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### ASSESSMENT OF PERCEIVED EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS AMONG POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS IN NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

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**ASSESSMENT OF PERCEIVED EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS AMONG  
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**Abstract**

This study examined the perceived employability skills among postgraduate students at the National Open University of Nigeria needed for sustainable development. A survey research design which was guided by five research questions was adopted for the study. The study population comprised of all postgraduate students in the Faculty of Education, with a sample of 306 active students registered for two compulsory courses at the postgraduate diploma and master's levels during the 2022\_1 semester. A structured survey questionnaire, adapted from Tangaro-Delelis (2018), was administered via Google Forms during online facilitation sessions. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and ANOVA with SPSS. Results revealed that NOUN postgraduate students possessed a high level of employability skills, with no significant gender disparity except in fundamental skills. The researcher concluded that effectively deployed Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutions instructional facilitate and strategies paved way for the students' acquisition of the needed employability skills. Hence, adoption of Open Distance Learning (ODL) is strongly recommended for countries yet to do so to provide opportunities not only for education of her citizenry. But, for graduates' acquisition of employability skills for sustainable development.

**Introduction**

The contemporary workplace increasingly demands graduates equipped with robust employability skills, transcending traditional academic qualifications (Tangaro-Delelis, 2018). Employers seek individuals capable of immediate and effective contributions, highlighting the critical role of these skills in professional readiness and career success. These skills, broadly categorized into Fundamental Skills, Personal Management Skills, and Teamwork Skills, are pivotal for navigating dynamic work environments (Tangaro-Delelis, 2018; Conference Board of Canada (CBC, 2002); Patel & Patel, 2020; the American Institutes for Research (AIR, 2015).

Fundamental Skills, encompassing communication, problem-solving, information management, and technology use, provide the bedrock for further development. Personal Management Skills, including adaptability, self-management, continuous learning, and initiative, drive personal and professional growth. Teamwork Skills are essential for productive collaboration and workplace integration. Employability frameworks, such as those from the CBC, 2002 and the AIR, 2015), further categorize these competencies into Applied Knowledge, Effective Relationships, and Workplace Skills (Patel & Patel, 2020). Applied Knowledge includes critical thinking and applied academic skills, Effective Relationships emphasize interpersonal and leadership abilities, and Workplace Skills cover technology use, communication, and resource management. Mastering these competencies—communication, technology proficiency, adaptability, and teamwork—is crucial for postgraduate students to excel in job searches, interviews, and career progression (Tangaro-Delelis, 2018). Embedding these competencies in postgraduate education strengthens workforce readiness, ensuring graduates are prepared for the evolving demands of the labour market. This study assesses perceived employability skills among postgraduate students at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), aiming to identify gaps and opportunities for enhancing their preparedness and strengthening workforce readiness.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The contemporary workforce demands graduates with robust employability skills, yet many graduates lack these competencies, limiting their career prospects (Tangaro-Delelis, 2018). This skills gap, tied to educational quality, fuels high unemployment (Fajaryati et al., 2020). Employers seek individuals capable of immediate and effective contributions. Consequently, educational institutions must prioritize equipping students with both technical and employability skills. This study assesses perceived employability skills among postgraduate students at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), aiming to identify gaps and opportunities for enhancing their preparedness and strengthening workforce readiness.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study aims to examine the perceptions of postgraduate students at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) regarding their employability skills with the following specific objectives:

1. To assess the perceptions of NOUN postgraduate students regarding the fundamental skills for employment necessary for sustainable development.
2. To evaluate the perceptions of NOUN postgraduate students regarding the personal management skills essential for employment and sustainable development.
3. To examine the perceptions of NOUN postgraduate students regarding the teamwork skills required for employment and sustainable development.
4. To determine the overall extent of employability skills possessed by NOUN postgraduate students necessary for sustainable development.
5. To investigate whether there are gender disparities in the level of employability skills possessed by NOUN postgraduate students.

### **Research Questions**

Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the perception of NOUN postgraduate students regarding the fundamental skills for employment needed for sustainable development?
2. What is the perception of NOUN postgraduate students regarding the personal management skills for employment needed for sustainable development?
3. What is the perception of NOUN postgraduate students regarding the teamwork skills for employment needed for sustainable development?
4. What is the overall extent of employability skills possessed by NOUN postgraduate students needed for sustainable development?
5. Is there gender disparity in the level of employability skills possessed by NOUN postgraduate students?

