Assessing MBA Graduates Acquired Competencies in Sudanese Universities

Samah Mohamed Mustafa Kamal[1], Abdalla Abdelrahim Idris[2]

[1]*(Doctor of Business Administration/School of Management Studies /University of Khartoum/ Sudan)*

[2] *(Associate Professor/ Director of Risk Management / Deposited Insurance Fund/Sudan)*

Corresponding Author: Samah Mohamed Mustafa Kamal

ABSTRACT

Purpose: The main purpose of this study is to assess the acquired competencies of MBA graduates (MBAG) in terms of soft and hard skills and explore the new needed competencies.

Design/methodology/approach: This is an exploratory cross-sectional study conducted through an online survey. Cluster sampling technique is used to choose the sample, then rankings are used to sort the competencies according to their importance. Also paired sample T-test is utilized to compare the soft skills with hard skills.

Findings: The major findings show the competencies that highly developed through the MBA programs; organizational awareness, ability and willingness to learn, organizational commitment, written communication, and technical expertise. Three of them are categorized as hard skills and the other two are soft skills. Moreover, the study indicates a significant difference in importance in acquired competencies in terms of soft and hard skills.

Research limitations: Barriers exist in the collection of secondary data due to some factors like scattered information sources and treating data acquisition as a highly confidential issue by data suppliers. Also, using cross-sectional study include some limitations such as; we cannot analyze behavior over a period of time, and it does not help to determine cause and effect. Besides, snapshot does not represent a reliable source.

Originality/value: There is a radical progress in the field of higher education all over the world, as the attention became more focused on developing various competencies at different academic stages. In the Sudanese context, the proliferation of MBA programs made them a significant target to be investigated critically. Thus, the purpose of adopting the competency profile is to enable educators to identify and assess appropriate development areas for graduate programs which will enhance graduate employability.

- ***Keywords****: Competency, MBA, Business Education*
- ***Acronyms****: MBAG: Master of Business Administration Graduate, HRM: Human Resource Managers.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The world is changing and the business education is a key shaper of emergent possibilities. The growth of the business world and with it, the development of society, can be a conscious and purposeful process. Nevertheless, it will not be an easy transition (Laszlo, 2001). In general, the higher education system offers different academic and professional degrees that aim at improving knowledge and skills in different areas. Andrews & Higson, (2008) argue that universities are increasingly required to produce highly mobile graduates, able to respond to the ever-changing needs of the contemporary workplace. Specifically, business schools and business education should prepare students to become skilled in the basics of thinking critically, communicating effectively and managing small and large organizations so they can serve society in a successful and socially responsible manner (Cavico & Mujtaba, 2009). In particular, Sidiropoulos (2014) stated that the role of business and the reason of tertiary business education programs is to provide individuals with knowledge and skills. Therefore, only graduates with superior competencies will be able to meet these challenges and fit in the job market (Ting & Ying, 2012).

Baruch (1996, pp. 1) claim that "the aims of Master of Business Administration (MBA) programs are to prepare their graduates for managerial roles, help them gain a better understanding of the industrial and business world and its needs, enrich their skills and provide them with competencies relevant to their careers." Likewise, Mihail, & Kloutsiniotis (2014) stated that there is a widespread view among researchers that an MBA is intended at adding

value to graduate students by providing them with the suitable business-related managerial skills, while at the same time it can have a positive effect on the performance of the corporate world in general. Business schools have been under attack for their so-called inefficacy in developing students' managerial skills in MBA programs. On the basis of extant learning theories, the effectiveness of MBA programs with respect to the development of complex managerial skills has been harshly criticized (Varela, Burke & Michel, 2013). Hence, Business schools are increasingly called to transform—in some ways incrementally and in other ways radically—to address the needs of the students they educate and the industries they serve (AACSB, 2016). As the graduates are the ultimate products of higher educational institutions and their impact is translated in the world in terms of skills and competencies, involved in the development of every nation, they are considered as part of the workforce who contribute to the success of every organization leading towards a common goal (Dotong, 2014).

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Generally, the main objective of this study is to assess the current acquired competencies of the MBAG in terms of soft and hard skills and explore new needed competencies. Accordingly, there are three main objectives in this study:

1. To rank the relevant competencies acquired by MBAG in relation to their importance.

2. To investigate the difference (if any) in importance between the acquired competencies in terms of soft and hard skills as perceived by MBAG.

3. To explore more needed competencies in the MBA programs that are missing according to MBAG perception.

Hypothesis:H1: There is significant difference in importance between soft skills and hard skills as perceived by MBAG.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. The Value of the MBA programme

   According to Kini (2015), the high quality learning programs have specific characteristics include : learning should be relevant to the background and experience of the students and should be up-to-date; More importance should be given for active learning than passive learning; Constantly need to link theory with practice to make it real life learning; Need to effectively manage student expectations; Develop valid capability profile of students for relevant, timely and focused assessment; Give opportunity for students to develop flexible pathway; Coach students for self-managed learning; Additionally, Provide support and administrative services. Furthermore, Malan (2000, pp. 23) described six critical tenets of Competency based education programs: "1. The development of explicit learning outcomes with respect to the required skills and proficiencies;2. flexibility in time for skill mastery; 3. a variety of instructional methods to facilitate learning; 4. criterion-reference testing to validate the intended outcomes;5. certification based on the demonstrated learning outcomes; and 6. adaptable content to "ensure optimum learner guidance".

