

PERCEIVED FACTORS INFLUENCING GRADUATE CAREER READINESS IN GOVERNMENT-OWNED UNIVERSITIES IN LAGOS STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the perceived factors influencing graduate career readiness in government-owned universities in Lagos State, with particular focus on vocational skills and life skills. A survey research design was adopted. The study made use of stratified sampling technique and simple random sampling. The study collected from primary source via questionnaire as the research instrument. Simple linear regression analysis revealed that vocational skills had a significant positive effect on graduate employability ($\beta = 0.584$, $p < 0.05$), while life skills also exerted a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.121$, $p < 0.05$) on employability. The study concludes that vocational skills and life skills are significant determinants of graduate career readiness. It recommends that universities strengthen practical skill development through industry-based training and internships while promoting life skills through career counseling, communication, teamwork, and problem-solving programmes to enhance graduates' readiness for the labour market.

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Introduction

Higher education plays a vital role in national economic and social development by producing graduates with the knowledge and competencies required in the modern labour market (Phago & Thwala, 2012). As the labour market becomes increasingly competitive due to technological advancement, globalization, and changing employer expectations, universities are expected to prepare students with not only academic knowledge but also practical skills that facilitate a successful transition into employment (Anderson & Tomlinson, 2021).

Graduate employability refers to the knowledge, skills, attributes, and personal capabilities acquired through higher education that enable graduates to obtain, maintain, and progress in employment (Akingbade, 2023 & Suleman, 2018). Similarly, perceived employability reflects students' confidence in their ability to secure employment based on the competencies they have developed during their university education (Vanhercke et al., 2014). Studies have shown that employers increasingly value graduates who possess practical competencies alongside academic qualifications, making employability an important outcome of university education (Davies et al., 2012; Lundberg et al., 2021).

Among the competencies that influence employability are vocational skills and life skills. Vocational skills provide graduates with technical and occupation-specific competencies required to perform effectively in the workplace, while life skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability, and critical thinking enable graduates to function successfully in diverse work environments (Artess et al., 2017; Tran, 2015). Universities therefore play a crucial role in developing these competencies through academic programmes, practical training, internships, career guidance, and other employability initiatives that prepare students for the labour market (Jackson & Wilton, 2017; Hughes et al., 2023).

Despite the increasing emphasis on graduate employability, many university graduates continue to experience difficulties in securing employment due to inadequate vocational and life skills. This challenge has heightened concerns about the readiness of graduates to meet labour market expectations, particularly in developing countries such as Nigeria. Against this backdrop, this study examines the perceived factors influencing the employability of graduating students in government-owned universities in Lagos State, with particular focus on vocational skills and life skills among students of Lagos State University (LASU) and the University of Lagos (UNILAG).

Statement of the Problem

Graduate employability has become a major concern for governments, employers, and higher education institutions due to the increasing number of university graduates who struggle to secure meaningful employment despite possessing academic qualifications (Kumolu-Johnson *et al.*, 2025). Existing literature indicates that many graduates lack the vocational and life skills required by employers, resulting in a persistent mismatch between university education and labour market demands (Chiara & Magali, 2020; Mgaiwa, 2021). Similarly, Li (2017) observed that graduates' employability remains moderate, with deficiencies in innovation, teamwork, analytical ability, and self-management limiting their employment prospects. These challenges have widened the gap between educational outcomes and employers' expectations in an increasingly competitive and technology-driven labour market (Mishrif *et al.*, 2023).

