

EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS: CLOSING THE GAP BETWEEN EMPLOYERS' EXPECTATIONS AND SATISFACTION

Latifah Abdol Latif
latifah@oum.edu.my

Ramli Bahroom
ramli@oum.edu.my

Open University Malaysia

Abstract

In this new age of globalization, higher education plays an increasingly important role in preparing a workforce which meets the rapidly changing industry needs. There is now a critical need to re-examine the function of tertiary education such that it not only caters to fresh school-leavers but of equal importance, provide opportunities for the further re-skilling and up-skilling of people who are already employed. Open and distance learning (ODL) higher education institutions are able to contribute significantly to lifelong learning efforts for these working adults, however, these institutions have constantly been regarded as 'the lower quality alternative' with their flexible entry policy and flexible delivery and learning modes. This paper examines the extent to which Open University Malaysia, the country's first and premier ODL university trains and develops its graduates to meet employers' expectations with regard to the different types of skills required at the workplace. Printed questionnaires were sent via postal mail to employers of the December 2013 graduates of the Bachelor degree programmes. Responses of 109 out of a total of 600 (18.2%) employers were analysed using quadrant and gap analysis for four dimensions of employability skills namely, Knowledge and Understanding, General Qualities, General Skills and Specialized Skills. Quadrant analysis indicates that General Qualities fall in the strength quadrant, followed by General Skills, but to a lesser extent. Specialized Skills and Knowledge and Understanding were placed in the low priority quadrant. In the overall evaluation, 90.8% of employers were "satisfied" and "very satisfied" with employee's knowledge and skills; 59.6% indicated that general performance of the OUM graduates are "better" and "much better" compared to others and 89.0% are likely to employ graduates from OUM. The positive findings serve as evidence on the success of OUM in fulfilling its role in enhancing general qualities and skills which are synonymous to lifelong learning skills expected by employers.

Key words: *Employability skills, general qualities, general skills, knowledge and understanding, specialized skills, lifelong learning, higher education, human capital development.*

Human Capital Development, Lifelong Learning and Higher Education

Human capital development is a vital element in any country's economic development. Available research suggests strong relationships between education, productivity and output levels (Wilson & Briscoe, 2004) and that higher education, which equips future employees with the necessary knowledge and skills, is often deemed an important tool for economic growth.

Vast changes and new developments in terms of job requirements, dependence on knowledge-based economies and increasing utilization of newer information and communication technology (ICT) tools, have led to a shortening of the knowledge half-life. Therefore, as Simmons-McDonald (2009) aptly emphasized, "the concept of lifelong learning has become more critical as a factor which influences the employability of individuals" (p. 2). Such is the scenario whereby those who are employed will be required to further enhance or upgrade their knowledge and skills in order to continue to remain relevant in today's workforce. Thus it is important that employees take the responsibility for their own learning and development.

It has been pointed out that "employability of graduates is a key task for higher education" (UK Lifelong Learning, 1998). Across the globe, both developed and developing countries look upon higher tertiary education as a vital link to improved economic prosperity. The critical role of higher education in the nation's economic transformation is to produce graduates who not only possess knowledge of an academic subject but more importantly to engage in lifelong self-directed learning. This is the single most important competence that every

individual must possess. Lifelong learning is attitudinal – that one should be open to new ideas, decisions, skills or behaviours. Skills for lifelong learning relate to the need to acquire process and transfer knowledge. Lifelong learners need to know what they want to learn, how to come up with their learning plans and exercise critical and creative thinking, problem solving and decision making accompanied by regular self-reflection.

Employability and the Types of Skills Required

Generally, “employability” can be defined according to the definition adopted by Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) as possessing “a set of skills, knowledge, understanding and personal attributes that make a person more likely to choose and secure occupations in which they can be satisfied and successful.” The types of skills required for employability have been described as skills which are not job specific, but rather those which are applicable across all domains of employment as well as all levels of employment (Gurcharan Singh & Garib Singh, 2008).

However, ACCI (2002) as cited in Hampson and Junor (2010) described employability skills as “skills required not only to gain employment, but also to progress within an enterprise so as to achieve one’s potential and contribute successfully to enterprise strategic directions” (p.3). Similarly, the World Bank (n.d.) emphasized that “*the element of employability is important for workers to remain relevant in the world of work*” and that lifelong learning is crucial for the continuous development of competencies (Skill development: In the context of globalization). This definition is adopted in this paper as it applies to OUM graduates who were already working before graduation.

