

THE EMPLOYABILITY OF BUSINESS SCHOOLS' GRADUATES IN THE LABOUR MARKET IN TANZANIA: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Higher learning institutions have been blamed for producing graduates unfit to the labor market. However, many factors determine the performance of business schools' graduates in the labor market. Institutional (where training was undertaken), organizational (where graduate is working), and individual or personal factors. All these factors contribute to the performance of graduates at places of work or the labor market. The purpose of this paper is to present business schools ex-graduates' performance in terms of five employability dimensions. The ex-graduates performance assessment in five dimensions was compared to employers' assessment. The correlation between ex-graduates employability dimensions and immediate supervisors' performance assessment was established. The results obtained in this study indicating the ex-graduates' gap allows training institutions in Tanzania improve their curricula to bridge mismatch between the TVET training and the labor market. Second, the feedback from the study helps the employers improve their working environment. Third, recognition of skill gaps by ex-graduates enables them to adjust themselves to suit the labor market demands at the same time increase their marketability. A Cross sectional survey design was adopted. The data for the study was obtained using a back translated instrument to ex-graduates and their immediate supervisors. Forty eight ex-graduates working in financial institutions, ICT firms, and Government ministries volunteered to participate in the study. The respondents consisted of 54 % (26) male and 46% (22) females. A paper and pencil instrument sought responses from the participants. Responses were measured on a Likert scale anchored between 1 and 6. Twenty eight immediate supervisors filled in the instrument. The employability of ex-graduates' and immediate supervisors' performance Likert scale rating at places of work is reported. Ex-graduates were doing well in professional expertise but not very well at balancing work and other activities. Ex-graduates own assessment rating was significantly higher compared to that of immediate supervisors. A positive correlation between immediate supervisors' performance assessment and ex-graduates employability dimensions was established. The work performance of business schools' ex-graduates in Tanzania is determined by factors other than individual factors. The sample size of respondents in the study is small for generalization. This suggests a need for another study involving a large sample of the population.

Key Words: *Ex-graduates, Employability, Supervisors, Labor market, Performance, Tanzania*

Introduction

Higher learning institutions have been blamed for producing graduates unfit to the labor market (MSTHE1, 2000; CBE2 Workshop, 2013). In this regard higher learning institutions are therefore obliged to offer the best education to their students to serve the economic growth and welfare of the society. Training competent students will trigger economic growth (Gumbo, 2007). It is recognized that in a knowledge economy tertiary education plays an important role, through its graduates, and can assist economies keep abreast with the more advanced societies (George, 2006). The level, type and quality of education (knowledge, skills and competencies) that people and professionals attain are important elements in determining the available skilled labor force to serve various sectors of the economy. Tanzania education stakeholders have been arguing that the education offered is not adequately geared to integrate the individual into the strong competitive labor markets (local and international). Equally, it also has not adequately been able to innovatively engage Tanzanians in entrepreneurship and self-employment activities³. There has been mismatch between the skills demanded in the labor market and the supply of the same in the respective occupations or sector⁴. Koslowski III (2006) indicates that higher learning institutions have been delivering closed loop curricula. These assertions suggest possible underperformance of graduates trained in Tanzania higher learning institutions.

Many factors determine the performance of business schools' graduates in the labor market. Institutional (where training was undertaken), organizational (where graduate is working) and individual or personal factors (e.g. professional specialization, age, personality) contribute to the performance of graduates at places of work or the labor market. Given these factors, should higher learning institutions solely carry the blame? Personal factors can play a big role towards one's performance in the labor market. In this regard the extent of employability of graduates from higher learning institutions in Tanzania-specifically those regulated by the National Council for Technical Education may be questionable. Given the doubt on the employability of graduates from higher learning institutions in Tanzania, the extent of ex-graduates self assessment matching employer's expectations may be doubtful.

The purpose of this paper was to present the results obtained from an exploratory study conducted in 2008 to ex-graduates of two business schools working in Tanzania. Three Research questions (RQ) pertaining to ex-graduates employability and degree of performance in the

¹ MSTHE= Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education

² CBE=College of Business Education

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<http://www.tanzania.go.tz/pdf/The%20Study%20on%20National%20Skills%20Development%20to%20Facilitate%20Tanzania%20to%20Become%20a%20Strong%20and%20Competitive%20Economy%20By%202025.pdf>

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perspective of immediate supervisors were answered. The employability/ performance of business schools' ex-graduates in the labor market were measured using an instrument developed by Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006). The correlation between immediate supervisors' performance assessment and ex-graduates employability dimensions was established.

