

## Students Perception of Employability Skills at Adeleke University Ede Osun State, Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

Higher education must enable students to be problem solvers, think creatively as well as exercising leadership skills in the various fields of study and the societal in general. There is a large amount of research concerning employability of graduates demand and supply, however, student's perception is rarely considered when it comes to the mastery of employability skills. This paper therefore, investigated students' perception on their mastery of employability skills at Adeleke University Ede Osun State. The study adopted descriptive survey research design. Data for the study was collected through validated and reliability tested questionnaire with r value of 0.821. The study includes 10 employability skills domains combined 45 items. A total of 237 students from six faculties participated in the study. Frequency count distribution, percentages and mean score were used to answer the research questions raised. The results showed that the students have mastery of certain skills such as self-awareness, computer literacy and interpersonal skills while teamwork, adaptability and self- management domains needed to be worked upon. It was also discovered that students from science oriented faculties have highest percentages of mastery of all the skills while management and Art faculties are sailing behind. Not much difference was recorded of the mastery of skills among faculties. Finally, the study recommended that curriculum should be reviewed to enhance academic standard and preparation for labour market; employability skills should be taught by students' services unit of the University at the life seminars.

**Keywords:** Students perception, Employability skills, Labour market, Employers of labour

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### Journal Reference Format:

Ogunmiran O.O & Oyerinde B.A (2017): Students Perception of Employability Skills at Adeleke University, Ede, Nigeria. .Humanities, Management, Arts, Education & the Social Sciences Journal. Vol. 5. No. 2, Pp 63-74

## 1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Employability skills among the graduates of tertiary institutions in Nigeria have been to some extent a bone of contention among the employers of labour. These are the soft skills that employers of labour are expecting from their prospective employees. These skills must be specified in the goals of each course of study and implemented through the curriculum. According to the enhancing student employability coordination team (ESECT, 2006) in United Kingdom higher education, employability is a set of achievements- skills, understanding and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations which benefits themselves, the workforce, community and economy. The major goal of universities is to produce qualified, skilled and globally competent and locally responsive workforce for the labour market of business and industry.

This is a critical factor in the national growth and development. In the same vein, Winter (2010) citing Yorke and Knight (2004) asserts that employability in academic terms is looking at what graduates should obtain from a degree course and take into the world of employment.

There is no doubt that quality of higher education determines the quality of human resources of a country. Yorke and Knight (2004) refer to employability skills as the potential a graduate has for obtaining and succeeding in graduate level-positions. In support of this, Adedeji (2014) contended that the current trends in the workplace such as globalization, commercialization, deregulation, outsourcing, contract work and freelancing have led to significant changes in industrial structure and therefore, a change in skills required. According to Griffin (2012) numerous research studies indicate new employees lack needed employability skills such as teamwork, decision- making and communication. Moreover the concept of employability skills provides a bridge between education and work (Curtis and McKenzie, 2001).

The United State Department of Education, USDE (2016) asserts employability skills to be general skills necessary for success in the labour market at all employment levels in all sectors which may be taught through education and workforce development systems. The USDE categorized employability skills into three broad categories, namely;

- i. Applied knowledge-through integration of academic knowledge and technical skills;
- ii. Effective Relationships- interpersonal skills and personal qualities that enable individuals interact effectively with clients, co-workers and supervisors;
- iii. Workplace skills- the analytical and organizational skills and understandings that employees need to successfully perform workplace tasks.

In the same vein, Knight and York (2006) categorized employability skills into:

- i. Personal qualities/generic skills- self-awareness, malleable self-theory, self-confidence, adaptability, initiative, and independence;
- ii. Core Skills- Language skills, critical analysis, creativity, written communication, oral presentation, listening, numeracy, and reading effectiveness;
- iii. Process Skills- Computer Literacy, planning, problem solving, resolving conflicts, political sensitivity, decision-making, teamwork, and ethical sensitivity.

