



**MOUNT KENYA  
UNIVERSITY**



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**MKU-ACCESS SHORT VIRTUAL STAY SPONSORSHIPS REPORTING  
TEMPLATE**

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**Research Study Title:** Graduate Employability: Interpretations of Workplace Competencies and Skills by Business Students in Selected Universities in Kenya

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**Executive Summary**

The concept of employability entails the capability of an individual being able to get and keep work and/or sustain his/her employment. In an effort to assist graduates understand what this process entails, scholars for instance, (Dacre and Sewell, 2007) have shared elements of employability; by placing them into four different categories namely: 1) Assets- knowledge, skills and attitudes, 2) Deployment- career management skills, job search skills, 3) Job getting skills- CV writing, interview techniques, work experience, 4) Personal circumstances and external factors (opportunities within the labour market). For institutions with Career placement units, training workshops, career talks among other activities are offered to keep students informed on issues related to employability. On the other hand, in institutions without functional career units, students are left on their own to explore issues related to employability. Two years ago, the Ministry of Education made it compulsory for universities to establish career centers to support student work placement. Most institutions had to rush to develop Career and Student Work Plan Policy guidelines to support such units. What has been the impact in the establishment of these career units is a question worth exploring but is beyond the scope of this project. Understanding that institutions train students who are absorbed in the industry, we strive to examine the nexus among students, graduates and employer perspectives on important skills and competencies for graduate employability. The assumption is that students have and develop their own perspectives on the concept of employability, graduates who were once students and are currently working did carry perceptions, which may have changed and or not changed after being gainfully employed.

Likewise, employers have perceptions on employability that they use or consider during recruitment. With the knowledge on employability and available evidence of large numbers of unemployed graduates in the country, it is clear that there is a problem. This project makes the assumption that there is a lack of current knowledge linking graduate and employer perspectives/interpretations (Andrews and Higson 2008). This knowledge is pegged on context and content of training to graduate employability, making Kenya a unique case to study. If this knowledge on graduate employability is generated locally, and made available and accessible to students, it will go a long way to counter any other knowledge that is not current and that may have a negative impact on student views. For instance in Kenya, locally researched and generated knowledge will go a long way to educate our students, both undergraduate and graduate on current status of graduate employability.

**Proposed Idea:** The study examined business students, graduates and employers' perspectives on workplace skills and competencies in selected universities and organizations in Kenya,. The findings will be used to develop content for courses/trainings that would help students make the most out of their university education. It is hoped that students will understanding valuable skill sets, transferable skills and how to put them into practice at the workplace . This was followed by designing of a mobile application that would provide opportunities for students to access current knowledge on employability, access data bases of potential employers, networking opportunities, engage in student forums on employability, access training opportunities and platforms where they can market themselves and participate in virtual excursions with potential employers. This for instance will get them an opportunity to conduct an informational interview and engage in more practical virtual exercises aimed at enhancing employability skills. The app will continually be developed, using knowledge generated from the research survey and any other avenues deemed fit by Mount Kenya University (MKU). MKU will market the app to potential employers using social media and institutional networks.

**Methodology:** Questionnaires were administered among three categories of respondents: business students, business graduates and business run organizations. Filling in a questionnaire by a respondent was purely voluntary and consent was sort prior to the data collection. The study institutions were selected on the basis that one is private and one is public. The questionnaire had skills and competencies that respondents were asked to rank as well as qualitative questions assessing training impact and transferable skills.

**Study sites and population:** The population target was business students enrolled at selected (2) universities, business graduates and organizations that absorb business graduates All the three categories of respondents were selected randomly, and in cases where access to a graduate student was required, snowballing was used. A total of 141 questionnaires were administered to the students and 19 to the organizations.

**Ethical considerations:** There was no risk involved in engaging in the study. Approval was sought from the Mount Kenya Institutional Ethics Review Committee. In addition, informed consent was sought from the respondents and the institutions involved. All information was treated with confidentiality.

## Findings

While the students ranked Creativity and Self-confidence, Information and communication Technology skills and the ability to plan and think strategically as the three most top skills, the employers listed “teamwork”, The capacity to communicate and interact with others, either in teams or through networking as the first, followed by “ Professionalism” and “Good self-management and time-management skills” which were ranked equally, as number 2, and third “A willingness to learn and accept responsibility” and “ analytical thinking and ability” which came third. Clearly, there is a difference in what the employers perceive as highly ranked skills from that of what students perceive. A summary table on the ranking from most important (1) to least important (11) is shown below:

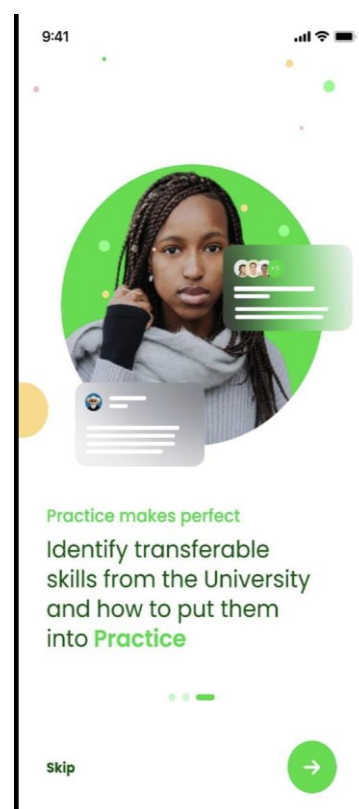
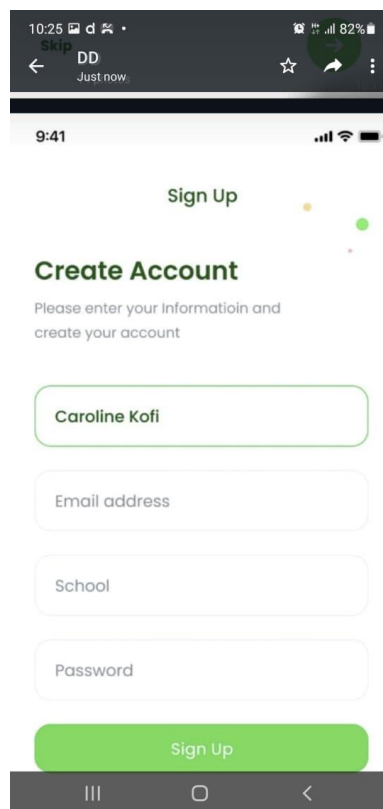
Student ranking-University A	Student ranking University B	Employer Ranking
Creativity and self confidence	Creativity and self confidence	Team work and cooperation
The ability to plan and think strategically	Information and Communication Technologies	Analytical thinking
Professionalism	The ability to plan and think strategically	Concern for order, quality and accuracy
Good self management and time management skills	Good written and verbal communication skills	Ability and willingness to learn
The capacity to communicate and interact with others in teams	Professionalism	Computer Literacy
A willingness to learn and accept responsibility	Good self management and time management skills	Personal planning and organization skills
Information and Communication Technologies	A willingness to learn and accept responsibility	Initiative, self confidence
Good written and verbal communication skills	The capacity to communicate and interact with others in teams	Self control
Reliability	Reliability	Written communication
The ability to cope with uncertainty	The ability to work under pressure	Technical expertise
The ability to work under pressure	The ability to cope with uncertainty	Information seeking/achievement orientation

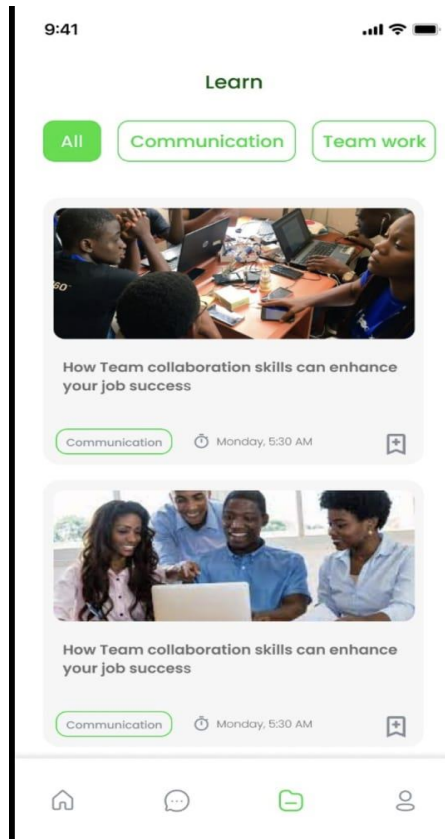
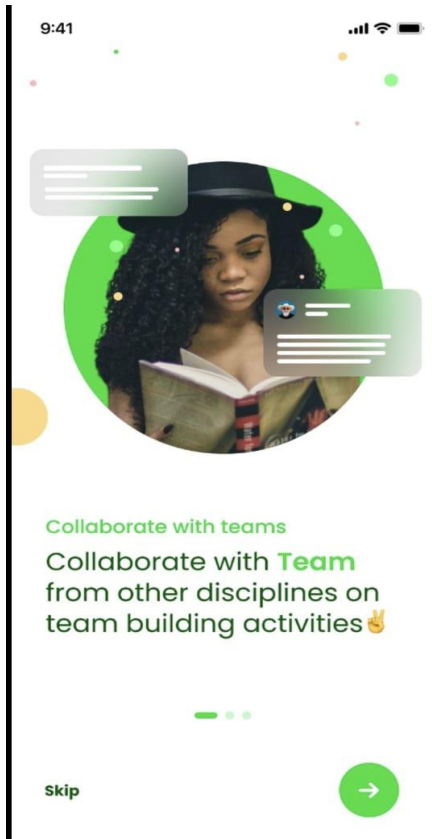
Strikingly, communication skills, which according to current literature is a core skill for employability, was lowly ranked by both the students and the employees sampled for this study. The employers ranked it number 9 out of the given 11 skills, while the students ranked it number 8.

Out of the research findings, we have 2 deliverables: a research article for publication titled “Graduate Employability: Interpretations of Workplace Competencies and Skills by Business Students in Selected Universities in Kenya” and a mobile application called GEAP (Graduate Employment Application). The article which carries the following content titles, abstract, introduction, methodology, data collection, data analysis, findings (discussions on skills and competencies from students and employers perspectives), conclusions, and recommendations will be peer reviewed and published in an open access journal.

**The Mobile App:** Called the GEAP- Graduate Employability Application. This application aims at providing current information, specifically, employer perspectives on skills and competencies. Over and above this, the students can also use the app to develop the required skills. For example, Using the striking variations between the perspectives, we pick the top listed skill “teamwork”, and using the app show how students can make use of this application to learn, discuss, and engage with not only employers but fellow students as well as access current knowledge on employability. Through engaging in various activities on the application, students will learn to develop “teamwork” skills. Other features on the app include, but not limited to, students accessing data bases of potential employers, networking opportunities, student forums on employability, training opportunities and platforms where students can share their profiles, and an opportunity to participate in virtual excursions with potential employers.

Below are sampled snapshots.





## Recommendations

With these variations, we recommend that accessibility to current information on employer perspectives of skills and competencies be made available to students in preparation for employment. Universities should continually endeavor to bridge the industry academic gap, and support students in understanding valuable skills sets, develop programs and activities that can help students develop these skill sets and provide networking platforms and opportunities through collaborative teaching with the industry.