According to Rubin and Dierdorff (2007) approach for examining the relevancy of MBA curriculum via managerial competencies, they claim that it offers many advantages including: First, if the main aim of MBA programs is to develop future managers, then the required curricula of such programs should represent any institution's best endeavor to capture the most crucial content relevant to managerial work roles. Second, the required curriculum of any MBA program communicates the "value," whether perceived or objective, of particular content. That is, when a program requires certain courses it stands to reason that the business school views such content as critical towards developing competent managers. Third, making a determination of relevancy based upon these required courses represents a systematic and standardized method allowing for comparisons across different academic institutions.

3.2. Competency

   There are many definitions of the word competency. Rainsbury *et al* (2002) defined competency from an educational perspective that it concerns with the ability of individuals to apply knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to the standards of perfection required in specific contexts. Accordingly, a competency is a combination of relevant attributes that underlie successful professional performance (David, Mei & Andrew 2002).

In general, competency is a debatable topic which involves wide disagreement among different scholars, for instance, in terms of dependent Vs independent variable (Azevedo *et al ,*2012). Besides, competencies are grouped according to a different criteria and various classifications; Generic competencies that classified it into Competencies for "Top Management" and Supra Competencies (Woodruffe,1993). Boyatzis (2008) classified competencies into three clusters: cognitive, emotional intelligence and social intelligence competencies. According to Hodges & Burchell (2003) competencies are a combination of cognitive skills and behavioral characteristics which are a function of an individual's personality. Some developed a small cluster of eight key generic competencies emerged as the most important (Azevedo *et al,* 2012; Martinovic, 2013). Jackson (2010) categorized the competencies into (a) the task requirements of graduate positions, akin with a job description, and (b) personal characteristics deemed important by employers. Aamodt & Havnes (2008) conducted Students' assessments of what competencies they have gained and listed out 19 competencies. On the other hand, Okoli (2014) classified the business competencies needed by business education student's development in Nigeria into management and marketing competencies. Also Iqbal and Zenchenkov (2014) categorize competencies as technical skills, interpersonal skills, intrapersonal skills and business knowledge skills. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no one way to define competency and there is no unified way of classifying or grouping them. In this study, 25 competencies have been adopted from a study carried by Hodges & Burchell (2003) and categorized into hard and soft skills. Basically, the focus here is on a wide range of competencies, so that the most critical ones can be highlighted and determined according to the real need in practice within organizations in Sudan.

3.3. Competencies Classification (Hard Vs Soft skills)

"Hard skills are specific, teachable abilities that can be defined and measured, such as typing, writing, math, reading and the ability to use software programs. By contrast, soft skills are less tangible and harder to quantify, such as getting along with others, listening and engaging in small talk. In business, hard skills most often refer to accounting and financial modeling" (Investopedia, 2016).The Collins English Dictionary defines the term soft skills as "desirable qualities for certain forms of employment that do not depend on acquired knowledge: they include the ability to deal with people, and a positive flexible attitude" (soft skills :http://dictionary.reference.com). Robles (2012) stated that soft skills are personality traits, attitudes, and behaviors—rather than technical skill or knowledge. Soft skills are the intangible, nontechnical, personality-exact skills that determine one's strengths as a leader, facilitator, manager, and negotiator.

As such, hard skills can be learned and improved over time, whereas soft skills are harder to acquire and change, because soft skills cover the personality traits that decide how well one interacts with others, and are usually a definite part of one's personality.

Generally speaking, there is a growing concern in the literature on the significance of 'soft' skills which are viewed as complementary to 'hard' skills and required for superior organizational performance. The literature also suggests that there is a lack of emphasis placed on the development of soft skills by many education providers. (Rainsbury *et al*, 2002; Robles, 2012; Shuayto, 2013).

4. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Hodges & Burchell (2003) and Spencer & Spencer (1993) identified a number of generic competency categories that are classified into soft and hard skills, which they claim account for 80-95% of the distinguishing features of superior performers in technical and managerial positions. Consequently, this study is endeavoring to assess the twenty-five dimensions of competencies from the perceptions of MBAG from the five universities under the study. It is clear from the reviewed literature that there is a great emphasis towards soft skills rather than hard skills, as most studies revealed the importance of the soft skills from the perspective of the employer (Rainsbury *et al*, 2002; Rubin, 2007; Rubin & Dierdorff, 2009 Robles, 2012; Shuayto, 2013). Moreover, people skills (or soft skills) are the most difficult to develop; whereas business (or technical) skills, which are comprised of many of the hard and administrative role requirements are the easiest to develop (Hogan &Warrenfeltz, 2003; Kaiser & Kaplan, 2006). As a result, in this study the main focus is on the soft skills development assessment for the MBAG. Thus, this study adopted 7 hard skills and 18 soft skills that will be assessed critically.

