to present an effective personal commercial.						
Response options	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree	Total
%	35.07	49.25	13.43	1.49	0.75	100%
n	47	66	18	2	1	134

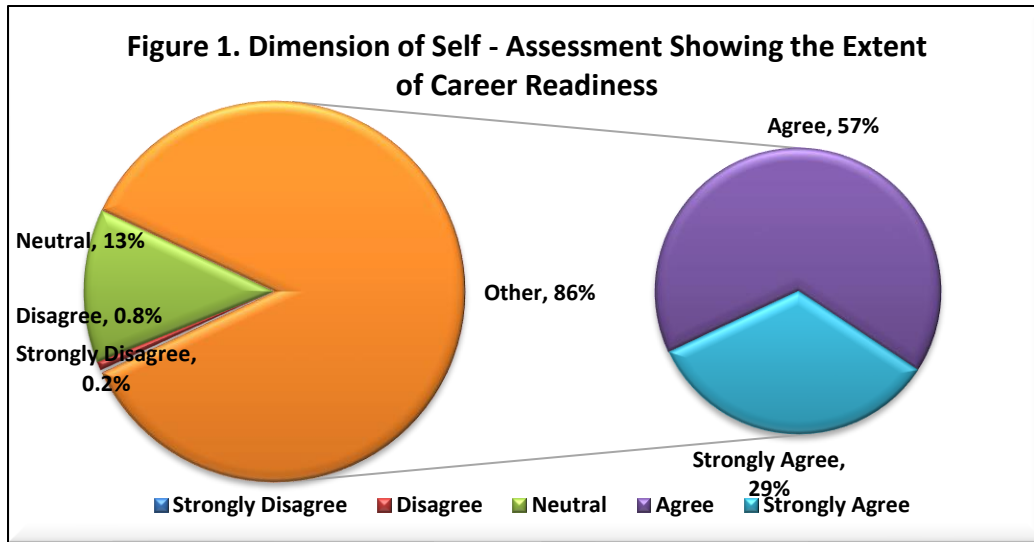
A high percentage of students (84.32) expressed agreement for the statement, “ESD has helped me in preparing effective personal commercial.”

Informed of significance of skills development to enter the dynamic job market.						
Response options	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Total
%	29.85	55.94	11.94	2.24	0.00	100%
n	40	75	16	3	0	134

Majority of the students showed agreement (29.85 + 55.94% = 85.79) for the statement “I am now aware of the importance of skills development to enter the dynamic job market”. Thus indicating their career readiness.

Gained an understanding of organising and maintaining an interview portfolio.						
Response options	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Total
%	38.06	53.73	6.72	0.75	0.75	100%
n	51	72	9	1	1	134

A very high percentage of students (38.06 + 53.73 =91.79 %) expressed agreement to the statement, “I feel I have gained an understanding of organising and maintaining an interview portfolio, thereby indicating one aspect of usefulness.



Dimension II Job Search Techniques

ESD module - awareness of various sources of recruitment						
Response options	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Total
%	14.18	57.46	25.37	2.24	0.75	100%
n	19	77	34	3	1	134

For the statement, “ESD module made me aware of various sources of recruitment (Advertisements in Newspapers, Job Portals/ Organisational Websites, Campus recruitment, Career Fairs, Professional Bodies, Professional Networks, Recruiting Firms, Internal Job Postings)”14.18% of the students showed strong agreement and 57.46% of the students showed agreement; i.e. a total of 71.64 % of positive opinion.

ESD module - drawn attention to online job applications.						
Response options	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Total
%	19.40	49.25	26.12	3.73	1.49	100%
n	26	66	35	5	2	134

For the statement, “ESD module has drawn my attention to online job applications”19.40% of students strongly agreed and 49.25% showed agreement.

Creation of a professional LinkedIn profile - post module.						
Response options	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Total
%	35.82	41.79	15.67	4.48	2.24	100%
n	48	56	21	6	3	134

For the statement, “I have created a professional LinkedIn profile after studying this module”, a total of 77.61% of students gave an affirmative response.

