AFRICAN JOURNAL OF

EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT

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RELEVANCE OF EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS TO UNDERGRADUATE CAREER PATH ACROSS DISCIPLINES IN NIGERIAN INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract
This study examined Nigerian undergraduates' perceptions of the relevance of employability skills across academic disciplines. A comparative survey design was adopted, using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure representation across federal, state, and private universities. The study sample comprised 1,594 undergraduates drawn from diverse disciplines, including the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and engineering. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA. Findings revealed significant differences in students' perceptions of employability skills across disciplines. While undergraduates generally recognised the importance of employability skills such as resilience (64.1%), self-efficacy (60.4%), and commitment (64.0%) are especially relevant for students who want to work in science and technology-based firms; communication, teamwork, and problem-solving are rated less relevant by engineering students compared to their peers in other disciplines. The study concluded that undergraduates' perceptions of employability skills are discipline-sensitive, highlighting the need for differentiated support mechanisms. It recommended that universities strengthen career counselling services and integrate both soft and technical skills into discipline-specific curricula. Policymakers and educators should also adopt a balanced educational model that values holistic competence development to enhance graduate employability in Nigeria's competitive labour market.

Keywords: Employability Skills, Career Development, Undergraduate

Introduction

Sub-Saharan Africa faces a considerable challenge with unemployment, particularly among its youth. In 2023, the region recorded an unemployment rate of 5.97%, marking a slight improvement from 6.08% in 2022 (Macrotrends, 2023). However, this overall figure masks a more troubling reality as youth unemployment remains alarmingly high, with rates reaching 12.2% among individuals aged 15 to 24 (Macrotrends, 2023). The International Labour Organisation (ILO) highlights that Africa has the highest average youth unemployment rate globally, underscoring a critical issue for economic development and social stability. Notably, Nigeria has seen its unemployment rate rise from 4% to 5% in 2023 (Ventures Africa, 2023), reflecting broader trends that threaten to hinder the potential of a significant portion of the continent's workforce.

As Africa's most populous nation and largest economy, Nigeria significantly shapes the continent's unemployment trajectory. The rise in unemployment rates in 2023 reflects the persistent structural challenges of job creation, notwithstanding the country's abundant natural resources and expanding youthful demographic. The burden of unemployment falls disproportionately on individuals aged between 15 and 34, who remain the most vulnerable to systemic barriers within the labour market. Key obstacles include economic instability driven by fluctuations in oil prices and inconsistent economic policies, which not only hinder youth from securing gainful employment but also contribute to job losses across sectors. Furthermore, rapid population growth continues to outpace job creation efforts, exacerbating the unemployment crisis (Adamu, & Bulus, 2024). However, the dominance of the informal sector, as previously observed in the report of Ventures Africa, (2023) further complicates this issue. Additionally, previous research has identified the skills gap among youths as a significant contributing factor to Nigeria's high unemployment rate (Devlin, 2013).

Employability skills are essential for success in today's dynamic job market, significantly enhancing workplace productivity. As the 21st-century economy evolves through rapid technological advancements and globalisation, job seekers must possess a diverse skill set to meet these changing demands. Employability skills can be categorised into hard skills (specific technical abilities) and soft skills (interpersonal attributes), further divided into foundational, transferable, technical,

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and vocational skills (Devlin, 2013). The impact of these skills on workplace efficiency is profound. For example, soft skills like strong communication facilitate clear information exchange, minimising misunderstandings and errors. Teamwork and problem-solving abilities can foster a collaborative environment where challenges are addressed effectively and innovative solutions emerge. Additionally, time management and adaptability allow employees to prioritise tasks efficiently and respond swiftly to shifting circumstances. Ultimately, a workforce equipped with robust employability skills is not only better positioned to achieve organisational goals but also drives productivity and maintains a competitive edge in the marketplace. Employers hence prioritise the development of these skills and employ candidates with these skills in place of those without the skills.

Notwithstanding the growing need for employability skills in the economic workspace, many graduates join the pool of job seekers each year, without having developed the necessary workspace employability skills. Numerous studies and reports highlight the disconnect between the skills acquired in Nigerian higher education institutions and the job market demands. For instance, a report by Leadership, Effectiveness, Accountability and Professionalism Africa (LEAP Africa) emphasises that Nigerian universities primarily focus on imparting hard skills while neglecting essential employability skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving (LEAP Africa, 2023). This gap has led to many graduates entering the job market unprepared, contributing to high unemployment rates. The graduate unemployment situation is such that individuals with higher degrees (for example, master's degrees and even Ph.D.) are part of the pool of unemployed.

