

Factors Contributing to Lack of Soft Skills among Tanzanian Higher Learning Graduates

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Abstract: Despite the critical role played by soft skills in ensuring employability and career development among graduates, evidence suggests a huge lack of these skills among graduates in Tanzania. Against this backdrop, this paper explored factors contributing to lack of soft skills among higher learning graduates in the country and recommended effective strategies of ensuring acquisition of soft skills by the graduates. The paper critically reviewed documents related to factors contributing to lack of soft skills among the graduates in Tanzania. The study revealed that lack of soft skills among graduates fundamentally emanates from poor curriculum which does not consider soft skills right from primary to higher learning level, ineffective educational policies and reforms that do not give emphasis on soft skills, incompetent trainers, inadequate teaching and learning facilities as well as lack of career guidance programs in academic institutions. These factors should be holistically addressed in a bid to equip graduates with soft skills necessary for employability. To ensure effective acquisition of soft skills by graduates, there should be regular curriculum and education policy review to include aspects of soft skills, allocating adequate budget for teaching and learning infrastructure, empowering higher learning trainers on soft skills and ensuring relevant teaching methodologies to enable educators equip students with soft skills.

Keywords: Soft Skills; Employability; Graduates; Industry; Tanzania

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Introduction

Soft skills, also known as people skills, refer to personal attributes that support situational awareness and enhance individual's ability to get a job done parallel to effective and harmonious interaction with other people. They are the various attributes and competencies that influence all aspects of one's career, right from interview to promotion (NACTE, 2020; Robles, 2012). To this end, soft skills enable graduates obtain employment and excel in their career throughout their lifetime (NACTE, 2020; Parlamis & Monnot, 2010). On the other hand, hard skills are technical and professional abilities that are taught in formal class; they include, but not

limited to, mathematics, science, business and social studies. Soft skills are currently regarded as an integral aspect at any workplace as employment requires collaboration, discussion and smooth flow of ideas without conflicts (Moss and Tilly, 1996). This state of affairs creates a productive and healthy work environment (Fogleman, 2019; Parlamis & Monnot, 2010; Robles, 2012).

There is strong evidence that soft skills and technical skills interact in tandem to get a job done at the right time and place. A survey on relevance of soft skills on employability at the McDonald's company rated communication skills at 96%, team-work skills at 94%, decision-making

skills at 93% and time management skills at 91%. In addition, the survey showed that over 50% of employees who had attended soft skills training while at the McDonald's significantly increased their self-confidence at work (Macdonald's, 2015)

Technical skills alone aren't enough for an individual to deliver effectively in a job (Fogleman, 2019). For example, in addition to technical skills, soft skills like excellent communication and negotiation can help an individual gain an edge over other employees as they might be of great relevance in cases like trying to close a deal with a customer (Mgaiwa, 2021; Smith, 2013; Williams, 2015). Future workplaces will depend more on soft skills because advancements in science and technology are likely to automatically replace many technical jobs with automation and artificial intelligence which require a few people with exceptional abilities.

Study findings show that technological innovation will have powerful effect on jobs because by 2030, 44% of current work hours will be automated (Fogleman, 2019). This aspect will result in more jobs relying on soft skills which cannot be replaced easily (Mgaiwa, 2021; Smith, 2013; Williams, 2015).

Despite the critical role played by soft skills in enhancing employability among graduates, these skills are said to be missing largely among graduates in Tanzania, a factor that either denies them jobs or puts their career at jeopardy (NACTE, 2020; Ngalomba, 2018; Richard, 2018; Williams, 2015; Wood, 2018). Evidence shows that over 60 percent of employers in Tanzania complain of lack of soft skills such as report writing, customer care, innovation, teamwork, communication, problem solving and time management among graduates and they attribute this problem to higher learning institutions' inability to effectively train the graduates (NACTE, 2020; Ngalomba, 2018).