Mitchell (2008) studied how educators' perceived the importance of specific soft skills for success in the twenty-first century workforce and the integration of soft skills into the business/marketing education curriculum. The endorsement of soft skills by educators had been on the rise; however the argument centered on importance of soft skills and its integration into courses because it showed statistical significance into the classroom. Also, Al-Alawneh(2009) examined educators and employers' perceptions on employability skills of graduates from career and technical education institutions as perceived by both educators and employers.

The results showed that employers and educators agreed on their need of the following employability skills: teamwork skills, communication skills, and work ethics. In addition, Tholen's (2010) study reveals that graduate employability is mediated through institutional national differences in the labour market and higher education. The industrial world is very competitive; graduates who lack employability skills may face a hard time in competing in the local and global labour market. These skills are mostly the generic attributes that every graduate should have (Graduate Skills Report, 2007). According to the Business Dictionary (2017) perception is the process by which people translate the sensory impressions into coherent and unified view of the world around them.

Theory necessarily based on incomplete and unverified (or unreliable) information, perception is equated with reality for most practical purposes and guides human behavior in general. In the same vein, Hazari (2014) stated that studies repeated show that students' perceptions are important determinant of student behavior and an understanding of those perceptions can be more useful in explaining their behavior than the well-intentioned inferences sometimes made by teachers. Perception is a more complex mental process. It depends not only upon attention paid to material, but also upon previous experience.

### 1.1 Statement of Problem

Employability plays a vital role in the professional success of an individual. Today's organizations are looking for the kind of manpower which not just has the basic academic knowledge but also has the ability to bridge between their available skills set and the elementary needs of the respective job (Varwandkar & Deshmukh, 2013). Lately employability has been a big concern and an agenda for national discussion and there is more focus by many higher education institutions on graduates' employability skills. Developing future workforce relies on the current students' mastery of competencies that are needed in the workplace (Al-Alawneh, 2014). This research paper, therefore, examined students' perceptions on their mastery of employability skills at Adeleke University, Ede Osun State.

### 3. Objective

- i. To examine the students' perceptions on their mastery of employability skills
- ii. To determine whether the students' perceptions of knowledge of employability skills vary among the faculties.

### 4. Research Questions

The following research questions emanates from the foregoing

- i. What are the students' perceptions on their mastery/knowledge of employability skills?
- ii. Do students' perceptions of knowledge of employability skills vary among the faculties?

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. The Research Design

The study is a survey type of descriptive research design. The population of the study consisted of all 300 and 400 levels students at Adeleke University Ede Osun State. Simple random sampling technique was used to select the 250 students that the questionnaires were administered to. Only 237 questionnaires were returned which represent 95% of the total questionnaires administered. The sample selected (300 level and 400 level) in the University was as a result of the fact that the students in both levels must have acquired internship experience in which they must have applied more than one of the soft skills mastered.

### 2.2. Research Instrument

The instrument used for the study was a well-designed self-questionnaire titled "Students Perception of Graduate Employability Skills Questionnaire (SPGESQ)". It was divided into two sections: Section A consist of the bio data information of the respondents while section B consists of ten selected soft skills such as Self-awareness-7 items, Independence-5 items, Interpersonal skills-5 items, Computer Literacy- 5 items, Critical Thinking-5 items, Decision Making- 5 items, Teamwork- 2 items, Creativity- 5 items, Adaptability- 3 items and Self-management- 3 items. The total number of items in section B is 45. The instrument was validated and found to be valid and reliable ( $r=0.821$ ) using Cronbach Alpha.

The statistical tools used to analyze the data were frequency percentage for analysis of demographic data of the respondents and descriptive analysis of frequency count distribution and mean score to answer the research questions.