A 2018 Stutern Nigerian Graduate Report on unemployment revealed that, of the 5,219 graduates interviewed, 28.9% were without jobs. A further breakdown in the survey showed that OND, HND, and Bachelor's degree holders comprised 40.52%, 39.40%, and 28.58%, of the unemployed respondents, respectively, while 'Master's degree, Ph.D., and MBA holders comprised 17.97%, 15%, and 14.29%. While there are several causes of graduate employment, Stutern's report emphasised the lack of employability skills among graduates. The disconnect in skills between graduates and employer needs is further supported by empirical evidence, which has identified some

contributing factors such as curriculum gaps, lack of practical experience, soft skills deficiency, and the rapidly-changing job market. Reports like this have raised questions from many scholars concerning the quality of education learners received in universities, its capacity to prepare students with on-demand employability skills, and how it creates employability skill awareness in students.

The inadequate emphasis on employability skills within Nigerian undergraduate curricula significantly impacts students' awareness and perception of their importance for professional development. Existing studies have primarily concentrated on various aspects, such as the disconnect between academic curricula and the skills demanded by the workforce, the relationship between employability and entrepreneurship skills among undergraduates, and the necessity for integrated work-learning experiences to equip graduates effectively. Additionally, these studies have explored factors influencing employability and examined how facility utilisation can enhance the acquisition of employability skills. A 2015 report by the World Bank highlighted that Nigeria's national certification system is neither comprehensive nor responsive to employers' needs, raising concerns about the suitability of tertiary institutions in fostering essential skills among students. While prior research has addressed the capacity of educational institutions to prepare students for the labour market, there remains a significant gap regarding students' readiness to acquire employability skills.

This study builds upon the Social Cognitive Career Theory proposed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994), which emphasises self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals. According to this framework, students' perceptions of the relevance of employability skills (outcome expectations) influence their assessment of their own skill levels (self-efficacy), which in turn affects their motivation (personal goals) to pursue these competencies throughout their education. Therefore, this study aims to investigate students' perceptions regarding the relevance of employability skills across various career paths, thereby addressing a crucial, yet underexplored, area in the discourse on graduate employability in Nigeria.

This study aims to achieve two major objectives which are:
1. to identify the skills students, perceive as most relevant in their career fields;
2. to identify specific employability skills applicable to each career field, which can serve as a framework to guide students in their career development.

Research Questions
1. What attributes do students perceive most relevant in the four career disciplines?
2. How do perceptions of career attributes differ among students from various core areas?

Sub-Research Questions
- What implications do the identified perceived attributes and their differences among students have for career guidance and counselling for undergraduate educational programmes?

The significance of this research lies in its potential to address Nigeria's youth unemployment challenge by identifying key skills, guiding curriculum development, and emphasising career guidance. The study's insights can inform stakeholders, leading to more effective educational strategies and economic growth. The next section will delve into these issues in more detail.

Literature Review

Social Cognitive Career Theory
This theory, developed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett in 1994, explain the interrelated aspects of career development, which are the development of basic academic and career interests, the formation of educational and career choices, and the achievement of academic and career success. The theory is based on three intricately-linked variables: self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals. Self-efficacy refers to a person's confidence in their ability to perform favourably in a given condition and is derived from four primary sources: past performance and accomplishments, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and emotional states. Outcome expectations refer to

beliefs about the consequences of performing a particular behaviour. This describes the choices people make about the activities they engage in, their effort, and persistence in these activities because of their anticipation of relative positive outcomes as well as self-efficacy beliefs. Personal goals define one's intentions to engage in a particular activity to attain a desired level of performance. The theory describes two types of goals as choice and performance goals. Social Cognitive Career Theory proposes a performance model which provides the framework for this study.

In this framework, students' perceptions of the relevance of employability skills serve as outcome expectations. These perceptions are shaped by various factors, including educational experiences, peer influences, and societal norms. When students recognise the importance of specific employability skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving they are more likely to view these skills as vital for their future career success. This recognition aligns with SCCT's assertion that clear and strongly-held choice goals enhance the likelihood of individuals taking proactive steps towards achieving those goals. As students perceive the relevance of employability skills, they begin to assess their own capabilities in these areas. For instance, if a student believes they can effectively communicate or work in teams, their self-efficacy regarding these skills will increase. This enhanced self-efficacy can lead to greater persistence in developing these competencies, even in the face of challenges or setbacks.