Understand of relevance of obtaining a membership of a professional body.						
Response options	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Total
%	20.90	52.24	21.64	4.48	0.75	100%
n	28	70	29	6	1	134

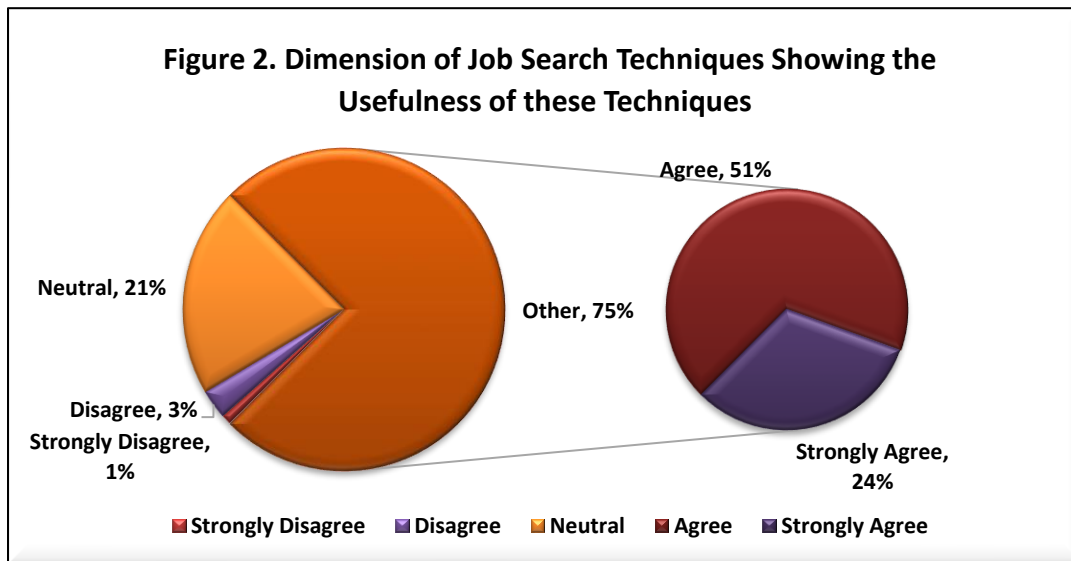
For the statement, “I am able to understand the relevance of obtaining a membership of a professional body” 20% indicated strong agreement and 52.24% indicated agreement.

Career pathway planning useful in knowing the various job options and positions available in specialisation.						
Response options	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Total
%	20.90	52.24	21.64	4.48	0.75	100%
n	28	70	29	6	1	134

Majority of the students (28.36 + 51.49 = 79.85 %) responded affirmatively to the statement, “Career pathway planning has been useful to me in knowing the various job options and positions available in my specialisation.

ESD module - helped to identify the key employers in the field of engineering.						
Response options	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Total
%	22.39	54.48	20.90	0.75	1.49	100%
n	30	73	28	1	2	134

It is noted in the above table that 22.39% of the students strongly agreed to the statement, “ESD module has helped me to identify the key employers in my field of engineering” and 54.48% of the students showed agreement.



Dimension III SELF-Marketing Tools

Equipped with the ways of presenting CV in an impressive manner.

Response options	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Total
%	35.07	52.99	11.19	0.75	0.00	100%
n	47	71	15	1	0	134

For the statement, “I am now equipped with the ways of presenting my CV in an impressive manner”, a total of 88.06% of students indicated agreement.

Prepared to answer commonly asked interview questions.

Response options	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Total
%	23.88	55.22	16.42	2.99	1.49	100%
n	32	74	22	4	2	134

