

A Study on the Effectiveness of the Career Guidance Model applied by NIBM

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Abstract

Opportunity to obtain higher education is considered as a privilege in countries like Sri Lanka, as people believe that this opens new avenues for young generation to obtain better employment and benefits in life. Therefore all the higher education institutions are keen to make their graduates employable. They use different models to inculcate skills and competencies required by the industry in their graduates, hence to make them employable. National Institute of Business Management (NIBM) is a statutory body which has been offering higher education opportunities for its students since 1968. They utilize their own career guidance model which is based on grooming school leavers with the graduate attributes based on TDF model (Thinker, Doer & Finisher) they have identified and finally making the students industry ready through a study module called Continuous Professional Development (CPD). This study aimed at identifying the level of satisfaction of the employers with whom the graduate students of NIBM completed their internships with regards to the graduate attributes as well as CPD module outcomes. A questionnaire developed to measure the satisfaction level of the employers regarding the graduate attributes and CPD module outcomes were distributed to 138 employers who have provided internship opportunities to NIBM students in 2017/2018. The results pointed out that the model utilized by NIBM is successful as it shows above average satisfaction level for all the areas that has been tested, but at the same time it shows that there is tremendous opportunity for improvements since none of the areas show extremely high satisfaction levels.

Key Words: Graduate Employability, TDF Model, Continuous Professional Development, Career Guidance Model, National Institute of Business Management (NIBM)

INTRODUCTION

Unemployment and underemployment of a country is a topic that has been widely researched and discussed throughout the world. In Sri Lanka also this problem is prevalent and many research works have been done to identify the extent of the problem, its causes and solutions.

Many Sri Lankan families give a priority to the education of their children; they take great efforts to get their children into a popular school run by the government to obtain the benefit of "free education". Once they complete their school education by sitting for highly competitive, GCE (A/L) examination, which is also considered as the university entrance examination, their highest expectation is to get selected into a state university to complete higher education. There is a great competition; according to Sri Lanka University Statistics 2016, 51.43% who sat for GCE (A/L) got eligible for university entrance but only 18.68%

received admission into a state university. In addition to the fifteen (15) state universities there are seventeen (17) institutes which provide degrees with the approval of the University Grants Commission (UGC) as well as many other institutes which provide degrees through affiliations with foreign universities.

Many parents in Sri Lanka consider higher education as a means of ensuring employability among their children, so they opt to provide higher education to them. Once a child is selected to follow a degree programme, the expectation in the minds of the future graduate, his/her parents, relations and the general society increases. "....almost all Sri Lankan families are having greater aspiration of providing university education for their children as a secured path of higher employability". (Ariyawansa,2008)

However, the reality might be different from their thinking, as "many students, who are fortunate enough to enter the universities, have to face numerous challenges especially at the end of the graduation in seeking suitable employments". (Ariyawansa,2008) It can be seen that this is a national level problem, which needs to be solved immediately, as it can lead to unhappiness and frustration among the most promising and talented young population of Sri Lanka as well as their parents. In the long run it may even lead to youth unrest and so many other social issues like getting delayed to achieve their life objectives, starting families, career growth etc.

According to the Census and Statistics department quarterly report, the total unemployment of Sri Lanka is 4.4% for the year 2016. The rate of unemployment among GCE (A/L) qualified and above category seems to be higher; 8.5%. This is a situation that needs to be considered seriously by the policy makers as well as academics, because it shows higher the qualifications, it becomes more difficult to find employment. The reason for this situation can be an increase in the expectations among the educated.

Most of the graduates expect to find government and pensionable jobs, but "private sector plays its role as a main actor in the labour market through its generation of labour market demand for personal qualified in computer science, finance, management and marketing with a sound knowledge of English." (Weligamage & Siengthai,2003) Many employers report difficulty in finding appropriately skilled labour, and identify this as a key constraint on business. Many research work has been done to identify the skills required. According to the Presidential Committee which was appointed has identified three main reasons for graduate unemployment;

negative attitudes of graduates, lack of communication skills and lack of English knowledge. (Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 1995)

When analyzing the current job opportunity advertisements, it can be seen that the employers are looking for potential employees with; leadership skills, team-work, self confidence, personality, interpersonal skills, positive thinking, practical mind set, business etiquette etc. The list can be quite long and comprise of two broad categories like soft skills and life skills.