Consequently, personal goals emerged as a result of this interplay between outcome expectations and self-efficacy. When students feel confident in their abilities and understand the importance of employability skills for their career aspirations, they are more likely to set specific goals related to skill acquisition. These goals may include seeking internships, participating in extracurricular activities that foster teamwork, or enrolling in workshops focused on communication skills. SCCT posits that such goal-setting is dynamic and influenced by ongoing feedback from performance experiences.

Overview of Existing Research
Research focused on the employability skills of graduates and final-year university students has made significant strides in identifying challenges and proposing solutions to enhance employability. A study by

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Omosunlade and Gbadamosi (2022) examined the relative awareness of employability and entrepreneurship skills among undergraduate students in Nigerian universities. Utilising an explanatory concurrent mixed-methods design, the study involved a purposive sample of 200 undergraduates alongside 20 Human Resource (HR) personnel and entrepreneurs. The findings indicated a notable disconnect between the employability skills that students acknowledge and those that employers require. Despite students' self-reported proficiency in key 21st-century skills, employers often express skepticism, citing a mismatch between graduates' claimed competencies and their actual employability. The authors recommended implementing a service-learning curriculum to enhance the acquisition of employability and entrepreneurship skills, thereby improving the quality of the labour force. Although this study provides valuable insights into students' awareness of employability skills, it adopts a broad approach that encompasses various potential competencies without delving deeply into specific areas. Feedback from HR professionals and entrepreneurs further suggested that students may not be receiving adequate training to develop the necessary skills, indicating a possible gap in their understanding of the actual competencies required for their chosen careers.

A study conducted by Singh (2022) investigated students' perceptions of employability skills within a Malaysian research university, revealing a significant disparity between how employers and scholars conceptualise these skills compared to students' understanding. Utilising a semi-structured interview methodology, the research focused on internal research students, identifying key skills that students associate with employability, including research, teaching, technical, and project management skills. Additionally, the study highlighted several soft skills deemed essential for career success, such as written and oral communication, interpersonal skills, flexibility, problem-solving abilities, and career planning. Personal attributes like self-confidence and adaptability were also recognised as crucial for career development among the research students.

However, the study's scope was limited to a homogeneous sample of research students from a single institution, which may not represent the broader student population. Furthermore, while it provided insights into the general perspectives of the participants

regarding employability skills, it did not explore variations in perceptions across different demographic groups within the research student population. This limitation underscores a significant knowledge gap concerning how students' perceptions of employability skills may differ across various academic disciplines. Additionally, there exists a geographical gap in the literature because, while there are studies on students' perceptions of employability skills in Nigeria, investigations on their perceptions of the relevance of these skills and the variations of these perceptions across disciplines in Nigeria remain sparse.

To address these gaps, this study aims to explore students' perceptions of the relevance of employability skills across different disciplines in Nigeria, utilising the methodological approach described below.

Methodology
The study adopted a comparative survey design (Keman and Pennings, 2014). This design was adopted to investigate students' perception of the relevance of employability attributes by undergraduates across disciplines and the three main institutional types (federal, state, and private) in Nigeria.

Sampling
1,594 undergraduates were selected using a multi-stage sampling approach from private, state, and federal universities across three geopolitical zones in Nigeria. In the first sampling stage, purposive sampling was used to identify one private university and one federal university in the South-West zone, one state university in the South-South zone, and one federal university in the North-West zone. This selection was based on the significant concentration of economic and commercial institutions in these areas, facilitating the collection of extensive and comprehensive data. In the second sampling stage, stratified sampling was employed to choose academic disciplines from core sciences, science and technology, behavioural sciences, and the humanities. To ensure a representative sample of students, simple random sampling was utilised to select penultimate and final-year undergraduates from the four disciplines across the schools selected in the first sampling stage to ensure a representative sample of students.

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Instrument

An undergraduate employability scale was used for data collection. The unidimensional scale measuring undergraduate employability was developed by the researchers to measure the employability of undergraduate students in selected Nigerian universities. The scale is a 5-point self-reporting scale ranging from 0 = None; 1 = Very little; 2 = Little; 3 = Average; 4= Good; 5= Outstanding. The scale includes 129 items measuring key components of undergraduate employability. The instrument contains four sections: section one is the demographic characteristics of the respondents, section 2 covers the individual dimensions of the graduate employability skills model, and sections 3 and 4 contain the institutional dimension and the policy dimensions of the graduate employability skills model, respectively.

Validity and Reliability

Exploratory factor analysis was conducted to establish the construct validity of the undergraduate employability scale to measure undergraduate employability. Figure 1 shows the plots fall off from the second factor, meaning that only one dimension majorly underlies the Undergraduate employability scale. The result of the analysis further shows that factor one alone has a percentage variance of 34.17%. It accounted for a 34.17% variance in the undergraduate employability construct. Further examination of the factor loadings revealed that 529 (96.36%) of 549 significantly (Factor loadings greater than 0.3) loaded under factor 1, hence they were retained as the final items while others were discarded (Maskey, Fei, and Nguyen, 2018).