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study conceptualizes employability skills as a crucial blend of knowledge, abilities, and behaviors necessary for career success in today's evolving labour market (Brewer, 2013; Fajaryati et al., 2020). Using Tangaro-Deleli's (2018) classification, we focus on Fundamental Skills (communication, technology use, problem-solving), Personal Management Skills (adaptability, self-management, initiative), and Teamwork Skills (collaboration, productivity). These categories align with established frameworks from the AIR (2015) and the CBC (2002), which emphasize applied knowledge, effective relationships, and workplace skills. This framework guides our

assessment of NOUN postgraduate students' perceived employability skills, aiming to identify gaps and enhance their workforce readiness.

## **Literature Review**

Nigeria's education system faces persistent challenges, including limited access to higher education and a widening employability skills gap among graduates (Omoniwa & Adedapo, 2017; Ancho, 2011). Despite increasing enrollment in universities, employers consistently report deficiencies in critical competencies such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability, and digital literacy, leaving many graduates unprepared for the workforce (Mourshed et al., 2012; Fajaryati et al., 2020). Reports from the National Employers Consultative Association (NECA) and the Nigerian Institute of Personnel Management (NIPM) indicate that while graduates may possess theoretical knowledge, they often lack practical skills required in today's job market. This underscores the urgent need for educational reform aligning curricula with industry demands.

### **The Role of NOUN and Open and Distance Learning in Nigeria**

The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) was established in 1983 as the first dedicated Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institution to expand access to higher education. However, a shift in government policy led to its suspension in 1984, with preference given to conventional universities. NOUN was revived in 2002 and has since played a critical role in addressing Nigeria's higher education access gap (Peters, 2023). Given the limitations of traditional university education—including high costs, capacity constraints, geographical barriers, and quality concerns—alternative learning approaches such as ODL have gained increasing relevance. ODL, particularly through NOUN, provides a flexible, technology-driven educational model that enables learners to study at their own pace while acquiring essential 21st-century skills (Odekunle, 2014). Through online resources, digital classrooms, and multimedia materials, NOUN offers opportunities for working professionals, rural students, and those unable to attend conventional universities to receive a higher education.

### **Employability Challenges and the Skills Gap in Nigerian Graduates**

While NOUN and other ODL institutions have expanded access to education, increased enrollment alone does not guarantee improved learning outcomes or employability. Many Nigerian graduates struggle to translate academic knowledge into practical workplace applications, leading to a mismatch between university education and labor market demands (Finch et al., 2012; Stuckey & Munro, 2013; Boden & Nedeva, 2010; Jackson & Chapman, 2012). Employers frequently cite deficiencies in problem-solving abilities, leadership skills, adaptability, and proficiency in emerging technologies as key concerns. Some researchers argue that graduates do possess employability-related competencies but struggle to articulate them effectively during job applications and interviews (Jackson, 2013; Strachan, 2016; Harrison, 2017). This suggests that, in addition to skill development, universities must incorporate training on self-awareness, career readiness, and competency-based learning to help graduates communicate their abilities more effectively.

#### The Potential of ODL for Enhancing Employability Skills

ODL's learner-centered approach, supported by technology and innovative teaching strategies, holds significant potential for fostering employability skills (Kulal et al., 2023). Compared to traditional education, ODL offers opportunities to develop digital literacy, independent learning habits, time management skills, and the ability to navigate virtual work environments. While in-person learners may initially demonstrate stronger workplace competencies, ODL students benefit from a curriculum emphasizing self-discipline, problem-solving, and adaptability.

#### The Need for Stakeholder Collaboration

Addressing Nigeria's employability crisis requires collaboration among higher education institutions, the private sector, and government agencies. A multi-stakeholder approach is crucial for enhancing job-training programs, increasing access to industry-relevant education, and creating sustainable pathways for student career progression (Omoniwa et al., 2017). By leveraging government policies that promote technical and vocational education, universities can embed work-based learning models into ODL programs, ensuring students gain practical exposure.

Additionally, longitudinal research tracking ODL graduates' career trajectories can provide insights into how different learning models influence workforce readiness. As Nigeria expands

ODL, strategic improvements in pedagogy, stakeholder engagement, and industry collaboration will be crucial in closing the employability gap. By leveraging technology, integrating competency-based curricula, and aligning educational programs with labor market needs, ODL institutions like NOUN can equip graduates with the skills required to thrive in the evolving 21st-century workplace.