The solution is to design the degree programmes to incorporate many of these skills as much as possible, according to Knight & Yorke (2003) "While it can be argued that subject matter has become more complex, governments, employers and other stake holders have come to expect higher education to contribute to the development of a variety of complex 'skills' which - they argue - enhances the stock of human capital." This task can be very challenging for universities or higher education institutions.

The National Institute of Business Management (NIBM) an institute that functions under the purview of the Ministry of Skills Development and Vocational Training in Sri Lanka has introduced a new career guidance model to the degree programmes offered with affiliation of foreign universities, in order to make their students employable.

Research Problem

The National Institute of Business Management (NIBM) is an institute that has been providing opportunities to acquire higher education to school leavers as well as professionals. NIBM offers degree programmes in the areas of Information Technology, Management & Creative Designing with the affiliations of many foreign universities for the last fifty years. As this institute did not want to add some more graduates who will join the group of unemployed graduates, they have introduced a unique career guidance model for their graduate programmes.

The model comprise of two years of full time studies which end with a compulsory internship, and the final year of the degree is conducted on part time basis, which can be followed by the student while being employed. This model is quite similar to the "sandwich degree model" applied by Salford Business School, University of Salford, UK. According to Procter (2010) a one year period of employment is an excellent opportunity for the student to develop knowledge and skills in their discipline and for the employer to assess the suitability of a student for a long term future graduate position."

The students, who join NIBM to continue their higher studies, would complete their first year of the degree, which is identified as Advanced Diploma in Business Management (ADBM) and the second year of the degree which is identified as the Higher National Diploma in Business Management (HNDBM). Throughout these two years students acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes which are critical to ensure employability and be successful in the corporate world. These two years are focused on creating a person with identified graduate attributes based on a model known as TDF – Thinker, Doer, and Finisher given in *Table 1*. These attributes are transferred to the students through study modules, application of different delivery methods like lectures, case studies, field visits, presentations, practical sessions,

The internship opportunities are provided by the "Career Guidance and Industrial Training" (CGIT) unit and the students are encouraged to continue with the employer until they complete their relevant degree or even beyond. Therefore when they graduate, they have acquired one year work experience in the industry, which will gain competitive advantage over other graduates who enter into the job market without any experience in the corporate environment. written reports, group and individual assignments and industry placements.