Content validity, which is a systematic way of ensuring that the items generated covered a representative sample of the issues to be measured (Almanasreh Moles and Chen, 2019) was ensured first, by carrying out a comprehensive review of literature on employability. Secondly, drawing stakeholders to participate in scrutinising the generated items ensured proper coverage of the employability issues. Also, the use of stakeholders and iteratively reading and correcting the items until they were ready for administration on the respondents enhanced their face validity.

The undergraduate employability scale was subjected to reliability analysis using the Cronbach Alpha method. The choice of this method was informed by the continuum rating format of 0-5, which the

expert established as continuous. The result of the Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient is 0.99. The obtained values confirmed the potency of every item in the instrument in measuring undergraduate employability in Nigeria.

Data Collection and Analysis
The undergraduate employability scale was scripted to Kobo Toolbox, an online data collection platform, which facilitated data collection from multiple respondents using online and offline methods. The instrument was available offline through the use of a phone application called Online Data Kit (ODK), and online through online methods with the use of a link. Collected data was analysed using frequency counts and percentages.

Presentation of Results
As shown in Table 1 below, analysis of responses from the survey revealed the distribution of students' perceptions of attributes important to their career disciplines.

Table 1. Relevance of the Attributes to Students' Career Based on Core Areas

Attributes	*Rating*	*Science and Technology*	*Humanities*	*Engineering*	*Social Sci.*
Loyalty	Low relevance	41.50%	37.40%	51.10%	36.40%
	High relevance	58.50%	62.60%	48.90%	63.60%
Resilience	Low relevance	35.90%	35.00%	40.80%	33.30%
	High relevance	64.10%	65.00%	59.20%	66.70%
Self-Efficacy	Low relevance	39.60%	40.90%	41.20%	35.30%
	High relevance	60.40%	59.10%	58.80%	64.70%
Commitment	Low relevance	36.00%	38.20%	42.00%	36.60%
	High relevance	64.00%	61.80%	58.00%	63.40%
Common Sense	Low relevance	43.70%	44.50%	52.30%	38.80%
	High relevance	56.30%	55.50%	47.70%	61.20%
Effective Communication	Low relevance	49.80%	44.10%	57.60%	44.60%
	High relevance	50.20%	55.90%	42.40%	55.40%
Time Management	Low relevance	48.80%	49.20%	58.40%	43.50%
	High relevance	51.20%	50.80%	41.60%	56.50%

Team Work	Low relevance	45.30%	42.10%	50.80%	43.20%
	High relevance	54.70%	57.90%	49.20%	56.80%
ICT Proficiency	Low relevance	47.50%	53.90%	51.90%	45.90%
	High relevance	52.50%	46.10%	48.10%	54.10%
Problem-Solving	Low relevance	47.80%	48.00%	56.10%	45.00%
	High relevance	52.20%	52.00%	43.90%	55.00%
Life Long Learning	Low relevance	45.30%	47.20%	55.30%	44.10%
	High relevance	54.70%	52.80%	44.70%	55.90%
Discipline	Low relevance	47.20%	45.70%	55.30%	43.20%
	High relevance	52.80%	54.30%	44.70%	56.80%
Initiative and Enterprising	Low relevance	54.10%	52.80%	61.80%	50.10%
	High relevance	45.90%	47.20%	38.20%	49.90%
Reflective and Critical Thinking	Low relevance	48.30%	47.20%	53.80%	46.30%
	High relevance	51.70%	52.80%	46.20%	53.70%
Go-getting Skills	Low relevance	46.30%	48.80%	56.50%	44.10%
	High relevance	53.70%	51.20%	43.50%	55.90%
Technical managerial Skills	Low relevance	48.60%	50.00%	57.60%	44.30%
	High relevance	51.40%	50.00%	42.40%	55.70%

Table 1 displays the variation of selected attributes by their perceived students' relevance to each career of undergraduates in science and technology, humanities, engineering, and social science. Further analysis was applied to answer the research questions as presented below.

Research question 1:
What attributes do students perceive as most relevant to the four career disciplines?

