

FACTORS AFFECTING EMPLOYABILITY OF COLLEGE GRADUATES

Dr. Gilbert M. Talue¹, Dr. Ishaq Kalanther²

^{1,2} Assistant Professor, Business Administration Department, Jubail University, Royal Commission of Jubail, KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA.

¹TaluaeG@ucj.edu.sa , ²Kalatheri@ucj.edu.sa

ABSTRACT

This study aims to trace the alumni of Jubail University College (JUC), particularly the Business Department from 2014 to 2019. It will also endeavor to determine the factors that affects the employability of alumni. The respondents of the study are the alumni from academic year 2014 to 2019. Descriptive method of research was applied and survey was utilized as data gathering instrument. It was found out that JUC alumni are good team players and can blend and work with a team based on the findings. Majority of the respondents' first work are not related to their specialization so they leave their work. Distance and salary are the deciding factors of respondents to accept job. Respondents viewed Grade Point Average (GPA) as not the whole indicator to be accepted for the job. Companies requires not only technical skills for their applicants and new employees but also soft skills. Based on the conclusions drawn, it is recommended that alumni should accept the job even it's far from their hometown to be able for them to gain experience; must learn special skills by attending short-term specialized courses to broaden their knowledge and acquire new skills; must work hard while they are studying to raise their GPA for higher chances of getting job in multi-national companies; and should improve their soft skills be able to market themselves and show that they have the ability to make a difference in the workplace. Soft skills are as important as the hard skills. It is personal attributes that enhance a person's job performance, interactions and career prospects.

Keywords: employability, job-hunting, unemployment, Saudi Arabia, college graduates

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The transition from undergraduate to employee is often difficult. It is competitive, particularly when unemployment is high and especially for the best 'graduate' jobs where applicants need to stand out, and it is full of uncertainties (Hinchliffe & Jolley, 2010).

As fresh graduates enter labor market, large numbers of university graduates have been unemployed or underemployed for many years. Most fresh graduates would like to pursue high wages with a desirable working environment, but this is critical for them due to some reasons. There are many factors, such as college prestige, professional fields, and individual or entire economic elements, which can influence job search and starting wages.

According to Jun (2017), there are different factors affecting job search in different countries such as reputation of the college, gender and specialization. Succeeding literatures presented significant findings.

Unemployment in Kenya has become a headache both for those in leadership and those seeking various opportunities. In as much as successive governments have tried to mitigate the already alarming situation, labor supply has been on the rise in relation to its demand.

This has created a huge backlog. The major effects are felt by the youth who seek to get return for their investment in education (Farah & Ali, 2018).

The continued high unemployment in Western Europe and North America has given rise to a discussion of the reasons for this persistence of unemployment. One hypothesis is that persistence is due to the depreciation of human capital in case of longer spells of unemployment. Another explanation discussed in the literature is a shortage of real capital due to longer periods of unemployment with a low level of investment activity. (Pedersen & Westergard-Nielsen, 1993).

In U.S. 11.8 million persons were unemployed, putting the unemployment rate at 7.6 percent. The state of the economy is a large contributor to these numbers. In September, 2015, unemployment is reported by the Labor Department to be at 5.1%. The lack of jobs available, and skills desired by employers, are beginning to prove to be major cause for graduate unemployment in the U.S. Graduates (money.cnn.com, 2015).

In Canada, a 2016 labor market assessment by the Parliamentary Budget Officer reported that the underemployment rate for undergraduates under the age of 35 increased from 32% in 1991 to 39% in 2015. The equivalent rate for college graduates was similar until 2006. Since then it has fallen to 33%. A 2017 study from Statistics Canada showed that, for both men and women, more than 24% of undergraduates in the arts, the humanities, the social sciences and the behavioral sciences are underemployed. In nursing, engineering, education and training, and computer and information science, the underemployment rate is less than 8%. In Australia, a 2017 study by the Productivity Commission found that 20% of graduates are working part-time, while 26% of graduates are working full-time but consider themselves to be underemployed. The markets for China's graduates share much in common with those of other countries. One important aspect is its education policy-making and economic development as well as reforms in the economy and in its higher education. Recently the annual growth in the numbers of new graduates was estimated at 7,270,000 for 2014. At 8% annual growth, the Chinese labor market will generate about eight million jobs, but these are mainly in manufacturing and require low-level qualifications. This rising enrollment made employment an issue and a serious challenge for China. Including the graduates who are not employed last year, the number of unemployed graduates may reach 8,100,000. (Feelan, n.d.).