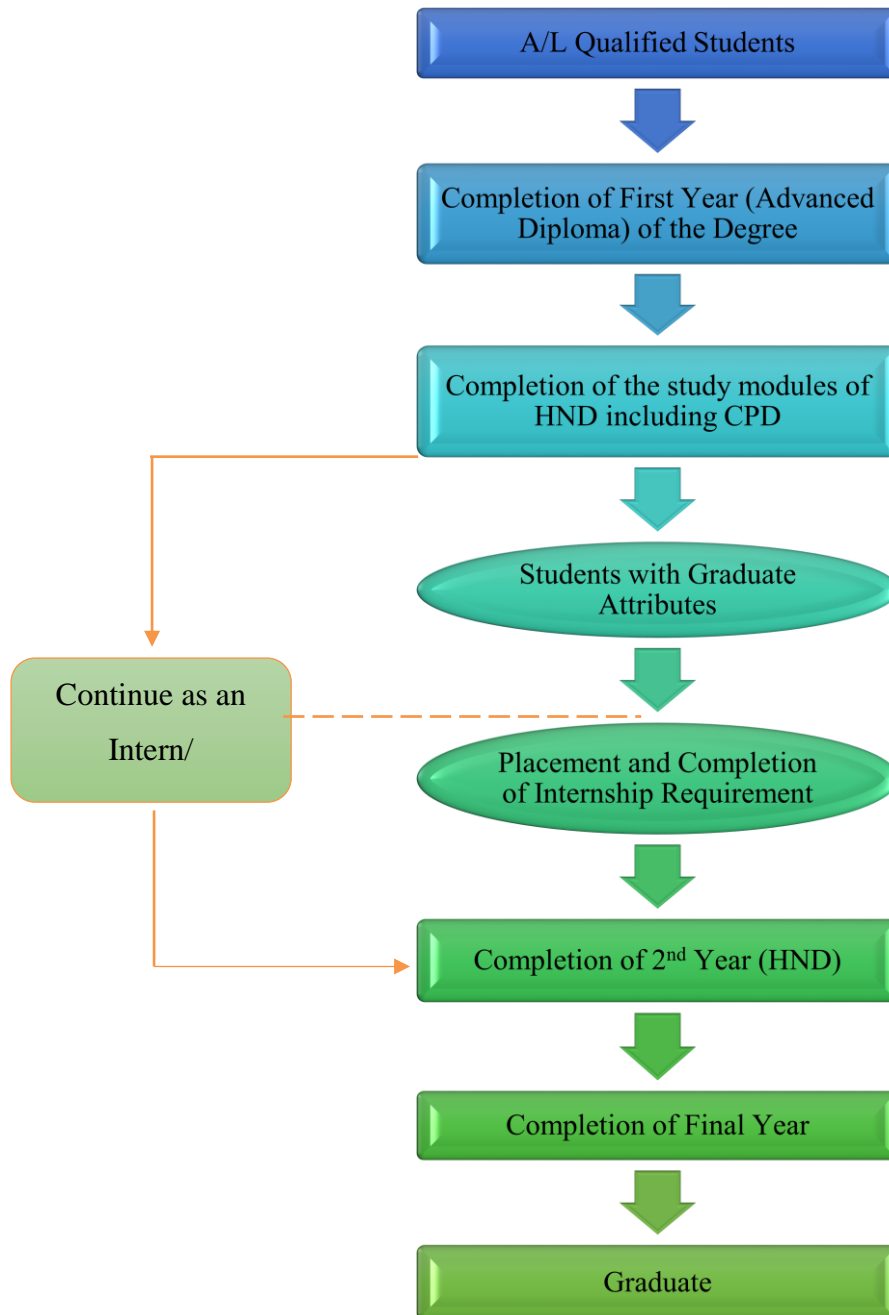


Figure 1: Study Model of NIBM

Table 1: Graduate Attributes of NIBM Students(TDF Model)

Broad Attribute	Specific Attribute
Thinker	Independent & critical thinker
	Investigator
	Resourceful & responsible person
Doer	Technical specialist
	Effective communicator
	Self confidence
	Collaborator & adaptable person
	Process oriented
Finisher	End in minder
	Ethically & socially responsible person
	Lifelong learner

The students are prepared for the industry specifically by grooming them to be aligned with the graduate attributes that have been identified. Also the students are taught the essential soft skills through a specific study module, Continuous Professional Development (CPD) during the third trimester of the second year or Higher National Diploma level. (*Figure 1*).

CPD Module covers the below given content (*Table 2*) which is delivered with class room lectures and workshops. The content can be divided in to three categories based on the categorization indicated by Knight & Yorke (2006)

Table 2: Module Content Covered in the Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

Categorization	Module Content
Personal Qualities	Identifying own personality
	Seven habits
	Stress management through time management
	Adapting to a new organizational culture
	Leadership & change
	Developing career plan
	Professional grooming & etiquette
	Maintaining health & fitness
Core Skills	Writing journal & web articles
	Writing business proposals
	Writing visionary report for business development
	Creativity & innovation
Process Skills	Office management & administration
	Problem solving process
	Process improvement

In addition the students are have to participate in CV writing sessions, face a mock interview, general health test, general IT knowledge test and general English knowledge test. These would help the student to get an additional advantage when facing a real employment interview and afterwards starting the internship in an organization.