Science and Technology: As shown in Figure 1, respondents in science and technology expressed that the attributes resilience (64.1%), self-efficacy (60.4%), and commitment (64.0%) are especially relevant for students who want to work in science and technology-based firms. Also, skills like problem-solving (52.2%) and discipline (52.8%) were considered relevant by the students because they help people think analytically and conduct studies and experiments methodically.
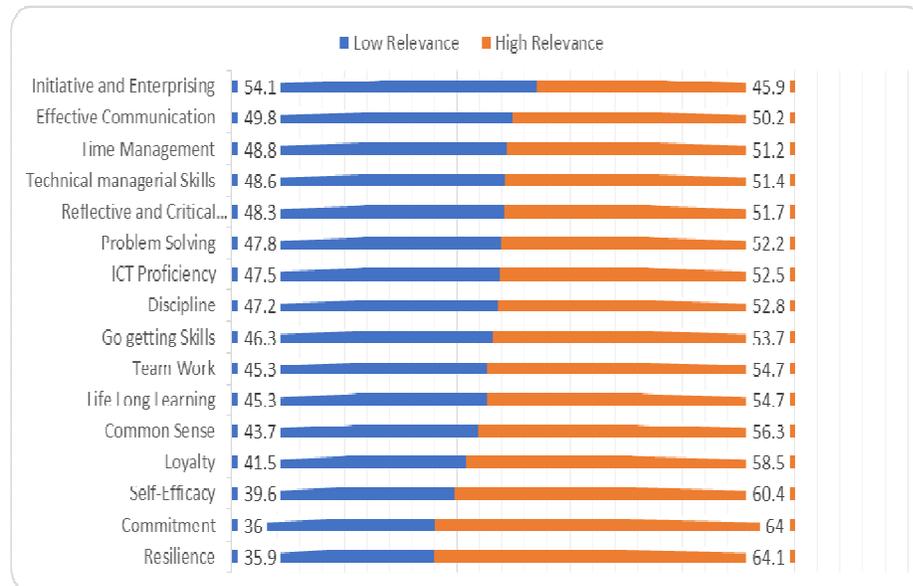
Figure 1. Perceived Relevance of Attributes in Science and Technology

Humanities: As shown in Figure 2, responses from humanity students revealed that most of the attributes are relevant to the career path, with resilience (62.6%) and loyalty (62.6%) leading the list. Initiative and enterprising (50%) and ICT proficiency (46.1) were not popularly considered relevant by the students. These skills help students get their ideas across clearly, use their time wisely, and think critically about difficult problems.

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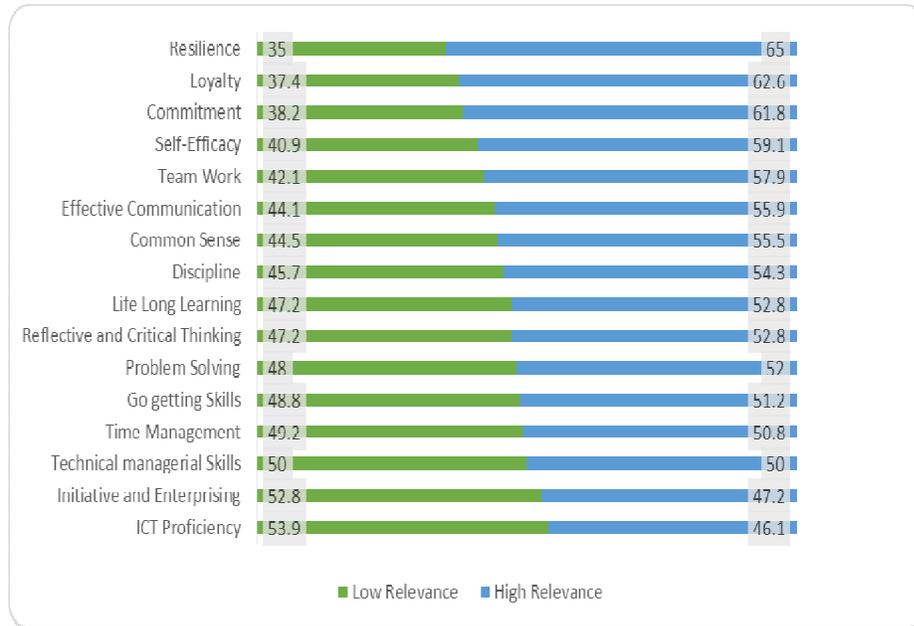
Figure 2. Perceived Relevance of Attributes in Humanities