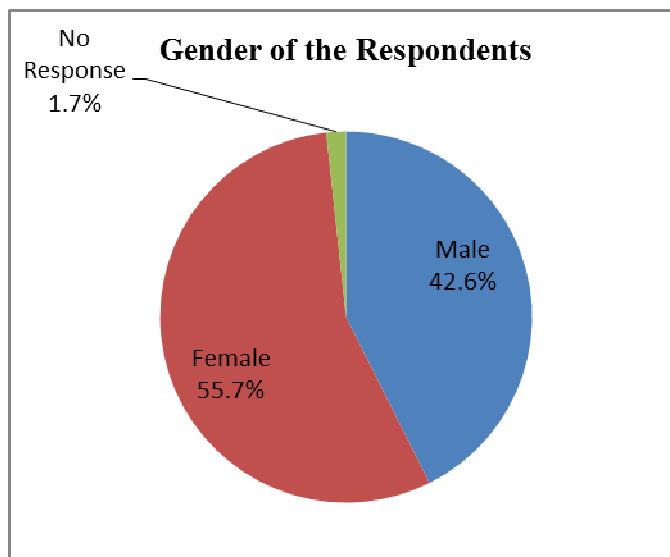
### 3. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### 3.1 Socio-Demographic data of the Respondents

**Table 1: Gender of Sampled Respondents**

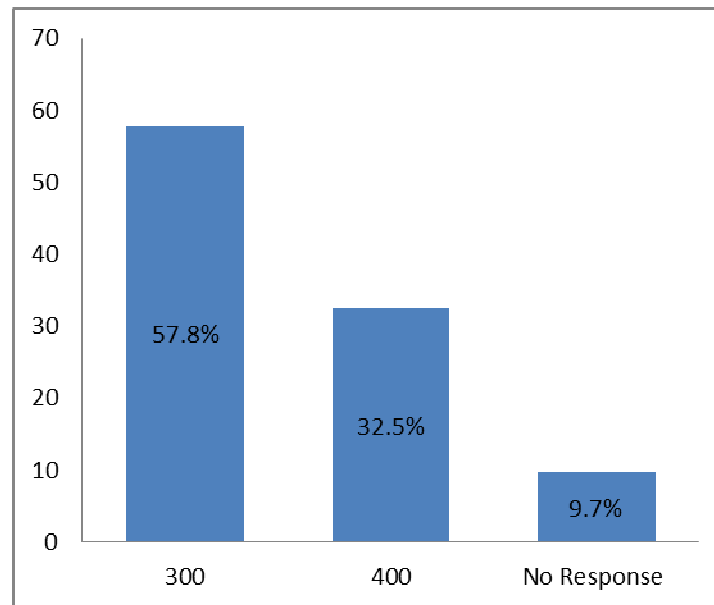
Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	101	42.6
Female	132	55.7
No Response	4	1.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>100</b>

\*No Response\* Number of students that did not indicate their Gender



**Figure 1: Pie Chart Presenting the Gender of Respondents Sampled for the Study**

Table 1 and figure 1 present the gender of the sampled respondents, it shows that 237 students were sampled for the study out of which 42.6% were male and 55.7% were female. The table also shows that 1.7% of the respondents did not indicate their gender.



