

Employability Skills and Task Performance of Employees in Government Sector

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Abstract

Today's employers highlight the workforce skills needed to thrive in this technological advancement era. The skills possessed and mastered by employees may affect their job performance level. The present research determined whether employees' employability skills correlate with task performance. It utilized a correlational design using survey questionnaires administered to 220 respondents. Descriptive data showed that fundamental, personal management and teamwork skills were highly preferred by employers and sufficiently acquired by employees. Positive attitudes and behaviors emerged as topmost preferred and acquired skill. Skill competence obtained moderately competent rating. Employers assessed task performance as satisfactory but employees rated task performance (job knowledge and skills, quality of work, quantity of work and cooperation and judgment) as very satisfactory. Inferential analysis revealed that skill acquisition and skill competence had significant positive relationship to task performance. The acquisition and competence on employability skills valued by employers require continuous enhancement to succeed in job performance.

Keywords: Employability Skills, Task Performance, Employees' Skills Competence, Employees' Acquired Skills, Employers' Preferred Skills

1. Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that a gap still exists where the level of employability skills of graduates and entry level work requirements do not meet (Ranasinghe, 1992; Lindsay, 2002). Researchers (Morley, 2001; Kivinen & Silvennoinen, 2002; Shivpuri & Kim, 2004) recognize the prevailing skills gap among the college graduates. The presence of such skills gap puts pressures on higher education institutions (HEIs) to contemplate on how the academe can do its pivotal role of preparing the graduates to readily face the needs and challenges of the labor market (Martin, Milne-Home, Barrett, Spalding, & Jones, 2000). Various literatures and studies confirm the need for skills suited to the requirements of the current knowledge age and global economy. Employers give preferential attention to employability skills above specific occupational skills or technical knowledge. The term employability skills is coined by the Conference Board of Canada (CBC) in 1992, and it is also labeled as "generic," "core competencies," "core," "key," "transferable," "general," "non-technical," "critical," "essential," and "soft".

Sponsoring Institution: This research is supported by the University Sains Malaysia (USM) Fellowship to the first and second authors through the Institute of Postgraduate Studies (IPS), USM, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia.

The employability skills refer to skills, attitudes, and behaviors, other than technical capability, to enable an individual to engage and advance in the constantly changing demands of the work setting (CBC, 2000; Buck & Barrick, 1987; Gregson & Bettis, 1991) and to remain as an asset to employers (Buck & Barrick, 1987; Gregson & Bettis, 1991). These are skills that cut across all jobs from entry level to chief executive officer (Sherer & Eadie, 1987) and that are necessary for both personal and career success and fundamental to good performance in the job. In today's competitive world, a degree is no longer a guarantee of employability unlike decades ago when enrolling in almost any degree program ensures a choice of employment offers in the graduating year. Mastery of content areas solely by graduates will not totally respond to employer requirements for they need transferable skills to improve their job opportunities (see Fallows and Steven, 2000; Warn & Tranter, 2001; Cox & King, 2006;).

Employers assert that graduates are deficient in transferable skills required of the workforce (Evers, Rush, & Berdrow, 1998; Brown, Hesketh & Williams, 2003) as a result of the unsuccessful development of their employability skills during their stay in the university (Evers et al., 1998; Tymon, 2011). Employers view that graduates are not yet ready to enter and face the complexities and challenges of the world of work (Tymon, 2011; Brown et al., 2003) and such unpreparedness leads to an apparent insufficiency of skills in the work settings (Tetreault, 1997). Employers are convinced that the academe should be most responsible for equipping the graduates with generic skills. However, the skills, behaviors and attitudes needed by job entrants differ from those taught in higher education. Martin et al. (2000) stress the predicament of universities in educating and training their students that will address the requirements of employers.

There has been a consistent global call for HEIs to help the graduates through various ways, like integrating the skills into the curriculum, to enable them to adequately acquire and develop the employability skills throughout the course of their studies (Brown et al., 2003). In this time of quickening change, improving the graduates' employability skills is an essential aspect in higher education (Evers et al., 1998) and is consistent with the emerging needs of a world economy in a high performance workplace (Bailey, 1997). Studies have been conducted on the need to value the learning of general skills (Evers et al., 1998) and to enhance such skills in order to get employed upon graduation and succeed in the work (Brown et al., 2003).