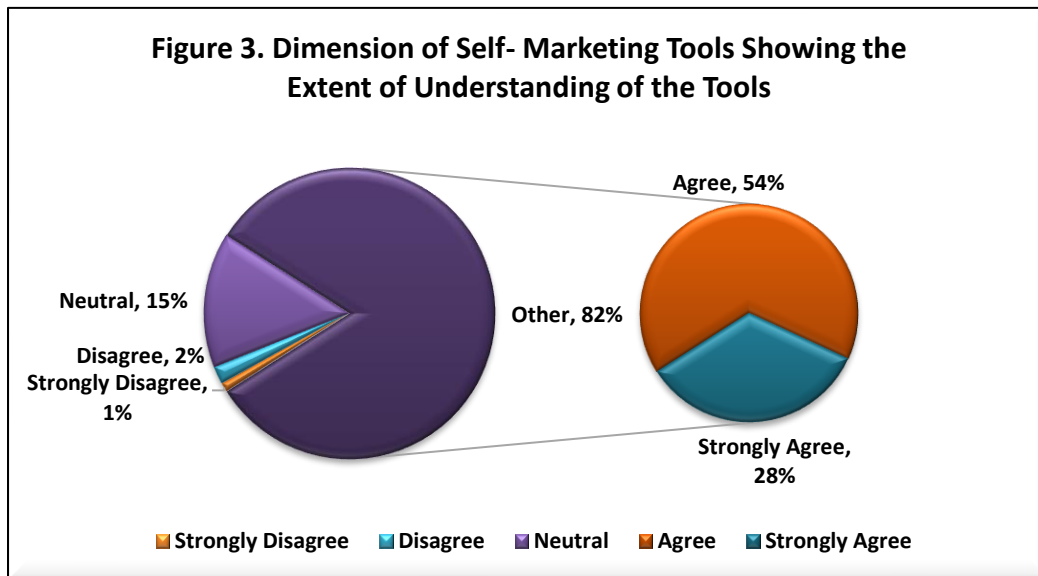
For the statement, “I am ready with answers to commonly asked interview questions”, a total of 79.1% of students responded affirmatively.

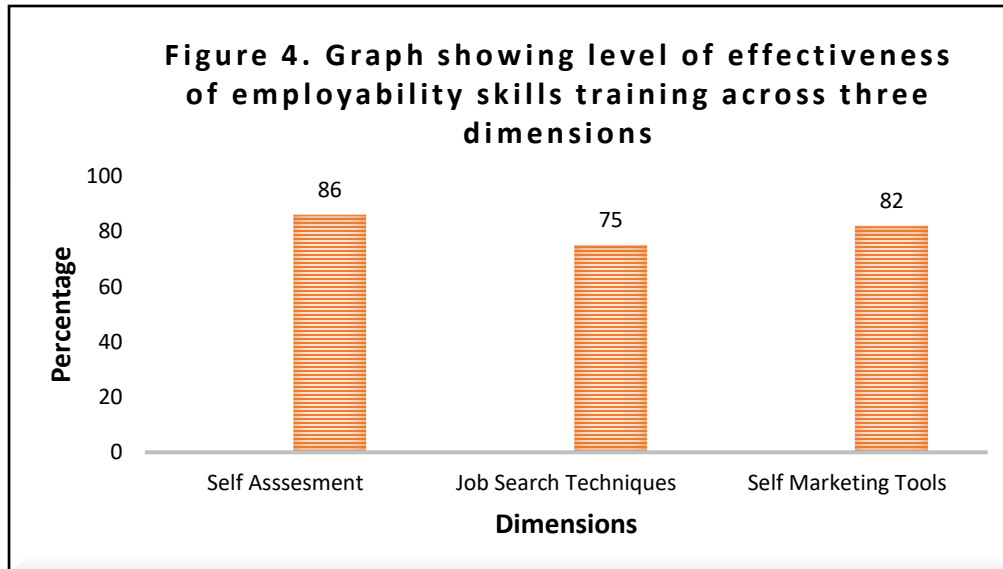
Confidence of cover letter being shortlisted for an interview call.						
Response options	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Total
%	27.61	52.24	16.42	3.73	0.00	100%
n	37	70	22	5	0	134

Majority of the students (27.61 + 52.24 = 79.85%) responded positively to the statement, “I am now confident that my cover letter will lead to being shortlisted for an interview call”.

Ready with skills to ace a job interview.						
Response	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree	Total
%	26.12	55.97	14.93	2.24	0.75	100%
n	35	75	20	3	1	134

A high percentage of students (26.12 + 55.97 = 82.09%) expressed agreement to the statement, “I believe that I have developed skills to ace a job interview”.





Qualitative Analysis

The questionnaire also featured two open ended questions which gives an account of their reflection of career readiness.

- How prepared do you feel to enter the job market?
- How beneficial did you find the Employability Skills Development module?

The qualitative analysis is as follows

- How prepared do you feel to enter the job market?

