

Matching MBA Graduates' Competencies with Employability Requirements in Sudanese Organizations

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Abstract: *The world is changing and 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. This study is an exploratory comparative cross sectional study that assessed MBA graduates and HRM perceptions critically. It compared the MBA graduates acquired competencies with employability requirements in Sudanese organizations. The main argument of this study is that there is a 'competency gap' between the acquired competencies by MBA graduates and the required competencies by Sudanese organizations. Paired sample technique is used to select a sample size of 214 pairs from MBA graduates and HRM, and T-test is utilized to test the hypotheses under 0.05 significant level. The study revealed the most crucial competencies that valued most by employers are: ability and willingness to learn, achievement orientation, concern for order, quality and accuracy, energy and passion, self-confidence, teamwork and cooperation, analytical thinking, technical expertise, customer service orientation, initiative and problem solving. On the other hand, 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. Moreover, the research shown that there is a significant difference between the competencies acquired by MBAG, and those that are required by HRM with $T = 17.98$. Therefore, it can be concluded that the acquired competencies through the MBA programs in Sudan do not match the employability needs and requirements of Sudanese organizations. Accordingly, this study recommends achieving MBA-industry collaboration and engagement, through employing cooperative education programs which can provide an ideal vehicle to bridge the gap between the world of work and the world of education.*

Keywords: Competency, Business Education, Employability

Acronyms: MBAG: Master of Business Administration Graduates. HRM: Human Resource Managers

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I. Introduction

The advancement of the educational system since World War II increases the opportunity for national growth and improves access to jobs for individuals. And presently it has undergone radical changes to survive with globalization and employability related issues (Choudhury & Sharma, 2014). Accordingly, there is critical need to make the existing paradigms more innovative for better higher education. The fast changing business environment such as increasing competition or changing customer demand drives the quality of higher education to become even more crucial. The large demand for extremely skilled workforce has contributed to the growing importance of obtaining a superior university education (Boyles, 2012).

Thus, the role of universities in providing employees with sufficient knowledge and competencies as learning outcomes is essential (Moskal, Ellis & Keon, 2008).

However, recent studies indicate that newly employed university graduates do not excel in these higher-level knowledge and information based skills at the level that employers need (Boyles, 2012). Michael Porter (2013) declared in the report of (The new role of business in global education) that worldwide crisis in education is threatening social stability and economic progress. Around the world, two hundred million people are unemployed, while nearly 60 percent of CEOs report that a shortage of skilled labor is holding back their company's growth. In spite that, governments, nonprofits, and school leaders have long struggled to overcome these challenges, they have had limited success. World Economic Forum (2014), stated that the generation coming of age in the 2010s faces high unemployment and precarious job situations, hampering their efforts to build a future and raising the risk of social unrest. In advanced economies, the large number of graduates from expensive and outmoded educational systems – graduating with high debts and mismatched skills – points to a need to adapt and integrate professional and academic education. In developing countries, an estimated two-thirds of the youth are not fulfilling their economic potential. As a result, 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 et al, 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 education institutions and their impact is translated in the world in terms of skills and competencies and is involved in the development of every nation, they are considered as part of the workforce who contributes to the success of every organization leading towards a common goal (Dotong, 2014). Therefore, employability need to be addressed urgently as the levels of youth unemployment and underemployment across the world, and the related growing discrepancy in prospects between the best candidates and the rest are influential factors to income inequality. The World Economic Forum has identified unemployment and income inequality as major global risks that are interconnected with the number one risk: fiscal crises in key economies (World Economic Forum, 2014). Aamont & Havnes (2008) claim that higher education institutions tend to increase graduate employability. Thus, the role of academic institutions is to hone the competencies of the students in order for them to achieve the personal and professional growth (Dotong, 2014).

The main argument of this research is that there is a 'competency gap' between the acquired competencies by MBA Graduates (MBAG) and the required competencies by Sudanese organizations.

II. Research Objectives

In general, this study tries to answer the question: Can business education currently delivered in Sudanese universities prepare MBAG adequately for the workplace, by meeting organizations' requirements in terms of competencies? (i.e. is there a match between MBAG and employability requirements in Sudanese organizations?)

Therefore, this study is seeking to attain the following objectives:

1. To rank the relevant competencies acquired by MBAG and those required by employers.
2. To match the perceptions of MBAG and employers against each other in terms of the acquired and the actual competencies in order to identify the gap (if any).
3. To show the relevance of the current business education outcomes, to the needs and requirements of Sudanese employers.

Hypothesis: H1: There is significant difference between the acquired competencies through the MBA program as perceived by MBAG and the required competencies as perceived by employers in organizations.

III. Literature review

Competency: There are many definitions of 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 standards of perfection required in specific contexts. From an industrial perspective, Boyatzis (1982) defined 'Competency' as including the knowledge, skills, abilities, traits and behaviors that allow an individual to perform a task within a specific function or job. Accordingly, a competency is a combination of relevant attributes that underlie successful professional performance (Moore, Cheng, & Dainty, 2002).