Traditionally, higher education has been elitist in that only the ‘cream of the crop’ is given a better opportunity to obtain tertiary education at a certain specific age. Pursuing tertiary education also meant that students are required to attend lessons in physical classes on a full time basis. Such a setting is no longer applicable in today’s world as those who missed the chance of pursuing their studies are now given the opportunity to pursue their ambition and dream of higher education through open and distance learning (ODL). The unique features of ODL, among others, include open or flexible entry where those with lesser qualifications but with relevant work experience may enter tertiary education institutions. Accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) has helped non-traditional students to cross over onto the academic pathway. ODL also offers flexible blend of face-to-face and online learning using ICTs, enabling working adults to continue to work full time and study part time. Transforming its teaching and learning from “teacher-centred” to “learner-centred” and providing efficient and effective learner support has been OUM’s top priority.

While there is a dire need to widen access to educational opportunities, the emergence of open and distance learning (ODL) higher education institutions in meeting that need has been scrutinized in terms of the quality of their programmes. As pointed out by Kirkpatrick (2005), “Despite a long and generally successful track record, ODL is still required to prove that the quality of student learning is at least equivalent to or better than face-to-face teaching” (p. 2).

Objective of Study

The objective of this paper is to examine the extent to which OUM graduates meet the expectations of their employers with regard to four types of employability competencies.

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative approach whereby printed survey questionnaires were sent by postal mail to employers of the December 2013 graduates. Names and postal addresses of the employers were initially sought from the graduands using an online submission of data prior to the December 2013 convocation. Stamped, self-addressed envelopes were enclosed together with the questionnaires to facilitate the return of the completed surveys.

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the research findings. An Importance-Satisfaction Quadrant analysis was carried out for the four dimensions of competencies. A gap analysis was also carried out together with dependent samples t-tests to determine areas of strengths and weaknesses as perceived by the employers.

Instrumentation

The items related to Importance and Satisfaction with regard to Employability competencies were largely adapted from those validated and utilized in the 2005 Noel-Levitz Employer Satisfaction Survey (Kleinke, 2006). The respondents were required to rate the level of importance on a five-point Likert-type scale (1) Not at all important; (2) Not very important; (3) Somewhat important; (4) Very important; and (5) Extremely important. A similar five-point Likert-type scale was also offered for the respondents to rate their level of satisfaction with the performance of OUM graduates.

Table 1: Dimension, Number of Items and Reliability of Dimensions

Dimension	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Knowledge and Understanding	7	0.88
General Qualities	14	0.97
General Skills	15	0.96
Specialized Skills	7	0.92

The Cronbach alpha coefficients for the Knowledge and Understanding, General Qualities, General Skills and Specialized Skills dimensions exceeded 0.7 and these alpha values indicate that as a whole, the Importance-Satisfaction scale has a high internal consistency (DeVellis 1991).

Population and Sample

Out of a total of 3875 Bachelor's and postgraduate degree graduates for the December 2013 semester, 600 complete addresses via the online system were selected randomly. Out of that number, only 109 completed surveys were received, giving an overall response rate 18.2% percent.

The respondents were from various sectors namely Education (67), Service (13), ICT (6), Healthcare (4), Hospitality (3), Construction (3), Manufacturing (2), Business (1) and Agriculture (1). The sector for 9 out of 109 respondents was not identified. The totals of 85.3 percent were from the public sector while remaining 14.7 percent were from the private sector. The respondents were from all states and federal territories in the country.

Data Analysis

In the quadrant analysis, the overall mean for satisfaction was plotted against the overall mean for importance, for each competency dimension. Interpretation for each of the four quadrants is as follows:

1. If the plotted values fall in the upper right quadrant (High Importance and High Satisfaction), the items are considered *Strengths*;
2. If the plotted values fall in the upper left quadrant (High Importance and Low Satisfaction), the items draw attention to *Opportunities for Improvement*;
3. If the plotted values fall in the lower left quadrant (Low Importance and Low Satisfaction), the items are considered of *Low Priority*; and
4. If the plotted values fall in the lower right quadrant (Low Importance and High Satisfaction), these items are considered under *Misallocation of Resources*.