In this case, HEIs should demonstrate a greater commitment to develop the generalized expertise that graduates can transfer to whatever working environment they find themselves in after graduation. In other words, the graduates are expected to have developed not only subject specific skills but also employability skills to make them both specialists and generalists. Also, HEIs need to improve their linkage with industry sector to find out the skills preferred by employers when they recruit employees (Kivinen & Silvennoinen, 2002). The employers are the ones who are most familiar in everything that takes place in the work environment so higher academic institutions do not ignore their complaints regarding the quality of graduates produced. The academe can maximize the knowledge shared by employers in training future graduates (Evers et al., 1998).

In fact, some researches were conducted that centered on the enhancement of generic skills to achieve and maintain employability of graduates. To name a few more, researchers identified the employability skills mostly valued by employers to ensure job retention and job progress and attain both job and life success; examined the skills possessed by graduates in different degree programs from the perspectives of different stakeholders, and determined the competence on the use of the skills while still in the university. The present article, however, will shed light on some issues not explored by previous studies related to the employability skills and task performance of employees with different fields of specialization from various government agencies.

The prevalence of uncertain and complex technological changes around the world has opened opportunities and challenges affecting education and employment sectors. Issues on the workforce skills needed in modern workplaces as well as the pressing role of higher education to produce highly skilled graduates have continuously risen. Since the interplay and cooperative endeavor of academe and labor market become highly imperative, this article aims to help address and clarify this concern on the employability skills as well as attitudes and behaviors required by the 21st century workplaces. It is believed that harmonization of skills and present and future employment requirements may be done. Thus, this article describes the level of preference of employers who are heads of government agencies, not business institutions in the Philippines, on the generic skills of job applicants. Similarly, this shows the level of acquisition of the employability skills of government employees as a result of their undergraduate degree programs' training and experience.

This provides an insight and understanding as to whether the skills preferred by employers are also the skills possessed by employees before finding a job. Knowing this, it will be easy to identify and confirm the findings of other relevant studies regarding the growing discrepancy between the preparation of the workforce and the changing demands of employment.

It is also the intent of this article to delve into the perceptions of both government employers and employees on the skill competence to find out if employees increase their proficiency level on the employability skills while in their respective workplaces. In addition, this article discloses the employees' level of job performance specifically their task behaviors. It is vital to know how proficient they are in accomplishing key technical tasks during a transition stage since they are new in the job. Moreover, the focus of this paper regarding the relationship of the acquired employability skills to task performance and that of competence on the employability skills to task performance is not found in the available literatures and on line studies reviewed particularly in the Philippine context. This paper further reveals how crucial and influential the acquired employability skills and competence on the skills are on the employees' task performance. Through this, it is hoped that the critical points raised on academe and employment collaborations will be resolved, thereby bridging the gap between the demands of work and the level of skill preparation of graduates to effect better task performance and greater success in workplaces.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

The present study employed an explanatory correlational design to determine the association between employability skills and task performance among government employees. It described the skills preference of employers as well as skills acquisition and competence of employees. It also established the relationships between skills acquisition in three categories and task performance and between skills competence and task performance.

2.2. Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A total of 220 respondents were taken as sample equally distributed between employers and employees. The research was undertaken from 25 government institutions in Central Mindanao, Philippines. For every government agency, two groups of respondents were identified - employers and employees. The employers were selected using purposive sampling. Only the section or unit chiefs with employees under their direct supervision for not less than one year were taken as respondents. The employees who served and directly reported to the identified section or unit chiefs for at least one year were randomly chosen.

2.3. Instrument

Two sets of survey questionnaires were used in the study, one set for each group of respondents. For the employees' questionnaire, it is composed of three parts such as Personal Profile, Employability Skills Questionnaire (ESQ), and Job Performance Questionnaire (JPQ). ESQ had two components. The first component was a two-tier closed instrument divided into columns; each column had 50 items. Column A, which focused on the extent of acquisition of skills, was rated adopting a three-point scale with their equivalents from (1) "slightly acquired" to (3) "very sufficiently acquired". Column B dealt with the level of competence of employees on the said skills and was answered using the scale from (1) "not competent" to (3) "very competent". JPQ measured the task performance of employees and it also utilized a three-point scale that ranged from (1) "needs improvement" to (3) "very satisfactory".