Employability: The Employability is considered a new business word that finds no consensus in the literature (Dhanawade & Bhola 2015). Dacre and Sewell, (2007, pp.277) stated that "employability is acquiring a set of skills, knowledge, understanding and personal attributes that make a person more likely to choose an occupation in which he can be secure and successful".

Employability Competencies Classification (Hard Versus 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" (Hard Skills Definition: 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). Robles (2012) classified employable competencies into hard skills which are the technical expertise and knowledge needed for a job, and soft skills which are interpersonal qualities, also known as people skills, and personal attributes that one possesses. Jackson (2010) posed that higher education institutions are consistently blamed for soft skill deficiencies and many are now pursuing policies on the development of generic skills. Furthermore, Robles (2012) claim that business executives consider soft skills a very important feature in employees. But according to his findings that employers want new employees to have strong soft skills, as well as hard skills. According to Shuayto (2013), soft skills are communication, negotiation, and team building. On the other hand, Andrews & Higson (2008, pp.4) identified 13 dimension and call them the key 'transferable' soft skills that integral to graduate employability: "professionalism; reliability; the ability to cope with uncertainty; the ability to work under pressure; the ability to plan and think strategically; the capability to communicate and interact with others, either in teams or through networking; good written and verbal communication skills; information and communication technology skills; creativity and self-confidence; good self-management and time-management skills; a willingness to learn and accept responsibility". Robles (2012, pp.455) identified the top 10 soft skills in his study as perceived the most important by business executives: "integrity, communication, courtesy, responsibility, social skills, positive attitude, professionalism, flexibility, teamwork, and work ethic". Saludin & Salahudin (2014) examined eight dimensions critical for employability skills these are: knowledge and understanding, general attributes interpersonal skills, computing skills, thinking skills, management skills, communication skills, generic skills. Andrews & Higson (2008) highlighted three significant themes emerged out of their research that handled in four European countries, each one focusing on different components of graduate employability:

- Business Specific Issues (Hard business-related knowledge and skills);
- Interpersonal Competencies (Soft business-related skills);
- Work Experience and Work-Based Learning.

They concluded that; graduates' perceptions, contextually different, whilst employers' perceptions of the skills and competencies necessary to enhance graduate employability were similar in all four countries.

Moreover, Tiwari (2012) stated ten factors and call them critical success factors which contribute to the employability skills directly those are; communication and interpersonal skills, information and technology skill, ability to work as a team, leadership skills, problem solving skills, clearly identified professional accreditations, an emphasis on work experience, clearly identified industry links, adaptability skills, and creativity skills.

And he demonstrated that in order to achieve the above, some of the following interventions are needed:

- Employer participation and involvement in higher education through specific programs.
- Employability skills set into the conventional curriculum.
- Assessment practices should tie to employability skills.
- Include personal development and planning modules.

Therefore, it is noticeable that employability requirements differ in terms of soft versus hard skills, and most studies revealed the importance of the soft skills from the perspective of the employer. (Rainsbury et al, 2002; Rubin & Dierdorff, 2007; Rubin & Dierdorff, 2009 Robles, 2012; Shuayto, 2013). Moreover, most studies stressed the critical need to create engagement and linkage between the employers and universities to develop both the soft and hard skills in the graduates' competencies. (Andrews & Higson, 2008; Tiwari, 2012). In this study, the main focus is on the competencies that are critical for employability. These competencies are grouped in terms of soft and hard skills, and they are assessed critically from the MBAG and employer perspectives.

Tracking the competency gap in MBA programs: Mihail & Kloutsiniotis (2014) argue that an MBA contributes considerably to most of the managerial skills, and it also helps graduates to find enriched jobs with increasing compensation over time although relevant criticisms regarding a gap between MBA programs and business needs are not groundless. In spite that MBA programs "...would seem to add value to graduates, giving them business-related knowledge and managerial skills, improving their employability, career advancement and remuneration" (Baruch & Peiperl, 2000, pp.69). Yet there is less research which specifically examines exactly what skills and knowledge are acquired from an MBA program, and how they may contribute to business organizations and future career development (Sturges, Simpson & Altman, 2003). Even those studies that have found a positive effect of the MBA degree are open to the alternative interpretation that what is being assessed is the quality of the student body rather than the effects of acquiring some specific competencies (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002).

Rubin & Dierdorff (2009) stated that MBA programs are being met with rising criticism from academics, students, and various organizational stakeholders. Central to these criticisms is the argument that the MBA is wholly out-of-touch with the "real world" and is irrelevant to the needs of practicing managers. Elliott and Goodwin (1994) criticize MBAs and business school programs citing these shortcomings:

- Business schools do little effort to produce future executives who are able to meet the challenges of the changing global business environment.
- MBAs are ill-equipped to cope with an increasingly diverse workforce.
- There is a shortage of faculty qualified staff to teach environmental, ethical, and international issues influencing business.
- Faculty lack suitable business experience, are under significant pressure to produce academic publications, and cannot effectively teach students what is applicable in "real world" environments.