Results

The four skills dimensions involved in this study include:

1. Knowledge and Understanding;
2. General Qualities;
3. General Skills; and
4. Specialized Skills.

The Means and Standard Deviations for each dimension is as shown in Table 2. The overall importance mean is 4.13 while the overall satisfaction mean is 3.93. It is noteworthy that all of four types of skills were rated ‘very important’ and ‘extremely important’; the highest of which is General Qualities, followed by General Skills, Specialized Skills and Knowledge and Understanding. In terms of satisfaction, the employers were ‘somewhat satisfied’ to ‘very satisfied’ with the skills of OUM graduate employees. The General Qualities dimension was accorded highest satisfaction, followed by General Skills, Knowledge and Understanding and finally specialized skills.

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations of the Dimensions

Dimensions	Importance	SD	Satisfaction	SD
General Qualities	4.29	0.49	4.09	0.53
General Skills	4.18	0.48	3.95	0.50
Specialized skills	4.04	0.50	3.81	0.53
Knowledge/Understanding	4.02	0.52	3.86	0.52
Average	4.13		3.93	

Quadrant Analysis

A visual representation of the ratings given by the employers can be seen in Figure 1 by plotting the importance means and satisfaction means in a scatter diagram, depicted in the form of a quadrant. All the four dimensions fall in the Strength Quadrant, indicating that OUM has successfully produced graduates who are well equipped with the right skills required (importance) by and to the satisfaction of their employers.

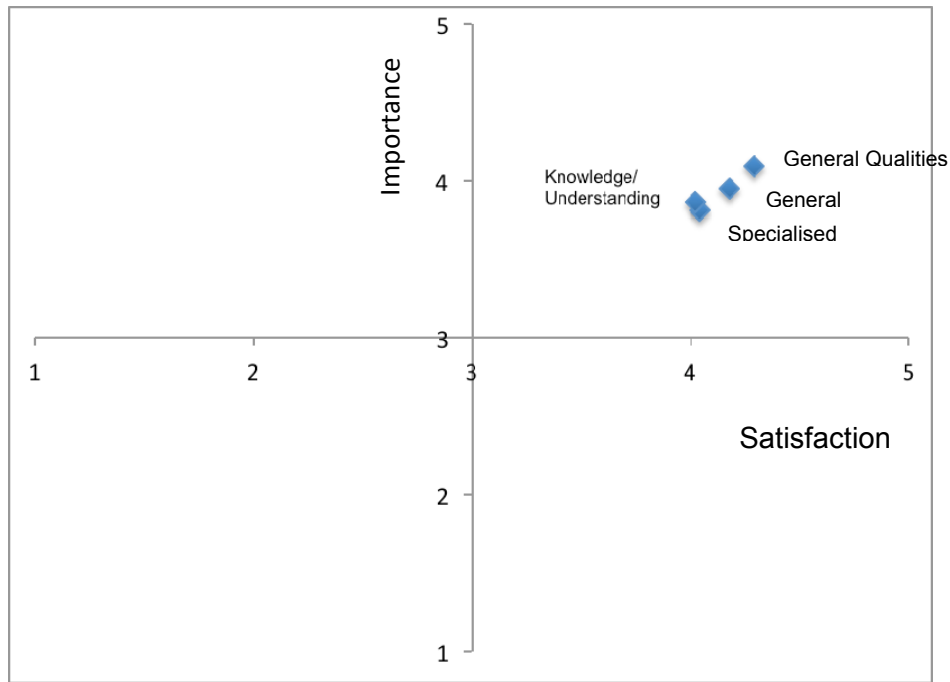


Figure 1: Quadrant analysis for overall dimensions

To further refine our analysis to gain deeper insights into the ratings by the employers, we reconstruct the above quadrant by using the overall means of importance (4.13) and satisfaction (3.93) as the reference points or new axis (Figure 2). This indirectly converts the absolute ratings into relative ratings based on their own averages. Based on this new quadrant, the ‘*General Qualities*’ dimension falls in the strength quadrant, together with ‘*General Skills*’ (to a lesser extent). ‘*Specialized Skills*’ and ‘*Knowledge and Understanding*’ are both in the low priority quadrant.

