



Qualities of Business Graduates Expected by the Employers in Sylhet City: An Action Research Approach

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Abstract: For the last few years, it has been observed that the skills required for business graduates are being changed. They are facing problems in getting a suitable job. That is why this study was conducted using action research methods. It is found that in this competitive era, business graduates need to acquire special qualities on their own and from their institutions. In this study, 62 employers in Sylhet City were interviewed using an open-ended questionnaire. Analyzing and summarizing their answers, the findings and recommendations are presented. It is found that both the graduates and their institutions need to take necessary actions for increasing employability.

Keywords: Business Graduates, Qualities for employment, Action Research.

1. Background of the study

Bangladesh's higher education system has a long history of teaching business and management. It has something to do with the year 1921 and the founding of the University of Dhaka. At the University of Dhaka, the Department of Commerce was established in 1921 as part of the Faculty of Art (Islam et al., 2018). The department provided students with B. Com and M. Com degrees. To give professional education in business and management, the University of Dhaka's Institute of Business Administration (IBA) was founded in 1966 and originally offered an MBA degree. The University of Dhaka founded the Faculty of Commerce, which consists of two departments: Management and Accounting, because of the rapidly rising need for business graduates throughout time (Islam et al., 2018). The BBA Program was established by the Institute of Business Administration (IBA), University of Dhaka, in 1993. The Faculty of Commerce gained two additional departments in 1994, and the name of the faculty was changed to the Faculty of Business Studies (FBS) in 1995. The B. Com (Hons.) and M. Com degrees were changed to BBA and MBA beginning with the academic year 1994–1995 to make those degrees more practical and uphold the worldwide standard of business education (DU, 2018). At the University of Chittagong and the University of Rajshahi, respectively, business education began in the 1970s and 1980s (CU, 2018; RU, 2018). Now, Bangladesh has a sizable number of business schools that provide BBA and MBA degrees at both public and private colleges. Along with BBA and MBA degrees, several business schools also offer MPhil, Ph.D., and DBA degrees. However, the subjects and topics covered in this study are exclusive to the BBA and MBA levels (Chisty, Uddin, and Ghosh, 2007).

To improve productivity, creativity, entrepreneurship, gender mainstreaming, and general socio-cultural progress, higher education is crucial (Miyan, 2008). Before 1992, there were very few options for higher education in Bangladesh. As a result of the very restricted number of seats available at public colleges, many prospective students were unable to enroll. Additionally, many students were forced to pursue higher education overseas (particularly in countries like India, Cyprus, Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, the UK, etc.) due to campus violence, class overcrowding, and declining educational standards at public colleges. Along with these issues, additional elements, including a dated curriculum, obsolete teaching techniques, insufficient reference materials, etc., created the conditions for private institutions to flourish

in Bangladesh. To ameliorate the situation, the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) issued an act allowing the creation of private institutions in 1992. Therefore, the rationale for creating private institutions in Bangladesh is both patriotic and logical. Although many people initially opposed the idea of a private institution, it now exists. Even so, some of the private colleges are not only meeting the demands of Bangladeshi students but also attracting the interest of international students, which is a significant accomplishment for both the private institutions and the nation. Private universities can make a significant economic contribution to Bangladesh if appropriate measures are taken by policymakers to ensure quality. First, by reducing the tendency of Bangladeshi students to leave for other countries, private universities help Bangladesh save foreign currency. Second, they help Bangladesh earn foreign currency by drawing in more international students. The fact that these colleges follow the American system of education rather than the British one is a well-known characteristic of them. They provide credit-based four-year bachelor's degree programs. In Bangladesh, this technique has also gained widespread acceptance (Hoque, Mowla, Chowdhury, and Uddin, 2013).