In developed country such as Saudi Arabia where the unemployment rate is 6% (CIA world Factbook, 2019), it is expected that at least university graduates will requisite skill-set should be able to get employment, but it is not the case. Al-Dosary, Rahman, & Shahid (2005) identified that the Saudi's graduating from renowned foreign universities and a few local universities were being easily absorbed while most of the locally educated Saudis were finding it very difficult to obtain suitable jobs with competitive salaries.

The General Authority for Statistics (GaStat) indicated that the rate of unemployment in Saudi nationals was 12.2% in 2016 (GaStat, 2016). In fact, nearly 34.5% of all Saudi Arabian adult females and 5.9 % of Saudi Arabian adult males are unemployed. However, the highest levels of unemployment are found in youth populations where 40% of all citizens under the age of 35 have no stable form of employment. Moreover, with over 35% of the population being under the age of 19, and with increasing labor force participation of women, the rising number of Saudi citizens entering the workforce will exacerbate the problem of unemployment unless more jobs are created, or expatriates are reduced (Alrasheedy, 2017).

Al-Asmari (2008) emphasized that the lower pay for foreign workers makes them desirable for private sector companies who often give them preference over Saudi nationals, essentially exacerbating the unemployment issue in the nation.

Unemployment is one of the big and vital problems in all over the world. It is the common issue in developed as well as underdeveloped countries. It is the consistent problem facing by all industrially advance and as well as poor countries. Unemployment occurs when people are without jobs. Unemployment means people are able to work and actively finding job but fail to get a job. According to neoclassical economic, unemployment occurs when rigidities are imposed on labor market from the outside. (Arslan & Zaman, 2014).

In this study, we will attempt to trace the alumni of Jubail University College, particularly the Business Department from 2014 to 2019. Also, we will try to determine the factors that affects the employability of alumni and will try to give suggestions to improve the alumni's thinking about the work environment.

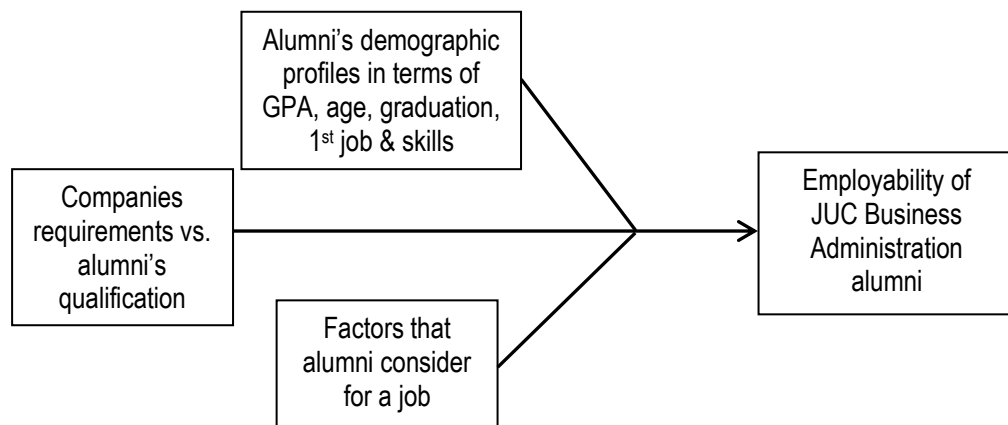
Jubail University College is an affiliate of the Royal Commission for Jubail & Yanbu. It was established in 2006 to achieve the objectives of the Royal Commission, in developing human resources and to provide the Saudi manpower with high education and training, so that they can properly manage the Kingdom's growing economy in its various sectors. Jubail University College's mission is to achieve the following objectives: (a) to contribute to the stability of the local community in Jubail Industrial City and to attract qualified Saudi nationals to work in and manage the city projects; (b) to provide well-trained and qualified Saudi manpower to meet the requirements of industrial development projects and investment in Jubail Industrial City; and (c) to achieve a distinctive level of performance in the applied academic field to prepare professionals who can keep pace with and utilize global technological developments. (Jubail University College website, 2018).