4.1. Competency Descriptions

According to Hodges & Burchell, (2003, pp.16-22) the following are the competencies classifications and descriptions.

- *Hard skills*

1. **Analytical thinking** (thinking for self, reasoning, practical intelligence, planning skills, problem analyzing, systematic)

2. **Computer literacy** (able to operate a number of packages; has information management awareness)

3. **Conceptual thinking** (creative thinking, insight, pattern recognition, critical thinking, problem recognition and definition, can generate hypotheses, linking ideas)

4. **Organizational awareness** (understands organization, knows constraints, power and political astuteness, cultural knowledge, ethical understanding)

5. **Personal planning and organizational skills** (ability to organize self and others, effective time management, organizes and completes tasks effectively and efficiently)

6. **Technical expertise** (job-related technical knowledge and skills, depth and breadth, acquires expertise, donates expertise)

7. **Written communication** (relevant skills / appropriate use of: emails, internal memos, internal and external reports, letters to clients).

- *Soft Skills*

1. **Ability and willingness to learn** (desire and aptitude for learning, learning as a basis for action)

2. **Achievement orientation** (task accomplishment – a completer, seeks results, employs innovation, has competitiveness, seeks impact, aims for standards and efficiency)

3. **Concern for order, quality & accuracy** (monitoring, concern for clarity, reduce uncertainty, keeping track of events and issues)

4. **Customer service orientation** (helping and service orientation, focus on client needs, commercial awareness, actively solves client problems)

5. **Developing others** (coaching, mentoring, providing support, training, developing others, positive regard)

6. **Energy & passion** (a positive 'can-do' attitude, high energy levels, enthusiasm, pro-active, strong drive)

7. **Flexibility** (adaptability, perceptual objectivity, staying objective, resilience, behavior is contingent on the situation)

8. **Impact & influence on others** (impression management, strategic influence, presentation skills, showmanship, persuasion, collaborative influence)

9. **Initiative** (seizes opportunities, bias for action, proactive, self-motivation, persistence, decisiveness, strategic orientation, diagnostic focus, looking deeper, contextual sensitivity)

10. **Interpersonal communication** (effective speaking and listening, utilizes and is responsive to non-verbal communication)

11. **Interpersonal understanding** (empathy, sensitivity to others, diagnostic understanding, awareness of others' feelings)

12. **Leadership** (vision, taking charge, concern for subordinates, builds a sense of group purpose, assertiveness, decisiveness, firmness of standards)

13. **Organizational commitment** (align self and others to organizational needs, business-mindedness, self-sacrifice)

14. **Problem solving** (actively solves identified problems, carries through to completion)

15. **Relationship building** (networking, establish rapport, use of contacts, concern for stakeholders e.g. clients)

16. **Self-confidence** (strong self-concept, internal locus of control, independence, positive ego strength, decisive, accepts responsibility)

17. **Self-control** (resistance to stress, staying calm, high emotional intelligence (EQ), resists temptation, stamina, not impulsive, can calm others)

18. **Teamwork & cooperation** (fosters group facilitation and management, conflict resolution, motivation of others, creating a good workplace climate).

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The main focus of this study is on the MBA programs, run in Sudan. It is an exploratory cross sectional study that is focused on five universities, pioneers in the field of MBA programs that deliver the courses in English language including: University of Khartoum (U of K), University of Medical Sciences and Technology(UMST), Ahfad University for Women (AUW), Sudan International University(SIU) and Garden City University for Science and Technology(GCUST). According to Azevedo *et al* (2012) that there is wide disagreement in defining the concept of competency, and whether it is dependent or independent variable. Accordingly, this research is concerned with ranking the competencies rather than examining cause and effect relation. (Martinovic, 2013; Rainsbury *et al*, 2002; Hodges and Burchell, 2003).

5.1. Population and Sampling technique

For the purpose of this study, the researchers concentrate on the MBAG, who are already enrolled in different Sudanese organizations. In fact, MBAG are expected to be more experienced and relevant to impact the organizations compared to fresh graduates, as they acquire and develop a variety of competencies critical for employability through their educational stages and are more likely to be hired (Tay, 2001). MBAG total population is 5185 and the selected sample size is 214 according to sample size calculator for comparing two paired proportions at G*Power V 3.7.1 tool (David Machin *et al,* 2009*)*. The sample of MBAG is selected using cluster (double stage) sampling technique. And an online survey instrument is constructed using google form and circulated to 214 MBAG. Furthermore, T-test is utilized to test the hypotheses under 0.05 significant level. The questionnaire is created using Google Drive, an online software for creating web surveys. An online hyperlink of the questionnaire was sent via private messages on different social media tools WhatsApp, Facebook and Emails. In addition, the researcher used his professional and personal contact agenda for sending the questionnaire hyperlink to the people's mailbox. Individuals were asked to participate by filling out the questionnaire and to follow the hyperlink. The response rate is 100%, as the researcher kept sending notification messages to ensure that all sent out questionnaires were filled.