Employers' and graduates' viewpoints may both be used to define employability. From the viewpoint of an employer, employability pertains to a new graduate's possession of the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and business understanding necessary to be successful in attaining organizational goals (Mason, Williams & Cranmer, 2006). Employees see employability as the abilities they'll need to manage their careers and never stop learning. Throughout their academic careers, students acquire two sets of talents. First, there are the technical or subject-specific abilities associated with a particular profession, such as those in accounting, statistics, or banking (Cassidy, 2006; Cox & King, 2006; Pool & Sewell, 2007). Second, graduates utilize nontechnical abilities, often known as employability skills, throughout their working lives in a variety of vocations or professions. Examples include the capacity to communicate, learn new things, network, work in a team, and function well under pressure (Cassidy, 2006; Duoc and Metzger, 2007; Raybould & Sheedy, 2005). As a result, certain employability abilities cut vertically across organizational job hierarchies inside firms as well as laterally across all sectors (Sherer & Eadie 1987). Graduate characteristics, graduate qualities, transferable skills, core skills, generic skills, and critical competencies are all terms used to describe the abilities required for graduates to find community employment (Cassidy, 2006; Pensiero & Mellveen, 2006).

In terms of updating their curricula, fostering an entrepreneurial attitude, and cultivating business professionalism, private colleges score somewhat better. Public universities are quicker than their private counterparts regarding practical focus and employability, which matter. (Akter, 2020).

There have been a few studies on higher education in Bangladesh, but none have looked at how MBAs affect the labor market or how they help people improve their work abilities (Alam et al., 2020).

In this context, we need to find out the expectations of the employers of business graduates for making business graduates more employable in the competitive job market.

2. Methodology

For this study, the action research method has been used to conclude. Action research is appropriate for anybody who aspires to enhance his or her performance, as well as any group or organization with similar goals. Action research is commonly employed in education, particularly by teachers to enhance their instruction. The United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Vietnam, among others, have adopted action research as part of their teaching and research. Action research complements education and helps both instructors and students in their teaching and learning since its cyclical approach promotes research continuation and satisfies the demand for education. Action research's appropriateness to education is evident in its nature, traits, "circle within a circle" approach, etc. This article examines all parts of action research, including definitions, benefits, steps, etc., to determine the significance and benefits of action research and education to provide a suitable response to the question posed above (Tran, 2009).

Action Research has five steps to follow. These are diagnosing, action planning, action taking, evaluating, and specifying learning (Baskerville, 1999).

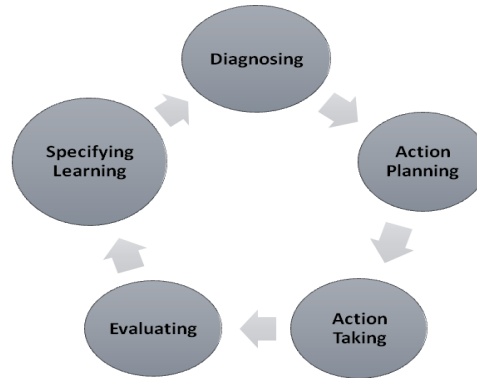


Figure 1: Action Research Cycle

As it has already been diagnosed that we need to improve the employability of business graduates, in the second stage, it is planned that some 62 employers of business graduates will be asked three (3) open-ended questions to collect their opinion, in the third stage, their opinion is collected. In the fourth stage, their opinion is evaluated using MS Excel. And finally, the learning (findings) from the study is presented through charts.

3. Analysis

At this stage of the study, the opinions of the participants were encoded into a few requirements that they desired for appointing a business graduate to their organizations; they thought that these were common to every business graduate; they recommended improving soon. The first open-ended question was: what are the general qualities you desire for employing a business graduate?

In response to this question, a total of eleven (11) requirements were desired by the participants. Among them, 99% of the participants urged commitment to responsibility and the organization. Secondly, (96% of the participants) desire a teamwork spirit, while 92% of the participants want English language proficiency as an important requirement. A positive attitude is another significantly important (91%) requirement for employers, while 86% of the employers in Sylhet City require soft skills for employing a business graduate.