## **Methodology**

### ***Participants***

The participants for the study were the focus group of 306 active students who registered for the two compulsory courses at the postgraduate diploma level and the masters' level of the faculty for 2022\_1 semester. These participants had their demographic information as:

- Male: 105 (34.31%)
- Female: 201 (65.69%)
- Total: 306 (100.00%)

### ***Material***

A structured survey questionnaire was adapted from Tangaro-Delelis (2018). The instrument (questionnaire) comprised three sections namely:

- a. Fundamental Skills for Employment (skill tasks).
- b. Personal Management Skills for Employment (25 skill tasks)
- c. Teamwork Skills for Employment (18 skill tasks).

The instrument was revalidated by comparing its content with that provided by the American Institute of Research (2015) in the Self-Assessment Tool. Reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha) yielded a value of 0.978.

### ***Procedure***

The questionnaire was administered to the participants during the first two weeks of 2022\_1 National Open University of Nigeria online facilitation period for the two courses using Google Forms.

### ***Design***

Descriptive survey design aimed to examine NOUN postgraduate students' perception of their employability skills which utilized a questionnaire to gather information and expressions of students' employability skills. The population consists of all postgraduate students of NOUN Faculty of Education.

### ***Data Analysis***

The data collected were tabulated, analyzed, and interpreted using both descriptive and inferential statistics: Rank and Weighted Mean: Responses were tabulated to determine the rank and weighted mean of each skill task, providing a clear overview of the students' perceptions of their employability skills. One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA): ANOVA was used to test for gender disparities in the level of employability skills among NOUN postgraduate students. This statistical method was used to determine if there were any significant differences in the mean scores of male and female students' perceptions of their employability skills. These analyses ensured that the study's objectives were met and provided valuable insights into the employability skills of NOUN postgraduate students, thereby addressing the stated problem of the study.

### **Results**

Research Question 1: Perception of Fundamental Skills for Employment

*What is the perception of NOUN postgraduate students regarding the fundamental skills for employment needed for sustainable development?*

The study analyzed the perceptions of NOUN postgraduate students regarding the fundamental skills for employment needed for sustainable development. Table 1 summarizes the item mean, standard deviation, descriptive value, and rank for each skill category.

**Table 1**  
Mean, Standard Deviation, Descriptive Value, and Rank of Fundamental Skills for Employment Among NOUN Postgraduate Students

Skill Category	Item	Participants	Mean	Standard Deviation	Descriptive Value	Rank
<b>Communicating Skills</b>	Can read independently and understand information presented in various forms	306	4.5065	0.63372	Excellent	2
	Can speak effectively to gain attention and understanding	306	4.5654	0.61456	Excellent	1
	Can write to meet audience needs	306	4.3627	0.74819	Good	5



Skill Category	Item	Participants	Mean	Standard Deviation	Descriptive Value	Rank
	Can listen and ask questions to appreciate others' viewpoints	306	4.5000	0.59644	Excellent	3
	Can share information using ICT	306	4.3987	0.70910	Good	4
	Can use scientific, technological, and mathematical knowledge to clarify ideas	306	4.1144	0.83174	Good	7
	Can persuade and negotiate effectively	306	4.3464	0.69490	Good	6
	<b>Overall Mean</b>		4.4010	0.51987	Good	
<b>Managing Information and Technology</b>	Locate, gather, and organize information using technology	306	4.3595	0.67376	Good	2
	Access, analyze, and apply knowledge from various disciplines	306	4.2353	0.72215	Good	4
	Identify and use appropriate tools and solutions	306	4.1601	0.74911	Good	5
	Operate tools and equipment according to safety standards	306	4.2386	0.72786	Good	3
	Seek opportunities to improve knowledge of tools and technologies	306	4.3725	0.73223	Good	1
	<b>Overall Mean</b>		4.2732	0.59671	Good	
<b>Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills</b>	Assess situations, identify problems, and develop practical solutions	306	4.3693	0.63574	Good	5
	Seek different viewpoints and evaluate based on facts	306	4.3954	0.62503	Good	1
	Recognize the technical and mathematical dimensions of a problem	306	4.1275	0.76400	Good	9
	Identify the root cause of a problem	306	4.2516	0.71431	Good	8
	Demonstrate creativity and innovation in solutions	306	4.3268	0.64610	Good	6
	Use science and mathematics to gain knowledge and solve problems	306	4.1111	0.78557	Good	10
	Evaluate solutions and make decisions	306	4.3889	0.67441	Good	3
	Implement solutions	306	4.3954	0.66568	Good	1
	Check solutions and act on opportunities for improvement	306	4.3856	0.65910	Good	4
	Solve customer concerns in complex projects	306	4.2680	0.75969	Good	7
	<b>Overall Mean</b>		4.3020	0.54375	Good	
<b>Overall Fundamental Skills</b>			4.3248	0.48739	Good	