5.2. Questionnaire Design

The instrument for data collection is researcher self-structured survey that developed, entirely published and circulated online in order to facilitate the process to the respondents, as they only have to answer them through entering an internet link hosted in Google's website. The questionnaire is directed to MBAG and divided into two sections: **the first section**; is about demographic data such as their gender, Age, MBA specialization, number of years since graduation, the field of industry they are working in and the company name. **The second section**; include asking MBAG to rank the list of 25 competencies according to the level of competency development through their MBA program. In this study rankings are mainly used for the 25 competencies that listed in the questionnaires and are identified by Hodges & Burchell (2003).

The online survey conducted for MBAG consists of the questions referring to the development of their own competencies by asking them:

"Please indicate to which extent do you agree with following statements regarding the level of each competency that had been acquired through your MBA Program."

The competencies were listed in random order on the questionnaires and the respondents are allowed to add additional competencies they felt were relevant.

As such, MBAG were asked to rate the level of each competency they acquired through the MBA program by using 5-point Likert scale, **1** indicated the competency was (*very low)* and **5** indicated the competency was (*very high)*. The scale is graded as (1=Very Low, 2= Low, 3=Medium, 4=High, 5=Very High).

6. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Generally, the main objective of this study is to assess the current acquired competencies of the MBAG in terms of soft and hard competencies and explore new needed competencies.

6.1. Research Objective (1): To rank the relevant competencies acquired by MBAG according to their importance. This research objective is answered through the question asked in the MBAG questionnaire *"Please indicate to which extent do you agree with following statements regarding the level of each competency that had been acquired through your MBA Program."* Using 5-point Likert type Scale, where **1** indicated the competency was (**very low)** and **5** indicated the competency was (**very high**). The scale is graded as (1= Very Low, 2 = Low, 3= Medium, 4= High, 5= Very High). The criteria for mean ranking also follow the same grading criteria of the scale.

- **Table (1):** The Mean Rank of MBAG Competencies

Competencies	Ranking Overall	Ranking within Category	Mean	Std. Deviation
• *Hard Skills*				
Organizational awareness	1	1	4.16	.801
Written communication	4	2	4.04	1.027
Technical expertise	5	3	4.00	.914
Personal planning & organizational skills	6	4	3.97	.804
Analytical thinking	15	5	3.79	.930
Conceptual thinking	20	6	3.66	.909
Computer literacy	23	7	3.40	1.069
Overall Mean for Hard Skills			**3.86**	
• *Soft Skills*				
Ability and willingness to learn	2	1	4.10	.760
Organizational commitment	3	2	4.06	.779
Interpersonal understanding	7	3	3.96	.860
Interpersonal communication	8	4	3.95	.908
Problem solving	9	5	3.90	.869
Customer service orientation	10	6	3.89	.946
Leadership	11	7	3.88	.901
Relationship building	11	7	3.88	.974
Achievement orientation	12	8	3.84	.733
Initiative	12	8	3.84	.812
Flexibility	13	9	3.81	.907
Self-confidence	14	10	3.80	1.091
Energy & passion	16	11	3.78	1.010
Teamwork & cooperation	17	12	3.77	1.007
Concern for order, quality & accuracy	18	13	3.72	.901

Developing others	19	14	3.71	1.084
Impact & influence on others	21	15	3.63	.974
Self-control	22	16	3.58	1.007
Overall Mean for Soft Skills			**3.84**	