The above cited thoughts stimulated the researchers to investigate and trace the factors that affects the employability of Business Administration Department of Jubail University College – Male branch alumni and will endeavor to offer recommendations to address some issues of alumni's employability.

Conceptual Framework

The paradigm of the study adopted the Shikawa model, also known as fishbone diagram. Shikawa model is causal diagram developed by Kaoru Ishikawa that shows the causes of a specific event (Talaue, 2018). The variables of the study in terms of profile of alumni are: demographic profile, factors that alumni consider to get a job, and the companies' requirements for new entry employee. By assessing the mentioned variables and reviewing some previous studies, as well as floating questionnaires to the respondents, the study can determine factors that affect or may affect employability of Jubail University College alumni.

Figure 1. Paradigm of the study



Statement of the problem

This study aims to investigate and trace the factors that affects the employability of alumni of Business Administration Department of Jubail University College – Male branch. Specifically, it sought to answer the following:

1. What are the demographic profile of alumni in terms of the following variables:
 - a. age;
 - b. GPA;
 - c. year of graduation;
 - d. first job;
 - e. skills.
2. What are the factors that alumni consider to get a job?
3. Is there a correlation between the GPA and chances of acceptance for the job?
4. What are the companies' requirements for their new entry employees?

Objectives and Hypothesis

The present study aims and presupposes the following:

1. To examine the demographic profile of alumni in terms of age, GPA, skills, date of graduation, and first job;
2. To find out the factors that alumni consider to get a job.
3. H_{01} : There is no correlation between the GPA and the chances of acceptance for the job
4. To determine the companies' requirements for their new entry employees

Scope and Limitation

This study aims to trace the alumni of Jubail University College, particularly the Business Department from 2014 to 2019. It will also endeavor to determine the factors that affects the employability of alumni.

The respondents of the study are the alumni of Business Administration Department of Jubail University College – Male Branch from 2014 to 2019. There are 191 total male alumni. Based on Slovin's formula, a sample size of 129 is needed, but only 73 alumni responded to the survey thus, the response rate is 56%.

Significance of the study

Tracing the alumni Business Administration Department of Jubail University College would benefit Jubail University College itself by finding out what alumni needed to have job, for instance, qualification. This study will also give an opportunity to Business Department to find solution on how to help the students and equip them with necessary skills that the companies prefer. The researchers will also be benefited by gaining new knowledge. Finally, other researchers and universities can utilize this for future study and can serve the reference.

METHODOLOGY

This part presents the methodology used. Discussed here are research design, the sources of data that includes the locale of the study and research population, instrumentation and data collection, and tools used for data analysis.

Research Design, Sources of Data, Instrumentation and Data Collection, and Tools for Data Analysis

The study used the quantitative as well as qualitative methods of research. Descriptive research design was utilized to gain accurate profile of situation. To support the study,

information relevant to the study were obtained from both primary and secondary data. Primary data were acquired from the respondents, the 73 alumni. On the other hand, the secondary data were obtained from previous studies, literatures, documents, and other electronic materials related to the present study.

The instrument for data collection was the survey questionnaire, observations, review of previous studies and analysis. To gather data for the four research questions, survey and review of literatures were used. Survey questionnaires were floated to the respondents. It is a tool containing several questions to gather information from the respondents. The survey questionnaire contains clear and simple questions that enables the respondents to provide accurate information. Each item in the survey questionnaires are intended to answer the research sub-problems. Google Form was used to create the questionnaire for the respondents. Google Forms is a tool that is free and powerful, it is ideal for anyone who needs to gather information about almost anything. Google Forms can be access from Google Drive right beneath the word processor, spreadsheet and presentation apps.