A cross sectional survey design was adopted. The data was collected using the back translated instrument before it was administered to ex-graduates' immediate supervisors. Forty eight ex-graduates volunteered to participate in the study. The respondents consisted of 26 (54 %) male and 22(46 %) female. 28 Supervisors filled in the instrument.

The scope of the study focuses on the individual employability dimensions as independent variables and performance at place of work as a dependent variable measured in the perspective of an immediate supervisor. The sample of this exploratory study involved ex-graduates working in Dar es Salaam in the sectors of finance, public and private. Organizational factors and higher learning institutional (where ex-graduates studied) factors are not measured in this study.

Ex-graduates indicated their employability with the work environment while immediate supervisors indicated the rating of ex-graduates' performance at places of work. There was a positive correlation between ex-graduates overall employability and immediate supervisors' performance assessment of ex-graduates.

Based on the review of literature on definitions of the variables measured i.e. employability and performance at places of work and empirical studies, three research questions were posed.

Literature Review

Employability is an individual's ability to apply knowledge/skills and ones' personal attributes. Employability as a construct has been defined in various ways by different authors (Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004; Harvey, 2001; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). Harvey (2001) defines employability in three different ways: i. as the ability to gain and retain fulfilling work- Hillage and Pollard (1998) as cited in Harvey, (2001), ii. as the propensity of the individual to exhibit attributes that employers anticipate will be necessary for the effective functioning of their organization in the future, iii. as the ability of the individual to get a satisfying job (Harvey, 2001). On the other hand De Grip et al. (2004) define employability as the capacity and willingness of workers to remain attractive for the labor market (supply factors) by reacting to and anticipating changes in tasks and work environment (demand factors), facilitated by human resource development instruments available.

Fugate et al. (2004) define employability as a psycho-social construct that embodies individual characteristics that foster adaptive cognition, behavior, and affect, and enhance the individual-work interface. In short employability represents a form of work-specific (pro) active adaptability that enables workers to identify and realize career opportunities (Fugate et al., 2004).

Van der Heijden (2005) defines employability as the (individual) capacity of continuously fulfilling, acquiring or creating work through the optimal use of competences. This definition is the most comprehensive and encompasses the other abovementioned definitions.

Employability has been construed as a multi-dimensional construct. Rothwell and Arnold (2007) suggest that “self perceived employability can usefully be thought of as either a unitary construct, or one with two related components-internal (to the organization) and external employability”. Similarly, Fugate et al. (2004) argue that employability embodies a synergistic combination of career identity, personal adaptability, and social and human capital. Van der Heijden (2005); Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006) suggest five dimensions of employability relating career development and job-related matters. The dimensions comprise:- occupational expertise; anticipation and optimization; personal flexibility; corporate sense and balance.

The employability definition suggested by Van der Heijden (2005) is adopted in this study. This is because the author developed and validated an instrument to measure the employability construct. Empirical studies show that individual characteristics, among other things, determine one’s employability. Van der Heijden (2005) in an intercultural study showed that ICT professionals in SMEs had control over their employability as they kept on advancing on the current technological development. Similarly, Hay and Hodgkinson (2006) showed in their study that managers boost their employability and professional expertise through attaining MBA. In the context of Greek graduates, Mihail and Elefterie (2006) indicate that graduates enhance their employability by acquiring appropriate skills required by the labour market.

Based on the prior literature the studies conducted are contextually different from Tanzania. This study therefore seeks to measure the extent of employability of ex-graduates from higher learning institutions in Tanzania by answering the Research question (RQ1).

RQ1: To what extent is the employability of ex-graduates from higher learning institutions in Tanzania-specifically those regulated by the National Council for Technical Education?

While the employability construct consists of five factors that determine the performance of an ex-graduate, factors such as demographic variables- age and gender (Ham, 2003) and personality may also influence the individual performance at place of work since some professions have a heredity inclination (Hellriegel & Slocum , 2004). In this study, the influence of gender and personality on employee’s performance at place of work is not examined. However, this opens a new avenue for further studies.

Job performance: Job performance is defined an assessment of employees’ performance by their employers on the possession of the required knowledge, skills and abilities for the job based on a set standard (Huczynski & Buchanan, 1991).