Moreover, Louw, Bosch & Venter (2001) claimed that in addition to the above criticisms there are two more:

- Connection between business schools and stakeholders is insufficient.
- There is an overemphasis on quantitative subject disciplines, while the growth of people skills is ignored. Furthermore, Datar et al. (2010) list eight areas that business schools seem to be weak in. These are:
 - Gaining a global perspective: managing institutional, economic, and cultural diversity
 - Developing leadership skills: learning to build with others.
 - Honing integration skills: framing problems holistically and incorporating judgment and intuition into analytical decision-making.
 - Recognizing organizational realities and implementing effectively: understanding the politics of organizational behavior
 - Acting creatively and innovatively
 - Thinking critically and communicating effectively
 - Understanding the roles, responsibilities, and purpose of business: balancing the financial and non-financial objectives of business and multiple stakeholder demands
 - Understanding the limits of models and markets.

According to Richards-Wilson (2002) that those who work in higher education are familiar with the internal inertia and obstacles that business schools and other academic departments must hurdle when attempting to implement change. AACSB International (2012) International Board of Directors stated that there are disparities exist between business and business schools and added three specific hurdles: first, to many industry leaders, business schools are still the well-known ivory towers, where scholarship and education are often disconnected from the real-world and its requirements. Conversely, many deans and faculty of business schools believe business leaders misunderstand their teaching and research missions and the importance of rigorously developed and validated teaching and scholarship. Second, despite growth and commitments to continuous improvement, business schools still attract criticism. Most of the critics have originate from the business school academic community itself. Business schools had "lost their way" by focusing on research that was too scientific and not preparing students with skills to deal with complex management problems. Third, business schools operate at a different pace from the communities they serve in business and government, which often frustrates business leaders who need answers to today's problems today. Management education appears slow to respond to new business challenges. Articulating and reacting to those challenges, plus creating the knowledge and the skilled graduates to meet them, is often a multi-year process.

Concerning MBA curriculum Porter & McKibbin (1988) noted that many critics argued that quantitatively based analytical techniques received too much attention, while there was too little attention given to developing leadership and interpersonal skills, and too little emphasis on communication skills. Additionally, Mintzberg & Gosling (2002, pp. 28) noted that "contemporary business education focuses on the functions of business more than the practice of managing". Similarly, Martinovic (2013) argues that there is a significant gap between what employers expect from employees and what they get. Moreover, both managers and the graduates are aware that competencies are not developed enough to fulfill contemporary organizations' expectations and they are not satisfied with current competencies of their employees.

On the contrary, Sturges, Simpson & Altman (2003) argues that the issues for employers who recruit MBAG or sponsor students on MBA programs, suggest that such courses cultivate a broader range of skills than potentially might have been expected. Skills such as increased assertiveness, better people management and greater comfort with change are likely to benefit organizations as much as technical skills, such as finance and marketing expertise. However, Tiwari (2012) argues that the gap exists in terms of ensuring that the needs of industry are met by the ongoing skills development of the workforce. Then the study revealed a clear understanding of the factors in business education that govern the relationship between the skills, competencies, and employability.

Moreover, a research conducted by Saxena & Bendale (2014) to explore whether MBA's show better or not in managerial competencies in comparison to Non MBA's. They concluded that corporate managers do not find MBA's better equipped than Non MBA's while performing a managerial task on most of the competencies. In a similar manner, the findings from a previous study conducted in the banking sector in Malaysia by Ting & Ying (2012) confirmed that there is still a gap between the employers' perception and the actual performance of Malaysia business graduates. Thus, Amen (2014) proposed that business schools as well as employers need to review their teaching methodologies and development programs to enhance the skills and competencies of their employees. Another study conducted by Dhanawade & Bhola (2015) came to confirm the previous researches that the level of employability skills perceived by the industry is low as compared to the level of employability skills perceived by the students.

Hodges & Burchell (2003) claimed that, employers want 'well-rounded' graduates with a wide variety of competencies, as well as they, place a great importance on graduates' soft skills, and their ability to deal empathetically and effectively. Though, they suggested that employers believe graduates have unrealistic expectations of life in the business world and are generally deficient in interpersonal skills. Besides, Bedwell, Fiore & Salas (2014) argue that executives consistently rank interpersonal skills as a critical competency for a successful workforce.

Moreover, Shuayto (2013) concluded that there are significant differences in the importance of "soft skills" vs. "hard skills" among the prospective employers of MBAG and among the deans and directors at business schools with MBAs. In addition, the research offered business school leaders empirical evidence for curriculum redesign for prioritizing skills and designing coursework to incorporate top ranked skills viewed as most important by business and industry leaders. Therefore, as stated by Banerjee & Patter (2015) given the important and strong connections between student competencies and their employability, employers should give more clarity to the competencies and skills needed by them. Still, the capabilities are not restricted to occupation particular knowledge and skills; rather they ought to additionally address the generic skills too. Furthermore, Hodges & Burchell (2003) concluded that in spite that employers are generally satisfied with the performance of new graduates, but still there is a performance gap in graduate competency levels between what required by employers (and therefore what they would ideally like) and what they experience.