Engineering: Data generated from engineering students as shown in Figure 3 revealed that resilience (59.2%), self-efficacy (58.8%), and commitment (58.0%) are perceived as the most relevant skills in engineering while initiative and enterprising (38.2%), time management (41.6%) and technical managerial skills (42.4%) polled as the least necessary skills.
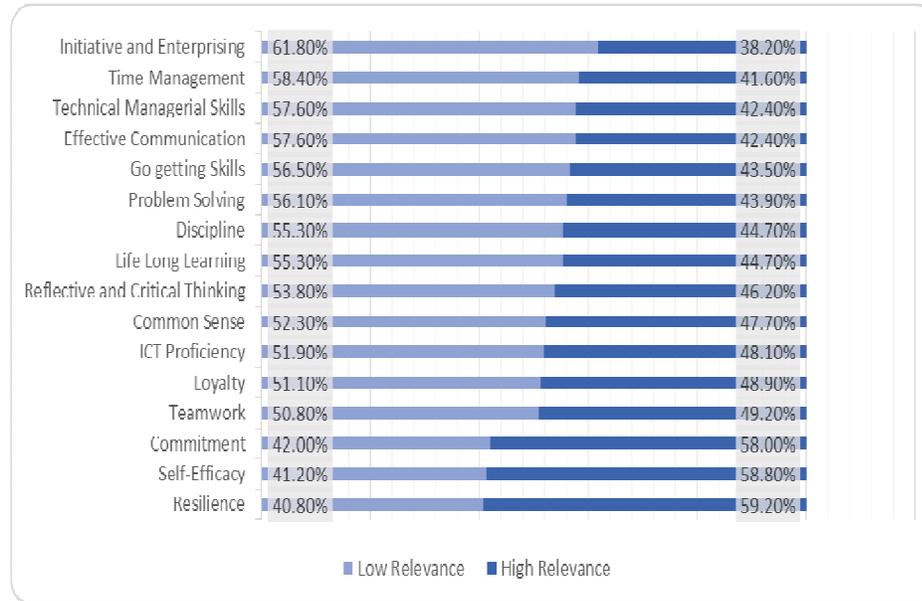
Figure 3. Perceived Relevance of Attributes in Engineering

Social Science: According to responses from social science students as shown in Figure 4, the students perceive that all the listed skills are relevant (with above 50%) for a career in social science except for initiative and enterprising (49.9%).

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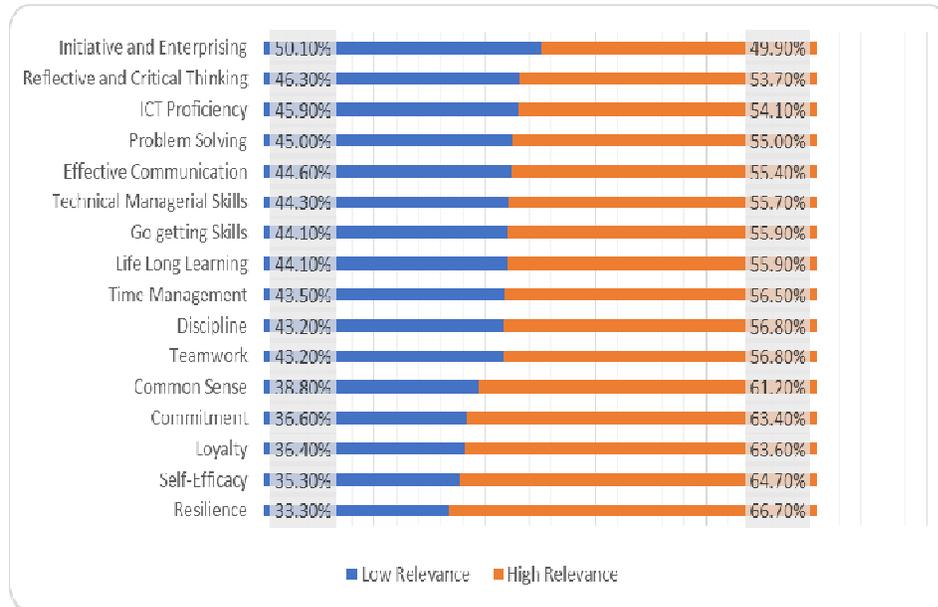
Figure 4: Perceived Relevance of Attributes in Social Science

Research Question 2

How do perceptions of job attributes differ among students from various core areas?

A comparative analysis revealed notable disparities in the perceived relevance of attributes among the four academic disciplines under consideration as shown in Table 2 and Figure 5.