For the employers' questionnaire, it also consisted of three parts: Personal Profile, Employability Skills Preference Questionnaire (ESPQ) and Employability Skill Competence Questionnaire (ESCQ). ESPQ elicited information regarding the employability skills they prefer when accepting job applicants. This was answered on a three-point Likert scale with descriptions ranging from (1) "low preference" to (3) "very high preference". ESCQ was made up of two questionnaires. One was the Employability Skills Competence Questionnaire, which ranged from (1) "not competent" to (3) "very competent". This described the level of skill competence of employees as perceived by employers. The other was the Job Performance Questionnaire, which obtained data on employees' task performance and was rated using a three-point scale ranging from (1) "needs improvement" to (3) "very satisfactory". Moreover, the 50-item list of employability skills adopted in the ESPQ, ESQC, and ESQ was patterned from the Employability Skills 2000+ (The Conference Board of Canada, 2000). It was then modified in order to yield the needed data for the study.

Thus, the final list of employability skills used in the study only included 50 skill items out of 56 descriptions in the original document.

The employability skills, based on the Employability Skills 2000+, were further categorized into three; each category had skill areas. These were Fundamental Skills (communicate, manage information, use numbers, and think and solve problems), Personal Management Skills (demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviors, be responsible, be adaptable, learn continuously and work safely) and Teamwork Skills (work with others and participate in projects and tasks). The same employability skills items were used to measure the extent of skill acquisition and skill competence of employees as well as the skill preference of employers.

In the case of the JPQ, its task performance dimension was conceptualized based on literature as well as the Employee's Performance Checklist based on the work of Miranda (1993) Hence, JPQ used in this study consisted of 30 items measuring task performance which involved eight elements: Dependability, Job Knowledge and Skills, Quality of Work, Quantity of Work, Cooperation, Judgment, Initiative, and Task Adaptability. All the scale values of the different questionnaires were given the corresponding weights of 1.00-1.49 for 1; 1.50-2.49 for 2, and 2.50-3.00 for 3.

The instrument was pilot tested to establish its validity and reliability. Content validity in the aspects of adequacy of items, relevance and format of instruments were obtained through an assessment by five education experts from higher education institutions. Necessary modifications were made so that respondents can easily identify and understand the skills they were asked to rate.

To test the reliability of the instrument, test-retest approach was employed. The instrument was administered twice within a period of three weeks to the two groups of non-participating respondents. The result yielded a median reliability coefficient of .88 and .71 for the employers' questionnaire and employees' questionnaire, respectively, which indicate that the two sets of instruments are reliable. These values are comparable to standardized measures for non-ability test (Helmstadler, 1964).

2.4. Data Analysis

Means was applied to obtain the norm in describing the skill preferences as perceived by employers, the extent of skill acquisition as perceived by employees and the level of skill competence as perceived by both employers and employees for every skill category and skill area. Also, it was utilized to describe the employees' task performance as perceived by both groups of respondents. Furthermore, Pearson product moment coefficient of correlation (r) was computed to determine the correlation of all employability skills categories and areas in two factors namely (a) skill acquisition and (b) skill competence of employees to task performance. For the purpose of interpreting the strength of relationship between factors of employability skills and task performance, Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtler's (2006, p. 233) categorization of the size of r was used as follows: 0-0.19 (Weak Relationship), 0.20-0.34 (Slight Relationship), 0.35-0.64 (Moderately Strong Relationship), 0.65-0.84 (Strong Relationship), and 0.85 or greater (Very Strong Relationship). All statistical tests were set at .05 level of significance.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Employability Skills Preference of Employers

Table 1 presents the data on the employability skills valued and desired by the government agencies or offices when they screen, select and hire new employees (graduates) for entry-level jobs in various fields. As shown in the Table, government employers revealed a high extent of preference for all three categories, i.e., Fundamental Skills, Personal Management Skills and Teamwork Skills, which recorded the overall mean scores of 2.39, 2.49, and 2.45, respectively. This indicates an almost consensual agreement in giving a high preference rating to skill areas which is supported by some studies ((e.g Dench, 1997; Billing, 2003; Clarke, 2008).

Notable in this finding is that the positive attitudes and behaviors, which belong to Personal Management Skills category, received the highest mean of 2.63 that corresponds to a very high preference description. This result may imply that the number one quality that employers look for in a job applicant is a desirable attitude and behavior. Over the years, researches have consistently showed high preference to positive attitudes.

For instance, managers and supervisors gave high value to attitudes (Bisconti, 1979; French, 1978); employers gave greatest weight on employee attitudes (Natriello, 1989), and employers identified as essential the affective characteristics like adaptability, responsibility and positive attitude toward work and were inclined not to promote employees who exhibit undesirable or unacceptable work behaviors and attitudes (Gregson, & Bettis, 1991).