Maddox & Nicholson (2014) believe that this type of assessments has potential merit in terms of improving delivery of high quality educational experiences to students within a student centered educational culture. As such Jackson (2010) proposes that in order to successfully enhance employability and the immediacy of adding value to organizations, businesses must not only articulate what they need and want from graduates, it is also significant that graduates are aware of what they are learning and its use in the workplace.

Accordingly, Martinovic (2013) argues that universities have the key role in shaping and developing desired competencies in their students as they are competence suppliers. On the other hand, Richards-Wilson (2002) stated that keeping up with the speed of business, business schools face significant challenges, including staff and resource limitations, cultural resistance to change, wariness of technology, stubborn adherence to routine, decentralization, and an overall lack of flexibility resulting from hierarchical decision making or organizational structural impediments. Further problems result because many administrators and faculty members feel that these challenges must be overcome with speed. Also, Osmani et al (2015) concluded that the gap between industry and academia make it difficult for universities to identify and deliver the appropriate and needed skills to prospective graduate employees.

Bridging MBA-industry gap: Indeed, change is needed to bridge the gap between MBA and organizations. But the most important questions in this situation are 'What' and 'How' (Kini 2014). Iqbal and Zenchenkov (2014) suggested that there is a lack of efficient direct mechanisms to encourage university-industry collaboration and this created large discrepancies in the ability of institutions to interface with the corporate sector. That study found that there is a vital need for soft skill development in the future graduates. Also, Varela et al, (2013) argued that lack of skill mastery is a sign of MBA program failure, which needs to be reexamined and that this assumption overlooks constraints to complex managerial skill development within MBA instruction and precludes consideration of intermediate stages of development as meaningful accomplishments. Dhanawade & Bhola (2015) conclude that some efforts can be taken to bridge this gap through various development programs for MBA students in addition to the syllabus and pedagogy of the MBA course. Jackson (2010) suggested that this could be happening through fostering lifelong learning, the development of a range of employability-related competencies.

As the effective use of information is a key component of the manager's job, Cullen, (2013) asked the question for MBA programs how to provide instruction so their graduates have the necessary foundations in this skill. Business managers use information during the decision-making process, so students need to learn about how to build the capabilities to use information effectively. Accordingly, he suggested using the case method and co-teaching with a faculty member to introduce information skill development. Boyatzis & Saatioglu

(2008) claimed that continuing to innovate and assess the effectiveness of experiments is crucial in achieving creative thinking and healthy degrees of organizational cooperation. Hence, according to Shuayto (2013) business schools need teaching what needs to be taught according to the needs of prospective employers. On the contrary, Chia (2014) proposed that university-based business schools must resist to surrender to the demands to teach only what appears immediately “relevant” to the business world in order to be actually useful to business. Alternatively, they must rigorously seek to expand limits of knowledge between students and business executives through the process of relevating the seemingly irrelevant. In this way they can genuinely help prepare students and business executives for the challenges and necessities of a dynamic and fast-changing world.

Shuayto (2013) argues that graduate business programs must also find methods of strengthening soft skills, or people skills, while continuing to prepare students in the hard skills. This can be done according to Hodges & Burchell (2003) through cooperative education programs that provide an ideal means to bridge the gap between the world of work and the world of education, curriculum developers need to be alert and ensure that they understand the world of work, and thus the competencies demanded of business graduates. Kini (2014) proposed that this could happen through effective knowledge sharing and learning between research, policy, and practice along with practical case studies that enhance the efficiency of students. Similarly, Bedwell, Fiore & Salas (2014) argued that students must acquire effective interpersonal skills before entering the workforce. This could be achieved by the use of science of training as a stepping-stone to facilitate instructors' integration of interpersonal skills into existing MBA courses. Alternatively, Aamodt & Havnes, (2008) argued that good quality and relevant training programs seem to be essential, but in the first years of working life and could be seen as a link between higher education and competent mastery as a professional. Yet, relying on training and development efforts after hiring is not enough according to Bidwell, Fiore & Salas (2014) —especially when backing for “soft skills” training is being split between work fields. Because, organizations need to select interpersonally competent individuals who can effectively participate in interactions immediately upon employment.