Source: *Compiled by the authors using SPSS statistical package.*

Figure (1): The Mean Rank of MBAG Competencies
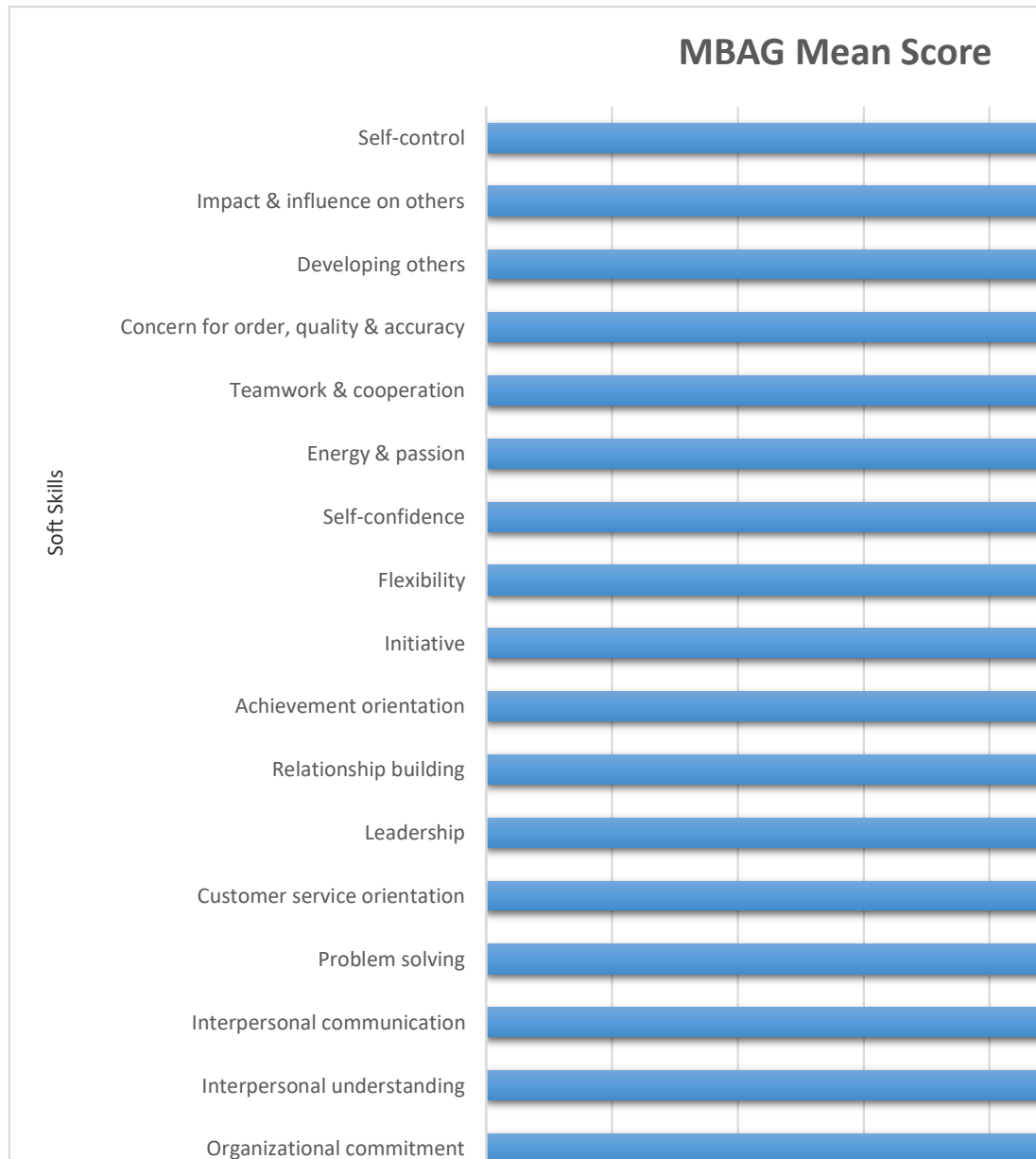
Source: *Compiled by the authors using SPSS statistical package.*

In general, according to table (1) the overall mean for hard skills is 3.86 which is more than the overall mean for soft skills 3.84. This indicate that mean rank of hard skills is slightly larger than the mean rank of soft skills. Also, the most acquired competencies by MBAG are ranked of medium development.

The high top five competencies ranked by MBAG as the highest acquired competencies in MBA programs are; First, *Organizational awareness*, as it has got the highest rank overall (rank 1, mean 4.16). The second highest competency ranked overall is *Ability and willingness to learn* (rank 2, mean 4.10). Third, *Organizational commitment* (rank 3, mean 4.06). Then *Written communication* (rank 4, mean 4.04) and *Technical expertise* (rank 5, mean 4) came in the fourth and fifth ranking over all respectively.

It is noticed that three of the top five competencies categorized as *hard skills.* These are*; Organizational awareness* (rank within category 1)*, written communication* (rank within category 2) *and technical expertise* (rank within category 3), while two are categorized as *soft skills* these are *ability and willingness to learn* (rank within category 1) and *organizational commitment* (rank within category 2).

On the other hand, *computer literacy* is categorized as hard skill that ranked the least overall (rank 23, mean3.4), and rank 7 within category. The rest of the nineteen competencies ranked overall as *medium in importance* with mean range from 3.58 to 3.79. These competencies categorized as hard skills, which include: *Personal planning & organizational skills* (rank overall 6 & within category 4, mean 3.97), *analytical thinking* (rank overall 15 & within category 5 mean 3.79), *conceptual thinking* (rank overall 20 & within category 6, mean 3.71). On the other hand, these competencies categorized as *soft skills,* which include*: Interpersonal understanding* (rank overall 7 & within category 3, mean 3.96), *interpersonal communication* (rank overall 8 & within category 4, mean 3.95), *problem solving* (rank overall 9 & within category 5, mean 3.90) and *customer service orientation* (rank overall 10 & within category 6, mean 3.89).

There are some competencies are of equal importance like *leadership* and *relationship building* (rank overall 11 & within category7, mean 3.88), also, *achievement orientation* and *initiative* have the same mean and rank (rank overall 12 & within category 8, mean 3.84). Then came the rest of the competencies which are; *flexibility* (rank overall 13 & within category 9, mean 3.81), *self-confidence* (rank overall 14 & within category 10, mean 3.80), *energy & passion* (rank overall 16 & within category 11, mean 3.78), *teamwork & cooperation* (rank overall 17 & within category 12 , mean 3.77), *concern for order, quality & accuracy* (rank overall 18 & within category 13, mean 3.72), *developing others* (rank overall 19 & within category 14, mean 3.71), *impact & influence on others* (rank overall 21 & within category15, mean 3.66), *self-control* (rank overall 22 & within category 16, mean 3.71).

The most noticeable thing that the ranked means by MBAG are very near to each other, which indicate that MBAG rank the acquired competencies nearly between high and medium see table (1) and figure (1).