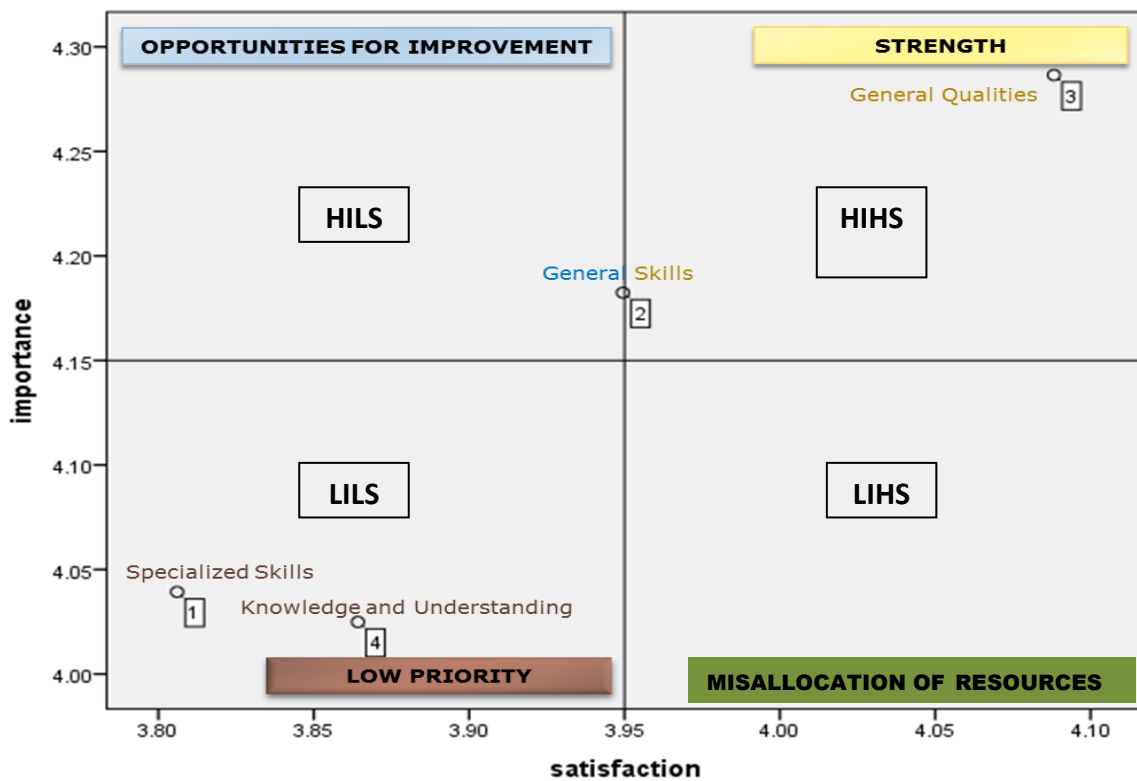


Figure 2: Relative quadrant analysis for overall dimensions

Based on the above, all the items are distributed to their respective quadrants, which are labeled as HIHS (high importance high satisfaction); HILS (high importance low satisfaction); LILS (low importance low satisfaction) and LIHS (low importance high satisfaction) (Table 3).

Across all the four different types of skill, a majority that is 25 out of 43 or 58.1% are high importance-high satisfaction items, followed by 14 items, which contribute 32.6% of the low importance-low satisfaction (low priority) quadrant. The high importance-low satisfaction (need to concentrate here) and low importance-high satisfaction (misallocation of resources) each bears 4.7% of the items.

Gap Score Analysis

The gap analysis was also carried out with an objective of explicitly identifying the gaps between importance and satisfaction. The gap was measured by subtracting the mean score of satisfaction from the mean score of importance. Items with large positive gaps are indicative of problems areas that need correction, as these items are not meeting employers' expectations. Small gap values imply that expectations are met. Percentage difference was also computed by subtracting the Satisfaction score from the Importance score and dividing by 5 (since the responses were based on a five-point scale) and then multiplying by 100 (see Table 3).