Once the student start their internship which is for a minimum period of three months, a set of documents need to be completed by the external supervisor from the organization, internal supervisor from NIBM and the student.

1. Note book which is to be maintained by the student to enter important details in elaborated form
2. Daily diary which needs to be maintained by the student and certified by the external supervisor
3. Project report prepared by the student which incorporates details of a company process that the student is familiar with, collect & analyze data to identify the weaknesses and provide recommendations for improvements under the supervision of the internal supervisor
4. Interim presentation and final presentation done for students of the study group and internal supervisor
5. Feed-back given by the external supervisor

Since the internship is embedded into the study programme and considered as a module, marks are allocated for the above components and grades are given according to the performance of the student.

This model has been followed for the last ten years by NIBM and the feed – back received from the employers regarding the performance of the students have been satisfactory, but any formal survey has not been done. Therefore this research is conducted to study the effectiveness of this model and to see the level of satisfaction of employers regarding the students. The problem of the study is "How effective is the career guidance model applied by NIBM to ensure employability of their graduates?"

Literature Review

According to Celik (2006) ...work provides not only financial resources but also a means to self realization.” Having paid employment helps a person to be independent, to plan life pursuits and maintain a preferred life style, therefore paid employment is crucial for a young person.

Employability has been defined by Hillage & Polland (1998) as “having the capability to gain initial employment, maintain employment and obtain new employment if required.” They have proposed a model based on four elements;

- Employability assets based on knowledge, skills & attitudes
- Deployment of the assets based on career management and job searching skills

- Presentation of the person based on CV writing skills & interview techniques
- Personal circumstances based on opportunities in the job market

Knight & Yorke (2003) defined employability as “A set of Achievements - skills, understandings and personal attributes- that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.” This emphasizes the close relationship between employability and learning, which can be gained from higher education institutes. This is clearly indicated in their USEM model (*Figure 2*), which provides four interrelated components of employability.

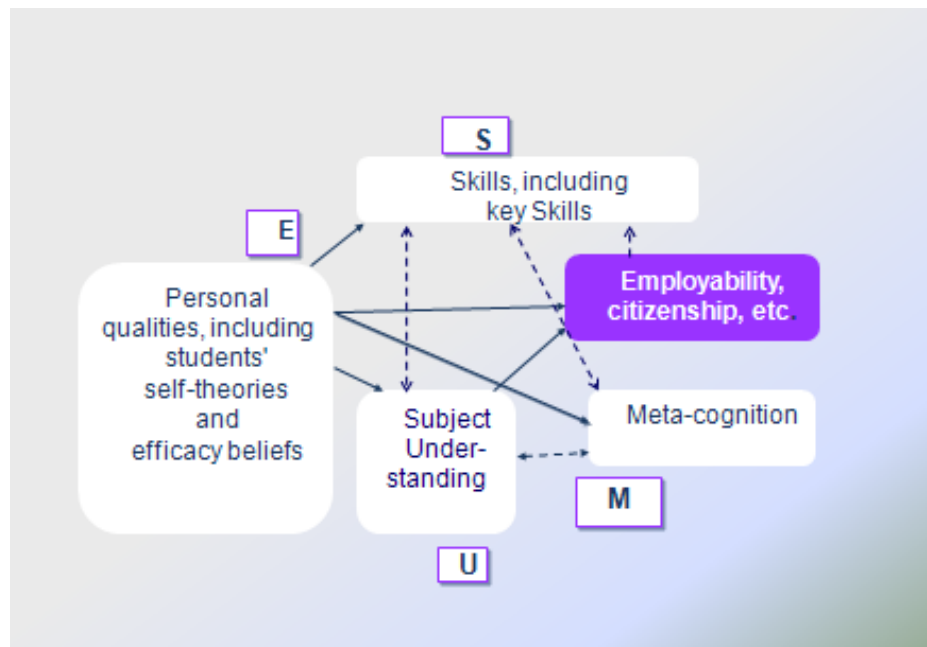


Figure 2: USEM Model (Knight & Yorke, 2003)