According to a study conducted by Rubin & Dierdorff (2007) who examined the relevancy of MBA curricula in relation to managerial competency requirements across 373 schools, the most critical managerial competencies were found to be the least competencies represented in MBA curricula. Then again, Costigan & Brink (2015) extend the work by investigating the pervasiveness of this curricula misalignment by considering whether the learning goals of MBA programs are also misaligned with key managerial competencies. Through an analysis of the learning outcomes of 250 MBA programs, their study surprisingly found that the learning outcomes are mostly in alignment with the competencies that lead to managerial success. Hence, they suggest that managing human capital and managing decision-making processes competencies have the greatest share of the learning outcomes. These data also indicate sharp differences with Rubin & Dierdorff's (2009) data. Additionally, according to Almog-Bareket (2011) business schools need to facilitate an education process that include the development of awareness of the human factor organizations, and the competencies to engage and encourages a deep identification with change, in a sense that leaders should be able to consolidate a vision and lead change derived from that vision as reflected in their daily managerial practice, and furthermore, that current MBA students need to develop additional unique skills that will enable them to diagnose problems related to the assimilation of change and to measure the effectiveness of this process. In addition, Osmani et al (2015) conclude that higher education curriculum development should be directed towards competencies that are expected of MBAG and are relevant to the needs of the market and industry.

In general, business schools should redefine their objectives and craft a strategy to facilitate the change process like adopting a total quality education (TQE) model that considers society, students, and the business community as beneficiaries of the educational process (Richards-Wilson, 2002). Furthermore, business schools need to add a substantial focus on the soft skills, continually re-assess their goals and strategies and make the necessary changes in order to keep up with the rapidly changing needs of business organizations (Shuayto, 2013). Specially, higher education institutions can and should contribute greatly to the promotion and development of each of these aspects. As the responsibility does not, however, remain solely with them. Social, family and work experiences also play a role and once graduates have entered the workplace, and it is essential for employers to create a supportive culture and environment which fosters the emergence and continued development of these aspects of employability (Jackson, 2010).

Addressing all the above challenges, Doria et al (2002) suggested six principles for MBA program reform 1. Require more courses in the “people skills” that are vital to managing effectively. 2. Emphasize the basic skills and tools needed for problem solving. 3. Provide strong grounding in theories of economics, measurement, governance, psychology, human behavior, and leadership. 4. Design curricula so that students can learn — by doing — to apply multiple disciplines on the job. 5. Encourage students to take electives outside the traditional core curriculum. 6. Create differentiated curricula and allow students to concentrate in specific industries. Furthermore, AACSB International (2012) proposed the establishment of a partnership between

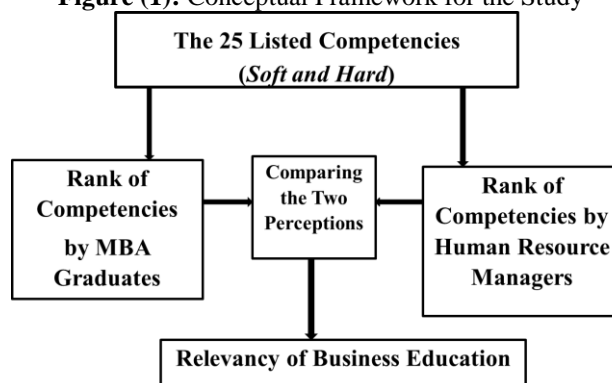
business and business schools in order to bridge the competency gap, this could be happening through: firstly, targeting and teaching the right things: management education should develop mechanisms for understanding the crucial competencies and skills of business school graduates, and forecasting how those competencies will change in the future, and assessing the level of mastery of those skills and competencies. These processes are essential measures in helping to ensure the capability and competency of the next generation of business leaders. Secondly, Optimizing business school research: AACSB-accredited business schools view scholarship as a critical mission. They suggest that an enhanced partnership, would provide opportunities for the business community to gain a clearer understanding of management education research. Thirdly, keeping up with the pace and challenge of globalization: As they identified globalization and its challenges as a concern for both business and business schools. Some business schools have implemented strategies for addressing these global trends in their programs. Fourthly, increasing the engagement of business in business schools and business schools in business. In spite that leaders from both groups are concerned, cross-communications are still too limited.

IV. Conceptual Framework for 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. As Managerial competencies are broadly similar in importance across cultural environments (Chong, 2013), thus, the selected competencies in this study are expected to be very helpful in assessing and evaluating the competency gap in the Sudanese context for their broadness, generality, and inclusion of the most important competencies needed in managerial positions. Consequently, this study is endeavoring to assess the twenty-five dimensions of competencies from the perceptions of both MBAG and employers depending on a competency framework developed by Hodges & Burchell (2003).

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 & Dierdorff, 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 from both perspectives(MBAG/HRM). Thus, this study adopted 7 hard skills and 18 soft skills that will be assessed critically.

Figure (1): Conceptual Framework for the Study



Source: The authors elaboration

- **Firstly**, the survey started by identifying the relevant competencies based on the previous literature. The list of competencies is unified for the two target groups (MBAG/HRM).
- **Secondly**, MBAG are asked to rank the competencies that acquired from their MBA programs and HRM are asked to rank the competencies relevant to their importance.
- **Thirdly**, comparative techniques are run to assess the gaps (if any) between the perceptions of the two target groups.
- **Fourthly**, based on the findings, the researcher comes up with conclusions and recommendations that developed in the light of findings, in order to enhance MBA programs and make it more relevant and helpful in acquiring the required competencies.

