

Employability skills of Future Communication Graduates in Egypt: Employers' Perceptions

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Abstract

Egypt is witnessing a growing trend of adoption of advanced technologies in all types of businesses including media institutions. This created a demand in the job market for skilled communication graduates with advanced employability skills to meet the needs of employers. This study aimed at exploring the perceptions of employers regarding the employability skills of future communication graduates. The study surveyed forty-two managers in media and business organizations to answer four research questions about the most essential skills, personal attributes, characteristics of future communication graduates and how universities can better contribute to advancing the employability skills of future graduates in Egypt. The results indicated that employers prioritize personal attributes like emotional intelligence and self-learning over technical skills and academic knowledge. The respondents emphasized the urgent need to develop academic programs to enhance the general skills and experiences of future communication graduates through professional training and internship programs.

Keywords: Employability skills, future graduates, employer's perceptions, Egypt

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مهارات التوظيف المستقبلية لخريجي الإعلام في مصر تصورات أصحاب الأعمال

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الملخص:

شهدت مصر اتجاها متزايدا لاعتماد التقنيات المتقدمة في جميع أنواع الأعمال بما في ذلك المؤسسات الإعلامية، مما أدى إلى خلق طلب متزايد في سوق العمل على خريجي كليات الإعلام المهرة ذوي مهارات التوظيف المتقدمة لتلبية احتياجات أصحاب الأعمال، وقد هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف تصورات أصحاب الأعمال فيما يتعلق بمهارات قابلية التوظيف المستقبلية المطلوب توافرها في خريجي الإعلام، وقد استطلعت الدراسة آراء اثنين وأربعين مديراً في مؤسسات الاعمال ووكالات التسويق والإعلان للإجابة على أربعة أسئلة بحثية حول أهم المهارات والسمات الشخصية وخصائص خريجي الإعلام المستقبليين وكيف يمكن للجامعات أن تساهم بشكل أفضل في تطوير مهارات قابلية التوظيف لخريجي المستقبل في مصر. أشارت النتائج إلى أن أصحاب الأعمال يعطون الأولوية للسمات الشخصية مثل الذكاء العاطفي والقدرة على التعلم الذاتي وتطوير المعارف والعمل بكفاءة في فريق عن اجادة المهارات التقنية والمعرفة الأكاديمية، وقد أكد المشاركون على الحاجة الملحة لتطوير البرامج الأكاديمية لتعزيز المهارات والخبرات العامة لخريجي الإعلام المستقبليين من خلال برامج التدريب المهني والتدريب العملي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مهارات التوظيف، خريجي المستقبل، تصورات اصحاب الاعمال، مصر

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1. Introduction:

The world has witnessed a rapid development in digital media technologies in the past few years. All types of businesses and organizations are competing to adopt and adapt to digital communication innovations and technologies, which provided tremendous advantages for the facilitation of faster, cheaper, collaborative, engaging communication between organizations and their stakeholders. Thus, creating an increasing demand for skilled communication graduates, with advanced employability skills to perform and command the technology-driven communication operations. In the communication and media world, the debate over the increasing economic efficiency of the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the decreasing employability skills of communication graduates is growing among both professionals and academics.

A recent study confirmed that communication jobs represent 10% of the job market demand in Egypt, while the supply of communication graduates is only 2% of university graduates (Soudi 2024). Nevertheless, local, and international companies voiced their inability to find skilled talents, despite the considerable substantial number of mass communication graduates in Egypt. The main reason for this phenomenon is the gap between what employers seek and what academic programs produce in terms of employability skills and qualifications of graduates.

This inspired the researcher's eagerness to explore employers' perception of employability skills of future communication graduates in Egypt through an empirical study that adopts the employability Career EDGE model and focuses on mass communication graduates and their needed future skills in relation to the technologically driven working environment. With over twenty years of academic experience in various mass communication faculties in Egypt, the researcher aims to explore the mismatch between the current communication graduates and the advanced employability skills required by employers. The review of literature focuses on three axes; namely the definition of employability and its related skills, the studies that covered the role of higher education in forming the employability skills of graduates in general and of communication graduates in particular, and a more-

focused review of Egyptian reality and academic studies that discussed the employability skills of communication graduates in Egypt.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Overview of employability

Recent years have witnessed an advanced view of employment, which was limited to 'finding a job', to the discussion of the added value of employability and sustainable employability. Small, Shacklock and Marchant (2018) defined employability as:

“The capacity to be self-reliant in navigating the labor market, utilizing knowledge, individual skills, and attributes, and adapting them to the employment context, showcasing them to employers, while considering external and other constraints.” p.161.