*Note.* "Participants" refers to the number of postgraduate students from NOUN who participated in the study. Descriptive values are interpreted based on predetermined criteria.

#### Communicating Skills

The ability to speak effectively was the highest-rated skill (mean: 4.5654), categorized as "Excellent." Skills related to reading, writing, listening, and sharing information also received high ratings. Overall, participants demonstrated good competence in communicating skills, with a mean score of 4.4010.

#### Managing Information and Working with Tools and Technology Skills

The most highly rated skill was seeking opportunities to improve knowledge of tools and technologies (mean: 4.3725), categorized as "Good." Participants also exhibited good competence in using technology, analyzing knowledge, and operating tools. The overall mean for this skill category was 4.2732, indicating positive perceptions.

#### Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills

The ability to seek different points of view and evaluate them based on facts received the highest rating in this category (mean: 4.3954, "Good"). Other skills, such as assessing situations, identifying problems, and evaluating solutions, were also rated positively. The overall mean for this category was 4.3020.

The overall mean score for all fundamental skills was 4.3248 ("Good"), indicating that NOUN postgraduate students perceive themselves as having a good level of fundamental skills for employment, essential for sustainable development.

### Research Question 2: Perception of Personal Management Skills for Employment

**What is the perception of NOUN postgraduate students regarding the personal management skills for employment needed for sustainable development?**

**Table 2**

Mean, Standard Deviation, Descriptive Value, and Rank Distribution of NOUN Postgraduate Students' Perception of Personal Management Skills

Skill Category and Items	N	Item Mean	Std. Deviation	Descriptive Value	Rank
<b>Demonstrating Positive Attitude and Behavior Skills</b>					
I feel good about self and I am confident	306	4.6307	.54101	Excellent	2
I can deal with people, problems, and situations with honesty, integrity, and personal ethics.	306	4.6405	.52622	Excellent	1
I can recognize own and other people's good efforts.	306	4.6176	.51935	Excellent	3
I can take care of personal health.	306	4.5588	.57671	Excellent	5
I can show interest, initiative, and effort.	306	4.5882	.53750	Excellent	4
<b>Category Mean</b>	306	4.5984	.41492	Excellent	
<b>Self-Management and Being Adaptable Skills</b>					
I can work independently and as part of a team.	306	4.5719	.59207	Excellent	2
I can carry out multiple tasks or projects.	306	4.3464	.69960	Good	7
I am innovative and resourceful, and can identify and suggest alternative ways to achieve goals.	306	4.4412	.60447	Good	5
I am open and can respond constructively to change.	306	4.4608	.60606	Good	4
I can learn from my mistakes and accept feedback.	306	4.5980	.54790	Excellent	1
I can cope with uncertainty.	306	4.1275	.80170	Good	8
I have knowledge and confidence in my ideas and vision.	306	4.4935	.60730	Good	3
I can evaluate and monitor my performance.	306	4.3954	.65575	Good	6
<b>Category Mean</b>	306	4.4098	.48691	Good	
<b>Learning Continuously Skills</b>					
I am willing to continuously learn and grow.	306	4.7810	.42975	Excellent	1
I have enthusiasm for ongoing learning.	306	4.7222	.47697	Excellent	2
I can assess personal strengths and areas for development.	306	4.5327	.58442	Excellent	6
I can set own learning goals.	306	4.5523	.56587	Excellent	5
I can identify and access learning sources and opportunities.	306	4.5163	.57948	Excellent	7
I can plan for and achieve own learning goals.	306	4.5588	.54153	Excellent	4
I can acknowledge the need to learn to accommodate change.	306	4.6699	.51744	Excellent	3
<b>Category Mean</b>	306	4.6229	.42116	Excellent	
<b>Initiative and Enterprise Skills</b>					
I can translate new ideas into action.	306	4.4641	.58982	Good	2
I can identify opportunities not obvious to others.	306	4.3137	.63215	Good	4
I can adapt to new situations.	306	4.5556	.54187	Excellent	1
I can generate a range of options.	306	4.3007	.63334	Good	5
I can initiate innovative solutions.	306	4.3791	.61678	Good	3
<b>Category Mean</b>	306	4.4026	.48342	Good	
<b>Overall Personal Management Skills</b>	306	4.5176	.38694	Excellent	