Moreover, Branine's (2008) study revealed that employers focus more on graduates' personal characteristics and soft skills than undergraduate degree program, and college or university attended. The Confederation of British Industry (2008) pointed out that 86% of the board executives regarded graduates' skills and attitudes as their top priority concern; 32% of them considered degree obtained as important and only 10% rated university attended as also important. Recently, a study finding disclosed that eight in ten employers gave more importance to attitudes to work when hiring for "entry level posts" in contrast with 38 percent of employers who valued literacy and numeracy (Daily Mail Reporter, 2011). However, few studies identified problem solving skills (e.g. Carnevale, Gainer, & Meltzer, 1990; Espinoza, 1999; Coplin, 2003) and communication skills (Cohen & Cohen, 1984; Covey, 1989) as top priority by employers.

3.2. Employability Skills Acquisition of Employees

The data reflected in Table 2 pertain to the level of acquisition of government employees' generic skills which are learned or developed through higher education. The major skill categories and specific skill areas measured to examine the skill preference of employers are also the ones rated by employees to describe their acquired skills.

The Fundamental Skills category involving communication, management of information, use of numbers and thinking and problem solving were just sufficiently acquired by employees. The present result seems contradictory to what Ochsner and Solmon (1979) found. For them, college graduates consistently considered their higher education as primarily influential in the development of analytical ability.

However, two skill areas under Personal Management Skills category, namely positive attitudes and behaviors and learning continuously, were very sufficiently acquired by the employee-respondents. This may be the case because all the skill areas in Fundamental and Teamwork Skills which were given average rating are important in acquiring more skills in learning continuously. Supportive of this, Astin (1977) reported that college years increased self-esteem and contributed most to positive attitudes about work. Clarke (2008) posited that various stakeholders like educators, governments and employers believed that transferable skills serve as a basis for lifelong learning. Then, the two skill areas of Teamwork Skills such as working with others (2.43) and participation in projects and tasks (2.21) were sufficiently acquired.

As a whole, Table 2 indicates that the overall mean values of Fundamental (2.21), Personal Management (2.48) and Teamwork (2.35) Skills categories registered a sufficiently acquired rating from the government employees themselves. These results suggest how vital the role of higher education is in preparing the graduates to learn and acquire employability skills. The UK, Canada and the USA listed other workplace transferable skills (numeracy, literacy, communication, problem solving, technical and interpersonal skills) which are considered valuable (Clarke, 2008).

As shown in the results, the level of acquisition of employability skills was not very high. This implies that colleges and universities experienced difficulty in fulfilling their responsibility in the preparation of graduates who will comprise the labor force. Employers observed that higher education is failing to satisfactorily enhance the graduates' employability skills (Peddle, 2000). Taylor (1998) pointed out that employers in corporations recognize and value the graduates' employability skills and are eager to support the development of these skills in higher education. Also, corporations want to collaborate with academic institutions to impart the relevant skills contributory to success in an industry (Paulson, 2001).

3.3. Employability Skills Competence of Employees

Competence of employees on the employability skills is an important element affecting their jobs. It is assumed that employees develop mastery in the use of their skills to respond to the present-day needs and demands of the workplaces. As seen in Table 3, the employers and employees did not vary in their perceptions on the level of competence on Fundamental Skills as evidenced by their overall mean scores (2.16; 2.11).

Both groups of respondents gave a rating of moderate competence on Fundamental Skills with thinking and problem solving as their lowest (2.11; 1.9) and communication as their highest (2.21; 2.33). It is only in Fundamental Skills category that employees indicated a lower average than their employer counterparts. This finding may be expected since the employee-respondents were still new in their workplaces and perhaps they were not yet so exposed in handling complicated and bigger responsibilities like solving problems that require the use of skills. In a way, the result may suggest that duration of job experience appears to be one determinant of employees' competence on basic skills. This implies that the level of competence in Fundamental Skills is affected by either previous higher education or actual employment experiences because without these employees may be unable to improve their skills. With regard to competence on Personal Management Skills category, the present finding reveals differing perceptions of employers and employees on the three skill areas, namely positive attitudes and behaviors, learning continuously and working safely. However, the two groups of respondents had similar rating on the other two skill areas such as responsibility and personal adaptability. Thus, in this category, the employers' overall mean score of 2.36 revealed that their employees' level of competence was described as moderate. This result implies that employers observed the lack of competence of their employees on the said Personal Management Skills category due to the latter's short working experience. Perhaps, as novice in the work setting, the employees had not mastered yet all the relevant skills. This may also be caused by the inadequate resources and facilities needed to support employees' proficiency in the use of the said skills.