The data that were gathered are collected, tallied and tabulated. These data were presented in graphs, analyzed and interpreted for the readers to understand better the results obtained.

To determine the appropriate sample size, Slovin's formula was used (Talaue, 2018). There are 191 total alumni of Business Administration Department – Male Branch from 2014-2019. The researchers decided on 0.05 error of margin with the confidence level of 95%, thus one-hundred twenty-nine (129) respondents are appropriate. Slovin's formula is written as:

$$n = N / (1 + N e^2)$$

where:

n = number of samples

N = total population

e = error tolerance (0.05)

thus,

$$\begin{aligned} n &= N / (1 + N e^2) \\ &= 191 / (1 + 191 \times ((0.05)^2)) \\ &= 191 / 1.48 \\ &= 129.27 \approx \mathbf{129} \end{aligned}$$

To answer the three research questions, statistical tools were identified. For first research question, mode was used. For the second inquiry, mode and average weighted mean were used. In the third research question, Pearson correlation also known as Pearson's r was utilized. The fourth inquiry employed the literature review. The formula for average weighted mean is:

$$AWM = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^N W_i X_i}{N}$$

where:

W= Weighed Value of each Item

X = Item Values

For the interpretation of the Average Weighted Mean (AMW) the following descriptive points were used:

Table 1. Average Weighted Mean (AMW) descriptive points

Relative Value	Statistical Limit	Interpretation
4	3.5 to 4	Most important
3	3 to 3.4	Moderately important
2	2 to 2.9	Slightly important
1	1 to 1.9	Not important

PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

This section presents the data gathered, the analysis and their interpretation relative to the questions raised in the study. The respondents' responses are evaluated against the following parameters

Demographic profile of the alumni

To find out the demographic profile of the alumni, the researchers floated survey questionnaire (refer to Appendix). Item number 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 addressed this matter. Table 2 shows the demographic profile of the respondents.

Table 2. Demographic profile of the respondents

		Number of respondents	Percentage
Age Bracket	20-22	11	15%
	23-25	41	56%
	26-28	9	12%
	29-31	12	16%
		73	100%
GPA	2-2.5	10	14%
	2.5-3	18	25%
	3-3.5	27	37%
	3.5-4	18	25%
		73	100%
Year of Graduation	2014-2015	12	16%
	2016-2017	10	14%
	2017-2018	30	41%
	2018-2019	21	29%
		73	100%
Type of first Job	Associate	10	14%
	Supervisor	3	4%
	Working with team	19	26%
	Other	41	56%
		73	100%
Special Skills	No special skills	45	62%
	Possess special skills	28	38%
		73	100%

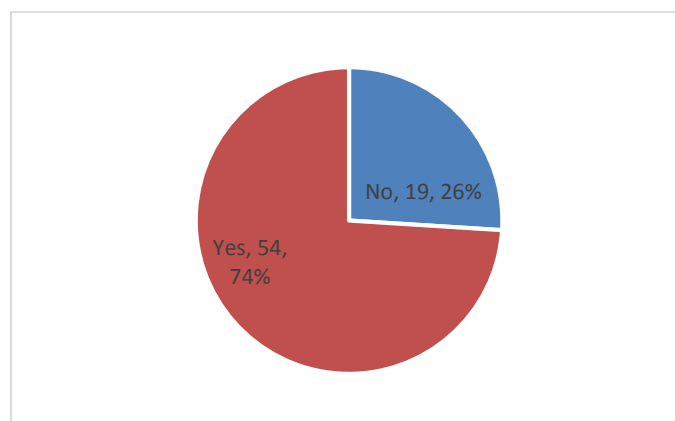
Based on table 2, majority of the alumni graduated at the age of 23 to 25, but there are also who finished their studies late, meaning they graduated at the age of 29 to 31. The highest possible GPA (Grade Point Average) that Jubail University College student/alumna can earn is 4. Based on table 2, 36% or 27 of the respondents earned GPA between 3-3.5. It can be noticed that 54% of the respondents says that their first job is not related to their specialization, Business or MIS. 62% or 45 of respondents considered themselves possessing no specials skills, since the Business Administration and Management Information System degrees in Jubail University College has no specific specializations/concentration, compared to other universities. In other university such as King Fahad University of Petroleum & Minerals (KFUPM), their degree in Business Administration have specializations or concentrations in Human Resource Management, Supply Chain, and Entrepreneurship. In their MIS degree, students can have the option to take the concentration courses in place of the two MIS electives and one Business Elective (<http://cim.kfupm.edu.sa>, 2018). 38% of the respondents considered themselves possessing special skills, because there are some alumni attended some short-term courses or training related to Business or MIS. Most of the alumni's first job is with the team, meaning working with other co-workers, a good indication that JUC alumni can blend and work with a team. But 54% of the respondents' first work are not related to their specialization so they leave their work.