V. Research Methodology

The main focus of this study is on the MBA programs, run in Sudan. Precisely, by considering the perceptions of Human Resource Managers (HRM) and MBAG about the required competencies in enhancing employee performance in Sudanese organizations. Thus, both MBAG and HRM views are investigated critically in a comparative cross sectional study. This study seeks to assess and match the acquired competencies by MBAG with the competencies required by organizations and critical to employability. The sample of MBAG is selected using cluster (double stage) sampling technique. Then matching paired sampling technique is adopted to choose the HRM sample. An online survey instrument is constructed using google form and circulated to 214 MBAG and 214 HRM, and connecting each MBAG to its HRM. Furthermore, T-test is utilized to test the hypotheses under 0.05 significant level.

This study focused on five universities that are the 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).

Table (1): The Population of the Study and the Sample Size per each University (MBAG):

The University	MBAG Population Size	Percentage from the Total Population(%)	Percentage from the Total Sample(%)	Sample Size
U of K	1892	4.18%	36.6%	79
UMST	1412	4.1%	27.2%	58
SIU	997	4.11%	19.2%	41
GCUST	650	4%	12.5%	26
AUW	234	4.27%	4.5%	10
Total	5185	4.13%	100%	214

Source: U of K, UMST, SIU, GCUST, AUW records.

Table (1) shows that the MBAG total population is 5185 and the selected sample size is 214 which represent 4.13% of the total population. A sample is chosen proportionally from each university. U of K has the largest sample that is 79 which represent 36.6% of the sample. In the second place comes UMST with sample size 58 which represent 27.2% of the sample. In the third place SIU with sample size 41 which represent 19.2% of the sample. In the fourth place comes GCUST with sample size 26 which represent 12.5% of the sample. Lastly, AUW has the least sample size of 10 which represent 4.5% of the sample. On the other hand, the HRM sample is selected according to the sample size of the MBAG using matching pairs design.

Table (2): Summary of Research Design and Methodology

Attribute	Characteristics
Research Nature	Exploratory
Research Strategy	Survey
Unit of Analysis	Individuals
Time Dimension	Cross-sectional
Research Methodology	Comparative study
Data Collection Method	Online Questionnaire Survey
Sampling Technique	1. Cluster sampling technique is used to choose MBAG sample. 2. Paired sampling technique is used to connect MBAG with HRM sample.
Statistical methods used	Descriptive statistics, Mean ranking and t-test.

Source: Compiled by authors

VI. Data Analysis

VI.1. Research Objective (1) To identify the relevant competencies acquired by MBAG and those required by employers. This objective is attained by answering 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."

Also, through answering the first section of the HRM questionnaire, through asking the respondents "Please indicate to what extent do you agree with following statements regarding the importance of each competency for your organization".

By Using 5-point Likert type Scale in MBAG questionnaire, 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. On the other hand, The HRM also were asked using 5-point Likert type scale, to indicate the importance of each competency for their organization. As **1** indicates the competency was (**not important**) and **5** indicated the

competency was (**very important**). The scale is graded as (1=Not important,2= Less important, 3= Medium important, 4= Important, 5=Very Important). The mean ranking criteria also follow the same grading criteria of the scale.