On the contrary, employees perceived themselves to be very competent in this Personal Management Skills category as indicated by 2.51 overall mean. As opposed to employers' perception, the employees' very high rating to their skill competence may be attributed to several factors like their familiarity to their own qualities and abilities, maintenance of good image to evade possible criticism, and tendency to avoid low self-rating especially affecting their personal traits and attitudes.

For Teamwork Skills category, the employers registered an overall mean of 2.28 and the employees had 2.34, indicating that both groups perceived skill competence as a moderate one. This implies that employers were not so interested in promoting employability skills among their employees, provided limited opportunities to work in groups and involve in organizational activities, did not require them to perform their job always in teams, and had insufficient time to deal with them due to the few years of their stay in the work setting. As reported by Powney, Lowden, and Hall (2000), work experience is a critical element not just to learn more about the job but to become competent in the use of skills and abilities needed to succeed in the work environment as well.

Table 3 shows that both groups of respondents only disagreed in their responses to Personal Management Skills. As a whole, employers recorded consistent responses of moderate competence in all employability skills categories such as Fundamental, Personal, and Teamwork. This implies that the employees had the chance to consider the evaluation of their superiors, which may validate their self-assessments on their skill competence. Although the employees were perceived to have shown very high competence on Personal Management Skills, they somehow lacked mastery on the Fundamental and Teamwork Skills specifically on thinking and problem solving and participation in projects and tasks.

3.4. Task Performance of Employees

The data presented in Table 4 deals with Task Performance which refers to the specific tasks and duties inherent in the jobs of the employees. Data shows that the employees' Task Performance was perceived by employers as all satisfactory based on the overall mean of 2.33. Employees, however, obtained higher scores since they had a very satisfactory Task Performance as shown by the overall mean of 2.52. Despite a discrepancy in the overall mean scores, the employers and their employees expressed agreement with the satisfactory Task Performance of employees in dependability, initiative and task adaptability. The two groups of respondents projected different views in terms of job knowledge and skills, quality of work, quantity of work, cooperation and judgment. The employers rated such task elements as satisfactory only but employees gave these elements very satisfactory rating. The higher rating of employees is in line with Sonnentag's (2002) notion that getting the job related tasks done and implementing the job well bring out fulfillment and achievement.

An examination of the data further reveals that employees' self rating is generally higher than their employers' evaluation of Task Performance. This is a good indication that employees observe a greater performance of their tasks.

But the very satisfactory self-rating given to elements of Task Performance may also be attributed to employees' tendency to become subjective. In addition, there has been much research into the imperfection of personal judgments when assessing or evaluating personal qualities and behaviors. Sutherland (1994) noted that inaccurate or erroneous rating is committed due to overconfidence.

3.5. Correlation between Acquisition of Employability Skills and Task Performance of Employees

Table 5 presents the data showing the correlation between the acquired employability skill areas and the elements of Task Performance. Indicated in the data were all the positive relationships shown between the acquired skills and task elements. While majority of the relationships were significant at .01 level and three at .05, there were only three of these which were not significant.

As seen on the table, majority of the skill areas in Fundamental Skills category had a slight relationship to Task Performance. However, for Bisconti (1979) basic skills and analytical ability help carry out the jobs effectively. Bisconti and Solmon (1976) regarded that ability to communicate with people through effective speaking and writing is important to job performance. In similar case, Powney, et al. (2000) reported that better academic success and job opportunities and prospects are open to graduates who are equipped with communication as well as ICT skills.

As observed on the table, almost all skill areas belonging to Personal Management and Teamwork Skills categories gained a moderately strong relationship to Task Performance. Specifically, learning continuously, working safely, adaptability and responsibility (Personal Management Skills) and working with others (Teamwork Skill) were the only skill areas found to have consistent moderately strong positive correlation to the entire elements of Task Performance. This conforms with Bisconti and Solmon's (1976) view that to work well with co-workers, supervisors, subordinates and clients is essential to job performance. For Stasz (1997), skills which are transferable to any kinds of jobs and indispensable to successful performance are not only communication and problem solving skills but also teamwork skills as well (Stasz, 1997). Also, an ability and eagerness for lifelong learning are crucial in present day work settings (Tamkin, 1997) to stay on the job (Rainbird, 2000) and experience progress in the workplace (Garvin, 1993).