Table 1: Desired Qualities for Business Graduates

Desired Qualities	Participants	Percentage
Communication skill	43	70
Computing / Software Skills	41	67
Confidence	35	57
English Language Proficiency	57	92
Etiquette and attire	37	60
Commitment	61	99
Knowledge of modern technology	38	62
Positive Attitude	56	91
Soft Skills	53	86
Teamwork	59	96
Theoretical Business Knowledge	45	73



Chart 1: Desired Qualities for Business Graduates

On the other hand, a big percentage of the potential employers require theoretical business knowledge (73%), communication skills (70%), computing/software skills (67%), knowledge of modern technology (62%), and formal etiquette and attire (60%) from their potential employees. Even, more than half (57%) of employers want their future employees to have enough confidence. Table – 1 and chart – 1 show the responses to the fast question.

Table 2: Common Qualities of Business Graduates

Common Qualities	Participants	Percentage
Commitment	38	62
Communication skill	43	70
Computer Literacy	43	70
Confidence	33	54
Creative Thinking	23	38
Management Skills	40	65
Positive Attitude	39	63

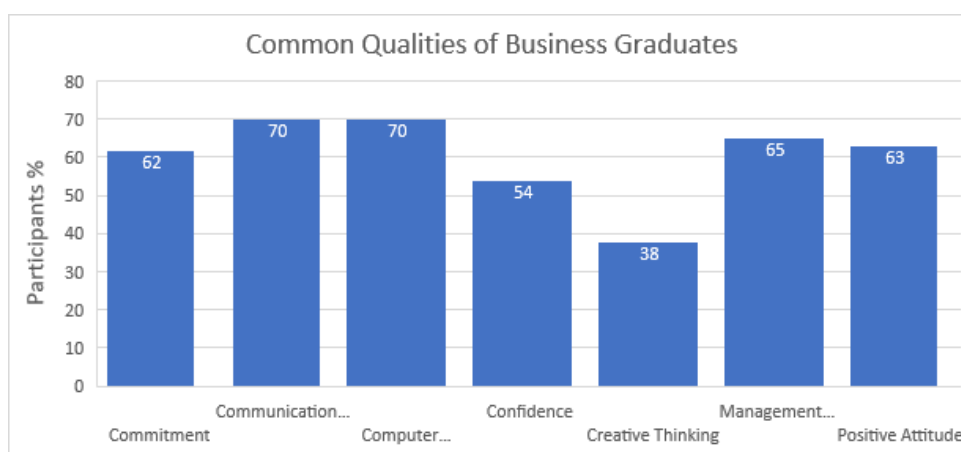


Chart 2: Common Qualities of Business Graduates

The second open-ended question was according to their opinion, what are the qualities a business graduate must have as built-in?

To answer this question, (as seen in Table – 2 and Chart -2) participants talked about seven (7) qualities. 70% of them mentioned two qualities, namely, **communication skills** and **computer literacy**. More than 60% of the potential employers have the following: desired **management skills** (65%), a **positive attitude** (63%), and **commitment** (62%). Again, **confidence** is desired by 54% of the participants, while 38% require **creative thinking** as a built-in quality of potential employees.

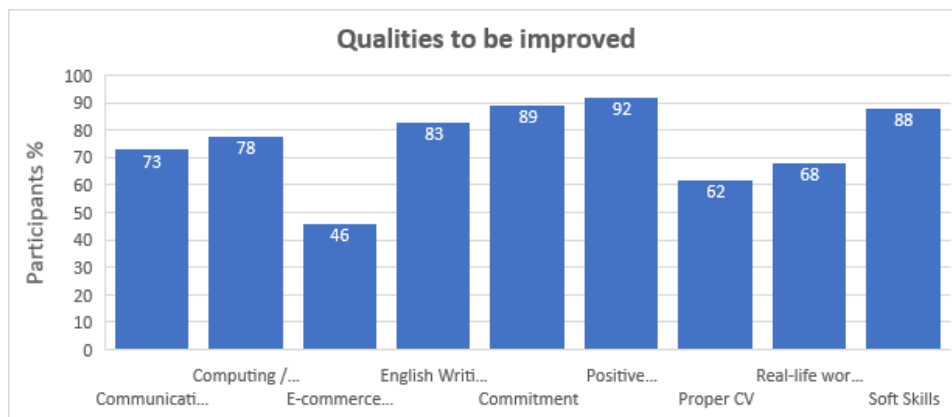
The final open-ended question to the employers of business graduates: what qualities of business graduates need to be improved?