Table 3: Distribution of Items by Important-Satisfaction Gap and Quadrants

DIMENSIONS / ITEMS	IMP	SAT	GAP	HIHS	HILS	LILS	LIHS
Understanding of industry regulations and policies	4.07	3.8	0.27*			X	
Knowledge of specific computer applications required for job	4.08	3.83	0.25*			X	
Understanding of job-related information	4.23	4.02	0.21*	X			
Ability to translate theory into practice	4.14	3.93	0.21*	X			
Knowledge in employee's field of study	4.13	3.96	0.17*	X			
Specific technical knowledge required for the job	4.03	3.9	0.13			X	
Understanding of international business environment	3.56	3.57	-0.01			X	
KNOWLEDGE & UNDERSTANDING	4.02	3.86	0.16	3 (42.9)	0	4 (57.1)	0
Professional ethics	4.34	4.06	0.28*	X			
Creativity and innovation	4.21	3.95	0.26*	X			
Integrity	4.44	4.21	0.23*	X			
Self-discipline	4.43	4.2	0.23*	X			
Accepts responsibility for consequences of actions	4.25	4.03	0.22*	X			
Positive attitude towards work	4.41	4.20	0.21*	X			
Ability to reflect own performance	4.22	4.01	0.21*	X			
Self-confidence	4.38	4.18	0.20*	X			
Flexibility and adaptability (responds well to change)	4.26	4.06	0.20*	X			
Self-motivation and initiative	4.33	4.14	0.19*	X			
Empathy (understands situations and feelings of others)	4.12	3.95	0.17*				X
Willingness to learn	4.32	4.18	0.14*	X			
Reliability (can be depended on to complete work assignments)	4.24	4.1	0.14*	X			
Appreciation of different cultural contexts	4.10	3.96	0.14*				X
GENERAL QUALITIES	4.28	4.08	0.20	12 (85.7)	0	0	2 (14.3)
Verbal communication	4.31	4.00	0.31*	X			
Problem solving skills	4.27	3.99	0.28*	X			
Written communication	4.22	3.94	0.28*	X			
Presentation skills	4.15	3.88	0.27*		X		

DIMENSIONS / ITEMS	IMP	SAT	GAP	HIHS	HILS	LILS	LIHS
Critical thinking and analytical skills	4.16	3.90	0.26*		X		
Listening to others	4.28	4.03	0.25*	X			
Customer service	4.17	3.95	0.22*	X			
Decision making skills	4.16	3.94	0.22*	X			
Leadership skills	4.11	3.89	0.22*			X	
Use of equipment or technology specific to the job	4.08	3.86	0.22*			X	
Management of resources	4.03	3.83	0.20*			X	
Ability to find and access information	4.24	4.06	0.18*	X			
Teamwork	4.30	4.15	0.15*	X			
Basic computer	4.20	4.06	0.14*	X			
Entrepreneurial skills	3.97	3.77	0.20*			X	
GENERAL SKILLS	4.18	3.95	0.23	9 (60.0)	2 (13.3)	4 (26.7)	0
Fluency in English	4.04	3.63	0.41*			X	
Ability to set goals and allocate time to achieve them	4.17	3.92	0.25*	X			
Mentoring or coaching colleagues	4.09	3.84	0.25*			X	
Ability to translate theory into practice	4.12	3.88	0.24*			X	
Management of organizational resources	4.06	3.89	0.17*			X	
Project management	3.83	3.67	0.16*			X	
Negotiation	3.96	3.81	0.15*			X	
SPECIALIZED SKILLS	4.03	3.80	0.23	1 (14.3)	0	6 (85.7)	0
OVERALL	4.13	3.93	0.20				

* Significant at 5% confidence level.

General skills and specialized skills dimensions showed the largest gaps of 0.23 or 4.6% and this is greater than the overall mean gap of 0.20 or 4.0%. The smallest gap was for 'Knowledge and Understanding' (see Table 3). The detailed analysis of items by dimension using combined quadrant and gap analysis is given in the following paragraphs.

Knowledge and Understanding

As for the Knowledge and Understanding dimension, the difference between the importance and satisfaction mean scores is significant for five (5) out of the seven (7) items (see Table 3). The two items in which the differences are not significant are: *Understanding of international business environment* and *Specific technical knowledge required for the job*. Of the five items with significant differences, three are in HIHS quadrant while the other two are in the LILS quadrant.

General Qualities

In the General Qualities dimension, the difference in the importance-satisfaction scores is significant in all fourteen (14) items. Of the fourteen items, thirteen (13) are in the HIHS quadrant with only one (1) item in the LIHS quadrant.

General Skills

In the General Skills dimension, the difference in the importance-satisfaction scores of all fifteen (15) items is significant. Of these items, nine (9) are in HIHS quadrant, two (2) are in the HILS quadrant, and the remaining six (6) are in the LILS quadrant.

Specialized Skills

Finally, in the Specialized Skills dimension, the difference between the importance and satisfaction scores for all items is significant. Of this number of items, only one (1) is in the HIHS quadrant with the other six (6) are in the LILS quadrant.