But what is notable was the weak relationship and the absence of significant relationship between communication and quantity of work ($r = .18$) which means that abilities in reading, writing, listening, speaking, understanding and asking questions did not at all affect the completion and organization of the employees' work within a given time. Similarly, management of information did not significantly correlate with quantity of work ($r = .12$) and judgment ($r = .16$) which suggests that employees' ability to gather and organize data through technology and information systems and use scientific, technological and mathematical knowledge and skills to explain or clarify ideas did not have any influence on their analysis of problems, development of solutions, management of time and concern for work as well as to their ability to finish their work on time. In this case, not all employability skills identified in this study had been prioritized and maximized to tasks assigned to employees in their respective work stations. Although employees possess the necessary skills and exemplify desirable attitudes, values and behaviors, they may still struggle and encounter problems as they search for employment or sustain a good job. In fact, employability is affected by other individual and labor market factors beyond the control of employees (Clarke, 2008). Considering that workplaces are being faced with fast-track environmental changes, employees could not afford to have continued neglect of all moderately acquired employability skills.

On the basis of the overall correlation coefficient values, Table 5 shows that Fundamental Skills with .48 coefficient value and both Personal Management Skills and Teamwork Skills with the same coefficient value of .63 established a significant, moderately strong, and positive relationship to Task Performance. This degree of relationship between skills and task performance suggests a higher level of influence on the performance of employees' specific tasks in their workplaces. This implies that personal qualities and other employability skills acquired by employees during their higher education studies can affect to a certain extent how they carry out their jobs. This means further that employees who learned and possessed more skills relevant to their work will most likely demonstrate better job performance.

3.6. Correlation between Competence on Employability Skills and Task Performance of Employees

Table 6 shows the correlation of employees' competence on each of the skill areas of employability skills to Task Performance elements.

As viewed from the data, all employability skill categories had significant positive correlation to Task Performance. Majority of the relationships between the skill competence areas and task elements were described as moderately strong.

In the category of Fundamental Skills, competence on communication and management of information had slight correlation with most of the task elements while competence on the use of numbers and thinking and problem solving indicated consistent moderately strong correlation to all task elements. This may support Sproull (2001) as he claimed that problem-solving is learned and the use of this skill is an instrument to success. Coplin (2003) and Rampersad (2001) concurred on the importance of problem solving skills.

In terms of Personal Management Skills category, competence on all its skill areas except adaptability showed moderately strong correlation to task elements. Adaptability had strong correlation to quality of work. Though flexibility and adaptability do not readily assure an employment, these skills may possibly assist individuals to find a good job (Clarke, 2008). Richardson and Kabanoff (2003) stated that graduates' transfer to work settings will be successfully facilitated if they have personal ability, competence and skills.

For the Teamwork Skills category, only working with others had consistent moderately strong relationship to all task elements. Robinson (2006) asserted the value of identifying the workplace skills and the significance of establishing the competence of graduates in their application of the skills.

Based on the overall correlation coefficient values, the data on the table disclose that competence on Fundamental Skills ($r=.60$) category had moderately strong correlation to Task Performance whereas Personal Management ($r=.77$) and Teamwork Skills ($r=.68$) categories were strongly correlated with Task Performance. These results suggest that what becomes a crucial concern now is for workplaces to recruit job applicants that demonstrate not only technical skills but also appropriate employability skills at a higher level and to sustain employable workers. This may sound challenging but it is feasible in order to address the complex world of employment. The findings of this study further imply that employment is a good avenue where development of various employability skills of employees takes place.

4. Conclusion

With a higher demand for competent work force and limited job opportunities due to the advent of scientific and technological explosion age, one big challenge to HEIs is to produce graduates who are equipped with most valuable core skills. The graduates as prospective employees irrespective of their degree programs are highly expected to have learned the right kind and amount of employability skills and qualities which are greatly desired by employers for continuous growth and success in workplaces. However, employers observe an insufficient level of acquired generic skill of employees, making their transition from school to work a bit difficult especially to keep pace with the sophisticated needs and demands of work. This condition must be addressed; thus, it is essential that the skills required for the workforce must be communicated and shared to the academic community so that it can properly adjust to attune its curriculum programs to the workplace requirements. In this way, effective feedback system is established that will somehow narrow the skills gap and effect good job performance.

As employers and employees express greatest interest and preference to personal management skills especially positive attitudes and behaviors, it is assumed that such personal skills are foundational skills for the employees to develop and maintain their being competent and employable to remain as assets to employers. In a highly competitive working environment, full competence on employability skills is a quality that could downplay any threat of devaluation and sustain job security. Worth mentioning is that job entrants or employees should continue learning about fundamental and teamwork skills since these still form part of the entire package of employable employees. However, it is not merely a matter of acquiring all these employability skills because what becomes more vital is how the employees increase their skill mastery to help meet both personal and organizational goals. Moreover, the employability skills brought into the workplace are unquestionably valuable in the exercise of specific tasks and duties inherent in the jobs of the employees. This, in a way, breaks the gap between what is expected of employees and their actual performance. In essence, a complementary relationship is shown because the various categories of fundamental, personal management and teamwork skills most likely influence success in jobs and exposures to work settings affect the enhancement of and competence on the skills needed to survive in the job. On one hand, it becomes crucial now for employees to incessantly develop and possess the employability skills to gain a very satisfactory task performance.