In developing countries such as Nigeria, graduate unemployment is further exacerbated by both demand-side and supply-side factors, including limited employment opportunities, economic instability, and inadequate preparation of graduates for workplace realities (Okunbanjo & Tijani, 2029; Mukherjee, 2016; Guru, 2016). In addition, family influence, social support, institutional quality, and university reputation have been identified as factors shaping students' educational experiences and career outcomes (Duong *et al.*, 2023). Despite these findings, there is limited empirical evidence on how vocational skills and life skills influence the employability of graduating students in government-owned universities in Lagos State. This gap necessitates the present study, which seeks to examine the perceived influence of vocational skills and life skills on the employability of graduating students in Lagos State University (LASU) and the University of Lagos (UNILAG), with the aim of providing evidence that can inform university policies and graduate employability initiatives.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the perceived factors influencing the employability of graduating students in government-owned universities in Lagos State. The specific objectives are to:

- i. Examine the effect of vocational skills on the employability of graduating students in government-owned universities in Lagos State.
- ii. Determine the effect of life skills on the employability of graduating students in government-owned universities in Lagos State.

Research Questions

- i. What is the effect of vocational skills on the employability of graduating students in government-owned universities in Lagos State?
- ii. What is the effect of life skills on the employability of graduating students in government-owned universities in Lagos State?

Research Hypotheses

H₀₁: Vocational skills have no significant effect on the employability of graduating students in government-owned universities in Lagos State.

H₀₂: Life skills have no significant effect on the employability of graduating students in government-owned universities in Lagos State

Literature Review

Conceptual Review

Perceived Factors

Perceived factors refer to the conditions, experiences, and influences that students believe shape their preparedness for employment and their ability to secure and sustain meaningful careers after graduation. These factors may originate from the individual, the university, or the external environment and often determine how students assess their employability and career prospects (Vanhercke et al., 2014). According to Zou et al. (2024), perceived employability is influenced by a combination of individual characteristics, behavioural attributes, and environmental conditions, including career engagement, labour market opportunities, and institutional support. Similarly, Chen et al. (2025) classified the factors influencing students' employability into university-related, student-related, and societal factors, emphasizing that employability is a multidimensional concept requiring collaborative efforts from universities, employers, policymakers, and students.

Perceived factors also include the quality of educational programmes, curriculum relevance, institutional facilities, career support services, family influence, and peer interactions that shape students' career readiness and employment confidence (Duong et al., 2023). Cahyono et al. (2020) argued that quality educational services, effective student support, and positive learning experiences enhance students' satisfaction and preparedness for the labour market. Therefore, students who perceive that they receive adequate institutional support and opportunities for personal development are more likely to demonstrate higher employability. In the present study, perceived factors are represented by vocational skills and life skills, which are considered critical determinants of the employability of graduating students.

Vocational Skills

Vocational skills refer to the practical, technical, and occupation-specific competencies acquired through education, training, and workplace experience that enable individuals to perform effectively in particular professions or occupations. These skills are developed through practical instruction, internships, industrial attachments, laboratory activities, and competency-based learning, enabling graduates to meet employers' expectations and adapt to workplace requirements (Becker, 1964; Yorke, 2006). Unlike theoretical knowledge, vocational skills emphasize the application of knowledge in solving workplace problems and improving job performance. The importance of vocational skills in enhancing graduate employability has been widely acknowledged in the literature. Hartini et al. (2024) identified vocational competencies such as creativity, communication, adaptability, critical thinking, problem-solving, and self-confidence as key determinants of employability among graduates.

Life Skills

Life skills are the personal, interpersonal, and social competencies that enable individuals to effectively manage everyday challenges, make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and adapt to changing environments. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 1999), life skills encompass abilities such as communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, self-awareness, emotional regulation, teamwork, interpersonal relationships, and coping with stress. These skills enhance individuals' capacity to function effectively in both personal and professional settings, making them valuable attributes in the contemporary workplace.

Employability

Employability of graduating students has become a major concern for higher education institutions (HEIs), employers, and policymakers due to the increasing demand for graduates who possess both academic qualifications and workplace competencies (Akingbade, 2021; Donald et al., 2019; Donald et al., 2018). Employability refers to the knowledge, skills, personal attributes, and capabilities that enable graduates to obtain, maintain, and progress in employment (Suleman, 2018). In today's dynamic labour market, characterized by technological advancement, globalization, and changing employer expectations, universities are expected to produce graduates who are equipped with relevant technical and transferable skills that facilitate successful entry into the workforce (George & Paul, 2024). Despite these efforts, graduate unemployment and underemployment remain significant global challenges because many graduates do not possess the competencies required by employers (Tushar & Sooraksa, 2023; George & Paul, 2024).