Many universities and higher education institutes work hard to make their graduates and undergraduate students employable. Making the graduates employable is a challenge faced by them. Corporate sector organizations have a doubt about the industry readiness of fresh graduates.”Employers in South Africa were the most dissatisfied with graduate’s ability to speak foreign language, their business acumen, leadership, problem solving, self awareness and customer orientation, willingness to learn, team work, interpersonal skills, lack of practical skills & experience” (Jonck & Minnaar, 2015). Therefore they prefer graduates with work experience, which leaves fresh graduates unemployed.

To face this, the universities and higher education institutes need to design their study programmes to embed skills and competencies essential for employment. According to Jonck & Minnaar (2015) a growing demand for adequately skilled graduates led to many higher education institutions to review their objectives and aims to meet industry needs.

The USEM model of employability introduced by Knight & Yorke in 2003, provide a framework to embed employability into the curriculum and this has become one of the best known and respected models for employability. (*Figure 2*)

This model identifies four inter-related components of employability;

- Understanding of subject matter
- Skillful practices in the context of academic, organizational and life in general
- Efficacy beliefs of the learner on self, self belief and improvement & development of self
- Meta cognition include knowledge on strategies for learning, thinking, problem solving & lifelong learning

Universities and higher educational institutes are focusing on enhancing the cognitive skills and for a graduate to be employable; they need to learn how to transfer this knowledge in to real life situations. But “spontaneous transfer is not nearly as frequent as one would expect, even with the best instructions.” (McKeachie, n.d.) Even though not easy, this is exactly what universities need to do because it is expected by the organizations and they need to make their graduates employable as it is a key indicator when ranking a university. Also this is a duty expected from a university by the country as a whole and how they can contribute to enhance the economy of the country. . . .” A university can contribute to improving the competitiveness of businesses if it produces graduates possessing competencies demanded in the labour market.” (Sultanova *et al*, 2017)

A major issue faced by universities and higher education institutions is “that although authors agree that skills other than subject content are essential for securing and maintaining employment, the individual skills, competencies, and personality traits that have been identified in different countries as being pivotal are not universal” (Jonck & Minnaar,2015)

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire was developed to cover the graduate attributes and competencies gained through CPD module. Expert opinion was obtained from 03 employer representatives and 03 senior lecturers of NIBM. Changes were made based on the expert suggestions. After ensuring the validity through expert opinion, a pilot survey was conducted by distributing this questionnaire to 10 employers to ensure the reliability of the research instrument. Cronbach's alpha value was calculated using SPSS 18 statistical package.

Table 3: SPSS Output for for Cronbach's Alpha

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.980	.980	42

This questionnaire was administered to all the organizations which have provided internship opportunities for NIBM students in the years 2017/2018 through Google Forms. There were 16 forms which returned and 39 organizations have completed the survey, which is 28% of the total population.

DATA ANALYSIS

Most of the employers in the sample had a favorable perception about NIBM undergraduate students which was reflected in the responses given by them for the initial questions:

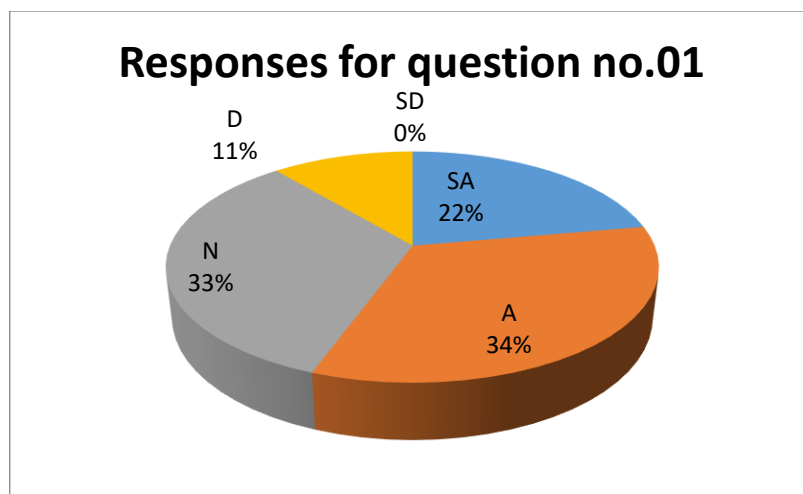


Figure 3: Whenever we have vacancies NIBM students are our preferred choice

Figure 3 indicates the responses given for the question whether NIBM undergraduates are their preferred choice, 33% was neutral. 22% of the sample strongly agrees, while 34% agree with the statement. 11% disagree with this.

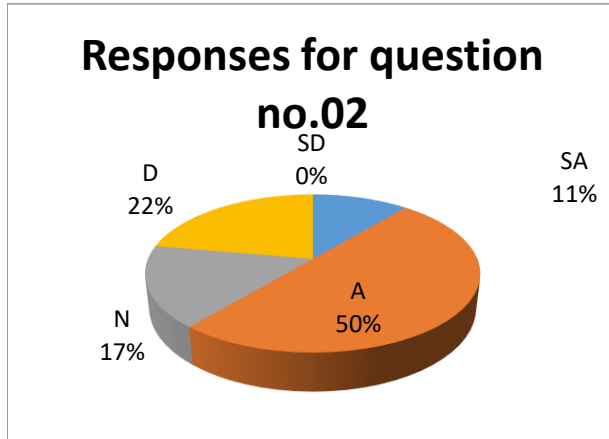


Figure 4: They perform well above other new recruits

Figure 4 indicates the responses given for the question whether NIBM undergraduate students perform well above others, 61% either agree or strongly agree, while 17% is neutral about it and 22% disagree.

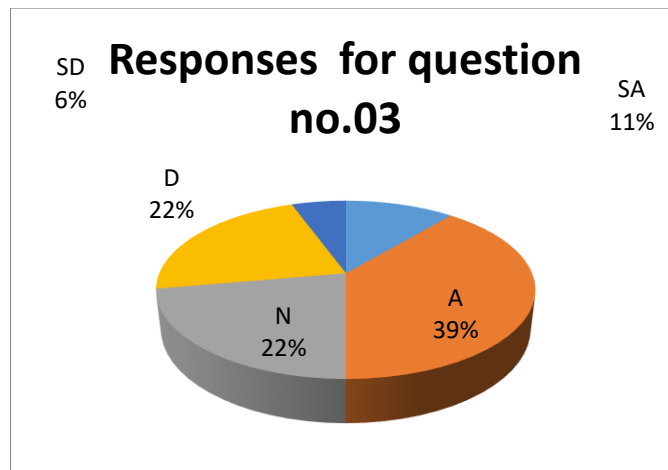


Figure 5: They stay with our organization longer than other new recruits

According to the *figure 5*, 50% of the employers either agree or strongly agree to the question whether NIBM undergraduate stay with the employer longer than other new recruits. While 22% is neutral about it and 28% either disagree or strongly disagree.