On the other hand, it is believed that job experience can enrich employees' acquired skills and then upgrade their degree of competence on these skills. Embraced with competence on the skills while in the workplace, the employees generally exhibit good job performance. Realizing the importance of employability skills to task performance, therefore, will create a smooth transition of graduates and a conducive workplace atmosphere in this 21st century and beyond. With this scenario, HEIs can confidently claim that they meet the expectations of the local and global economy. As a whole, a closer collaboration and partnership between HEIs and employment institutions become more urgent today than ever to solve the long standing gap between what the school produces and what the work requires. After all, employees or entry-level workers, employers, HEIs and other stakeholders will greatly benefit from giving emphasis to employability skills that are demanded for in the performance of jobs.

Tables

Table 1: Employability Skills Preferred by Employers

EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS (Categories/Areas)	Mean	Description
<u>Fundamental</u>		
Communication	2.40	High Preference
Management of Information	2.44	High Preference
Use of Numbers	2.31	High Preference
Thinking and Problem Solving	2.40	High Preference
*Overall	<u>2.39</u>	High Preference
<u>Personal Management</u>		
Positive Attitudes and Behaviors	2.63	Very High Preference
Responsibility	2.49	High Preference
Personal Adaptability	2.42	High Preference
Learning Continuously	2.48	High Preference
Working Safely	2.44	High Preference
Overall	<u>2.49</u>	High Preference
<u>Teamwork</u>		
Working with Others	2.49	High Preference
Participation in Projects and Tasks	2.41	High Preference
Overall	<u>2.45</u>	High Preference

Note. N = 110. 1.00-1.49 (Low Preference); 1.50-2.49 (High Preference); 2.50-3.00 (Low High Preference)

Table 2: Employability Skills Acquired by Employees

EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS (Categories/Areas)	Mean	Description
<u>Fundamental</u>		
Communication	2.25	Sufficiently Acquired
Management of Information	2.16	Sufficiently Acquired
Use of Numbers	2.22	Sufficiently Acquired
Thinking and Problem Solving	2.18	Sufficiently Acquired
*Overall	<u>2.21</u>	Sufficiently Acquired
<u>Personal Management</u>		
Positive Attitudes and Behaviors	2.57	Very Sufficiently Acquired
Responsibility	2.38	Sufficiently Acquired
Personal Adaptability	2.46	Sufficiently Acquired
Learning Continuously	2.52	Very Sufficiently Acquired
Working Safely	2.47	Sufficiently Acquired
Overall	<u>2.48</u>	Sufficiently Acquired
<u>Teamwork</u>		
Working with Others	2.43	Sufficiently Acquired
Participation in Projects and Tasks	2.21	Sufficiently Acquired
Overall	<u>2.35</u>	Sufficiently Acquired

Note. N = 110. 1.00-1.49 (Insufficiently Acquired); 1.50-2.49 (Sufficiently Acquired); 2.50-3.00 (Very Sufficiently Acquired)

Table 3: Perceptions on the Competence of Employees on Employability Skills

EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS (Categories/Areas)	Employer-Preferred Skills		Employee Preferred Skills	
	Mean	Description	Mean	Description
<u>Fundamental</u>				
Communication	2.21	MC	2.33	MC
Management of Information	2.15	MC	2.16	MC
Use of Numbers	2.19	MC	2.21	MC
Thinking and Problem Solving	2.11	MC	1.9	MC
*Overall	2.16	MC	2.11	MC
<u>Personal Management</u>				
Positive Attitudes and Behaviors	2.47	MC	2.64	VC
Responsibility	2.31	MC	2.46	MC
Personal Adaptability	2.32	MC	2.45	MC
Learning Continuously	2.36	MC	2.52	VC
Working Safely	2.40	MC	2.50	VC
Overall	2.36	MC	2.51	VC
<u>Teamwork</u>				
Working with Others	2.33	MC	2.42	MC
Participation in Projects and Tasks	2.19	MC	2.22	MC
Overall	2.28	MC	2.34	MC