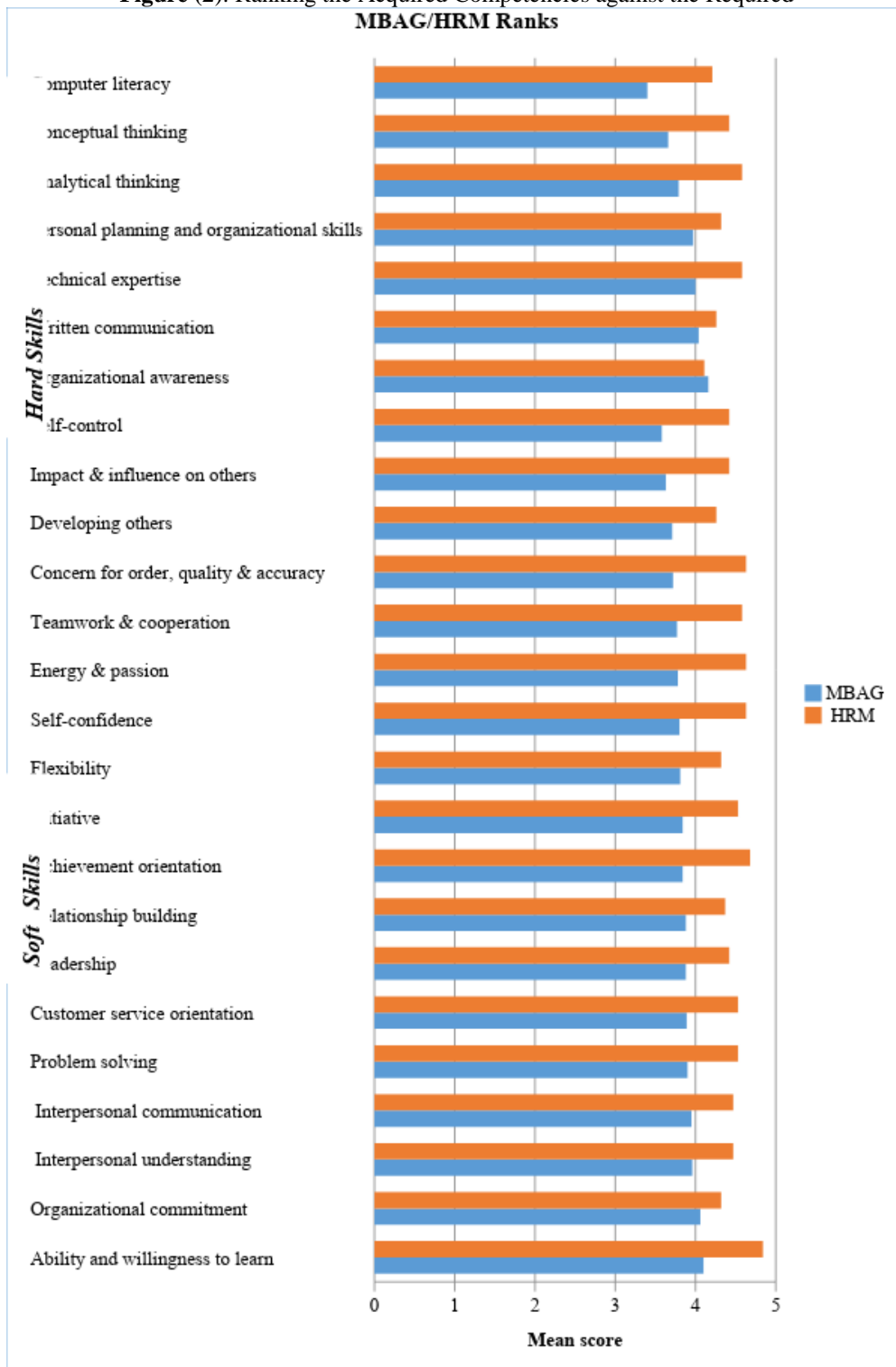
This section will be analyzed by comparing the means and ranks of the top competencies that is shown in table (3) and figure (2).

● **Table (3):** Ranking the Acquired Competencies against the Required

Competency	MBAG overall rank(Acquired Competencies)	MBAG Rank within category	MBAG Mean	HRM overall rank(Required Competencies)	HRM Rank within Category	HRM Mean
Hard skills						
Analytical thinking	15	5	3.79	4	1	4.58
Computer literacy	23	7	3.40	11	5	4.21
Conceptual thinking	20	6	3.66	7	2	4.42
Organizational awareness	1	1	4.16	12	7	4.11
Personal planning & organizational skills	6	4	3.97	9	3	4.32
Technical expertise	5	3	4.00	4	1	4.58
Written communication	4	2	4.04	10	4	4.26
Soft skills						
Ability and willingness to learn	2	1	4.10	1	1	4.84
Achievement orientation	12	8	3.84	2	2	4.68
Concern for order, quality & accuracy	18	13	3.72	3	3	4.63
Customer service orientation	10	6	3.89	5	5	4.53
Developing others	19	14	3.71	10	10	4.26
Energy & passion	16	11	3.78	3	3	4.63
Flexibility	13	9	3.81	9	9	4.32
Impact & influence on others	21	15	3.63	7	7	4.42
Initiative	12	8	3.84	5	5	4.53
Interpersonal communication	8	4	3.95	6	6	4.47
Interpersonal understanding	7	3	3.96	6	6	4.47
Leadership	11	7	3.88	7	7	4.42
Organizational commitment	3	2	4.06	9	9	4.32
Problem solving	9	5	3.90	5	5	4.53
Relationship building	11	7	3.88	8	8	4.37
Self-confidence	14	10	3.80	3	3	4.63
Self-control	22	16	3.58	7	7	4.42
Teamwork & cooperation	17	12	3.77	4	4	4.58

Source: Compiled by the authors using SPSS statistical package.

Figure (2): Ranking the Acquired Competencies against the Required
MBAG/HRM Ranks



Source: Compiled by the authors using SPSS statistical package.

Research objective (2): To match the perceptions of MBAG and employers against each other in terms of the acquired and the required competencies in order to identify the gap (if any).

This research objective is tackled through testing the first hypothesis H1: There is significant difference between the acquired competencies through the MBA program as perceived by MBAG and the actual competencies as perceived by employers in organizations.