In contrast to employment, which is to get a job and enter the work force, employability means having the suitable skills and personal attributes that will grant graduates their dream jobs and smooth movement from one job to a better job. Oliver (2015) added that continuous self-development of the employees to benefit themselves, the workforce, the community, and the economy is a core value in employability.

Professionals predicted that the storm of technologies, artificial intelligence (AI), augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) and similar technologies would lead to the disappearance of millions of jobs in the world to be replaced by robots or AI (Oliver 2015). Those predictions were proven on ground with the waves of layoffs adopted by several companies around the globe like, MSN, Ikea, Google, Dukaan, Duolingo and Turnitin, which are heavily depending on AI as replacement for human workers (O'Sullivan 2024). On the other hand, other scholars like Nassar (2019) defended the superiority of human beings in performing complex tasks requiring creativity and critical thinking skills, while pointing to AI as a creation of the human mind. This scholarly quarrel is not evident in Egyptian literature yet, as most studies are concerned with the increasing unemployment and unemployability of university graduates, leading to the discussion of the second axis that reviews the relationship between higher education and employability.

2.2. Relationship between higher education and employability

Regarding the role of higher education in employability, most recent studies affirmed the value of higher education in acquiring basic skills to enter the job market, but researchers like (Tomlinson 2012) , (Moore 2015) and (Oliver 2015) confirmed that today's competitive market requires much more than the basic skills. Tomlinson (2012) argued that universities have failed to prepare graduates for the labor market due to a strict focus placed on academic education and not enough on practical learning and skills.

The gap between university education and employability skills is evident in the study of Moore and Morton (2015) who argued that written communication generates a constant debate between educators and employers. Their results suggested that academic writing taught in universities is different from forms of writing in the professional workplace. They suggested that students adapt their writing skills to suit the specialized professions. (Permatasari 2021) discussed the value of business writing skills in the performance of PR functions and communication with governmental institutions. Bassyouny (2024) confirmed that debate over the mismatch in Egypt between the professional high Arabic languages still used in conventional mass media in Egypt and the writing capabilities of generation Z that hardly commands the simple nor the high Arabic languages.

The mismatch between the graduates' skills and the job market was discussed by many studies like (Holidi 2023), (Lindsay 2015) (Small, Shacklock and Marchant 2018). Holidi (2023) researched the gap between the students' and employers' perspectives of employability skills in Malaysia and the results confirmed agreement on perception of basic skills, but the differences between both parties regarding thinking skills, personal quality skills, resource and capability skills, interpersonal skills, information skills, and system technology skills were proven by results.

Assessing employers' requirements for qualified candidates varied from one country to the other, which indicates that market conditions control the employability requirements. Few studies tackled the required skills for sustainable employability and proposed that market requirements differ according to time and region. Some western

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studies prioritized the communication and teamwork skills like the studies of (Archer 2008) in UK and (Lindsay 2015) in Australia. Cultural adaptation was a highly needed skill in diverse cultures (Small, Shacklock and Marchant 2018). An employability study in the UK surveying 233 employers from several types of organizations found that the two most preferred skills were communication and teamwork (Archer 2008). That study also found that small companies placed more importance on 'good, fitting-in personality,' while both large and small organizations prioritized work experience as a vital component of graduate employability. In Small et.al. (2018) review of the historical development of employability requirements in different countries, they reported that in Australia over 58% of employers ranked interpersonal and communication skills (written and oral) as the most needed skills. The diverse society of Australia placed cultural alignment as the second most needed skill for employability (Lindsay 2015) and teamwork skills were not on the list.