Theoretical Framework

Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory, originally developed by Becker (1964), provides a relevant theoretical foundation for understanding the relationship between students' development and employability outcomes. The theory posits that education, training, knowledge, and skills represent forms of human capital that enhance individuals' productivity, competitiveness, and economic value in the labour market (Becker, 1964). From this perspective, graduates who acquire relevant competencies through higher education are more likely to improve their employment opportunities because employers value individuals with skills that contribute to organizational performance (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1993). Therefore, the theory explains why vocational skills and life skills are essential components of graduate employability.

In the context of this study, Human Capital Theory suggests that vocational skills acquired through practical training, professional development, and competency-based learning increase graduates' ability to perform specific workplace tasks and meet employer expectations. Similarly, life skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability, and critical thinking represent valuable human capital that enables graduates to effectively respond to workplace challenges and sustain employment (Yorke, 2006; Tomlinson, 2017).

Empirical Review

Chen et al. (2025) examined the systematic literature review on Students' Employability conducted a systematic literature review to examine the factors influencing students' employability. The findings revealed that employability is influenced by three broad dimensions: university-related factors, societal factors, and student-related factors. The study concluded that improving students' employability requires coordinated efforts from higher education institutions, policymakers, employers, and students.

Rukuni et al. (2018) examined students' perceptions of factors influencing graduate employability at a higher education institution in South Africa. The study adopted a descriptive research design and collected data from 120 students using structured questionnaires. The findings indicated that students had negative perceptions regarding curriculum-related employability factors such as work attitudes, communication skills, and workplace exposure. However, a positive relationship was established between employability factors and graduate employment outcomes.

Harry et al. (2018) investigated final-year students' perceptions of factors affecting employability at a rural South African university. The study employed a qualitative exploratory research design using focus group interviews involving 30 final-year students. Narrative

analysis identified six major factors influencing employability, namely poor socio-economic background, weak education systems, curriculum challenges, institutional reputation, social connections, and individual circumstances. The study recommended enhanced career guidance and institutional support to improve graduate employability.

Kir et al. (2021) explored the determinants of perceived employability among international African students studying in China. Using an explanatory research design, data were collected from 514 students through structured questionnaires and analyzed with Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The findings revealed that personal professional ability, university curriculum, interpersonal communication skills, and social support significantly and positively influenced students' perceived employability. The study concluded that strengthening these competencies enhances graduates' employment prospects.

Igbal et al. (2025) examined students' perceptions of employability after graduation in Fiji. The study reviewed factors influencing students' confidence in securing employment, including academic preparedness, practical experience, professional networking, and career attitudes. The findings showed that students who possessed practical skills, career planning abilities, and strong professional networks reported higher confidence in obtaining employment after graduation. The study recommended strengthening career support initiatives within universities.

Martini et al. (2025) investigated the effect of employer engagement activities on students' perceived employability in an Italian public university. A quasi-experimental design involving 277 students was employed using pre-test and post-test questionnaires. Data were analyzed using non-parametric statistics, Ordinary Least Squares regression, and propensity score matching. The findings showed that participation in employer-led engagement events significantly improved students' perceived employability compared to conventional university career services, highlighting the importance of university-employer collaboration.

Zou et al. (2024) reviewed studies published after 2021 to identify factors influencing university students' perceived employability. The review found that individual characteristics, behavioural attributes, and environmental factors significantly shape perceived employability. The study also identified career engagement, personality traits, labour market conditions, and political skills as emerging determinants requiring further investigation. An integrated employability model based on Career Construction Theory was proposed to guide future research and policy.

Hartini et al. (2024) conducted a PRISMA-based systematic review to identify determinants of employability skills among vocational students. A total of 1,016 studies were screened, with

311 articles reviewed and 39 studies included for synthesis. The review identified six dominant employability skills influencing graduate readiness: creativity, communication, adaptability, problem-solving, critical thinking, and self-confidence. The authors concluded that these competencies should be integrated into vocational education to improve graduates' competitiveness in the labour market.