**Figure 2: Bar Chart showing the Level of Study of Sampled Respondents**

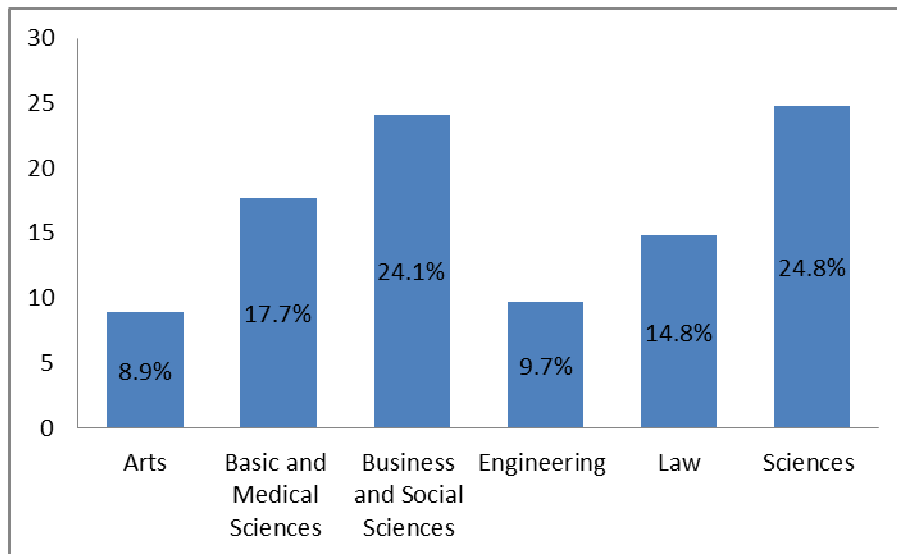
The level of study of the sampled respondents is presented graphically in figure 2. It revealed that 137 students representing 57.8% were in 300 levels while 77 of the respondents given as 32.5% were in 400 levels. 23 of the respondents given as 9.7% did not indicate their level of study. The figure shows that majority of the respondents were 300 level students.

**Table 3: High School Discipline of Sampled Respondents**

Discipline	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Science	113	47.7
Arts	68	28.7
Commercial	13	5.5
Social Sciences	38	16.0
No Response	5	2.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>100</b>

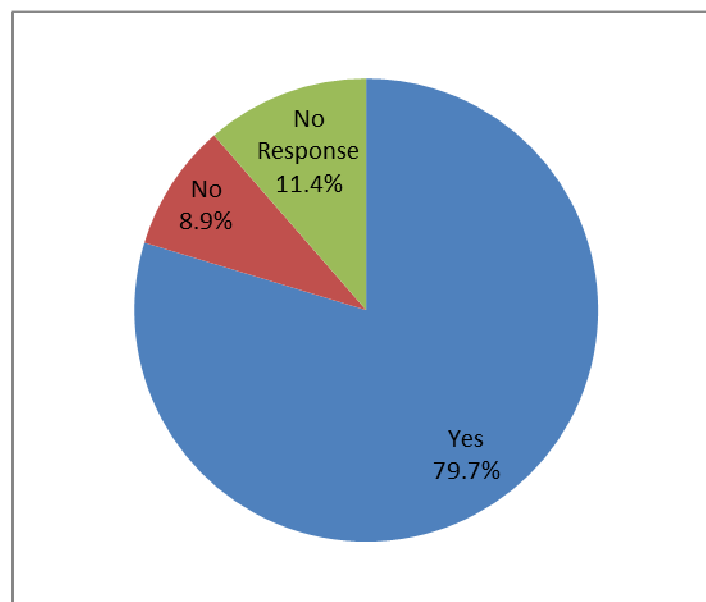
\*No Response\* Number of students that did not indicate high school discipline

Table 3 presents the high school discipline of the sampled respondents, it revealed that 113 (47.7%) respondents were Science students; 68 (28.7%) were Arts students; 13 (5.5%) were Commercial students; while 38 (16.0%) were Social Science students. Also, 5 of the respondents representing 2.1% did not indicate their discipline in High School.



**Figure 4: Bar Chart showing the Distribution of Respondents by Faculty / College**

Figure 4 shows the distribution of the sampled respondents by Faculty/College. Only 21 of the sampled respondents given as 8.9% were in Faculty of Arts; 42 representing 17.7% were in Faculty of basic and Medical Sciences; 57 (24.1%) were in Business and Social Sciences; 23 of the respondents given as 9.7% were in Faculty of Engineering; 35 respondents representing 14.8% were in Faculty of Law while 59 respondents given as 24.8% were in Faculty of Science. This showed that the sampling was done and spread across all the Faculties in the University.