6.2. Research Objective (2): To investigate the difference in importance of acquired competencies in terms of soft and hard skills as perceived by MBAG

This objective is attained through comparing the mean ranks between the two categories (Soft and Hard) in MBA questionnaire using the paired-sample T-test for comparing two means.

H1: There is significant difference in importance in the acquired competencies between soft skills and hard skills as perceived by MBAG.

- **Table (2):** Paired Samples Test (Hard and Soft Skills) for MBAG

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Soft Skills – Hard Skills	42.08879	8.87295	.60654	40.89319	43.28438	69.391	213	0.000

Source: *SPSS analysis according to the collected data.*

According to the results in table (2) the null hypothesis is rejected at Alpha = 0.05 since P-value = (0.00). Accordingly, results show that there is significant difference in importance of the acquired competencies in terms of hard skills and soft skills from the MBAG perceptions.

6.3. Research Objective (3)*:* To explore more needed competencies in the MBA programs that are missing according to MBAG perception.

A chance is given for MBAG in the questionnaires to add some competencies that are perceived as important and not included within the twenty-five competencies. They added the following competencies that should be acquired in MBA programs: *The IQ testing, customer relations management, integrity, intelligent curiosity, enhance the ability to respond effectively to changing environment, positive thinking, cope and create organization change, high qualification, good negotiator, forecasting and analysis skills.*

7. DISCUSSION

First; In general, according to the study findings the overall mean for hard skills ranked by MBAG is 3.86 which is more than the overall mean for soft skills 3.84. Also, the analysis indicates that most acquired competencies by MBAG are ranked of medium development (refer to table (1).

Moreover, the study findings show that the MBAG ranked a number of the competencies as highly acquired through the MBA programs (refer to table (1); the high top five competencies ranked by MBAG as the highest acquired competencies in MBA programs sequentially are; *organizational awareness*, *ability and willingness to learn*, *organizational commitment, written communication* and *technical expertise.* It is noticed that three of the top five competencies categorized as *hard skills.* These are*; organizational awareness, written communication and technical expertise*, while the other two are categorized as *soft skills* these are *ability and willingness to learn* and *organizational commitment*. On the other hand, *computer literacy* is categorized as hard skill that ranked the least overall.

These findings are consistent with previous studies that claim that soft competencies specified to be most critical are the least competencies represented in acquired MBAG competencies (Rubin, 2007; Rubin & Dierdorff, 2009). As the majority of the highest ranked competencies are categorized as hard skills.

Also this study is consistent with previous studies in ranking willingness to learn as one of the most important competencies (Rainsbury *et al*, 2002; Tiwari 2012; Andrews & Higson, 2008). Additionally, written communication considered one of the most important competencies which support the study handled by Shuayto (2013). Furthermore, computer literacy considered in this study one of the lowest ranked competencies. This results are consistent with Hodges and Burchell (2003) who claim that the lack of emphasis placed on such hard skills indicates that these are considered 'a given' skill.

The rest of the nineteen competencies ranked overall as medium in importance with mean range from 3.58 to 3.79. These competencies are personal planning & organizational skills, interpersonal understanding, interpersonal communication, problem solving and customer service orientation.

There are some competencies which are of equal importance like leadership and relationship building. Also, achievement orientation and initiative have the same mean and rank. Then came the rest of the competencies which are; flexibility, self-confidence, analytical thinking, energy & passion, teamwork & cooperation, concern for order, quality & accuracy, developing others, conceptual thinking, impact & influence on others, self-control.

The most noticeable thing that the ranked means by MBAG are very near to each other, which indicate that MBAG rank the acquired competencies nearly between medium and high refer to table (1) and figure (1).

Second; the research findings revealed a significant difference in importance in the acquired competencies in terms of soft and hard skills from the MBAG perceptions. This finding support previous studies conducted in this area. As they confirm that there is significant difference in importance between hard and soft skills (Rubin, 2007; Rubin & Dierdorff, 2009).

Furthermore, a chance is given for MBAG to add some competencies that are perceived as important and not included within the twenty-five competencies. They added the following competencies that should be acquired in MBA programs: *The IQ testing, customer relations management, integrity, intelligent curiosity, enhance the ability to respond effectively to changing environment, positive thinking, cope and create organization change, high qualification, good negotiator, forecasting and analysis skills*.

It is noticed that customer relations management mentioned as relationship management competencies by Boyatzis (2008) and categorized as soft skills. Also, the two competencies *positive thinking and integrity* are considered as soft skills which consistent with Robles (2012) frame work. Moreover, the competencies *enhance the ability to respond effectively to changing environment and cope and create organization change* considered by Iqbal &

Zenchenkov (2014) as one of the most critical competencies. Additionally, the proposed *good negotiator* competency is listed in an MBA core curriculum at Top-50 U.S. Business Schools as *negotiations* and categorized as soft skill (Navarro, 2008), also it considered one of the crucial competencies for top management by Woodruffe (1993). On the other hand, *IQ testing and high qualification* are not mentioned explicitly in previous studies, but can classified as soft skills. It is noticed that they are considered as broad skills description rather than competencies. It can be concluded that most proposed competencies by MBAG are classified as soft skills.