Table 2. Variation of Attributes across Disciplines

Attributes	*Science and Technology*	*Humanities*	*Engineering*	*Social Sci.*
Loyalty	58.50%	62.60%	48.90%	63.60%
Resilience	64.10%	65.00%	59.20%	66.70%
Self-Efficacy	60.40%	59.10%	58.80%	64.70%
Commitment	64.00%	61.80%	58.00%	63.40%
Common Sense	56.30%	55.50%	47.70%	61.20%
Effective	50.20%	55.90%	42.40%	55.40%

Communication				
Time Management	51.20%	50.80%	41.60%	56.50%
Team Work	54.70%	57.90%	49.20%	56.80%
ICT Proficiency	52.50%	46.10%	48.10%	54.10%
Problem-Solving	52.20%	52.00%	43.90%	55.00%
Life Long Learning	54.70%	52.80%	44.70%	55.90%
Discipline	52.80%	54.30%	44.70%	56.80%
Initiative and Enterprising	45.90%	47.20%	38.20%	49.90%
Reflective and Critical Thinking	51.70%	52.80%	46.20%	53.70%
Go-getting Skills	53.70%	51.20%	43.50%	55.90%
Technical managerial Skills	51.40%	50.00%	42.40%	55.70%

Table 2 shows that loyalty is highly valued in humanities (62.6%) and social sciences (63.6%), with the lowest relevance in engineering (48.9%), resilience is consistently rated highly across the four fields, especially in social sciences (66.7%) and humanities (65.0%). Similar to resilience, self-efficacy is valued across the disciplines, with a slight emphasis on social sciences (64.7%), commitment is considered highly relevant in the disciplines, particularly in science and technology and social sciences (64.0%), while common sense is more important in social sciences (61.2%) and moderately important in other fields, especially engineering (47.7%). Effective communication is particularly valued in humanities (55.9%) and social sciences (55.4%), time management most relevant in social sciences (56.5%), with moderate relevance in science and technology (51.2%) and humanities (50.8%), and teamwork highly valued across all disciplines, especially in humanities (57.9%) and social sciences (56.8).

ICT proficiency is perceived as crucial in social sciences (54.1) and science and technology (52.55), but lesser humanities (46.1%) and engineering (48.1%), problem-solving skills are highly relevant in social sciences (55.0%) and moderately relevant in science and technology (52.2%) and humanities (55.0%). Life-long learning was polled to be valued highly in social sciences (55.9%) and science and technology (54.7%), disciplines, but most relevant in social sciences (56.8%) and

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humanities (54.3%), initiative and enterprising more valued in social sciences (49.9%) and humanities (47.2%), with least relevance in engineering (38.2%). Reflective and critical thinking are relevant to each of the disciplines, particularly in humanities (52.8%) and social sciences (53.7), go-getting skills are also rated for high relevance in social sciences (55.9%) and science and technology (53.7%). Finally, technical managerial skills are considered relevant in social sciences (55.7%) and science and technology (51.4%), slightly less in humanities (50.0%) and engineering (42.4%).
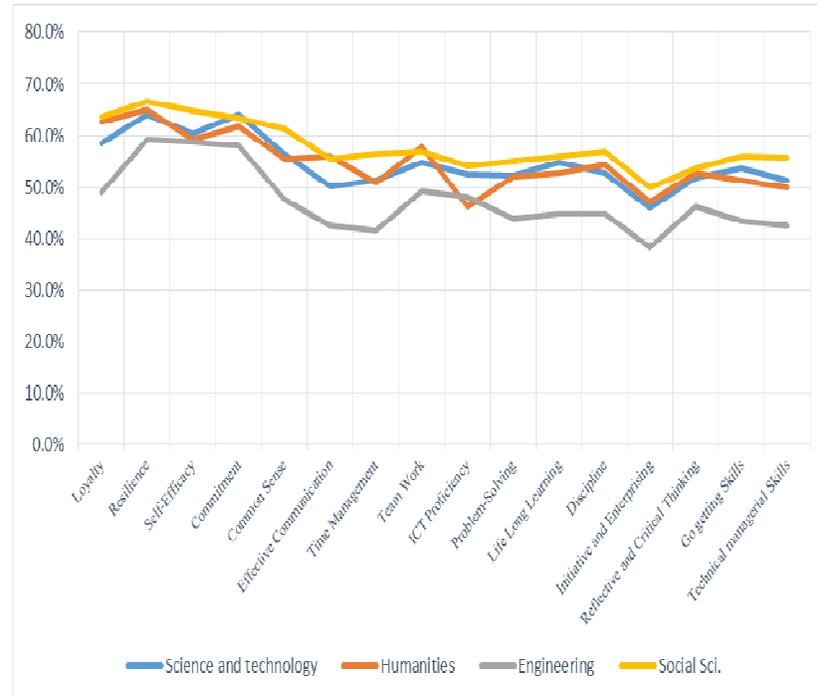

Figure 5. Variation of Attributes across Disciplines

Figure 5, further reveals some insights on the relevance of the selected attributes across the four disciplines. As shown in the line chart in Figure 5, the distribution of relevance across the skills is between 40 and 70, except for initiative and enterprising (38.2%) in engineering.