Huczynski and Buchanan (1991, p.8) indicate that the level of performance of individuals is tied to standards which determine what counts as inadequate, satisfactory, or good. Individual performance is therefore controlled by Managers/Supervisors. Managers/Supervisors monitor performance to ensure it is good enough or something should be done to improve it. Performance is therefore measured based on the match or mismatch of the supervisor's expectations. The extent of ex-graduates' performance at places of work was sought (RQ2).

RQ2: To what extent does the job performance of ex-graduates match the employers' expectations-specifically those regulated by the National Council for Technical Education?

While ex-graduates may feel that they are performing well given the institutional factors, supervisors may feel otherwise. Recently civil servants' performance in Tanzania have been evaluated based on an open review appraisal system where one assesses own performance on the same scale and then the supervisor does the same on the same scale (e.g. College of Business Education, 2013). The scores on this scale may/may not be related if the factors based on the performance evaluation differ. To establish the correlation between the performance scores of ex-graduate and the immediate supervisors, research question RQ 3 was posed.

RQ3: Is there correlation between employers' performance assessment and ex-graduates employability?

The relationship of independent and dependent variables in the posed research questions is presented in Figure 1.

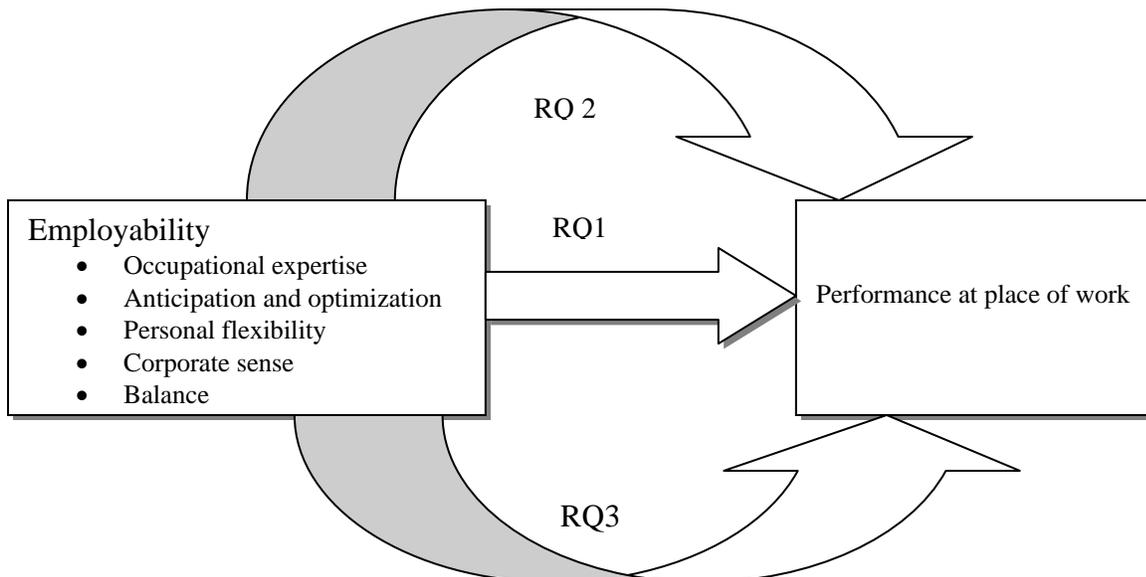


Figure 1: Relationship of Variables Measured in Corresponding Research Question

In the context of organizations, the performance is measured on the extent the organization has achieved its establishing objectives. The methodology followed, data analysis and results, discussion and conclusion of the study are given. Further, limitations of the study including suggested areas for further research are highlighted in the rest of this paper.

Research Methodology

In order to answer the three research questions posed in the introduction section, a validated instrument (Van der Heidje & Van der Heijden, 2006) was used. The instrument sought data related to ex-graduates employability at places of work and work performance from immediate supervisors. The scale items on the instrument measuring ex-graduates employability were anchored at a 6 point Likert scale, where for example “1” indicated very little expertise; and, “6” indicated a very great deal expertise. On the part of immediate Supervisors, a cross-sectional survey design was adopted in this study. A purposeful sample of 48 participants was used in the study whereas 28 employers gave their assessment of ex-graduates. Sample characteristics and the administration of the instrument are explained in the forthcoming sections.