Lack of soft skills among graduates has led to serious socio economic effects on the labour market worldwide and Tanzania in particular. While many graduates in Tanzania are failing to compete in the labor market due to lack of soft skills (Ngalomba, 2018). A good number of employers in Tanzania have been compelled to incur extra costs in providing extra training to complement the graduates' technical and hard skills (NACTE, 2020; Richard, 2018). Following the huge deficit of soft skills by the graduates as well

as the importance attached to these skills in the context of employment and career development, the government of Tanzania and other relevant education stakeholders have undertaken a number of initiatives towards ensuring provision of soft skills to the graduates. The first initiative concerns the enactment and introduction of generic educational related reforms that have directly and indirectly impacted on employability skills among the higher learning graduates. These reforms include but not limited to the Tanzania's Education and Training Policy (URT, 1995), National Higher Education Policy (URT, 1999), Education Sector Development Program (ESDP 2008 - 2017) URT (2018, National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (NSGRP II) (URT, 2010), Education for All (EFA) initiative (UNESCO, 2007) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (URT, 2018).

Additional efforts towards improving employability and soft skills among the graduates in the education sector is reflected in the Big Results Now (BRN) 2013/15, which mainly intended to ameliorate primary and secondary education through improvement of education infrastructure, curriculum and equipment to ensure that students did not only attend school but actually acquired relevant skills and knowledge (The World Bank, 2014; URT, 2018).

Another recent initiative has been the investment in apprenticeship and incubation programs that offer employers an opportunity to build soft skills and knowledge for future employees as well as enabling some previously unskilled youth to secure jobs (ILO, 2019). This has been realised through collaboration between ILO and key government stakeholders, notably the Ministry of Tourism and Natural Resources, the National College of Tourism (NCT), Hotel Association of Tanzania (HAT) and the Association of Tanzania Employers (ATE) (ILO, 2019). Recently Tanzania benefited from an ILO project which aimed at supporting the graduates take advantage of new emerging opportunities related to increased digitalization, international trade integration, technological change, globalisation, climate change etc. (ILO, 2018).

Another initiative is the introduction of National Internship Programme aimed at enhancing graduates' employability skills in general and soft skills in particular among youths. This is

coordinated under the Prime Minister's office for labour, youth employment and persons with Disability (URT, 2017).

A number of studies (Fulgence, 2015; Harold, Utouh & Msuya, 2020; Munishi, 2016; NACTE, 2020) (Harold, Utouh & Msuya, 2020; Sanga, 2019; Gratton, 2018; Nkwame, 2015) have looked into the issues of soft skills in relation to graduates' employability, without paying adequate and specific attention to the factors associated with lack of soft skills by the higher learning graduates in the country. Existing findings on soft skills in relation to graduates' employment has been either too general or too specific, focusing on the importance of soft skills in employment and career Excellence (Fulgence, 2015; Harold, Utouh & Msuya, 2020; Munishi, 2016; NACTE, 2020) or assessment of soft skills (Harold, Utouh & Msuya, 2020; Sanga, 2019; Gratton, 2018; Nkwame, 2015). This study therefore sought to bridge this gap by specifically examining factors contributing to lack of soft skills among graduates in a bid to recommend strategies for equipping graduates with more proper soft skills relevant to the current labour market. This aspect is critical, considering that lack of relevant skills among graduates, including the soft skills, weakens the skills development sub-sector and presents a number of critical challenges for the country (Andreoni, 2018).

Meaning and Types of Softs Skills

One of the aspects of soft skills is communication, which denotes an individual's ability to pass messages across effectively in written, spoken, physically or through body language (Robles, 2012). An effective communicator should maintain clarity, correctness, conciseness, courtesy, concreteness as well as completeness in all his or her forms of communication (Kamenetz, 2015). Another aspect is listening, which means an individual's ability to pay attention, questioning during conversations as well as demonstrating effective body language during communication. Critical thinking, on the other hand, involves deliberately analysing information or situation so as to make better judgement and decisions (Robles, 2012). Problem-solving skills mean individual's ability to determine why an issue is happening and how to resolve that issue. Such a process starts with problem identification, coming up with solutions, implementing the

solution and evaluating effectiveness of the selected solution (Andreoni, 2018).