8. CONCLUSION

The major findings revealed the competencies that are highly developed through the MBA programs are *organizational awareness, ability and willingness to learn, organizational commitment, written communication and technical expertise.* Three of them hard skills and the other two soft skills. Besides, the study indicates significant difference in importance in acquired competencies in terms of soft skills and hard skills as perceived by MBAG. Thus, this imply that the major acquired competencies by MBAG are categorized as hard skills. Certainly, this will put more emphasis on the importance of the soft skills development in MBA programs in recent future. While MBAG have advance hard skills, their soft skills are weak. They need to keep more in touch with what's actually needed in the business world.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. In general, business schools should perform curriculum restructures for prioritizing soft skills and designing coursework to incorporate more skills which viewed as crucial by MBAG, business and employers.

2. Design curricula so that students can learn — by doing — to apply multiple disciplines on the job, and encourage students to take electives outside the traditional core curriculum in order to facilitate soft skills acquirement.

3. Create differentiated curricula and allow students to concentrate in specific industries.

4. To adopt more innovative ways of designing and delivering the MBA courses and add some relevant subjects based on Sudanese organizations requirements, environment and culture.

5. Optimizing business school research through effective knowledge sharing and learning between research and practice along with practical case studies that enhance the efficiency of students.

6. Use of training and coaching as a stepping-stone to facilitate instructors' integration of soft skills into existing MBA courses.

10. FURTHER RESEARCH

- The competencies can be classified into more specialized clusters for e.g. marketing competencies, financial competencies, leadership competencies and other different classifications.

- Concerning the methodology in future, researchers can employ longitudinal study rather than cross-sectional.

- Further research can be enlarged to include more universities under the study to evaluate more programs in Sudan. Moreover, a comparative study among universities could be handled in order to evaluate and rank the programs in terms of delivering rich competencies.

- In order to strengthen the study control group could be used (i.e. to compare the MBAG with non MBA holders in term of competencies).

- Future studies can include more deep analysis in terms of demographics, based on gender, industry, age, occupation, experience. In order to compare between different groups in terms of competencies.

- In future this study may be enlarged to include the (DBA) graduates also.

11. REFERENCES

[1]. AACSB international, 2016. A Collective Vision for Business Education. available at AACSB.EDU/VISION

[2]. Aamodt, P.O. and Havnes, A., 2008. Factors affecting professional job mastery: Quality of study or work experience? Quality in Higher Education, 14(3), pp.233-248.

[3]. Ahfad University for Women: records

[4]. Andrews, J. and Higson, H., 2008. Graduate employability, 'soft skills' versus 'hard 'business knowledge: A European study. Higher education in Europe, 33(4), pp.411-422.

[5]. Andrews, J. and Higson, H., 2008. Graduate employability, 'soft skills' versus 'hard 'business knowledge: A European study. Higher education in Europe, 33(4), pp.411-422.

[6]. Azevedo, A., Apfelthaler, G. and Hurst, D., 2012. Competency development in business graduates: An industry-driven approach for examining the alignment of undergraduate business education with industry requirements. The International Journal of Management Education, 10(1), pp.12-28.

[7]. Azevedo, A., Apfelthaler, G. and Hurst, D., 2012. Competency development in business graduates: An industry-driven approach for examining the alignment of undergraduate business education with industry requirements. The International Journal of Management Education, 10(1), pp.12-28.

[8]. Baruch, Y. and Leeming, A., 1996. Programming the MBA programme-the quest for curriculum. Journal of Management Development, 15(7), pp.27-36.

[9]. Boyatzis, R.E., 2008. Competencies in the 21st century. Journal of management development, 27(1), pp.5-12.

[10]. Cavico, F.J. and Mujtaba, B.G., 2009. The state of business schools, business education, and business ethics. Journal of Academic and Business Ethics, 2, p.1.

[11]. Dotong, C.I., 2014. School–Related Factors in the Development of Graduates' Competencies towards Employability. Journal of Education and Literature, 2(1), pp.28-3

[12]. Garden City University for Science & Technology: records

[13]. Hodges, D. and Burchell, N., 2003. Business graduate competencies: Employers' views on importance and performance. Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education, 4(2), pp.16-22.

[14]. Hogan, R., & Warrenfeltz, R. 2003. Educating the modern manager. Academy of Management Learning & Education, 2: 74–84.

[15]. Iqbal, A. and Zenchenkov, M., 2014. Market tested business education: Corporate sector perceptions of Saudi graduates' competencies. Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education, 15(2), pp.91-106.

[16]. Iqbal, A. and Zenchenkov, M., 2014. Market Tested Business Education: Corporate Sector Perceptions of Saudi Graduates Competencies. Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education, 15(2), pp.91-106.

[17]. Jackson, D., 2010. An international profile of industry-relevant competencies and skill gaps in modern graduates. International Journal of Management Education, 8(3), pp.29–58.

[18]. Kaiser, R. B., & Kaplan, R. B. 2006. The deeper work of executive development: Outgrowing sensitivities. Academy of Management Learning & Education, 5: 463–483.

[19]. Kini, R.S., 2015. Bridging the Gap between Knowledge and Application in Management Education–Challenges Ahead. Browser Download This Paper.