**Figure 5: Pie Chart showing the Major Willingness of Sampled Respondents**

The major willingness of students is presented in figure 5, the table shows that 189 of the respondents given as 79.7% indicated they have willingness in studying the course they find themselves while 21 respondents given as 8.9% indicated that they did not have willingness to study their courses and 27 of the respondents given as 11.4% did not respond to the item.

### Answers to Research Questions

Research Question 1: What are students' perceptions on their knowledge of employability skills?

**Table 6: Students' Perceptions on their Knowledge of Employability Skills**

Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	S.D
Self -Awareness	67 28.3%	153 64.6%	9 3.8%	8 3.4%	3.18	0.653
Independence	107 45.1%	118 49.8%	- 0.0%	12 5.1%	3.35	0.730
Interpersonal Skill	88 37.1%	149 62.9%	- 0.0%	- 0.0%	3.37	0.484
Computer Literacy	110 46.4%	107 45.1%	12 5.1%	8 3.4%	3.35	0.730
Critical Thinking	130 54.9%	98 41.4%	9 3.7%	- 0.0%	3.51	0.572
Decision Making	158 66.7%	61 25.7%	8 3.4%	10 4.2%	3.60	0.710
Teamwork	9 3.8%	53 22.3%	117 49.4%	58 24.5%	2.05	0.787
Creativity	117 49.4%	120 50.6%	- 0.0%	- 0.0%	3.49	0.501
Adaptability	14 5.9%	60 25.3%	104 43.9%	59 24.9%	2.12	0.852
Self -Management	9 3.8%	125 52.7%	45 19.0%	58 24.5%	2.48	0.913

The answer to research question 1 is presented in table 6. The table shows the perception of the sampled respondents on their knowledge of employability skills. The following are their responses: Only 220 respondents out of 237 representing 92.9% agreed they have knowledge of self -awareness skill while 7.1% disagreed. Mean value for the skill is 3.18, an indication that majority of the sampled respondents agreed that they have knowledge of self -awareness as an employability skill they must possess. Also, all the sampled respondents indicated that they have knowledge of independence and interpersonal skills as expected of them by the employers of labor. The mean values of independence skill and interpersonal skill are given as 3.35 3.37 respectively. On computer literacy skill, 217 respondents given as 91.5% indicated they have its knowledge l while 8.5% of the respondents disagreed; the mean is given as 3.35 which indicate that many of the respondents have computer literacy skill. Furthermore, 228 respondents representing 96.3% indicated they have knowledge of critical thinking while 9 respondents given as 3.7% disagreed.

The mean value of critical thinking is 3.51 which implies that majority of the sampled respondents can think critically which is one of the skills required by employers while 219 respondents representing 92.4% indicated their knowledge on decision making skill as skill expected of them by employers while 18 respondents representing 7.6% disagreed. The mean value of the skill is given as 3.60 which showed that many of the respondents can make decisions on their own which is a skill required by employers of labour. The table further shows that 62 respondents given as 26.1% indicated their perception on teamwork as employability skill while 175 respondents representing 73.9% disagreed they have the knowledge of teamwork skill as an employability skill required by employers.

Mean value of the skill is 2.05 which indicates that majority of the sampled respondents did not perceive teamwork as a skill they must be competent in. Also, all the sampled respondents perceived and indicated their knowledge about creativity skill as an employability skill mean is given as 3.49. On Adaptability skill, 74 respondents given as 31.2% indicated that they have knowledge of adaptability skill as part of employability skills required of employers while 68.8% of them indicated they did not have knowledge of the skill. This implies that majority of the respondents did not have knowledge of adaptability as skill required by employers. Lastly on the table, 134 respondents representing 56.5% agreed they have knowledge of self-management skill while 103 respondents representing 43.5% indicated their disagreement on the knowledge of self-management as skill required by employers, mean = 2.48.

Research Question 2: Do students' perceptions of knowledge of employability skills vary among the faculties?