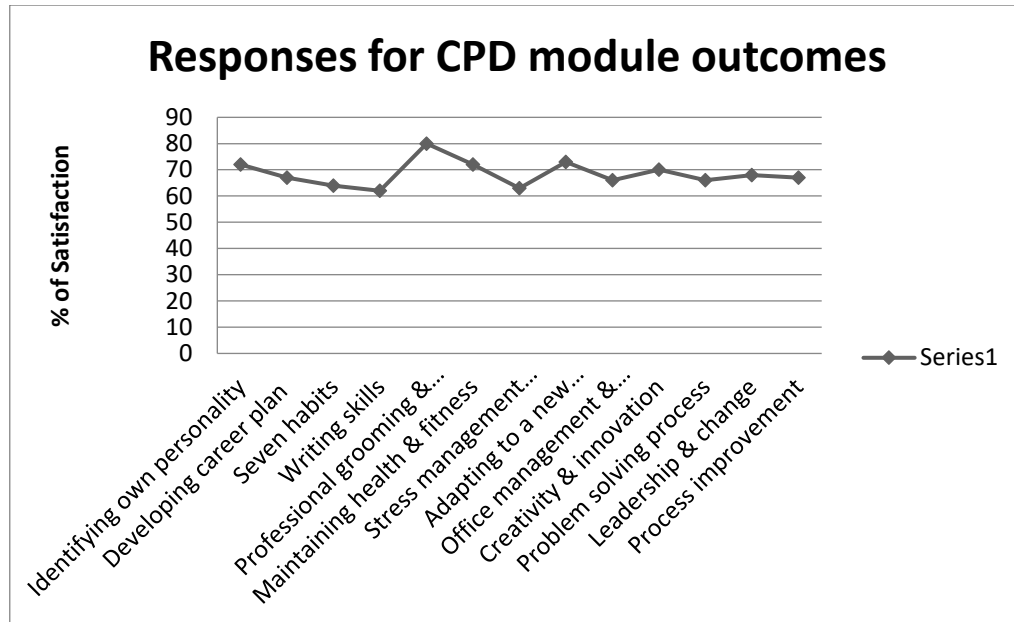


Figure 6: Satisfaction Level of Employers Regarding the CPD Module Outcomes

The *figure 6* shows the response received for the satisfaction level of employers on CPD module outcomes of the NIBM students. Overall level is above the average level (above 50%), but there is room for improvement. The highest level of satisfaction has been received for the professional grooming & etiquette (80%) lowest levels were received for seven habits, writing skills, stress management through time management and office management & administration.

Figure 7 shows the satisfaction level of employers regarding the graduate attributes and it can be seen that the largest gap exist for the thinker component of the graduate attributes. Employers have indicated the highest level of satisfaction for the doer component, but the level definitely can be improved as the highest level of satisfaction is 70%.

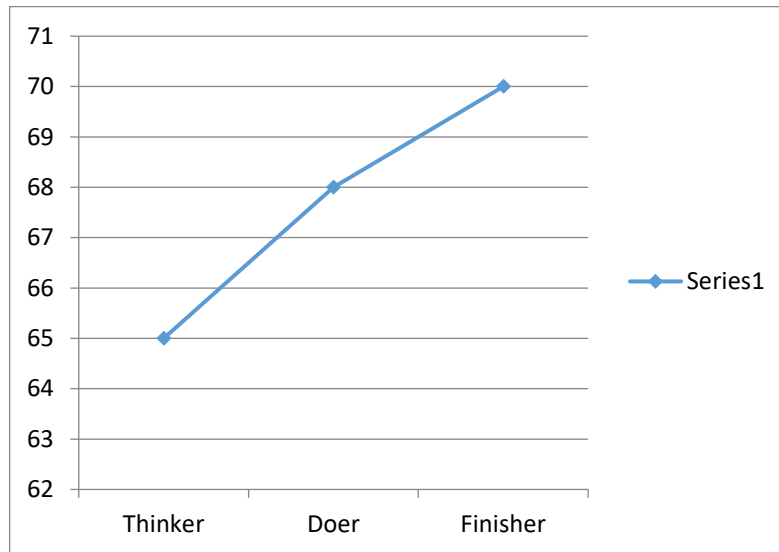


Figure 7: Satisfaction Level of Employers Regarding the Graduate Attributes

DISCUSSION

When it comes to expectations of students in Higher Education Institutions and their parents, employability takes a leading position. Most of the students complete their graduate level education expecting a better job with higher benefits. In order to achieve this, the higher education institution need to find ways of instilling skills required for employability into their graduates by incorporating them into the curriculum of the study programmes. Different institutions follow different models to provide better opportunities for their graduates. National Institute of Business Management has their own model where they have included a specific module *Continuous Professional Development (CPD)* and designed the whole programme to create a graduate with identified graduate attributes based on *Thinker Doer & Finisher (TDF) model*.