Items with Top 5 Highest Importance-Satisfaction Gap

To further examine the relative importance of all the skill items, top five (5) of them were identified based on the magnitude and percentage of their importance-satisfaction gaps. This is shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Top Five Highest Gaps in the Skill Items in All Four Dimensions

Items	Importance	Satisfaction	Gap	% GAP
Fluency in English	4.04	3.63	0.41	8.2%
Verbal communication	4.31	4.00	0.31	6.2%
Professional ethics	4.34	4.06	0.28	5.6%
Written communication	4.22	3.94	0.28	5.6%
Problem solving skills	4.27	3.99	0.28	5.6%

As can be seen from the table, *Fluency in English* has the largest gap of 0.41, followed by *Verbal communication* (0.31), *Professional ethics* (0.28), *Written communication* (0.28) and *Problem-solving skills* (0.28).

Overall Satisfaction

Analysis of data obtained from general feedback questions at the end of the survey revealed that 10.1 percent of the employers were of the opinion that OUM graduates were *much better* than new graduates from other universities while 49.5 percent thought OUM graduates were *better* (see Figure 3). This gives a total of 59.6 percent agreement that OUM graduates were better than those from other universities. Meanwhile, 37.6 percent found OUM graduates to be almost the same as the others, thus giving an overall satisfaction rate of 97.2 percent. Only 2.8 percent found them to be worse and none thought that OUM graduates were much worse than new graduates from other universities.

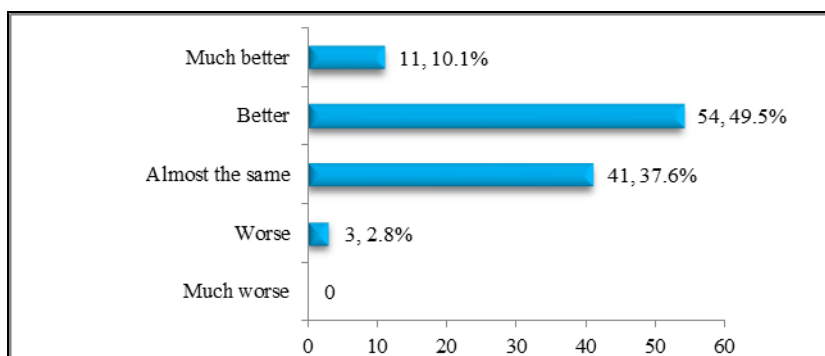


Figure 3: General performance of the OUM graduates compared to others

The study also found that 44.0 percent of the employers were very satisfied, 46.8 percent were satisfied and 6.4 percent were somewhat satisfied (see Figure 4). Only 2.8 percent of employers were not satisfied with OUM graduates and none was not at all satisfied with OUM graduates.

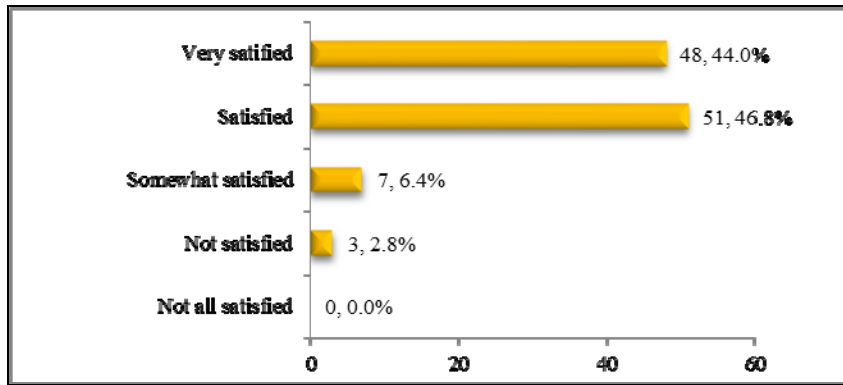


Figure 4: Overall satisfaction with the employee's knowledge and skills

On the likelihood of employing OUM graduates, 30.3 percent of employers indicated that they will *very likely* employ OUM graduates, while 58.7 percent will *likely* and 9.2 percent *somewhat likely* to do so (Figure 5). This gives a total 98.2 percent of employers who will *likely* employ graduates from OUM. Only 1.8 percent of employers indicated that they will *not likely* to employ them.