**Table 7: Students' Perceptions of Knowledge of Employability Skills among Faculties**

SKILLS	FACULTIES																	
	Arts			Basic and Medical Sciences			Business and Social Sciences			Engineering			Law			Sciences		
	A%	D%	Mean	A%	D%	Mean	A%	D%	Mean	A%	D%	Mean	A%	D%	Mean	A%	D%	Mean
Self-Awareness	90.5	9.5	3.10	95.2	4.8	3.21	94.7	5.3	3.25	95.7	4.3	3.26	88.6	11.4	3.09	91.5	8.5	3.14
Independence	85.7	14.3	3.33	78.5	21.5	3.17	77.2	22.8	3.12	78.3	21.7	3.13	80.9	19.1	3.11	74.6	25.4	3.05
Interpersonal	81.0	19.0	3.19	81.0	19.0	2.93	82.5	17.5	3.23	87.0	13.0	3.35	82.9	17.1	3.34	76.2	23.8	3.03
Computer Literacy	66.7	33.3	2.76	68.5	31.9%	2.88	70.2	29.8	3.02	78.3	21.7	3.13	85.7	14.3	3.26	67.8	32.2	2.78
Critical Thinking	95.2	4.8	3.57	88.1	11.9	3.05	89.5	10.5	3.39	87.0	13.0	3.04	62.9	37.1	2.71	88.1	11.9	3.31
Decision Making	80.7	19.3	3.14	85.7	14.3	3.12	91.2	8.8	3.19	95.7	4.3	3.22	91.4	8.6	3.14	91.5	8.5	3.25
Teamwork	23.8	76.2	2.00	92.9	7.1	3.52	92.9	7.1	3.58	95.7	4.3	3.70	82.9	17.1	3.06	89.8	10.2	3.44
Creativity	90.2	9.8	3.57	95.2	4.8	3.64	93.0	7.0	3.65	91.3	8.7	3.61	85.7	14.3	3.34	93.2	6.8	3.51
Adaptability	27.8	72.2	1.95	90.5	9.5	3.29	89.5	10.5	3.32	87.0	13.0	3.26	91.4	8.6	3.51	91.5	8.5	3.32
Self-Management	95.2	4.8	3.38	89.2	10.8	3.31	68.4	31.6	2.49	78.3	21.7	2.62	94.3	5.7	3.31	94.9	5.1	3.19



From table 7, findings revealed that students' perception of knowledge of employability skills from Faculty of Engineering is the highest, it has 95.7% agreed while 4.3% disagreed; Faculty of Basic and Medical Sciences has 95.2%, while 4.8% disagreed; Faculty Business and Social Sciences has 94.7% agreed and 5.3% disagreed. In Faculty of Science, the perception of students that agreed was 91.5% while 8.5% disagreed; this followed by Faculty of Arts that has 90.5% as those that agreed on self-awareness as employability skill, and lastly, students from Faculty of Law as the lowest perception of knowledge of employability skills.

So, this shows that there is not much difference in students' perceptions of knowledge of self-awareness among faculties. On independence skill, the table shows that students' perception was not as high as that of self-awareness. In Faculty of Arts, 85.7% agreed while 14.3% disagreed; 78.5% agreed and 21.5% disagreed in Faculty of Basic and Medical Sciences; in Faculty of Business and Social Sciences, 77.2% agreed while 22.8% disagreed. In Faculty of Engineering, 78.3% of the respondents agreed while 21.7% disagreed; Faculty of Law has 80.9% as agreed respondents while 19.1% disagreed and finally 74.6% of the respondents agreed in Faculty of Sciences while 25.4% disagreed.

Also, the table shows that there is not much difference among the students of different Faculties about interpersonal skill. 81.0% of the students in Faculties of Arts and Basic Medical Sciences indicated that they have knowledge about employability skill Business and Social Sciences has 82.5%; Engineering has 87.0% Law has 82.9% while Faculty of Science has 23.8%. On computer literacy skill, 66.7% of the sampled students from Faculty of Arts agreed they have knowledge about employability skill, 68.5% respondents from Faculty of Basic and Medical Sciences; 70.2% students from Business and Social Sciences; 78.3% students from Faculty of Engineering; 85.7% from Law while 67.8% students from Faculty of Sciences agreed they have computer literacy skill.