Factors that alumni consider to get a job

According to Hollon (2018), the top factors job seekers look for in job ads are: salaries – 67%; benefits – 63%; job location – 59%; commute time - 43%; and employee reviews – 32%. Salary is the number 1 key piece of information of workers and job seekers they look for in a job ad, followed closely by 63 percent saying benefits and perks most catch their attention. These breakouts also differ between men and women - women prioritize flexible work hours and office location more than men when deciding to apply to a job.

To reveal the factors that alumni consider in getting a job question item number 7, 8, 9 and 10 in the survey addressed this issue. Based on the result of the survey, the place of job affects the alumni's acceptance of the job. 74% of them considered place as deciding factor to accept or not to accept the job. Figure 2 shows the respondents' response about place as one deciding factor for the acceptance of the job.

Figure 2. Place as deciding factor to accept job



Based on question number 8 which state that how long the respondents have stayed in the job, it is found out that 42% of them stayed only for few months and then left the work place and look for another place while 36% of them says that they have stayed for 2 to 3 years on the same workplace to increase their knowledge and to gain experience whereas 22% of the

respondents says that they stayed only for one year and then they left the job because they found another job that they consider 'greener pasture' and provided greater return to them.

Figure 3. Length of staying in the company

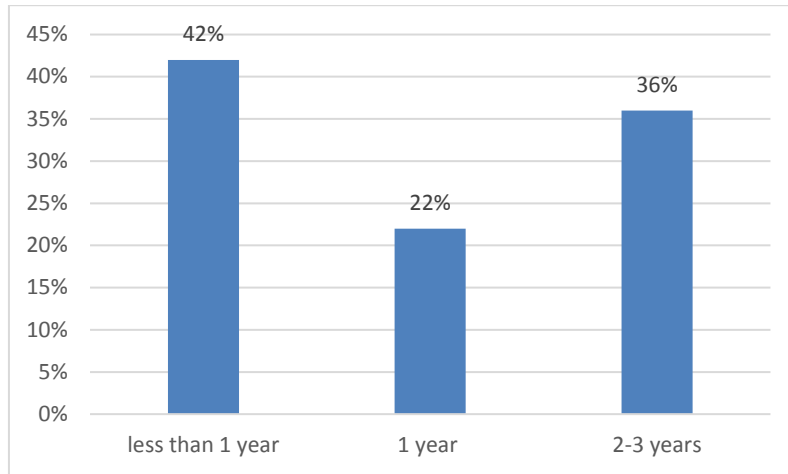


Figure 4 and 5, shows the degree of importance of distance and salary as perceived by the respondents.