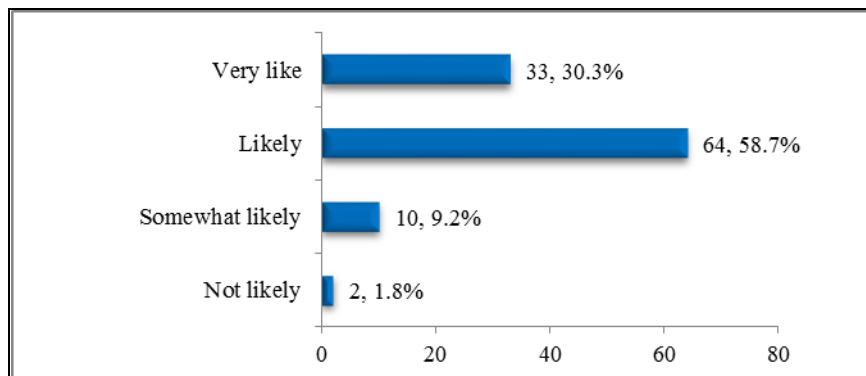


Figure 5: The likelihood of employers employing OUM graduates

Finally, in terms promotion, this study found that a majority of 53.3 percent was promoted in their respective career with OUM academic qualifications (see Figure 6).

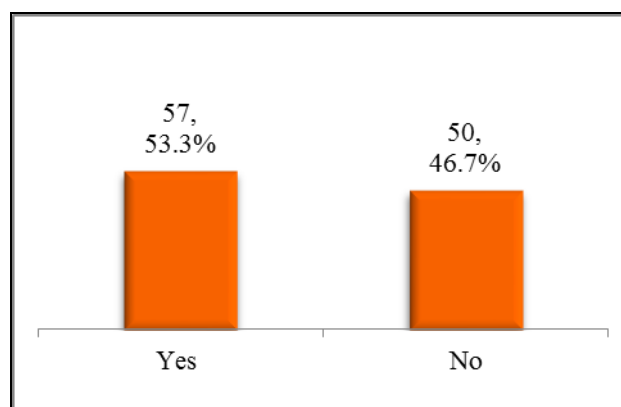


Figure 5: Promotion given with OUM qualification

Discussion

The gaps for all items in this study range from a low of 2.6% to a maximum of 8.2%. This range of values is half of the maximum values calculated based on the empirical data obtained by Agus *et al.* (2011) and certainly much less than the gaps obtained by Griesel and Parker (2009). In another study by Agus, Awang, Yussof and Mohamed Makhbul (2011), they found that the level of satisfaction was generally below the expectation level,

with a mean gap of 14.4 percent obtained for the skills examined. Wide gaps were recorded for skills such as Decision-making and Problem-solving (17.3%), Thinking (17.3%), Communication and Interpersonal (16.9%), and Ethical and Values (16.4%). The much lower values for the gaps obtained in this study compared to other studies seem to suggest that OUM's open and distance learning programmes have been successful in producing graduates who meet the expectations of their employers with regard to the four different types of skills.

In the Importance-Satisfaction quadrant as depicted in the tabular form in Table 3, 58.1% of all items are located in the HIHS or the Strength quadrant. This shows that a majority of employers in this study perceives that OUM graduates do exhibit the required skills in their organisation and applied these skills to their satisfaction. However, there are quite substantial items that fall under the LIHS (32.6%), HILS (4.7%) and LILS (4.7%) quadrants. The LIHS is a low priority quadrant which implies that the employers accord low importance to these items even though they are well satisfied with them. For the items in the LILS, even though employers are not satisfied, they can be safely ignored. The items in the HILS quadrant, which employers place very high importance but are not satisfied with them, are of concern to the university. There are two items in this quadrant, namely, *Presentation skills* and *Critical skills and analytical skills*. This suggests that efforts need to be undertaken by OUM to improve on these skill sets.

The overall finding revealed that more than 90% of employers felt that OUM graduates were better or at least of the same quality as new graduates from other universities, augurs well for the further contribution of ODL programmes towards human capital development. It certainly places OUM, as a relatively young ODL university at par or better when compared to its other traditional and campus-based higher education providers.

Notwithstanding the above positive feedback, there is still room for further improvements. Looking at the top five items with the highest importance-satisfaction gaps, *Fluency in English* appears to top the list (Table 5). This result at first appears to be perplexing in view of the tremendous emphasis on the English language at OUM. In fact, it is the primary medium of instruction for most of its programmes. In addition, the number of English courses offered to students is also quite significant. The results of the study clearly indicate that there is an urgent need for a review of the usage and teaching of English at the university. Perhaps, a review of the type of assessment used and the activities incorporated in the English and other courses may lead to better acquisition of this second language skill. As noted by Hager, Holland and Beckett, (2002), "the process of acquisition of generic skills would appear to be part of the overall learning process which is idiosyncratic, generally invisible and often intuitive". Incorporating such skills need to be done in a spiral manner whereby students are given opportunities to develop the skills incrementally as they progress in their studies.