Few studies discussed Employer's perception of employability skills of communication graduates. They focused on life experiences and personal attributes more than the high grades and degree type. All the studies that defined the characteristics of communication graduates for employability added personal attributes to acquired skills (Papattha 2014) (Papattha C. 2015). The study of Papattha et.al. (2015) highlighted fourteen characteristics of mass media officers in the digital age, which included both the acquired skills and personal attributes:

"Interdisciplinary knowledge, keenness, communication skills, systematic thinking, creative thinking, analysis thinking, critical thinking, media literacy, flexibility in working, active learning and self-learning, mass communication ethics, public consciousness and responsibility, multi-skilling, and integration and application to work (Papattha C. 2015)."

Confirming that notion, research results in the UK and Australia also showed that companies expect future PR graduates to 'understand digital concepts that can increase productivity, increase innovation, and offer financial effectiveness' in addition to communication skills that perform the core functions of PR regarding building and

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improving mutual beneficial relationships between the organizations and stakeholders (Alexander 2016).

Permatasari (2021) conducted qualitative research that measured professionals' expectations of PR graduates' competencies to serve digital PR and concluded the continuation of conventional PR functions in addition to the new digital PR specialization. This explains why communication skills are the most needed PR competency to effectively perform conventional and digital PR functions. Permatasari research concluded that employers expect future PR graduates to possess interpersonal, writing, analytical thinking, and soft skills, in addition to familiarity with digital platforms and ability to design corresponding content. The unique new skill of PR graduates, mentioned in the results of that study is mastering ceremonies and entertainment abilities in relation to the event management PR technique that is heavily used by many organizations worldwide (Permatasari 2021).

In conclusion, previous studies confirmed that communication skills and balanced personality traits are more needed in the job market than academic degrees. They also highlighted the mismatch between the academic curricula that focus on knowledge and the professional skills required for employability.

2.3. Employability skills of communication graduates based on the Egyptian context.

Egyptian statistics provide a paradoxical situation for the technological advancement and adoption on one hand and the availability of skilled graduates on the other hand. Egypt enjoys a steady internet penetration percentage of 72.2% and has over 45.4 million social media users (Kemp 2024). Over 36% of Egyptians are between 13 and 34 years old, implying a young population that can actively contribute to the work force and can easily adopt, command and use new digital technologies (Kemp 2024). Nevertheless, the reality of the Egyptian scene displays many obstacles to the provision of highly-skilled employees to meet the market increasing demand; like the soaring economic crisis, high inflation rates, social injustices, and high unemployment rates, especially among the university

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graduates, which were estimated at 1.5 million graduates in 2022 (Soudi 2024) .

There are a few recent studies that discussed the employment skills of Egyptian university graduates in general like the studies of (Roushdy 2021 and Assaad 2019). Roushdy (2021) depicted from his survey of 2370 Egyptian university graduate's high unemployment rates, especially among female graduates, high rates of education-occupation mismatch and self-reported dissatisfaction with job situation. The results of this study prove an alarming 69.8% unemployment among graduates of social sciences, journalism, and information. Another study concluded the distortion of the Egyptian labor market, because it is dominated by the public sector that requires credentials more than skills, while the small and informal private sector is demanding productivity and professional employability skills, which most university graduates don't acquire during their years of study (Assaad 2019). The same notion appeared in a current study confirming the mismatch between the job market demand in Egypt and the specializations of graduates (Soudi 2024).

An Egyptian study concluded from surveying 620 respondents covering all media fields in Egypt, that the most needed skills of communication graduates were the mastering of new communication technologies, communication skills, strong personality and emotional intelligence and knowledge of specialization (Fakhr El Din 2021). Other studies focused on the current and future employability skills of communication officers and public relations PR graduates like the studies of (Maraq 2018, Thabet 2022, Mohamadin 2022, and Bassyouny 2024).

Thabet (2022) argued that despite the vast potentials provided by AI technologies to the PR professionals, there will always be need for the human touch in the PR writing as the credibility and storytelling PR techniques depend heavily on human intuition and touch, which AI robots cannot perform yet. She describes the future to be for smart, creative, and integrated PR that employs the potential of modern digital technologies to perform advanced, specialized tasks of PR by fewer, skilled PR specialists, who are horizontally well-networked with less bureaucratic complications and restrictions.

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Maraq (2018) concluded in his empirical study that the needed future skills in the PR profession are creative artistic skills, new media writing skills, technical computer skills and advanced PR content production capabilities. The results of Maraq's study that forecasted the future of the PR profession in Egypt till 2025, indicated that forty percent of his sample suggested slow, constrained growth of digitalization, limited adoption of modern technologies and little innovation in Egyptian university programs (Maraq 2018).