Based on the *Figure 3* it can be seen that 33% of the organizations are neutral may be due to the reason that the officer who completed the questionnaire is not the person who takes decision regarding who should be recruited and when. This can make them neutral regarding this question but 56% agree or strongly agree while 11% disagree. That means NIBM graduates are the preferred choice among majority of the employers in the population at the moment. It can be seen that 11% of the employers have disagreed and the reasons need to be found.

Figure 4 shows that a clear majority (61%) either agree or strongly agree when asked whether NIBM graduates perform better than other graduates. Only 17% stays neutral and 22% disagree with the statement. This is a favourable situation but it is good if it's possible to find out the reasons for employers to stay neutral or disagree with the statement.

For the question 3 (*figure 5*) about whether NIBM graduates stay longer than other graduates, 50% either agree or strongly agree and 22% stayed neutral while 6% disagree with the statement. Since a majority (50%) either agreed or strongly agreed, this means that NIBM graduates stay with the employers who have provided them with internship positions. The reason being, that after completing their internship the employer may be impressed and satisfied with the performance of the student and offer a long term and permanent employment opportunity. Also the student becomes familiar and comfortable with the work environment which keeps them with that particular employer for a longer time.

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) module has been introduced to the study programme especially to inculcate employability skills in to the NIBM graduates. According to the responses received for the questions asked based on the CPD module outcomes, the highest level of satisfaction level (80%) has been received only for professional grooming & etiquette. Four of the factors namely, Identifying own personality, Maintaining health & fitness, Adapting to a new organizational culture and Creativity & innovation, the satisfaction level stay between 60%-70%. Areas like seven habits, writing skills, stress management through time management and office management & administration have been given the lowest satisfaction levels (between 50% - 60%).

According to this analysis, NIBM can be satisfied since their students have been able to create an above average level of satisfaction in all the outcomes but they can look for greater improvements specially in areas like writing skills and stress management through time management.

According to *figure 7*, employer satisfaction regarding the graduate attributes displayed by NIBM graduates, again show an above average result but with room for greater improvements. The thinking component has received the lowest level of satisfaction (65%) and for both doing and finishing has received 68% and 70% respectively. This indicates that NIBM graduates are capable of implementing and finishing work rather than thinking and finding solutions. To overcome this situation, further emphasis on the areas where employers have

shown lower level of satisfaction is recommended, as they are essential skills for graduate employability.

CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS

When looking at this study it can be said that the model utilized by NIBM to make their graduates more employable seems effective since the students were able to satisfy the employers at a above average level. Also the results indicate that there is room for improvement as only in one area the satisfaction level has reached 80% or more. Therefore it can be said that NIBM need to look into the ways and means of improving their employability model further to help their graduates have better chances of finding employment opportunities.

Comparing this model with career guidance models which have delivered successful results and applying different methods of delivery can provide opportunity to further improve the effectiveness. Since it is not possible to find a common model which is suitable for all situations, finding the best suited model for each higher education university has to be done using their own experience as well as using examples from other success stories.

Limitations & Further Research

The limitations that have been identified are;

- Low level of responses received; the questionnaire was to be completed by the immediate supervisor of the intern student and they may be really busy and might not consider this as a priority, but this could have been overcome by contacting them individually and requesting them to complete the questionnaire. Due to the time and resource constraints this was not possible.
- Contacting the immediate supervisor might not be easy, as the contact point of the organization can be another person (eg: Human Resource Manager), then the questionnaire may not reach the immediate supervisor or sometime they may have been transferred or even left the company. If the questionnaire had been completed by a person other than the immediate superior, their views about the student may not be accurate

As a further research opportunity this research can be repeated with a larger sample and with some encouragement for more employers to take part in the research. Further the findings of this research open new avenues to find out the reasons for employers to be satisfied in certain areas but less satisfied in certain other areas. Therefore a qualitative study would open out new insights into the situation. Also if a comparative study can be done with other university graduates and NIBM graduates then a proper idea can be drawn regarding employability of NIBM graduates.

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