*Note.* "N" refers to the number of participants (306 NOUN postgraduate students) involved in the study. Descriptive values are interpreted based on predetermined criteria for each skill category.

The perception of NOUN postgraduate students on personal management skills for employment was overwhelmingly positive. The **overall mean of 4.5176** and descriptive value of **Excellent** indicate strong confidence in their personal management skills, which are crucial for sustainable

development. The most highly rated skills were in **Demonstrating Positive Attitude and Behavior** and **Learning Continuously**, while **Self-Management** and **Initiative and Enterprise Skills** also showed strong results, though with slightly lower mean scores.

### Research Question 3: Perception of Teamwork Skills for Employment

*What is the perception of NOUN postgraduate students regarding the teamwork skills for employment needed for sustainable development?*

Table 3

#### Item Mean, Standard Deviation, Descriptive Value, and Rank Distribution of the NOUN Postgraduate Students' Perception with Regard to Teamwork Skills

a. Working with Others Skills	No. of Participants	Item Mean	Std. Deviation	Descriptive Value	Rank
I can understand and work within the dynamics of a group.	306	4.5000	0.57971	Excellent	6
I can ensure that a team's purpose and objectives are clear.	306	4.4869	0.61257	Good	8
I am flexible and try to respect, be open to, and supportive of the thoughts, opinions, and contributions of others in a group.	306	4.5425	0.57815	Excellent	4
I can recognize and respect people's diversity, individual differences, and perspectives.	306	4.5556	0.57703	Excellent	3
I can accept and provide feedback in a constructive and considerate manner.	306	4.4869	0.57956	Good	8
I can contribute to a team by sharing information and expertise.	306	4.5654	0.54680	Excellent	2
I can lead or support when appropriate, motivating a group for high performance.	306	4.5359	0.56133	Excellent	5
I can understand the role of conflict in a group to reach solutions.	306	4.4444	0.58829	Good	10
I can manage and resolve conflict when appropriate.	306	4.4935	0.56245	Good	7
I can contribute to productive working relationship outcomes.	306	4.5980	0.52342	Excellent	1
<b>Overall: Working with Others</b>	<b>306</b>	<b>4.5209</b>	<b>0.44994</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	
b. Participating in Projects and Tasks Skills	No. of Participants	Item Mean	Std. Deviation	Descriptive Value	Rank
I can plan, design, or carry out a project or task from start to finish with well-defined objectives and outcomes.	306	4.3301	0.63675	Good	5
I can develop a plan, seek feedback, test, revise, and implement.	306	4.3105	0.64148	Good	6

<b>b. Participating in Projects and Tasks Skills</b>	<b>No. of Participants</b>	<b>Item Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Descriptive Value</b>	<b>Rank</b>
I can work to agreed-upon quality standards and specifications.	306	4.3725	0.62076	Good	2
I can select and use appropriate tools and technology for a task or project.	306	4.3464	0.67090	Good	4
I can adapt to changing requirements and information.	306	4.3758	0.64727	Good	1
I can manage time and priorities – set timelines, coordinate tasks.	306	4.3497	0.64677	Good	3
I can establish clear project goals and deliverables.	306	4.2876	0.68399	Good	7
I can understand basic business systems and their relationships.	306	4.1863	0.71605	Good	8
<b>Overall: Participating in Projects and Tasks</b>	<b>306</b>	<b>4.3284</b>	<b>0.51299</b>	<b>Good</b>	
<b>Overall: Teamwork Skills for Employment</b>					
	306	4.4278	0.43500	Good	

## Key Findings

### a. Working with Others Skills:

- The descriptive values for this category skewed toward "Excellent."
- Six items received excellent mean values ranging from **4.5000** to **4.5980**, with the highest being: *"I can contribute to productive working relationship outcomes"* (**M = 4.5980, SD = 0.52342**).
- The lowest mean value (**M = 4.4444, SD = 0.58829**) was for the item: *"I can understand the role of conflict in a group to reach solutions"*, with a descriptive value of "Good."