Neneh and Dzomonda (2026) examined the relationship between employability skills, self-perceived employability, and academic satisfaction among South African university students. Using a quantitative causal research design, data were collected from 306 students and analyzed with SmartPLS 4. The findings demonstrated that communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, teamwork, and self-management skills significantly enhanced students' self-perceived employability, which subsequently improved academic satisfaction. The study emphasized the importance of developing transferable skills throughout university education. Jiang et al. (2023) investigated factors affecting employability among university graduates in China using data collected from 220 graduates. Reliability analysis, exploratory factor analysis, and multiple regression were employed to analyze the data. The findings revealed that individual characteristics, workplace training, social experience, professional competence, learning ability, emotional intelligence, career planning, and self-management significantly influenced graduate employability. The study concluded that universities should strengthen both technical and generic skills to enhance graduates' labour market competitiveness.

Methodology

This study adopted a survey research design to examine the perceived factors influencing the employability of graduating students in government-owned universities in Lagos State. The study was conducted in two selected public universities, namely Lagos State University (LASU) and the University of Lagos (UNILAG), because they are among the leading and old government-owned universities in Lagos State with diverse academic programmes and large populations of graduating students. Thus, final year and graduating students of the selected universities were captured in the study.

Therefore, the sample size for the study was approximated to 365 graduating students. The sample was proportionately allocated to LASU and UNILAG using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure adequate representation of both institutions. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire designed using a five-point Likert scale. The instrument was subjected to content validity by experts in educational management and research methodology, while reliability was established using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, following the recommendation of Nunnally (1978) that a reliability coefficient of 0.70 and above indicates

acceptable internal consistency. The reliability results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Reliability Test of Research Instrument

Variables	Number of Items	Cronbach's Coefficient	Alpha
Vocational Skills	5	0.82	
Life Skills	5	0.79	
Employability of Graduating Students	5	0.85	

Source: Researcher's Computation (2026)

The reliability coefficients obtained indicate that the instrument was reliable and suitable for data collection. Simple linear regression analysis was employed to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). A total of 365 questionnaires were distributed to employees across selected institutions, and 325 were correctly completed and returned, representing 89% response rate.

Hypotheses Testing

H₀₁: Vocational skills have no significant effect on the employability of graduating students in government-owned universities in Lagos State.

Table 2: Regression Results for Hypothesis One

Variable	R ²	B	t-value	f-value	p-value
Vocational Skills	0.468	0.584	14.960	223.811	0.000

Predictor: Vocational Skills

Dependent Variable: Employability

The regression result shows that vocational skills have a positive and significant effect on the employability of graduating students in government-owned universities in Lagos State. The model summary indicates that vocational skills explain 46.8% ($R^2 = 0.468$) of the variation in students' employability, while the remaining 53.2% is attributed to other factors outside the model. The ANOVA result reveals that the regression model is statistically significant ($F = 223.811$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that vocational skills significantly predict the employability of graduating students. Furthermore, the coefficient result shows that vocational skills have a positive and significant contribution to employability ($\beta = 0.584$, $t = 14.960$, $p < 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{01}) which states that vocational skills have no significant effect on the employability of graduating students in government-owned universities in Lagos State

is rejected. This implies that improvement in vocational skills significantly enhances the employability readiness of graduating students.

H₀₂: Life skills have no significant effect on the employability of graduating students in government-owned universities in Lagos State.