Mohamadin (2022) confirmed this conception through her primary study of the reality and future of digital PR in governmental organizations in Egypt, which predicted a pessimistic future for PR that involves deficiency in performing PR functions, lack of training programs for PR officers, no strategic plans for the technological development of employees, and remarkable deficiency in the internal communication inside the governmental organizations.

In a recent qualitative study that investigated the experts' opinions regarding the opportunities and challenges of digital marketing and PR in Egypt , results indicated that the greatest challenge facing digital marketing and PR profession in Egypt being the scarcity of talents and the enormous gap between the graduates work-related skills and the market needs for skilled graduates mastering the efficient use of social media, AI, VR and new communication technologies (Bassyouny 2024).

This enormous gap between the outdated academic curricula in Egypt and the required professional employability skills of graduates, led communication professors to demand stopping opening new mass communication faculties in Egypt. They argued that 43 faculties and departments of mass communication in Egypt graduate about thirty thousand students every year, who they describe as unskilled, inexperienced and lack the basic employability skills, lead to a shockingly modest percentage of 0.5% only of media graduates in Egypt working in media-related jobs (Nada 2023).

In conclusion, the review of literature covered three axes. The first axis identified the difference between employment and employability, emphasizing that employability focuses on possessing professional skills that guarantee growth in the suitable job and sustainable

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movement in the workplace. The second axes of the review of literature presented western studies that discussed the relationship between higher education and employability. All studies confirmed the gap between university programs and the required professional employability skills. Few studies discussed the required skills for sustainable employability and suggested that market requirements differ according to time and region. The third axis surveyed the employability skills of communication graduates based on the Egyptian context. Studies confirmed the high unemployment rate among Egyptian university graduates in general and in the information and journalism sector in particular, was due to their limited employability skills that resulted from the traditional, outdated curricula in most Egyptian universities. This study aims at testing the application of the Career EDGE model to discover what employers look for in the future graduates of communication and what are the priority skills needed for employability.

3. Theoretical Framework and research methodology

This study adopts the Career EDGE model, which is a framework to understand, develop and measure the employability of graduates (Dacre Pool 2020). The model highlights employability components to be the knowledge and skills acquired through academic study, work and life experiences, specialized knowledge through a degree program, general skills, and emotional intelligence, which gained increasing importance in the past few years. Generic Skills include transferable skills like communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, and teamwork (Dacre 2007).

The researcher selected the Career EDGE model to be the framework of this study because it provides a comprehensive framework of essential employability skills of graduates and confirms that academic degree is a vital component of the graduate. The model offers practical tips and strategies for developing each component of employability, helps students assess their strengths and weaknesses in each area to create a personalized career plan, setting goals and identifying steps to achieve them. The model also aligns with the skills and qualities that employers typically seek in graduates (Dacre Pool 2020). The features of the Career EDGE model serve the objectives of this study.

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The objectives of this study are to survey the employer's perception of future mass com. graduates and their skills, explore the most important personal attributes needed in future media jobs, describe the persona of future communication graduates, and identify how current university programs can fulfill employers' expectations of future graduates. The study attempts to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1. What are the Egyptian employers' perceptions of employability skills of future communication graduates?

RQ2. What are employers' perceptions of personal attributes of future graduates?

RQ3. How do employers describe the persona of the ideal future graduate?

RQ4. How can higher education institutions (HEI) better prepare communication graduates for the evolving needs of the workforce?

Population and sampling:

The population of the study is the managers in media and business organizations in Egypt, who usually recruit mass communication graduates. The researcher used a purposive sample from her professional network. With over twenty-five years of instruction in private universities, the researcher established academic and professional connections with media organizations, marketing, advertising, and PR agencies as well as business organizations in Egypt. She prepared an initial contact list from her acquaintance of professionals and asked them to disseminate the online questionnaire to contacts from their professional circles, creating a snowball pattern of broader distribution of the questionnaire to a larger sample of employers and managers.