Figure 4. Degree of importance of Distance

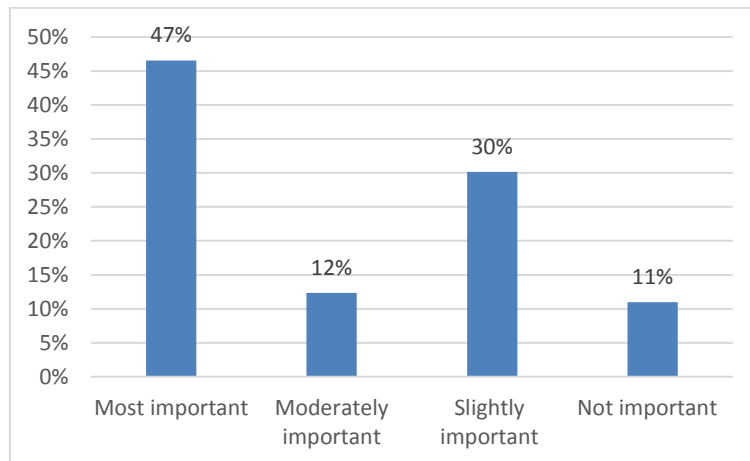
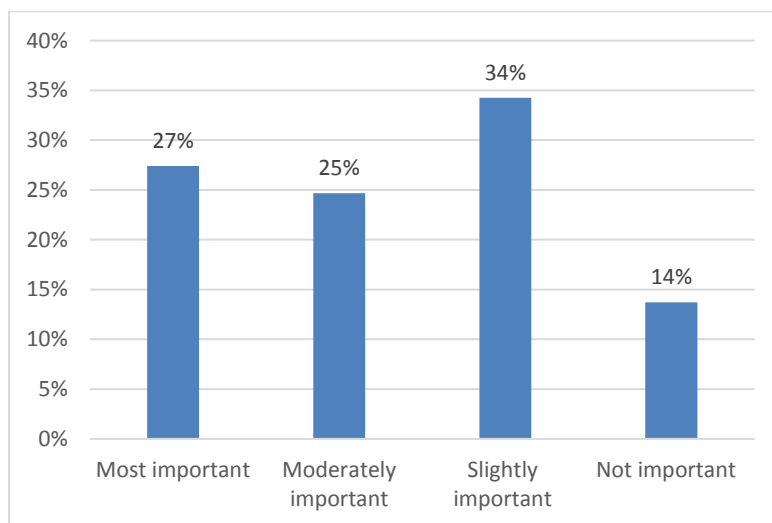


Figure 5. Degree of importance of Salary



Applying the average weighted mean (AWM) to interpret the response of the alumni regarding importance of distance gained the following:

$$AWM = \frac{(4*34)+(3*9)+(2*22)+(1*8)}{73} = 2.9 \approx 3$$

Degree of importance of salary, gained the following:

$$AWM \text{ for the salary} = \frac{(4*20)+(3*18)+(25*2)+(10*1)}{73} = 2.7 \approx 3$$

Based on the AWM it is found out that the distance between the workplace and the residence address are moderately important for the respondents. It would be safe to say that this is because of the culture of the respondents - that they are normally living with their families unlike the western culture that they have to leave their family's house when they reached 18 years old. According to the AWM of the salary, it is found out that the salary is also moderately important. The logical reasons behind this is the difficulty of finding job and the rate of the unemployment.

Correlation of the GPA and the chances of acceptance for the job

According to Pollak (2008), employers use GPA to gauge a few things about job applicants, such as intelligence, discipline and ambition. Good grades imply that you are smart, serious and motivated. Mediocre grades imply the opposite. Some elite employers have policies requiring a certain GPA (usually a 3.0 or higher), and there is generally no way around that rule.

According to Reshwan (2016), GPA matters sometimes. Most professionals who did well in college tend to regard a strong GPA as an indicator that a potential employee can handle pressure, learns quickly and is motivated to succeed. Some highly competitive roles or very desirable employers use GPA standards as a way to cut down the list of potential employees to consider. These requirements still limit the applicant pool, but clearly are more inclusive.

Reshwan (2016) further noted that most managers or companies, GPA is not a deal-killer. The majority of hiring authorities are satisfied with your achievement of a college degree. So, if the applicants face interview with one of these types of managers, their focus should be on communicating how they have solved problems, been responsible, worked hard and succeeded in the face of life's challenges.

A recent Harris poll conducted on behalf of CareerBuilder asked 3,147 hiring managers and human resource professionals about 'Do Employers Really Care about GPA? The following were revealed: 62% require no minimum GPA; 31% require a 3.0 or above; and 11% require a 3.5 or above (The Pongo Blog, n.d.)