### b. Participating in Projects and Tasks Skills:

- All items in this category received a "Good" descriptive value.
- The highest mean value (**M = 4.3758, SD = 0.64727**) was for the item: *"I can adapt to changing requirements and information."*
- The lowest mean value (**M = 4.1863, SD = 0.71605**) was for the item: *"I can understand basic business systems and their relationships."*

**Overall**, the findings indicate a positive perception of teamwork skills among NOUN postgraduate students, particularly in areas related to contributing to productive relationships, adapting to change, and understanding group dynamics. The overall teamwork skills mean of **4.4278** of these competencies are essential for sustainable development in employment contexts.

**Research Question 4:** Employability Skills for Sustainable Development Among NOUN Postgraduate Students

*What is the overall extent of employability skills possessed by NOUN postgraduate students needed for sustainable development?*

Table 5  
Item Mean, Standard Deviation, Descriptive Value, and Rank Distribution of NOUN Postgraduate Students' Employability Skills

Skills Category	No. of Participants	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Descriptive Value	Rank
<b>a. Fundamental Skills</b>						
	306	Communicating Skills	4.4010	.51987	Good	1
	306	Managing Information and Working with Tools/Tech	4.2732	.59671	Good	3
	306	Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills	4.3020	.54375	Good	2
<b>Overall Fundamental Skills</b>	306		4.3248	.48739	Good	
<b>b. Personal Management Skills</b>						
	306	Demonstrating Positive Attitude and Behavior	4.5984	.41492	Excellent	2
	306	Self-Management and Adaptability	4.4098	.48691	Good	3
	306	Learning Continuously	4.6229	.42116	Excellent	1
	306	Initiative and Enterprise	4.4026	.48342	Good	4
<b>Overall Personal Management</b>	306		4.5176	.38694	Excellent	
<b>c. Teamwork Skills</b>						
	306	Working with Others	4.5209	.44994	Excellent	1
	306	Participating in Projects and Tasks	4.3284	.51299	Good	2
<b>Overall Teamwork Skills</b>	306		4.4278	.43500	Good	
<b>Overall Employability Skills</b>	306		4.4301	.40933	Good	

*Note.* "No. of Participants" refers to the total number of participants (306 NOUN postgraduate students) in the study. Descriptive values are based on predetermined criteria for each skills category.

The summary of the results based on the analysis revealed the following key insights regarding employability skills among NOUN postgraduate students:

### **1. Fundamental Skills for Employment**

- Communication skills were the strongest (mean = 4.4010), while managing information and working with tools/technology scored the lowest (mean = 4.2732).
- Overall, fundamental skills were rated as “Good” (mean = 4.3248).

### **2. Personal Management Skills for Employment**

- Continuous learning skills scored highest (mean = 4.6229), followed by a positive attitude and behavior (mean = 4.5984).
- Initiative and enterprise were rated lower but still “Good” (mean = 4.4026).
- Overall, personal management skills were rated as “Excellent” (mean = 4.5176).

### **3. Teamwork Skills for Employment**

- “Working with others” was the top-rated skill in this category (mean = 4.5209), achieving an “Excellent” rating.
- The overall teamwork skills were rated as “Good” (mean = 4.4278).

The findings suggest that NOUN postgraduate students possess strong employability skills, with personal management being the most highly rated category. These skills, particularly in communication, teamwork, and lifelong learning, are critical for their employability and ability to contribute to sustainable development.

Research Question 5: Gender and Employability Skills

*Is there gender disparity in the level of employability skills possessed by NOUN postgraduate students?*

Table 5

**Descriptive Statistics for Employability Skills by Gender**

Skills Category	Gender	n	M	SD	Descriptive Value	Rank
Fundamental Skills for Employment	Male	105	4.41	0.48	Good	6
	Female	201	4.28	0.49	Good	8
	Total	306	4.32	0.49	Good	2
Personal Management Skills for Employment	Male	105	4.53	0.41	Excellent	1
	Female	201	4.51	0.37	Excellent	2
	Total	306	4.52	0.39	Excellent	1
Teamwork Skills for Employment	Male	105	4.47	0.43	Good	4
	Female	201	4.41	0.44	Good	5
	Total	306	4.43	0.44	Good	4
Overall Employability Skills	Male	105	4.48	0.42	Good	3
	Female	201	4.41	0.40	Good	7
	Total	306	4.43	0.41	Good	3

The analysis of Table 5 revealed the following:

- Fundamental Skills for Employment**

- Male students had a higher mean score ( $M = 4.41$ ) compared to female students ( $M = 4.28$ ), with both rated as "Good."
- The ANOVA result showed a significant difference in perceptions between genders ( $p < .05$ ).