Research methods and tools:

This study employed a quantitative survey research method with a questionnaire as the research tool. The questionnaire includes a set of closed-ended questions and three open-ended questions to allow the respondents to provide their reflections on the research subject. The questionnaire included Likert scale questions to assess the perception of employees regarding the skills and attributes of future media graduates in addition to open-ended questions. According to (Neuert

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2021), open-ended questions allow the respondents to discuss freely their points of views and go beyond the restrictions of closed-ended questions. The three open-ended questions covered the respondents' description of future graduates, the suggestions regarding the university programs' contributions and the employers' willingness to engage in mentorship programs for university students.

The researcher distributed the online survey to the managers and employers of various organizations including agencies and companies that are known for hiring communication graduates. She sent the questionnaire via email and WhatsApp to 130 employers during May 2024. Only 42 responded to the questionnaire, which represents 32 % (n=42). Google sheets statistics presented with frequency and percentage was the tool of analysis and presentation of survey results of the closed-ended questions. The researcher employed three research assistants to transcript the results and classify the open-ended responses into general qualities and specialized qualities. The following section will reveal the results of the online survey in accordance with the research questions.

4. Results:

The design of the survey questions adopted a list of employability skills as detected from the review of previous research studies to offer to the respondents for evaluation according to their priority skills of future communication graduates. The question provided a three-dimensional importance scale to evaluate the various employability skills. Figure 1 presents the answers to RQ1: What are the employers' perceptions of essential skills of future communication graduates?

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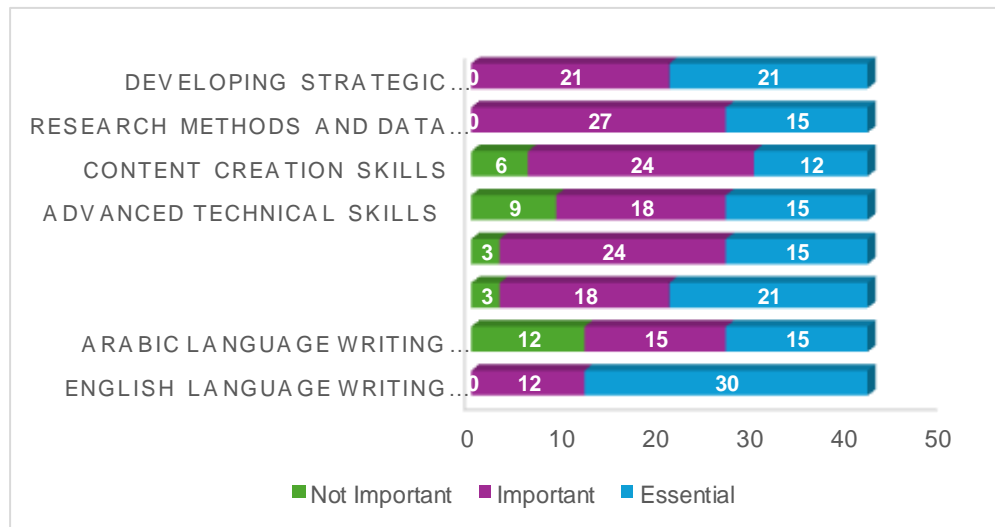


Figure 1: Respondents' Evaluation of Future graduates' skills

The results indicated that the most essential skill to 71% (n=30) of the employers is the English language followed by research and data analysis skills (n=27). most respondents 57% (n=24) identified both content creation skills and mastering new communication technologies as the third most important skills.

About 50% (n=21) of the respondents chose public speaking and oral presentation skills as essential skills. All respondents categorized Strategic planning as either an important or an essential skill required of future communication graduates. Although 42% (n=18) of the respondents classified the advanced technical skills as important, nine of them tagged the same technical skills as 'not important.' Twelve respondents considered the Arabic language as a 'not important' skill.

RQ2. What are employers' perceptions of personal attributes of future graduates?

The Career EDGE model acknowledges emotional intelligence, general skills and work and life experiences an equally vital elements as the academic degree. Figure 2 represents the results to the second research question reflecting the respondents' ranking of essential personal attributes of future graduates.