Pearson's correlation was applied to determine the correlation of GPA and chances of being accepted for the job generated the succeeding tables:

Table 3. Correlation of GPA and its effects on chances of being accepted for the job

		Effect on Employment	GPA
Effect on Employment	Pearson Correlation	1	.110
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.355
	N	73	73
GPA	Pearson Correlation	.110	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.355	
	N	73	73

Based on table 3, there is no statistical significant correlation between GPA and chances of acceptance for the job, $r(73) = 0.110$, $p=0.355$, H_{01} is accepted. Respondents perceived that their GPA has no effect on being accepted for the job. It can be concluded that respondents viewed GPA as not the whole indicator to be accepted for the job.

Companies' requirements for their new entry employees

Seetha (2013) indicated that one of the main reasons of low employability among graduates is a lack of soft skills. Also, in the study of Zaharim, et. al. (2011), they argued that soft skills are closely related to skills required in various industries. Having a good degree is not the only requirement for job today, but graduates must be able to market themselves by performing good soft skills as well as technical skills. Robles (2012) found out that corporate recruiters want candidates with soft skills who can add value with soft skills, and also have the ability to make a difference in the workplace.

Soft skills are as important as the hard skills. Soft skills are personal attributes that enhance a person's job performance, interactions and career prospects. How well one interacts with others influences the success of his career. "If you want a job, have technical skills. If you want career, have people skills" (Goswami, 2013). Soft skills are essentially people's skills or personality specific skills. According to Hewitt (2008), these are non-technical, intangible, personality specific skills that determines an individual's strength as leader, listener and negotiator, or as a conflict mediator. Furthermore, soft skills are the traits and abilities of attitude and behavior rather than of knowledge or technical aptitude (Tobin, 2006).

The Mastercard Foundation published article in their website entitled "Bridging the Gap between Job Seekers and Employers: The Al Morad Project in Morocco", authored by Miles & Assouan (2016). They found out that there are large gaps between education systems and the private sector, resulting in a skills mismatch between young job seekers and employers, as well as high youth unemployment rates. The Al Morad project was launched in 2011 to provide high quality technical and transferable skills training for unemployed university graduates and economically disadvantaged youth. The main objective of Al Morad was to improve youth employability in Morocco, while also strengthening ties between the private sector and local universities. After five years, the Al Morad project has provided employment training to more than 2,700 unemployed university graduates, 80 percent of whom were still working at least three months after their job placement.

In relation to Jubail University College, they are also doing the similar thing through a yearly program called 'Program Advisory Council Meeting. Through this meeting consultation, prospective and existing employers assess labour market skills of alumni and suggesting needed skills. By involving stakeholders, such as private and government sectors at the early stages was also fundamental in securing internship and job placements for youth who completed their training.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. JUC alumni are good team players and can blend and work with a team based on the findings. But majority of the respondents' first work are not related to their specialization so that they leave their work.
2. Distance and salary are the deciding factors of respondents to accept or not to accept the job.
3. Respondents viewed GPA as not the whole indicator to be accepted for the job.
4. Companies requires not only technical skills for their applicants and new employees but also soft skills.

Based on the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations are hereby offered:

1. Alumni must accept the job even it's far from their hometown to be able for them to gain experience. By the time they earned work experience, GPA will no longer be an issue.
2. Alumni must learn special skills by attending short-term specialized courses to broaden their knowledge and acquire new skills.
3. The alumni must work hard to raise their GPA for higher chances of getting job in multi-national companies. In case of low GPA, it is completely manageable challenge. It can squeak through by demonstrating that achieved better grades in particular major or in classes related to the job to which applicant is applying.
4. Alumni should improve their soft skills be able to market themselves and show that they have the ability to make a difference in the workplace. Soft skills are as important as the hard skills. It is personal attributes that enhance a person's job performance, interactions and career prospects.
5. A further study is recommended to broaden the scope and address the limitation on this study.

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