Cross-sectional survey design

In this study a Cross-sectional survey design was employed to explore ex-graduates work performance in Tanzania. Survey designs are differentiated in terms of time continuum (Babbie, 1998). These are cross-sectional and longitudinal survey designs. In a cross-sectional survey data (on a series of variables) are collected at one point in time whereas in a longitudinal survey data are collected over a period of time. According to Babbie (1998), cross-sectional survey designs are undertaken to describe populations’ characteristics or to determine relationships between variables at the time of the study. Causal relationships between the variables cannot be established by associations (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The authors further argue that this type of survey is not suitable to explore such relationships given there is no element of experimental design in cross-sectional research. As a result, cross-sectional surveys also lack the internal validity which experimental design offers (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Sampling design

The validity of a study is to a great extent influenced by the size of the sample compared to the population. Given that this study was exploratory, the size of the sample was not a big deal since it can be increased in future studies.

The research participants (ex-graduates) were purposely selected. In this sense the sampling design was not be probabilistic. However, efforts were made to get respondents from various groups (professional specialization and gender) of ex-graduates and immediate supervisors to reflect representative-ness. Each population was sampled differently. Babbie (1998, p. 60) holds that a research problem involving more than one population, each population should be sampled

separately. A ratio of one immediate supervisor to three ex-graduates was observed. Ming and Ing (2005) suggest the ratio of 1 manager to 3 customers in the survey.

Sample characteristics

A sample of 48 ex-graduates volunteered to participate in the preliminary study. Twenty six (54%) ex-graduates were male while twenty two (46%) ex-graduates were female. The participants were working in financial institutions, ICT firms, and Government ministries. Twenty eight immediate supervisors also volunteered to participate.

Administration of the instrument

The ex-graduates knowledge and skills required by employers was measured using employability dimensions. Employability measures were adopted from Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006). Since the end users of students' knowledge and skills obtained from business schools is the labor market (Harvey, 1999), an instrument that measures performance at place of work was used. The validated performance measures, adopted from Camilleri and Van der Heijden (2007) were used to obtain performance evaluations of ex-graduates' job performance from their immediate supervisors. The instrument was back translated before it was administered.

The paper and pencil instrument was hand delivered to ex-graduates and the ex-graduates immediate supervisors in November/December 2008. The dates and time of collecting the filled in instrument was agreed upon. This method was expected to turnout a generally good response rate. Conducting a survey on a sample from the ex-graduates and immediate supervisors' populations was economically advantageous as it reduced costs, time and manpower (Babbie, 1998; Creswell, 2003). Distribution of the questionnaires is done by one of two means: home delivery or by mail. Babbie (1998) suggests that the home delivery method is better than sending the self-administered questionnaires through the mail for it yields a better expected response rate and is relatively cost efficient. However, this method is also associated with weaknesses: a higher non-response rate and the respondents' inability to ask for clarification. Respondents returning the instrument may represent extremes of the population (may yield skewed responses)⁵. To address this weakness, follow-ups to collect questionnaires were made and clarification was offered where necessary to minimize the non-responses (Babbie, 1998).

Research Analysis and Results

Aggregated mean scores of items in each employability dimension was computed ($\sum E_i/N$) where E_i = items in a given dimension and N = Total number of items in a given dimension. Taking the mean aggregate scores is considered best as it relates similar items [correlated] (Babbie, 1998).

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statistical_survey

Performance at place of work

Performance scores from both ex-graduates and the immediate supervisors are presented in Table 2.

Ex-graduates Scores

The ex-graduates described the extent of their performance on five dimensions on the scale 1 to 6. The performance rated “1” if very little; “2”if relatively little; “3” if not much;”4” if a fair amount;”5” if a great deal and, “6”if a very great deal.

The aggregated mean scores for the dimensions Occupational Expertise (Job Competence and skills), Optimization and Anticipation (individual learning), Corporate sense(Organization’s commitment), Balance, and Personal Flexibility range from 3.8889(Balance) to 5.1552(Corporate Sense). The results indicate for example that ex-graduates were performing well in respect of Occupational expertise thus had required job competency and skills (score 5.0417 in a 1 to 6 continuum). Ex-graduates were more committed to organization performance as evidenced by a score of 5.1552 on corporate sense dimension.

To answer Research question 1: *To what extent is the employability of ex-graduates from higher learning institutions in Tanzania-specifically those regulated by the National Council for Technical Education?*

The Overall Employability of ex-graduates score was 4.7481- a score which is lower than a great deal performance and greater than a fair amount of performance.