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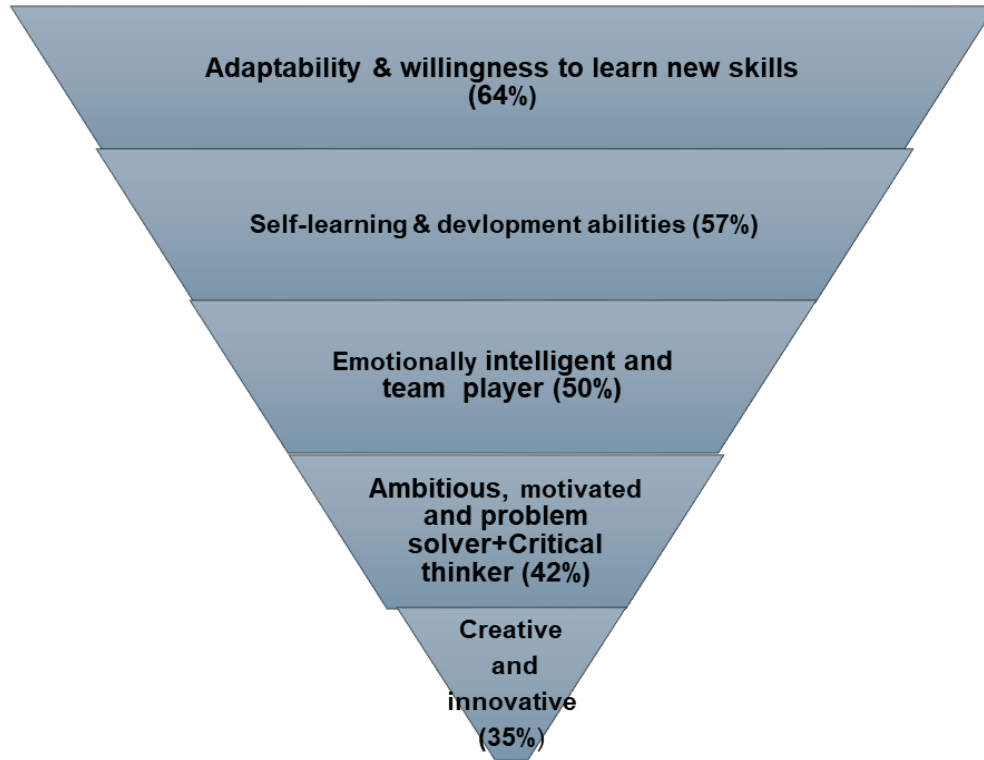


Figure 2: Respondents' Ranking of Personal Attributes

Results indicate that most employers value the graduate' ability to adapt to the work environment and job tasks, so that 64% (n=27) of respondents placed this as the number one most essential personal attribute. Fifty-seven percent of the respondents specified the self-learning and development abilities and the second most essential personal attribute in future graduates. Emotional intelligence that creates a stable, balanced personality came third in the rank of most essential personal attributes and soft skills. Respondents dedicated the same position to the ability to be a good collaborator and collaborate efficiently with colleagues of various social and cultural backgrounds. Three qualities: namely the problem-solving ability, critical, analytical thinking ability and having ambition occupied the fourth position on

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the employability scale. Forty-two percent, n=18 ranked these qualities as essential in future graduates of communication. Respondents placed being creative and innovative as the least essential personal attribute required in future graduates.

RQ3. How do employers describe the persona of the ideal future graduate?

The researcher needed to get deeper insights of the employers' description of the ideal graduate that they wish to hire in their organizations. Therefore, the researcher added three open-ended questions in the survey. The researcher employed three research assistants to transcript the results and classify the open-ended responses according to the type of respondents' specialization.

The answers to the open-ended question regarding the most needed skills of future graduates revealed the employers' concentration on personal attributes and soft skills, not hard skills. The respondents emphasized that personal attributes are the main distinct variables that employers search for in their hunt for the right talents, as communication graduates command media literacy and theoretical knowledge, and it is not what companies look for.

The sum of respondents' description of the general attributes of the ideal future graduate was:

“Ethical, well-behaved, motivated, collaborator, able to self-learn and continuously develop himself/herself. A sociable, intelligent person who gladly accepts criticism and is eager to learn and develop.”

Questionnaire participants from the news and journalism industry demanded that future graduates must acquire excellent reporting and translation skills in both English and Arabic, fact-checking abilities to differentiate between actual and fake news and persistence in following up and investigating news stories. According to the director of an international news agency:

“Today's journalists must have excellent writing skills in both English and Arabic as a basic requirement to work in news. News companies can further develop their skills of reporting, fact-checking and investigative journalism.”