Out of the 134 fresh graduates, 34 fresh graduates specifically mentioned that the Employability Skills Development module made them they feel good and comfortable and that they were ready to enter the job market. One of the fresh graduates also expressed preparedness to face the challenges of the competitive job market as a result of the training received through the Employability Skills Development module. Another fresh graduate reported confidence in presenting skills strongly, he felt that the learning experiences of the Employability Skill Development module made him feel perfect. Yet another fresh graduate confirmed the same and remarked that the module had helped in presenting herself in a professional way in the job market.

Adding on to the comments of fellow fresh graduates was another fresh graduate who said he gained an understanding of updating himself and continuously improving on his soft skills and technical skills. Some of the fresh graduates made a special mention that the module prepared them to market themselves through their CV's and personal commercials. A couple of fresh graduates added they felt ready to face and answer the questions at job interviews.

Sixteen of the fresh graduates were very assertive and said that the Employability Skills Development module gave them confidence to enter the job market. Reaffirming the same one of the fresh graduates said that she now feels very confident to apply for trainings and face job interviews and she believes that she is ready to answer the commonly asked interview questions. Another fresh graduate added that he learned of what the employer expects from a job applicant,

he also understood what skills and competencies he should develop to be noticed in the job market. Yet another fresh graduate mentioned that he was now capable of doing research on what are the job market requirements. A couple of the fresh graduates felt at ease as they now realised the importance of self-marketing tools such as CV, cover letter and personal commercial. Reiterating the same another fresh graduate said that it was the right time at which she got the information. Another fresh graduate appreciated that he gained knowledge of how to apply for jobs online.

Contrary to the opinion of majority of fresh graduates two of them stated that they were not sure about how prepared they felt to enter the job market. They expressed some anxiety as they felt they personally need to learn more. One of them stated that she was worried because of less of training experience.

The fresh graduates' responses to the second open ended question brought to light the usefulness of the module.

- How beneficial did you find the Employability Skills Development module?, All the fresh graduates who penned their answers to this question were positive about the benefits of the Employability Skills Development module. They all in one voice valued the syllabus of the module. They expressed the usefulness of learning to write a professional CV and presenting an impressive cover letter. The fresh graduates also valued the practicality of learning to explore their respective career pathways which would help them in the future.

One of the fresh graduates voiced his opinion stating that the module was very important, especially for fresh graduates planning to exit with diploma as it prepares fresh graduates with professional ethics and skills required to enter the interview room. The same fresh graduate also appreciated the learning of preparing an interview portfolio. One of the fresh graduate mentioned that it was a 'great module' and said that she was able to identify the soft skills required at workplace. Another fresh graduate specially noted the value of creating a LinkedIn profile and obtaining memberships of professional bodies such as Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE).

Besides two students appreciated the career pathway plan which helped to identify various jobs related to their respective engineering programme.

Most of the fresh graduates valued the learning of various self-marketing tools such as CV and personal commercial and preparation to answer interview questions. One of the fresh graduates mentioned that the information about what employers expect from fresh graduates was very useful. They all echoed that the training received through the Employability Skills Development module was beneficial for them as fresh graduates, they also expressed of its benefits for the future.

One of the fresh graduates said that he gained a lot from this module and said that the module guided him and put him on the right track to get well prepared for job search and interview. Besides he mentioned that it gave him the confidence to face any 'shortest call for an interview.'

Finally, a fresh graduate expressed her confidence to face interviews and mentioned that she was more informed about applying for jobs. She felt proud that she was now able to help other fresh graduates.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Self-Assessment

The Employability Skills Development (ESD) module asserted and convinced the students of the many career challenges ahead of them as revealed by the result of 89.55% (Strongly Agree). This proves that the ESD module opened doors and widened horizons of students' understanding of employability and its optimum impact to one's self improvement.

The students as well believed that the skills necessary for an engineer are acquired by them through the ESD module as evidenced by an 82.84% strong agreement. This is a manifestation that the ESD module truly aims at guiding students at enhancing the soft/transferrable skills needed as an engineer.

There are numerous existing job search techniques which the students were made aware of through the ESD module. This is proven by an 88.8% response of the respondents. This simply means that students got a clear understanding of the different job search strategies.

Confidence and preparedness are evident among the students in taking up summer trainings as shown by an 83.58%. This is a clear demonstration that the ESD module prompted and enabled the students to radiate preparedness and confidence in taking up summer trainings.