Note. N=110. 1.00-1.49 (SC - Slightly Competent); 1.50-2.49 (MC - Moderately Competent); 2.50-3.00 (VC - Very Competent)

Table 4: Task Performance of Employees

Job Performance Dimension/Elements	Employers' Perception		Employees' Perception	
	Mean	Description	Mean	Description
<u>Task Performance</u>				
Dependability	2.28	S	2.45	S
Job Knowledge and Skills	2.32	S	2.54	VS
Quality of Work	2.34	S	2.54	VS
Quantity of Work	2.34	S	2.51	VS
Cooperation	2.48	S	2.64	VS
Judgment	2.28	S	2.51	VS
Initiative	2.26	S	2.48	S
Adaptability	2.33	S	2.47	S
Overall	2.33	S	2.52	VS

Note. Range of Means and Description: 1.00-1.49 (NI - Needs Improvement), 1.50-2.49 (S - Satisfactory), 2.50-3.00 (VS - Very Satisfactory)

Table 5: Correlation of Employees' Extent of Acquisition of Employability Skills to Task Performance

EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS (Categories/Areas)	TASK PERFORMANCE								Overall r
	D	JKS	QW	QNW	CO	J	I	AD	
<u>Fundamental</u>									
Communication	.24**	.36**	.31**	.18	.24*	.23*	.19*	.33**	
Management of Information	.24**	.38**	.31**	.12	.31**	.16	.24**	.25**	
Use of Numbers	.25**	.44**	.32**	.26**	.31**	.33**	.36**	.38**	
Thinking and Problem Solving	.30**	.42**	.42**	.28**	.37**	.38**	.44**	.43**	
*Overall r									.48**
<u>Personal Management</u>									
Positive Attitudes and Behaviors	.40**	.49**	.46**	.37**	.39**	.49**	.30**	.38**	
Responsibility	.45**	.40**	.42**	.44**	.37**	.49**	.36**	.39**	
Personal Adaptability	.43**	.53**	.58**	.39**	.51**	.50**	.49**	.51**	
Learning Continuously	.41**	.50**	.55**	.42**	.48**	.49**	.42**	.54**	
Working Safely	.37**	.41**	.45**	.36**	.41**	.41**	.39**	.42**	
*Overall r									.63**
<u>Teamwork</u>									
Working with Others	.47**	.58**	.57**	.45**	.55**	.55**	.49**	.46**	
Participation in Projects and Tasks	.35**	.42**	.45**	.27**	.36**	.34**	.34**	.41**	
*Overall r									.63**

Note: D= Dependability; JKS = Job Knowledge and Skills; QW = Quality of Work; QNW = Quantity of Work; CO = Cooperation; J = Judgment; I = Initiative; AD - Adaptability

* p < .05. **p < .01.

Table 6: Correlation of Employees' Level of Competence on Employability Skills to Task Performance

EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS (Categories/Areas)	TASK PERFORMANCE								Overall r
	D	JKS	QW	QNW	CO	J	I	AD	
<u>Fundamental</u>									
Communication	.31**	.37**	.37**	.29**	.33**	.27**	.32**	.40**	
Management of Information	.26**	.24**	.32**	.24*	.27**	.29**	.38**	.34**	
Use of Numbers	.43**	.51**	.48**	.39*	.42**	.37**	.46**	.41**	
Thinking and Problem Solving	.38**	.49**	.52**	.43**	.52**	.50**	.46**	.47**	
*Overall r									.60**
<u>Personal Management</u>									
Positive Attitudes and Behaviors	.51**	.47**	.51**	.37**	.54**	.51**	.43**	.44**	
Responsibility	.58**	.59**	.62**	.55**	.57**	.57**	.45**	.44**	
Personal Adaptability	.48**	.58**	.66**	.49**	.59**	.61**	.59**	.58**	
Learning Continuously	.51**	.59**	.61**	.42**	.56**	.52**	.49**	.51**	
Working Safely	.51**	.59**	.54**	.33**	.57**	.52**	.39**	.40**	
*Overall r									.77**
<u>Teamwork</u>									
Working with Others	.51**	.62**	.61**	.44**	.61**	.52**	.56**	.58**	
Participation in Projects and Tasks	.28**	.47**	.49**	.40**	.42**	.33**	.33**	.40**	
*Overall r									.68**

Note: D= Dependability; JKS = Job Knowledge and Skills; QW = Quality of Work; QNW = Quantity of Work; CO = Cooperation; J = Judgment; I = Initiative; AD - Adaptability

* p < .05. **p < .01.

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