A deputy editor-in-chief of a local newspaper stated that journalism is not an appealing career to most fresh graduates in Egypt, who

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perceive the profession as too demanding, requiring advanced writing and translation skills, dangerous in field reporting, and financially less rewarding than other jobs offered to communication graduates. She described the ideal future graduate as:

“Enthusiastic person, stays updated with modern technologies and trends, works effectively in teams and communicates clearly across platforms, critically analyzes information, and solves problems creatively.”

Respondents from the marketing communication firms specialized in public relations or digital marketing and advertising, stressed their urgent need for talents with creativity and excellent negotiation skills. A manager of a digital marketing firm stated:

“The ability to produce creative, innovative, original ideas is a rare-to-find skill in new graduates. This generation that uses modern technology and AI in every aspect of work and life, is hardly able to create original, innovative ideas for the different clients.”

Another respondent described ideal future graduates as:

“Students with the ability to analyze marketing data, understand consumer behavior, and translate insights into compelling visuals moving beyond traditional advertising towards programmatic advertising. They must be acquainted with the latest platforms, algorithms, and best practices for social media marketing.”

Other respondents specified that persuasion and negotiation skills are essential requirements in current and future graduates, as one respondent mentioned that the market is becoming extremely competitive, and the negotiation skills are key skills to penetrating new markets and retaining current clients.

The third open-ended question of the survey aimed to answer RQ4 to discover the employers' suggestions regarding the role of HEI in enhancing the employability skills of future communication graduates to be able to meet the needs of the future job markets.

All respondents agreed that providing students with formal, practical training and internship opportunities before graduation is essential. Most employers stressed that HEI must reconsider the heavy amount of theoretical content of communication programs versus the marginal amount of practical and professional application that is currently

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prevailing in most communication programs in Egypt. Five respondents highlighted good practices in some universities like adding more practical courses to the curricula and using professional experts to co-instruct the courses with academic instructors. Most respondents stressed that despite these good attempts, building the right, skilled personality of a future graduate requires a 'dire revolution' in the design of current HEI communication programs in Egypt.

The director of a news agency suggested that HEI develop specialized reporting curricula for different beats, guide the university students to acquire the general communication skills they need, and after that for an entire year specialize in a certain beat to gain sufficient background knowledge and engage in real life experience and simulation for media work environment.

A manager of a digital marketing agency said:

“The German experience of dedicating a considerable percentage of credit hours in every semester to a strictly supervised industry internship creates responsible personalities, skilled communicators and market-connected graduates, who need no further training after graduation.”

A marketing manager in an international telecommunication company stated:

“I lived in the United States for 13 years and I exposed to a rich experience, where the communication faculties select local business companies to be the clients for senior student's graduation projects. Such clients may be organizations needing marketing, advertising, public relations research and/or campaigns, documentary or short films, feature or news articles, social media marketing campaigns, awareness campaigns, corporate communication campaigns, podcasts, and webcasts. This trial provided the senior students with firsthand professional experience in an actual business environment, allowing them to boost their knowledge and skills before graduation.”

Most respondents confirmed that there are no university programs in Egypt yet to provide the starving market with skilled digital communication technicians and specialists. All respondents stressed the need of HEI to provide students with real-life professional training

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in the industry, assist them to work in teams and coach them to be analytical people. A brand manager elaborated that the way to enhance the problem-solving skill is by giving students multiple scenarios and case studies of brands facing issues and judge students' analytical skills and solution options.

A survey question asked respondents about their willingness to offer internship or mentorship to mass communication students, the majority (64%, n=27) agreed to commit to offer internship programs for communication undergraduate students in Egypt, while 36% (n=15) refused to participate in such programs. Three respondents mentioned distinct reasons; one explained that his time in the agency is so busy that prevents him from engaging in the training of undergraduate students. Another respondent explained that clients' data is confidential and not sharable with interns. A third respondent mentioned that she had an unpleasant experience with training students, who committed fatal mistakes.

There was an agreement among the participants regarding the limited contribution of current HEI programs in Egypt to the preparation of skilled communication graduates who fit sustainable employability requirements. Less emphasis on theoretical content and more focus on more professional internships in the media organizations before graduation, were the core suggestions of the respondents to overcome this obstacle.