Careers fair is a perfect avenue for students to underscore especially their self-marketing skills. It's been noted students can effectively and efficiently provide essence and meaning to their skills given the right platform such as careers fair. This is proven with a response of 75.38% agreement.

Job adverts contain specific company requirements. Students are able to clearly match their acquired skills to any job advert as proven by a 74.63% agreement.

Site visits are a great platform for students to actually experience and feel life at work. With the proper planning of the ESD module, students are confident to write a report of their learning and give a reflection on their experience in industrial site visits. 76.86% of the students agreed to this.

Personal commercials provide a concise and clear impression of any job-prospective candidate. With the aid of the ESD module, students are fully able to prepare and deliver sharp personal commercials as revealed by 84.32% agreement.

Developing one's skills should never cease instead should be given greater priority as this would enable one to weather all challenges expected in any workplace. Having said this, there is a strong evidence of career readiness of students as indicated by an 85.79% agreement.

Interview management is one skill imperative for any job seeker. A strong evidence is shown among students in preparing and managing an interview portfolio with a result of 91.79%.

Having said all these, it is therefore concluded that the ESD module has been a very vital tool in leading and guiding students to face all the potential challenges ahead of their employment as future engineers, bearing in heart and mind the various self-marketing, presentation, transferrable and technical knowledge and skills required.

Job Search Techniques

Job search techniques comprise of making use of resources to obtain dream jobs. The ESD module aims to educate students to be effective and successful in this endeavour. To begin with a high percentage of students i.e. 71.64% affirmed that the ESD module was useful in making students aware of a wide range of recruitment sources which reflects that students have assimilated the information and are in the process of job related search, planning and taking action.

ESD module drew the attention of students to online applications and this was confirmed by a total of 68.65% of students. This indicates that these students are familiar with the fact that technology and floating labour market have modernised the recruitment scenario, hence it is necessary to be up to date and explore job opportunities through these channels.

A high percentage of students 77.61% endorsed that they created a professional LinkedIn profile after studying this module. This suggests that students have recognised the importance of networking online for career search and have made efforts in that direction. They are familiar with use of social media and hence have worked towards creating an account of themselves on this digital platform.

An aggregate of 73.14% of students expressed their understanding of the relevance of obtaining a membership of a professional body. This reveals that students enrolled to the ESD module paid special attention to becoming members of their respective engineering specializations.

The ESD module demanded an assessed exercise on career pathway planning, 79% of students confirmed that this exercise was useful in knowing the various job options and positions available in their respective specialisations. The benefit of this exercise is further reflected in the overall 76.87% confirmation of the students that the ESD module was helpful in identifying the key employers in their respective fields of engineering.

Self-Marketing Tools

A CV is often referred to as ones marketing flyer, giving one an opportunity to promote oneself in the job market. Overall 88.06% of students indicated that the ESD module trained them to present their CV's impressively. This consequently shows that students have learned the essential elements of a CV. Besides through this finding the researchers are convinced that students have learned to tailor their CV's to specific attributes required for a specific job role.

An aggregate of 79.1% of the students expressed their readiness to answer commonly asked interview questions. This endorses the usefulness of the ESD module, as it highlights the fact that students have gained confidence to do well at job interviews. This has received further confirmation of 82.09 % from questionnaire item 20, that students believed that they had developed skills to face a job interview.

A cover letter puts ones CV in to focus and is a preliminary introduction of oneself to the prospective employer. Majority of the student's i.e. 79.85% of the students conveyed that they were certain that they had learned to write strong cover letters which would add value to their CV's and further result in an interview call.

Major Findings

The results strongly confirm the effectiveness of the ESD module with an overall 89.55% of students expressing their confidence in facing career challenges. The results also reflect the students' full faith in themselves to successfully market their skills and prepare winning personal commercials.

Besides there is clear evidence that students have acquired the necessary job search techniques. Majority of the students were well informed about recruitment procedures, significance of obtaining memberships to be global engineers, as a result of the training and guidance as part of the ESD module.

Moreover students reported they were well equipped to present their CV's that would be shortlisted by potential employers and also expressed their belief in themselves to do well at job interviews.