Another critical aspect of soft skills is emotional empathy which denotes respecting others as well as showing genuine interest in others' success. It also means the ability to recognize wrought act and apologize, showing appreciation for a service or favour extended to an individual, greeting as well as addressing or acknowledging others by their names or titles. It also means being sensitive and caring about others. Another aspect is leadership and ability to take initiatives. Closely related to leadership is the ability to motivate a team and help those around one do their work more effectively (Robles, 2012). This further includes teamwork and ability to work with others.

Organizational skills further entail ability to influence others, read and manage other's emotions, manage conflict, negotiate, understand organizational contexts and develop meaningful networks (Nganga & Hashima, 2015, p. 1; Parlamis & Monnot, 2010; Robles, 2012). Other aspects would include, time management ability, flexibility and adoptability, willingness and readiness to learn as well as openness to feedback i.e. positively accepting feedback (Robles, 2012). Another aspect is work ethics which means an attitude of determination, dedication and discipline towards one's job. In addition, individuals need to have strong work ethics in terms of reliability, dedication discipline productivity cooperation, integrity, responsibility and professionalism (Schislyaeva & Olga, 2022); Robles, 2012). Last but not list is creativity and innovation which imply doing usual things in different ways or different approaches during the time of trouble (Robles, 2012).

Related Literature and studies

Literature mentions a number of factors contributing to lack of soft skills among graduates, citing poor curricular which does not incorporate soft skills as one of the critical factors (Ravindran & CMYSS, 2015; UNICEF, 2019).The argument presented by the literature is that curricular for most schools and higher learning institutions in particular put more emphasis on technical skills and place soft skills in much later stages of learning (Fogleman, 2019; Hodge & Lear, 2011). It is further noted that university curricula are rarely reviewed to incorporate current labour market

requirements (Obinna, Adewuni, & Taiwo (2014). Another factor cited by the literature is the trainers' inability to assess and grade soft skills, mainly owing to the trainers' poor background in soft skills as well as the hardship associated with identification and quantification of soft skills (Danial, Bakari, & Mohamed, 2014; Fogleman, 2019). Furthermore, the literature notes that there is hardly uniform teaching and assessment of soft skills. This further leads to the existence of different definitions of soft skills by different people, leading to confusion among trainers and students (Fogleman, 2019; Sanga, 2019).

Another factor cited in the literature responsible for lack of soft skills among graduates is lack of awareness about the importance of soft skills among both the trainers and graduates. This means that both trainers and graduates do not give the deserved emphasis on soft skills and at times they tend to shy away from them (Ravindran & CMYSS, 2015; UNICEF, 2019; Wood, 2018). Poor teaching pedagogy also accounts for the lack of soft skills among graduates. This means that higher learning trainers employed ineffective teaching methods that do not take into consideration practical teaching and learning practices (Richard & Govahi, 1983). This further means that trainers are incapable of designing classes properly as well as simulating classes in a manner that can guarantee practical acquisition of soft skills by students (Richard & Govahi, 1983).

Poor teaching and learning infrastructure and technology are also mentioned as a key factor contributing to lack of soft skills among graduates. This specifically suggests that inadequate classrooms and teaching equipment makes it hard for the students to effectively access and internalise the skills (Ravindran & CMYSS, 2015). Lack of career guidance services in academic institutions has also been cited as a factor responsible for lack of soft skills among the graduates, mainly due to lack of qualified staff in career guidance skills as well as lack of career counselling related infrastructure (Ra, Chin & Liu, 2015; Ravindran & CMYSS, 2015; Ahmad, & Zadhah, 2013).

Another factor is related to less effective education and development policies that do not take into consideration soft skills. The literature suggests that some existing policies emphasize more on technical skills relevant to the graduates' areas of specialization, leaving out other non-

technical skills such as communication skills, management skills, leadership skills and other basic skills critically required by the employers (Richard, 2018; UNICEF, 2019). As noted by Damon, Glewwe, Wisniewski & Sun (2016), there seems to be inconsistency between the existing education policies on the one hand and the development policies on the other hand. This means that education policies have not been able to take into consideration the labour market demand side such as inclusion of soft skills for students, which is an important aspect of employability and development at large. In this case, higher learning end up training graduates who lack relevant employable requirements in terms of soft skills (Richard, 2018; Williams, 2015).