As shown in Table 3 and Chart 3, the majority of employers (92%) believe that having a positive attitude is essential for anyone who wants to get a job and advance in his or her career. Just after that, almost all employers (89%) want business graduates to be **committed** to their job and their organizations. Nowadays, **soft skills** are very much essential for graduates to survive in this competitive work environment. This saying is again attested to by the opinion of the employers in Sylhet City. 88% of them urged soft skills. Then, a large number of employers (83%) want business graduates to have a command of **English writing skills**.

This survey shows us that, further, 78% of employers want business graduates to be **skilled in basic computing and relevant software**, while 73% of them asked for sound **communication skills**. On the other hand, many employers (68%) prefer to have an orientation with **real-life work experience**. Very interestingly, a good number of employers (62%) desire a **proper CV** that represents the candidate and communicates his/her knowledge, skills, and attitude. Nearly half of the employers (48%) want business graduates to be skilled in **E-commerce and/or digital marketing**.

Table 3: Qualities to be improved

Qualities to be improved	Participants	Percentage
Communication skill	45	73
Computing / Software Skills	48	78
E-commerce / Digital Marketing	28	46
English Writing Skill	51	83
Commitment	55	89
Positive Attitude	57	92
Proper CV	38	62
Real-life work experience	42	68
Soft Skills	54	88

**Chart 3: Qualities to be improved**

4. Findings

From the above discussion and analysis, we may draw a few findings. We need to inject some qualities into our business graduates. The main ones are as follows:

A Sense of Commitment and responsibility:

A business graduate must have a strong sense of commitment and responsibility to his/her job and the organization's goal.

Spirit of Teamwork:

Nowadays, people need to perform multidisciplinary activities, and for that, employees need to know how to work in a team.

English Language Proficiency:

Although proficiency in the English language does not represent knowledge and wisdom, business graduates require to have proficiency in the English language for communicating with different stakeholders at home and abroad.

Positive Attitude:

It is said, arguably, that a positive attitude is the only quality for success in life. So, having a positive attitude is required.

Soft Skills:

In recent years, soft skills are getting more important for graduates to become employed.

Computing / Software Skills / Technology:

It is not required to mention that all job applicants are required to know basic computing, some relevant software, and updated technological knowledge

Theoretical Business Knowledge:

Business graduates must have theoretical business knowledge and it is not required any further explanation.

Communication skills:

Apart from the language proficiency, business graduates must have communication skills for all their daily activities.

Real-life work experience:

Though it is tough for fresh graduates, employers want graduates to be equipped with real-life work experience. To solve this problem, internship programs may have to be given more emphasis.

Management Skills:

Business graduates will have management skills, which is the obvious expectation of employers.

Proper CV:

Sometimes, many graduates cannot prepare a perfect CV that properly represents their skills and experience.

Etiquette and Attire:

Etiquette and attire are very vital issues for graduates for getting appropriate employment.

E-commerce / Digital Marketing:

Nowadays, e-commerce and/or digital marketing are common requirements for employment, especially for business graduates.

Creative Thinking:

The day-to-day world is going through more competitive circumstances, and to address the situations, employees are required to have creative thinking abilities.

5. Recommendations and conclusion

To conclude the action research there are some recommendations for both business graduates and education-providing institutions. The majority of the above findings suggest that graduates must take the initiative to develop the skills required for employment in a suitable organization. For example, a sense of commitment and responsibility, the spirit of teamwork, English language proficiency, a positive attitude, soft skills, creative thinking, and appropriate etiquette and attire can be acquired by the graduates as they wish to have an appropriate job. On the other hand, academic institutions should incorporate some facilities for students to acquire the qualities necessary for their curriculum, like basic computing, required software, and updated technology. The evaluation system may be revised to provide stronger theoretical business knowledge. There should be some arrangements for the students so that they can acquire communication skills, real-life work experience, and management skills, prepare a suitable CV, and/or learn e-commerce and/or digital marketing skills through the institutions.

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