Verification of Hypotheses

The results show a clear indication of career readiness through the three dimensions namely self-assessment, job search techniques, and self-marketing tools. Eighty – one percent of the students are of the opinion that the Employability Skills Development module is beneficial for them and has equipped them with skills to make winning moves in the modern day competitive job market. Thus majority of the students found Employability Skills Development module useful in increasing their career readiness. The hypothesis corresponds to the results obtained and hence the researchers accept the hypothesis.

Future Scope of Research

- A comparative study on career preparedness before skills training and career preparedness after skills training could be measured to evaluate the effectiveness of skills training.
- A study could be conducted on the perception and feedback of employers about graduates trained for employability skills.
- A comparative study could also be done to evaluate the career readiness of male students and career readiness of female students.

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5. Appendices

Appendix A

QUESTIONNAIRE

Part A. Introduction

The main objective of this survey is to determine the level of career readiness of students in higher education institutions in Oman as well as to evaluate the usefulness of the Employability Skills Development module among promising engineers.

All gathered information through this survey will be treated confidential and will only be used for the sole purpose of research and development in the field under concern.

Part B. Personal Information

Kindly fill in the necessary information provided below. Write and tick ($\sqrt{\quad}$) where necessary.

Semester	A
SY	2017 – 2018 (September 2017)
Student Number	
Name (optional)	
Gender	<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female
Programme	BEng
Mode of Study	<input type="checkbox"/> FT <input type="checkbox"/> PT <input type="checkbox"/> SPT

Part C. Survey Statements

Understand the statement then encircle the option that best suits your response. SA – Strongly Agree; A – Agree; N – Neutral / Neither Agree nor Disagree; D – Disagree; and SD – Strongly Disagree.

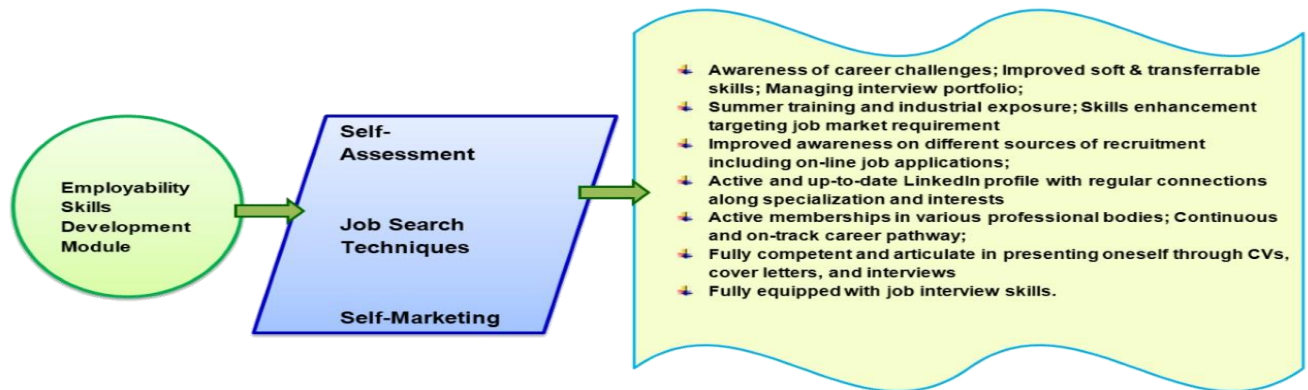
SN	Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD
Self-assessment						
1	I feel confident in facing career challenges after taking up the ESD module.	SA	A	N	D	SD
2	I believe I am equipped with essential soft skills for an engineer.	SA	A	N	D	SD
3	ESD module helped me to gain awareness on various job search techniques.	SA	A	N	D	SD
4	I am now prepared to take up summer training with confidence.	SA	A	N	D	SD
5	I believe I can now successfully highlight my skills at careers fair.	SA	A	N	D	SD
6	I believe I can now align my skills gained to job adverts.	SA	A	N	D	SD
7	ESD module has equipped me to prepare a report of my learning and experience during site visits.	SA	A	N	D	SD
8	ESD has helped me in preparing effective personal commercial.	SA	A	N	D	SD
9	I am now aware of the importance of skills development to enter the dynamic job market.	SA	A	N	D	SD

10	I feel I have gained an understanding of organizing and maintaining an interview portfolio.	SA	A	N	D	SD
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1. How prepared do you feel to enter the job market?

2. How beneficial did you find the ESD module?

Appendix B



Model 1: Outcome of the Employability Skills Development Module

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