[20]. Laszlo, K. C. (2001, July). The evolution of business: learning, innovation and sustainability in the 21st century. In 45th Annual Conference of the International Society for the Systems Sciences (Vol. 7, pp. 6-62).

[21]. Malan, S.P.T., 2000. The 'new paradigm' of outcomes-based education in perspective. Journal of Family Ecology and Consumer Sciences, 28(1), pp.22-28.

[22]. Martinovic, M., 2013. Competency Assessment: Can Graduate Business Education Meet Corporate Requirements? Listening, 4(23), pp.3-11.

[23]. Mihail, D.M. and Kloutsiniotis, P.V., 2014. The impact of an MBA on managerial skills and career advancement: The Greek case. The International Journal of Management Education, 12(3), pp.212-222.

[24]. Navarro, P., 2008. The MBA core curricula of top-ranked U.S. business schools: A study in failure? Academy of Management Learning and Education, 7(1), pp.108–123.

[25]. Okoli, M.B.B., 2014. An Assessment of Business Competencies Needed by Business Education Students for Entrepreneurial Development in Nigeria.

[26]. Rainsbury, E., Hodges, D.L., Burchell, N. and Lay, M.C., 2002. Ranking workplace competencies: Student and graduate perceptions.

[27]. Robles, M.M., 2012. Executive perceptions of the top 10 soft skills needed in today's workplace. Business Communication Quarterly, 75(4), pp.453-465.

[28]. Rubin, R.S. and Dierdorff, E.C., 2007, August. How relevant is the MBA? assessing the alignment of MBA curricula and managerial competencies. in academy of management proceedings (vol. 2007, no. 1, pp. 1-6). academy of management.

[29]. Rubin, R.S. and Dierdorff, E.C., 2009. How relevant is the MBA? Assessing the alignment of required curricula and required managerial competencies. Academy of Management Learning & Education, 8(2), pp.208-224.

[30]. Rubin, R.S. and Dierdorff, E.C., 2009. How relevant is the MBA? Assessing the alignment of required curricula and required managerial competencies. Academy of Management Learning & Education, 8(2), pp.208-224.

[31]. Shuayto, N., 2013. Management skills desired by business school deans and employers: An empirical investigation. Business Education & Accreditation, 5(2), pp.93-105.

[32]. Sidiropoulos, E., 2014. Education for sustainability in business education programs: a question of value. Journal of cleaner production, 85, pp.472-487.

[33]. Spencer, L.M. and Spencer, P.S.M., 2008. Competence at Work models for superior performance. John Wiley & Sons.

[34]. Sudan International University: records

[35]. Tay, A., 2001. Management's perception of MBAG in Malaysia. Journal of Management Development, 20(3), pp.258-274.

[36]. Ting, S.K.T. and Ying, C.Y., 2012. Business graduates' competencies in the eyes of employers: An exploratory study in Malaysia. World Review of Business Research, 2(2), pp.176-190.

[37]. Tiwari, S., 2012. Skills, Competencies and Employability through Business Education.

[38]. University of Khartoum - School of management studies records.

[39]. University of Medical Science and Technology: records

[40]. Varela, O., Burke, M. and Michel, N., 2013. The development of managerial skills in MBA programs: A reconsideration of learning goals and assessment procedures. Journal of Management Development, 32(4), pp.435-452.

[41]. Woodruffe, C., 1993. What is meant by a competency? Leadership & organization development journal, 14(1), pp.29-36.

Online References

[42]. Dhand, N. K., and Khatkar, M. S. (2014). Statulator: An online statistical calculator. Sample Size Calculator for Comparing Two Paired Proportions. Accessed 16 July 2017.

[43]. Hard Skills Definition | Investopedia: (http://www.investopedia.com/terms/h/hard-skills.asp#ixzz4Nw0EE23v)

[44]. Soft Skills :http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/softskills.

[45]. The questionnaire link of the study for MBAG. Available at: MBAG:(https://goo.gl/forms/25xsKMpIJNVhrefu2)

BIOGRAPHIES

Dr. Samah Mohamed Mustafa Kamal
DBA (*Doctor of Business Administration*), The Graduate College, School of Management Studies, University of Khartoum. Dissertation title: (Competency Assessment: Matching MBA Graduates with Employability Requirements in Sudanese Organizations). MBA (*Master of Business Administratio*n), BSc (Bachelor of Science) in Management, University of Khartoum (School of management studies). Member in the Advisory Board in The Sudanese Initiative for Open Training (SIOT). Member in Sudanese Next Generation(SNG) instructors' platform.

Dr. Abdalla Abdelrahim Idris Mahmoud
(Associate Professor/ Director of Risk Management / Deposited Insurance Fund/Sudan)
PhD Business Administration (2003). Thesis Title: 'The Relevancy of the Sudanese Organizational Context to TQM'. - M.Sc. Business Administration (1997), The Graduate College, School of Management Studies, University of Khartoum. - B.Sc. (honours), Business Administration (1993), School of Management Studies, University of Khartoum. Member of the Academic council at faculty of Commerce.Member of the Quality & Accreditation Committee.