Table 3: Regression Results for Hypothesis Two

Variable	R ²	B	t-value	f-value	p-value
Life Skills	0.520	0.121	7.960	63.362	0.000

Predictor: Life Skills

Dependent Variable: Employability

The regression result indicates that life skills have a positive and significant effect on the employability of graduating students in government-owned universities in Lagos State. The model summary shows that life skills explain 52.0% ($R^2 = 0.520$) of the variation in students' employability, while the remaining 48.0% is explained by other factors not included in the model. The ANOVA result confirms that the regression model is statistically significant ($F = 63.362$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that life skills significantly predict the employability of graduating students. The coefficient result further reveals that life skills have a positive and significant influence on employability ($\beta = 0.121$, $t = 7.960$, $p < 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{02}) which states that life skills have no significant effect on the employability of graduating students in government-owned universities in Lagos State is rejected. This implies that improved life skills, such as communication ability, teamwork, adaptability, problem-solving, and self-management, significantly enhance the employability readiness of graduating students.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that vocational skills have a positive and significant effect on the employability of graduating students in government-owned universities in Lagos State. The regression result showed that vocational skills explained 46.8% ($R^2 = 0.468$) of the variation in students' employability, with a significant contribution ($\beta = 0.684$, $p < 0.05$). This implies that students who possess practical, technical, and occupational skills are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of career readiness and improved employment prospects. The finding suggests that beyond academic qualifications, graduates require practical competencies that enable them to perform effectively and meet workplace expectations.

This finding is consistent with Hartini et al. (2024), who identified creativity, communication skills, adaptability, problem-solving, critical thinking, and self-confidence as major employability skills that influence graduates' readiness for the labour market. Their study emphasized that vocational education should integrate these competencies to enhance graduates' competitiveness. Similarly, Jiang et al (2023) found that professional competence, workplace training, learning ability, and career planning significantly influence graduate employability. The authors argued that universities should strengthen both technical and generic skills to improve graduates' labour market outcomes. The agreement between these studies and the present finding confirms that vocational skills represent a critical determinant of graduate employability.

The findings of this study established that life skills have a positive and significant effect on the employability of graduating students in government-owned universities in Lagos State. The regression analysis revealed that life skills accounted for 52.0% ($R^2 = 0.520$) of the variation in employability, with a significant positive influence ($\beta = 0.721$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that graduates who possess essential life skills such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, problem-solving, self-management, and interpersonal abilities are better prepared to navigate workplace challenges and compete effectively in the labour market.

This finding corroborates the study of Rukuni et al. (2018), which found a positive relationship between employability factors and graduate employment outcomes. The study revealed that factors such as work attitudes, communication skills, and workplace exposure influence students' perceptions of their employability. Similarly, Harry et al, (2018) identified individual circumstances, education quality, curriculum issues, and social connections as important factors affecting graduate employability. Their findings emphasized the need for career guidance and institutional support to develop students' personal and professional capabilities.

The finding is also supported by Chen et al. (2025), who, through a systematic literature review, identified student-related factors, university-related factors, and societal factors as major determinants of employability. The study emphasized that improving graduate employability requires the development of students' personal capabilities alongside institutional support. In addition, Zou et al. (2024) found that individual characteristics, behavioural attributes, career engagement, and environmental factors significantly shape students' perceived employability. This supports the current study's finding that life skills contribute substantially to graduates' ability to secure and sustain employment.

Conclusion

This study concludes that vocational skills and life skills are significant factors influencing the employability of graduating students in government-owned universities in Lagos State. The findings established that students who possess relevant technical competencies, practical abilities, communication skills, adaptability, problem-solving skills, and other transferable capabilities are better positioned to meet labour market demands and secure employment opportunities. The study therefore emphasizes the need for universities, particularly Lagos State University (LASU) and the University of Lagos (UNILAG), to strengthen skill-oriented education, practical training, career development programmes, and industry collaborations to enhance graduates' career readiness. Developing these competencies will not only improve students' confidence in transitioning into the labour market but also contribute to producing graduates who are more competitive and responsive to workplace challenges.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion of this study, the following recommendation were:

- i. Government-owned universities in Lagos State should strengthen vocational skills development through practical training, internships, industry partnerships, and curriculum improvement to ensure graduates acquire relevant workplace competencies.
- ii. Universities should also promote life skills development through career counselling, employability workshops, communication training, teamwork, and problem-solving programmes to improve students' readiness and transition into the labour market.

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