Research Methodology

This study is a desk based research that utilised more than 30 published academic articles as well as relevant grey literature in the area of soft skills in relations to higher learning graduates and employability in Tanzania. This literature was identified and gathered from the internet, particularly from the academic data bases such as Google Scholar. Documents utilized include full-length published articles in academic journals, Conferences Proceedings, book reviews, internet columns, and book chapters that are relevant to this subject matter.

All references cited were traced to evaluate their relevance in the study and they were carefully read through by the author before their inclusion. Decision to include or not to include the source was based on the relevance and authenticity of the source for this particular study. To achieve this objective, the research relayed on the keywords such as soft skills, people skills, higher learning graduates and Tanzania to search for the most relevant sources and literature. After getting the final list of the documents, analysis was carried out using content analysis strategy given its strength in analysing text data (Creswell, 2012; Elo, et al., 2002).

Results and Discussion

This section presents study findings and discussion. While the findings have been drawn from the relevant studies conducted in the context of Tanzania, discussion of these findings is undertaken in the light of the literature of similar studies conducted outside Tanzania.

Research: What factors contribute to lack of soft skills among the higher learning graduates in Tanzania?

One of the critical factors leading to lack of soft skills among the graduates in Tanzania is related to poor academic curriculum that does not include soft skills. It was noted that, most higher learning academic curricula do not include aspects of soft skills such as teamwork, communication, leadership and critical thinking that are widely required by the employers (NACTE, 2020; Ngalomba, 2018). Soft skills were inconsistently taught in high schools and universities since they were not formally included in the academic curricular (Fogleman, 2019). This has also been cited as critical contributors to lack of soft skills among graduates in India and Singapore (Ravindran & CMYSS, 2015; UNICEF, 2019).

Another factor leading to lack of soft skills among the graduates in the Tanzanian was the failure to include soft skills aspects in the National Education and development policies and frameworks (NACTE, 2020; Ngalomba, 2018). The inclusion and enforcement of soft skills in these frameworks was not clear and specific (Ngalomba, 2018; Nganga, 2014). It was specifically noted that review of the Tanzanian Education and training policy of 1995 did not include aspects of soft skills at all levels of training and as a consequence, this aspect was not also included in curricular development for various training levels (URT, 1995). Similar findings had also been established in Malaysia and China (British Council, 2015; Danial, Bakari & Mohamed, 2014) suggesting that current study contributes to the existing knowledge about the particular subject matter.

Inadequate teaching and learning infrastructure has also been frequently cited as a critical factor responsible for lack of soft skills among the graduates in Tanzania. Evidence shows that inadequate classrooms and teaching equipment in this case make it hard for the students to effectively access and internalize required soft skills (Kinyondo & Shija, 2019; Richard, 2018). Specifically, too big classes make it impossible for the teachers to teach effectively as well as for the students to internalise and understand soft skills aspects properly. Indeed, the number of instructors is practically small, which forces them to work over and above the average working hours, making them incapable to deliver adequately (Kinyondo & Shija, 2019; Richard,

2018). These findings partly corroborate well with the findings established India earlier on (Ravindran & CMYSS, 2015).

Another factor responsible for lack of soft skills among the graduates in Tanzania is poor soft skills pedagogy or teaching methodology by the trainers both in high schools and in higher learning institutions. It has been revealed that trainers were incapable of teaching as well as orienting graduates to soft skills because they themselves did not undergo training in soft skills as well as how to teach soft skills to students (Mutalemwa, 2021; Nganga & Hashima, 2015, p. 1; Richard, 2018; Sanga, 2019; URT, 2018). This aspect has also been observed in various parts of the world including India (Parlami & Monnot, 2010; Robles, 2012).

Lack of career guidance and counselling services in higher learning institutions has also been cited as a contributing factor to the lack of soft skills among the graduates. Career guidance and counselling is a program intended for developing and assisting individuals to plan and implement informed educational and occupational choices (UNICEF, 2019). However, evidence indicates that many of the higher learning institutions do not offer such services due to lack of designated officers and offices responsible for career guidance and counselling. This is very unfortunate because, having in place career guidance and counselling programmes is considered critical in equipping higher learning institutions with practical employable skills and the soft skills in particular (UNICEF, 2019). Similar findings have been established in India and China, suggesting that this paper positively contributed to the existing body of knowledge (Ra, Chin & Liu, 2015; Ravindran & CMYSS, 2015; Ahmad, & Zadha, 2013).