5. Discussion

This study aimed at exploring the employers' perception of employability skills of future communication graduates. Results regarding the most essential skills of future graduates indicated a considerable agreement among most respondents on the necessity of English language, data analysis and research skills. It was not a surprising result for most respondents to prioritize the English language competency skill, while eighteen respondents named the command of the Arabic language as a 'not important' skill. This result corresponds with the results of (Moore 2015), who confirmed the gap between academic and professional language. The business language in a global, digital, internet-driven job market explains the decreasing value of Arabic language and the increasing value of foreign language

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skills in a global business environment. Like the results of (Fakhr El Din 2021) there is a controversial debate regarding the value of spoken and written Arabic in Egypt and in most Arab countries.

Most participants in this study ranked willingness to learn new skills, self-learning, self-development, and emotional intelligence as the top personal attributes required in future graduates to achieve sustainable employability. These results confirm the results of (Dacre Pool 2020) and closely match the constituents of the Carrer EDGE model that suggest that acquiring the above-mentioned skills lead to improved self-confidence, self-esteem and consequently sustainable employability.

While the studies that anticipated the future of PR profession in Egypt (Fakhr El Din 2021), (Maraq 2018) and (Thabet 2022) concluded that the future employability skills rely on mastering new communication technologies and advanced communication skills, , the results of this research indicated that employers in Egypt do not prioritize mastering communication technologies. The results suggested that training programs at work impart such skills but cannot improve a bad attitude. On the other hand, this research confirmed previous studies results regarding respondents' agreement on the value of emotional intelligence. Most participants highlighted adaptation and self-learning as essential skills more than creativity and technology-related skills. strong personality and emotional intelligence

Respondents of this study provided a qualitative description of the persona of the ideal future communication graduate. Analysis of their answers indicated that employers search for a 'sociable personality, an efficient team-player with good time-management skills, an intelligent person who accepts criticism and is eager to learn and develop.' Respondents added that the ideal graduates must stay updated with modern technologies and trends, work effectively in teams, and communicate clearly across platforms as well as an advanced ability to analyze information and solve problems creatively.

Most respondents confirmed that HEI programs in Egypt failed so far to provide the professional market with highly skilled media graduates, thus creating a mismatch between employability skills of graduates and the professional world in addition to a high percentage

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of unemployment among university graduates. This is not a specific case of Egypt, as local and international studies reached the same conclusion (Bassyouny 2024; Assaad 2019; Roushdy 2021; Small, Shacklock and Marchant 2018). All respondents stressed the need of HEI to provide students with real-life professional training in the industry, assist them to work in teams and coach them to be analytical people, while minimizing the theoretical content and providing firsthand internship programs in specialized media institutions before graduation to enhance their employability skills.

Conclusion

The complex nature of the constrained conventional media industry in Egypt, the unregulated chaotic social media platforms, the vast growth of media technologies that are hardly taught in universities and the increasing demand for skilled graduates in an extremely competitive work environment, are reasons provided by communication professors to support their call to limit the number of faculties and graduates of communication in Egypt.

This study employed the Career EDGE model of employability to find out the Egyptian employers' expectations of advanced skills of the future graduates of communication. The results of the online questionnaire on a purposive sample of forty-two managers indicated their increasing need for personal attributes and soft skills more than hard or technical skills. Respondents confirmed that skilled communication graduates are rare to find in Egypt, because the current programs are stagnant and provide the students with modest professional employability skills, which creates the gap between the academic degree and work and life experience required in the continuously evolving and demanding job market. The employers participating in this study prioritized the English language skill, data-analysis, and research skills. Most respondents focused on the value of personal attributes in future graduates including adaptation, self-learning, and emotional intelligence skills. Critical thinking, problem solving, and teamwork remain constant skills required by employers, as confirmed by other studies. The results provide valuable suggestions of how HEI can better prepare future graduates with the essential employability skills.

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The researcher acknowledges that the main limitation of this study is the small, purposive sample of employers, which is not representative of the entire population of employers. Another limitation is the absence of students' perception of employability skills to be able to detect the similarities and differences between employers and students regarding their perceptions of future employability skills. Future studies in the same context can overcome these limitations.

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