Furthermore, 95.2% of the students from Faculty of Arts agreed that they have knowledge of critical thinking skill; 88.15 students from Faculty of Basic and Medical Sciences; 89.5% of the students from Business and Social Sciences; 87.0% students from Faculty of Engineering; 62.9% from Law while 81.1% students from Faculty of Sciences agreed they have the knowledge of critical thinking skill. On decision making skill, 80.7% of the students from Faculty of Arts agreed that they have knowledge of it; 85.7% students from Faculty of Basic and Medical Sciences; 91.2% students from Business and Social Sciences; 91.2% students from Faculty of Engineering; 95.7% from Faculty of Law while 91.5% students from Faculty of Sciences agreed they have knowledge about decision making skill.

Also, 23.8% of the sampled students from Faculty of Arts agreed that they have knowledge of teamwork skill; 92.9% students from Faculty of Basic and Medical Sciences; 92.9% of the students from Business and Social Sciences; 95.7% students from Faculty of Engineering; 82.9% from Law while 89.8% students from Faculty of Sciences agreed they have the knowledge of teamwork skill. On creativity skill, 90.2% of the students from Faculty of Arts agreed that they have knowledge it; 95.2% students from Faculty of Basic and Medical Sciences; 93.0% of the students from Business and Social Sciences; 91.30% students from Faculty of Engineering; 85.7% from Faculty of Law while 93.2% of the students from Faculty of Sciences agreed they have knowledge of teamwork.

Responses on adaptability skill revealed the following: 27.8% of the sampled respondents from Faculty of Arts agreed they have knowledge about adaptability skill; 90.5% students from Faculty of Basic and Medical Sciences agreed they have the knowledge of adaptability; 89.5% respondents from Faculty of Business and Social Sciences; 87.0% students from Faculty of Engineering; 91.4% from Faculty of Law while 91.5% students from Faculty of Sciences agreed they have the knowledge of adaptability skill. Lastly, on self -management skill, 95.2% students from Faculty of Arts agreed they have knowledge of self -management skill; 89.2% students from Faculty of Basic and Medical Sciences; 68.4% of the students from Business and Social Sciences; 78.3% students from Faculty of Engineering; 94.3% from Law while 94.9% students from Faculty of Sciences agreed they have the knowledge of self- management skill. Only few students from Faculty of Arts have knowledge about teamwork and adaptability skills which have 27.8% and 27.8% respectively, this means that students' perceptions of knowledge of employability skills differ from faculty to faculty, but not in all skills.

## 7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Employability skills (soft skills) are very vital to students in their course of study to be able to prepare them for the labour market. These soft skills are supposed to be part of the goals of every curriculum in various departments of the University. It has been revealed that students have competence in some of these skills while others are still struggling to catch up. The soft skills (generic skills, core skills, process skills) may be taught through education and workforce development systems. The variation in skills mastered by the respondents in various faculties can be attributed to the analytical nature of some courses while others are historical in nature. Based on different studies as identified in this study, employability skills are vital to employability of new graduates into the labour market as well as maintaining the job. There is urgent need for review of the curriculum to accommodate the employability skills. Areas for further research include the technical skills of employability which is also referred to as the hard skills as well as other soft skills that are not mentioned in this research paper.

Curriculum of various departments in the University must be reviewed to make educational services relevant to the societal needs, not just belaboring the students with unnecessary courses. One of the critical factors that should drive curriculum review should be employability skills. The employability skills should be part of what the students' services unit of the University will teach during the life seminar period in relation to labour market. There should be suitable blend of what has traditionally being seen as theoretical and practical.

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