Lack of motivation on and interest in soft skills related subjects by both the graduates and trainers has also been identified as one of the critical factors contributing to lack of soft skills among graduates in Tanzania (Kinyondo & Shija, 2019; Munishi, 2016). The reviewed data showed that both the graduates and trainers lacked interest in critical soft skills related subjects such as communication skills, negotiation, leadership and English language (Fulgence, 2015; Munishi, 2016; Onyango, Sunday, 5th January 2014). It was specifically, noted that students at higher learning institutions would shy away from soft skills

related modules and have negative attitudes towards such subjects. Indeed, students studied these subjects to simply memorize the content in order to pass or get the minimal pass mark so as they could continue to next levels of education (Kinyondo & Shija, 2019; Mjema, 2015; Munishi, 2016).

Another factor contributing to lack of soft skills among the Tanzanian graduates is related to lack of English language competence by the graduates (Kinyondo & Shija, 2019; Munishi, 2016; Richard, 2018). Specifically, it was noted that, although English language is a medium of instruction at secondary schools and higher learning level, graduates seemed to be less proficient in the language owing to their strong background in Kiswahili and some other local languages (Kinyondo & Shija, 2019; Munishi, 2016). Students met English language at the Secondary school level since the whole seven year primary education is undertaken in Swahili. Such situation rendered students incapable of grasping and practicing soft skills such as communication that were taught to them in English language (Kinyondo & Shija, 2019; Munishi, 2016; Richard, 2018). This aspect, hardly captured in the existing culture outside Tanzania, suggests that the challenge is unique in Tanzania, owing to its strong background in Swahili language and use of the English language at later stages of learning.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

It is concluded that lack of soft skills among graduates in Tanzania is due to poor academic curriculum that does not include soft skills, failure to include soft skills aspects in the National Education policies and frameworks, inadequate teaching and learning infrastructure, lack of soft skills knowledge and poor pedagogy by the trainers. Other factors are lack of career guidance and counselling services, lack of motivation on and interest in soft skills related subjects as well as lack of English language competence as a media of construction.

Recommendations

Strategies for ensuring soft skills among the graduates would include regular curriculum review to respond to social, political, economic and technological change at regional, national and global levels, review of the existing education

policy frameworks in such a manner to include provision of soft skills in the teaching and learning process. Others are setting aside adequate budget for teaching and learning infrastructure, empowering of teaching staff on both soft skills knowledge and soft skills teaching methodology, sensitizing higher learning students on the importance of soft skills in relation to employment as well as providing career guidance services to higher learning students

Responsible authorities and stakeholders in should ensure regular curriculum review at all academic levels to include aspects of softs skills, responding to social, political, economic and technological changes at the regional, national and global levels. Specifically, the curriculum for teacher training should be revisited to incorporate the teaching and assessment of soft skills in order to increase teachers' awareness on this aspect (Sanga, 2019). This should be done by all relevant and responsible education authorities in Tanzania, notably the Ministry of Education through regulatory bodies such as the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) and The National Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (NACTVET) as well as the learning institutions.

Education authorities should set aside adequate budget for teaching and learning infrastructure and continue with the initiatives of expanding teaching and learning infrastructure and equipment more especially those necessary for ensuring the training in soft skills. Higher learning trainers should be empowered with soft skills teaching methodology so as they can equip their students with soft skills more competently. To achieve this objective more smartly, higher learning curriculum should provide for more practical training techniques such as coaching, mentoring and apprenticeship training which guarantee development and utilization of soft skills after graduation.

Tanzanian education and higher learning institutions in particular should have specialized sections responsible for career guidance and counselling to students. Among other things, these sections should empower students on soft skills such as adaptability, communication, critical thinking and leadership as well as time management.

Finally, education authorities in Tanzania should devise appropriate ways of ensuring English language proficiency among higher learning graduates so as it can help them grasp and practice soft skills and other relevant employability skills.

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