It is concluded that the employability of ex-graduates from higher learning institutions in Tanzania specifically from the two business schools regulated by the National Council for Technical Education is more that fair.

Supervisors

The immediate supervisors described the extent of ex-graduates performance on five dimensions on the scale 1 to 6 where “1”if not at all; “2”if not really; “3” somewhat;”4” if fairly;”5” if sufficiently; and, “6”if extremely.

For example the dimension: Occupational Expertise (e.g. employee was in general competent to perform his/her work accurately and with few mistakes) was rated 4.4815 (Table 2). The score of 4.4815 is above 4 (fair) and less than 5 (sufficient). This implies that supervisors consider the occupational expertise of ex-graduates as more than fair.

Table 2: Students and Supervisors Performance Assessment

Dimension	Ex-graduates			Supervisors			Paired T-Test		Sig.(2-tail 95%)
	Mean	Rank	Std Deviation	Mean	Rank	Std Deviation	t	df	
Occupational expertise Optimization and	5.0417	2	0.43224	4.4815	1	0.64678	4.478	23	0.00000
Anticipation Coporate	4.8654	3	0.64896	4.4679	2	0.62007	4.998	25	0.00000
sense	5.1552	1	0.56683	4.3506	3	0.76420	6.067	28	0.00000
Balance	3.8889	5	0.86245	4.0729	4	0.35147	-2.203	24	0.00000
Personal Flexibility	4.3857	4	0.3699	3.4214	5	0.40766	15.399	27	0.00000
Overall Employability	4.7481		0.33317	4.1258		0.37024	6.482	17	0.00000

Optimization and Anticipation (e.g. employee was actively engaged in investigating adjacent job areas to see where success could be achieved) scored 4.4679. Employers consider ex-graduates Optimization and Anticipation to be a little higher than a fairly great degree.

Corporate Sense (e.g. employee does that extra bit for their organization/department over and above their direct responsibilities) scored 4.3506.

Overall, supervisors' employability score was 4.1258, a score which is 0.1258 higher than a fair score. Ex-graduates and supervisors rated low performance in Balance dimension. This means for example that ex-graduates fail to evenly balance the time they spend on work, career development, personal development and relaxation.

To answer Research Question 2: *To what extent does the job performance of ex-graduates match the employers' expectations-specifically those regulated by the National Council for Technical Education?*

The ex-graduates scored 4.7481 against 4.1258 from supervisors. The performance assessment between supervisors (Fair) and ex-graduates (less than a great deal) differ by 0.6223. Save for Personal Flexibility dimension, supervisors' rating have been all along lower than ex-graduates' rating. The difference is significant (see Table 2).

To answer Research Question 3: *Is there correlation between employers' performance assessment and ex-graduates employability?*

The correlation analysis (Table 3) indicates a significant strong linear relationship between Overall employability scores from ex-graduates and supervisors scores on the dimensions. With the exception of Personal Flexibility dimension ($r=0.170$) which is lowly correlated to Overall employability of ex-graduates, other dimensions indicate a very significant correlation ($p=0.01$). Occupational Expertise ($r=0.877$), Balance ($r=0.727$), Optimization and Anticipation($r=0.868$), Corporate Sense ($r= 0.920$) (Table 3).

Table 3: Correlation between Ex-graduates Overall Employability and Supervisors Assessment on Employability dimensions

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Pearson Correlation	1					
Sig. (2-tailed)						
N	20					
2 Pearson Correlation	.877(**)	1				
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000					
N	20	26				
3 Pearson Correlation	.727(**)	.507(*)	1			
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.016				
N	20	22	26			
4 Pearson Correlation	.868(**)	.649(**)	.711(**)	1		
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000			
N	20	25	24	27		
5 Pearson Correlation	.920(**)	.832(**)	.480(*)	.813(**)	1	
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.013	.000		
N	20	25	26	27	29	
6 Pearson Correlation	.170	.191	-.012	.022	.201	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.473	.371	.954	.915	.315	
N	20	24	24	25	27	28

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

1= Overall Employability, 2= Aggregated Occupational expertise as indicated by Supervisors, 3= Aggregated Balance as indicated by Supervisors, 4= Aggregated Optimization and Anticipation as indicated by Supervisors, 5= Aggregated Corporate sense as indicated by Supervisors, 6= Aggregated Personal flexibility as indicated by supervisors

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion on the results pertaining to the three research questions is given. Further, conclusion drawn from this study is presented.