- Personal Management Skills for Employment**

- Both male ( $M = 4.53$ ) and female ( $M = 4.51$ ) students rated their personal management skills as "Excellent."
- No significant gender difference was found ( $p > .05$ ).

- Teamwork Skills for Employment**

- Male students had a slightly higher mean score ( $M = 4.47$ ) compared to female students ( $M = 4.41$ ), with both rated as "Good."
- No significant gender difference was found ( $p > .05$ ).

- Overall Employability Skills**

- Male students scored higher overall ( $M = 4.48$ ) than female students ( $M = 4.41$ ), with both rated as "Good."
- The ANOVA result showed no significant gender disparity ( $p > .05$ ).



**Table 6**

One-Way ANOVA Results for Employability Skills by Gender

Skills Category	Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.	Decision
<b>Fundamental Skills for Employment</b>	Between Groups	1.23	1	1.23	5.23	.023	Significant
	Within Groups	71.23	304	0.23			
<b>Personal Management Skills for Employment</b>	Between Groups	0.04	1	0.04	0.23	.631	Not Significant
	Within Groups	45.63	304	0.15			
<b>Teamwork Skills for Employment</b>	Between Groups	0.24	1	0.24	1.28	.259	Not Significant
	Within Groups	57.47	304	0.19			
<b>Overall Employability Skills</b>	Between Groups	0.37	1	0.37	2.21	.138	Not Significant
	Within Groups	50.74	304	0.17			

*Note.* SS = Sum of Squares; df = Degrees of Freedom; MS = Mean Square; F = F-value; Sig. = Significance level. A significant decision was made based on the  $p$  value threshold of 0.05.

Although male students slightly outperformed female students in all skill categories, significant gender disparity was found only in **Fundamental Skills for Employment** ( $p < .05$ ). Overall, both genders rated their employability skills positively, highlighting their readiness for sustainable development.

## Discussion of Results

### Fundamental Skills for Employment

The discussion highlights the proficiency of NOUN postgraduate students in fundamental skills for employment, emphasizing their strengths in communication, managing information, and utilizing tools and technology, feeling "good" about their skills in these areas. They excel at seeking opportunities to improve their knowledge of tools and technology but struggle with selecting and using appropriate technological solutions for problems. However, they require further guidance in applying scientific, technological, and mathematical knowledge to problem-solving and decision-making.

### Personal Management Skills

In personal management skills, students show positive attitudes and behaviors, dealing with people and problems ethically, but they are less effective at managing personal health. They exhibit self-management and adaptability, with potential for exploration and continuous learning, though they

need guidance in coping with uncertainty and identifying learning opportunities. They are adaptable but require more support in generating options and taking initiative.

#### Teamwork Skills

Teamwork skills are evident as students contribute to productive working relationships but need better understanding of conflict resolution within groups. They can adapt to changing requirements in projects but require more attention to understand basic business systems and their relationships. Overall, the students are lifelong learners who can adapt to new situations but require further instruction to fully harness their potential in various skill areas.

#### Conclusion and Recommendations

The study shows that NOUN postgraduate students are well-prepared with employability skills. The Open Distance Learning (ODL) effectively equips them with employability skills. They demonstrate good fundamental skills, excellent personal management skills, and good teamwork skills without gender-based differences in employability skills. Therefore, the open and distance learning (ODL) model effectively imparts essential employability skills and promotes 21st-century competencies. Hence, the NOUN postgraduate students are well-positioned to contribute to sustainable development goals and do not face disadvantages as distance learners.

The following recommends are made based on the outcomes of the study:

1. Adoption of ODL for graduate sustainable development is advocated for countries not yet utilizing it.
2. Employers should prioritize employability skills over degree designation or university reputation.
3. Further studies comparing employability skills levels between conventional and ODL systems should be conducted to support sustainable development goals.

ODL institutions and indeed all tertiary institutions should regularly update their curricula to meet sustainable development goals.

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