Closely related to the English Language issue is the level of both verbal and written communication which fall into the second and fourth position based on the I-S highest gap ranking. OUM needs to take heed of these apparent weaknesses among its graduates and measures to improve them need to be instituted immediately. It is generally agreed that for most of today's graduates, communication skills are one of their primary inadequacies.

Besides English language, Professional ethics and Problem-solving skills also need to be further improved. The first deal with personal integrity, honesty and trust and the second, which is problem-solving skills is one of the critical factors that will place the graduates ahead of the others and ensure the success in their career. In order to prepare learners with these skills, the two courses: *Professional Ethics (OUMM3203)* and *Thinking Skills and Problem Solving (SBFS1103)* are incorporated as part of the curriculum in all of OUM's programmes.

One of the tools used to develop the above skills is the academic curriculum, which is a vehicle through which attributes can be transferred during the learning process. And in general the teaching and learning assumes a self-study format, which is guided by a tutor (face-to-face and online). This self-study approach is actually the tacit goal of higher education as it produces scholars who can work independently. However, the variations among all students in the classroom, (face-to-face and online) compounded by variations in their English proficiency levels, and cultural background poses a great challenge. A variety of instructional techniques that simultaneously help learners gain language skills and content knowledge, has been implemented, but obviously there is ample room for improvements.

Specific for English language, the following instructional components have been cited as potentially helpful to help learners increase their English language proficiency: visuals and demonstrations, scaffolded instruction, targeted vocabulary development, connections to student experiences, student-to-student interaction, appropriate use of supplementary materials, sufficient opportunities for oral English development, and explicit teaching of language learning strategies (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007; August & Shanahan, 2006). Incorporating the above instructional components will most likely lead to better outcomes.

While improving students' Knowledge and Understanding of subject matter may be more objectively measured and has traditionally been the mainstay of tertiary education, the development of General Attributes and Generic Skills need to be given greater emphasis. As Kiley and Cannon (2000) emphasized, "Taking lifelong learning as a goal, we would need to address these skills and attitudes as students go through the university, much as we now require knowledge goals to be met incrementally. Some of the skills and attitudes students learn involve gauging their own weaknesses and designing remedies" (p. 11). Taking up this suggestion, students could perhaps be required to assess their own attributes and generic skills on a yearly basis and track their progress towards self-improvement in the course of their studies.

Last but not least, in order to adequately equip a workforce which meets the challenges and demands of the new age labour market, "the nexus between output of graduates and industry needs, the university and the workplace, and the higher education system and the lifelong learning system needs to be further strengthened" (Ali, 2011).

Conclusion

As the popular saying goes, 'the proof of the pudding is in the eating', so in this case the proof of ODL's success in contributing towards human capital development is in the level of satisfaction indicated by employers with its graduates. In this context, the study clearly indicates that OUM as a premier ODL institution in the country has been successful in producing graduates who meet the requirements of their employers. This in turn implies that the university has been able to contribute towards the country's nation-building by providing a pool of human resources that can perform well in their workplaces. More significantly, the university has played a very positive role in the country's lifelong learning agenda by focusing on the upgrading and upskilling of its working adults. This effort becomes even more meaningful when these working adults are provided with ample second chances and opportunities to continue their studies and pursue their life dreams hitherto not readily available and easily accessible.

Needles to say, OUM's journey is far from over and it will never rest on its laurels. Since its inception 14 years ago, its diligent efforts at improving itself in its delivery modes, development of learning materials assessments, learner support services and others is focused on satisfying the needs of its learners. To date, OUM has produced more than 50,000 graduates in various academic disciplines and career paths. These graduates are lifelong learners who will continue to upgrade themselves to meet the needs of their employers, the true test of their capabilities.

The feedback from employers such as the one reported in this study is a critical element in the success of our nation's lifelong agenda as it provides the much needed information on the employability skills sets that are of importance in the workplace and whether employers are satisfied with the performance of the graduates from the higher education institutions. This study, in particular, bears testimony to the fact that ODL institution, such as OUM is playing an important role in contributing to the development of Malaysia's human capital development via a formal lifelong learning approach.

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