Discussion

RQ1: *The extent of employability of ex-graduates from higher learning institutions in Tanzania- specifically those regulated by the National Council for Technical Education.*

The results have indicated that the Overall Employability of ex-graduates score of 4.7481 was lower than a great deal performance and greater than a fair amount of performance.

The employability of ex-graduates from higher learning institutions in Tanzania specifically those regulated by the National Council for Technical Education is more than fair. The score of a fair performance is not sufficient in the current competitive labour market. Higher learning institutions should therefore counsel their students on the detriment of not advancing themselves after they had graduated for them to remain fit in the jobs or earn the freedom of selecting the best employer. Van der Heijden (2005) for example indicates the control the ICT professionals had over their employability.

Research Question 2: The extent which the job performance of ex-graduates match the employers' expectations-specifically those regulated by the National Council for Technical Education

The performance assessment between supervisors and ex-graduates differed by 0.6223.

These results indicate that ex-graduates might not know their job deficiencies. It would be advantageous to both the employer to retrain the staff for the skills which are missing or need to be developed further. MSTHE (2000) indicate skill deficiencies of higher learning institutions graduates in soft skills.

Research Question 3: Is there correlation between employers' performance assessment and ex-graduates employability?

Strong positive correlations between ex-graduates overall employability scores and immediate supervisors' performance scores on the same are observed.

The positive correlation indicates that ex-graduates and immediate supervisors were working towards a common organizational performance standards. This is good for organizational performance evaluation, monitoring control and control purposes.

Given the strong positive correlation between ex-graduates and supervisors scores on overall employability, it shows that indeed efforts to reduce the gap between the two should be made for ex-graduates to remain fit on the job at the same time employers to improve their productivity. Own assessment of job performance enables ex-graduates identify gaps on their part which may need to be closed by themselves, the employer or institution of higher learning. However, it is alarming that ex-graduates did not recognize the deficiency in their performance irrespective of the possibility of employers' bias in their assessment. Ex-graduates from the two business schools had moderate knowledge. In the current competitive labor market, possession of moderate knowledge, skills and ability do not place graduates in a better place in the labor market where employment opportunities are few.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the extent of employability of business schools' ex-graduates from two business schools (under the National Council for Technical Education- a

regulatory body) working in Tanzania. Answers to three research questions (RQ) pertaining to ex-graduates employability and degree of performance in the perspective of immediate supervisors were sought. The employability/ performance of business schools' ex-graduates in the labor market were measured using an instrument developed by Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006). The correlation between immediate supervisors' performance assessment and ex-graduates employability dimensions was determined.

The results obtained from this study indicated that:

RQ 1: The extent of employability of ex-graduates from higher learning institutions in Tanzania- specifically those regulated by the National Council for Technical Education,

Overall, the ex-graduates' employability rated more than fair. However, a gap below fair was realized in the Balance dimension which scored low compared to other dimensions. Supervisors also rated the same dimension low.

RQ2: The extent which the job performance of ex-graduates match the employers' expectations- specifically those regulated by the National Council for Technical Education,

The performance assessment between supervisors and ex-graduates differed by 0.6223. However, the magnitude of the difference is small on a 1-6 scale. Knowledge of the existence of performance gap for example hints to managers of the organizations on the areas to address immediately as they recruit graduates. On the other hand ex-graduates knowledge of their deficiencies may trigger a positive inclination of continuous learning for them to fit in the jobs. Further, recognition of these gaps should inspire higher learning institutions in Tanzania improve their curricula to bridge the mismatch between the TVET training and the labor market.

RQ 3: The correlation between employers' performance assessment and ex-graduates employability

The positive correlation observed between supervisor's performance scores and ex-graduate scores indicate that ex-graduates were working towards a common organizational performance standards used by the immediate supervisors. This is a good thing for the performance of the organizations. Performance evaluation, monitoring and control should therefore be a continuous process since the environment surrounding organizations is not static.

Limitations

This study was exploratory in nature. The sample consisted of 48 participants and 28 supervisors. The sample size limits the possibility of generalizing the results. However, further studies can be undertaken covering big samples. On the other hand, other factors which influence employability of ex-graduates like personality factors, demographics etc., factors from higher learning institutions and factors related to organizations in which the ex-graduates worked were not examined. Further studies can be undertaken to examine the influence they have on ex-graduates employability in relation to their performance at places of work.

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