There are some similarities in the relevance trend across the attributes such as resilience, commitment, and reflective and critical thinking where there is a rate of relevance in each of the disciplines. In attributes like initiative and enterprising, self-efficacy, and ICT proficiency, there is less perception of relevance in each of the disciplines. However, for attributes such as common sense, effective communication, problem-solving, life-long learning, and go-getting skills, there is no observable similarities in the student's perception of relevance across disciplines.

In summary, loyalty, resilience, commitment, and self-efficacy are highly relevant in the humanities and social sciences. ICT proficiency, problem-solving, and technical managerial skills are crucial in science and technology and social sciences. Engineering shows lower relevance for interpersonal skills like loyalty and communication but values resilience, self-efficacy, and commitment. Social sciences generally rate high relevance for most attributes, highlighting a broad appreciation for diverse skills.

Discussion

Findings from the study provide significant insights into how students perceive essential attributes across various academic disciplines. The findings directly address the primary research questions regarding the perceived importance of specific attributes and the differences in these perceptions among students from diverse fields of study.

The study revealed a consistent emphasis on resilience, self-efficacy, teamwork, and commitment across the core disciplines: science and technology, humanities, engineering, and social science. This aligns with previous research highlighting the importance of resilience for career success (Ellen, Marjolein, & Verbruggen, 2022), particularly in volatile job markets, and self-efficacy as a key predictor of success in various fields (Bandura, 1977). Commitment has also been previously identified as a crucial factor for career success (Bhawna, Sharma, & Akram, 2023), underscoring its significance in all disciplines. The emphasis on teamwork can be attributed to the increasing interconnectedness of modern workplaces, where collaboration and networking are essential for success in both corporate and entrepreneurial endeavours. This finding is particularly significant as it

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further establishes the importance of these interdisciplinary skills for successful career development.

The comparative analysis highlighted notable discrepancies in the perceived relevance of attributes among disciplines. Social science students consistently rated most skills as highly relevant to their fields, with loyalty, resilience, and self-efficacy being particularly emphasised. This suggests that social science disciplines may place a strong emphasis on interpersonal skills, perseverance, and confidence, which are crucial for navigating complex social systems and conducting research. As such, students in the field are aware of the need for these attributes in their career paths. This aligns with existing views of the importance of teaching and learning interpersonal skills for social science students (Beenen, Fiori, Pichler, & Riggio, 2023; Emma, 2022). In contrast, engineering students rated most skills lower in relevance compared to other disciplines. This could indicate a preference for technical and problem-solving skills over softer skills like effective communication and time management. As supported by several published research works, engineering education often focuses heavily on technical proficiency and analytical thinking (Una & Bowe, 2023), which explains the lower awareness and, consequently, lower perceived relevance of certain skills. Humanities students showed varied perceptions across the skills, with skills like common sense, effective communication, and reflective and critical thinking being rated relatively high. This aligns with the nature of humanities, which often involves critical analysis, interpretation, and communication of complex ideas.

Implications for Career Guidance and Counselling

The differences observed in students' perceptions of employability attributes carry significant implications for career guidance and counselling within undergraduate programmes. Since students across disciplines prioritise employability skills differently, career support must be tailored to meet these diverse needs. For example, while resilience training is beneficial for all students, it may hold particular value for those in science, technology, and engineering fields. The study further emphasises the importance of universities adopting curricula that go beyond academic excellence to incorporate practical, career-oriented skills. Such an inclusive approach reflects global educational trends that promote the integration of real-world experiences into academic learning in order to improve employability outcomes. Overall, the research underscores the central role of employability skills in shaping students' career trajectories and highlights how universities, by recognising and responding to students' perceptions, can strengthen graduates' readiness for the job market.

Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, this study examines students' awareness and perception of the relevance of select employability skills in building successful career paths across four core disciplines in Nigeria. By recognising the distinct perceptions of these skills among students, educational institutions can better prepare graduates for successful transitions into the workforce. The findings advocate for a balanced approach to education that values both technical competencies and soft skills, ensuring that graduates are well-rounded professionals capable of thriving in diverse work environments. As society continues to evolve with technological advancements and globalisation, the demand for adaptable professionals equipped with a broad skill set will only increase. Therefore, it is imperative for educational institutions to continuously assess and refine their curricula to meet these emerging challenges effectively.

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