Table (4): Paired Samples T-test Overall

		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower				Upper
Pair 1	Total HRM Total MBAG	19.621	15.962	1.091	17.471	21.772	17.983	213	.000

Source: SPSS analysis according to the collected data.

According to the results in table (4) the null hypothesis is rejected at Alpha = .05 since P-value = (.000), which means the finding support that there is significant difference between the acquired competencies through the MBA program as perceived by MBAG and the actual competencies as perceived by employers in Sudanese organizations.

Research objective (3): To show the relevance of the current business education outcomes to the needs and requirements of Sudanese employers.

According to the analysis findings in table (3) & (4), showed that there is significant difference between the acquired competencies through the MBA program and the actual competencies in Sudanese organizations. These findings reveal the mismatch between what is delivered in universities and what is actually needed by employers. Thus the results support the irrelevancy of business education delivered through the MBA programs.

VII. Findings and Discussion

Research Objective (1): To rank the relevant competencies acquired by MBAG and those required by employers.

Firstly; The major findings of this research according to table (3) indicate that *organizational awareness* ranked the highest by the MBAG, but it represented the least important for the HRM. While both MBAG and HRM are in agreement in ranking *ability and willingness to learn* as highly acquired and highly required for organizations respectively. Also it is aligned with previous studies, as it was rated the most important by industry professionals and graduates (Burchell, Hodges, & Rainsbury, 1999)

On the other hand, *organizational commitment* came as the third highly acquired competency according to the MBAG, while the HRM rank it as the one of the least important competencies. Also, *written communication* considered the fourth highly developed according to the MBAG, while it considered one of the least important according to the HRM. Finally, *technical expertise* seems to be of nearly equal importance for both MBAG and HRM, as rated by MBAG as the fifth highly acquired competency, and rank by the HRM as the fourth important competency (refer to table (3) & figure (2)).

On the other hand, HRM consider *achievement orientation* is the second important competency that is required in Sudanese organizations (rank overall and within category 2), while MBAG rank it one of the least developed competency (rank over all 12, and within category 9). *Concern for order, quality & accuracy* considered the third important competency for HRM (rank overall and within category 3), while came as one of the least acquired competencies according to MBAG (rank overall 18 & within category13). *Energy and passion* ranked as the third important competency for HRM (rank overall & within category 3), while MBAG consider it one of the least developed (rank overall 16 & within category11). Also, *Self-confidence* (rank overall & within category 3), but it is ranked one of the lowest for MBAG (rank overall 14 & within category10). Moreover, *teamwork & cooperation* (rank overall & within category 4) and *analytical thinking* (rank overall 4 & within group1), are of equal importance for HRM, while they ranked less by MBAG, where *teamwork & cooperation* (rank overall 17 & within group12) and *analytical thinking* (rank overall 15 & within group 5). Furthermore, in terms of classification as hard and soft, three of the five top ranked competencies by MBAG categorized as hard skills (*organizational awareness, written communication and technical expertise*), whereas the other two categorized as soft skills (*ability and willingness to learn and organizational commitment*). On the other hand, most of the top competencies ranked by HRM are categorized as soft skills and rank the same overall and within category except the two competencies *analytical thinking* and *technical expertise* which categorized as hard skills and ranked 4 overall and 1 within category. These results are consistent with Hodges & Burchell ,2003; Rubin & Dierdorff ,2007; Rubin & Dierdorff ,2009; Robles ,2012; Shuayto ,2013) who stressed that employers place a great emphasis on graduates' soft competencies.

Also it is noticed that *computer literacy* is scored lowest in importance for both the HRM and MBAG. These results are consistent with Hodges & Burchell (2003) who claim that the lack of emphasis placed on such hard skills indicates that these are considered 'a given' and/or that any deficiencies can be 'fixed' through further training/education – whereas soft skill deficiencies may be seen as less easily overcome. In addition, this lower emphasis on the technical skills is perhaps indicative of the changing nature of the workplace.

In general, the interesting feature of data that the rank by HRM (required competencies) score higher in means in all competencies than the rank of the MBAG (acquired competencies). This may imply that HRM are considering most of the competencies are highly important in Sudanese organizations (refer to table (3) and figure (2)). Consequently, the overall findings indicate mismatch between the acquired competencies through the MBA program and the required competencies by employers in workplace, indeed this results support the findings from previous studies conducted by Hodges & Burchell (2003) that there is a competency gap between importance and performance. It is obvious that the highly ranked competencies by MBAG categorized as hard skills except for the *willingness to learn* which shared the high rank in importance by both HRM and MBAG. Also organizational commitment which categorized as hard skill ranked high by MBAG and lower by HRM. This finding is consistent with Jackson (2010) who suggested that higher education institutions are consistently blamed for soft skill deficiencies and many are now pursuing policies on the development of generic skills. Moreover, it is consistent with Rubin & Dierdorff (2007) and Rubin & Dierdorff, (2009) study that found that soft competencies specified by managers to be most critical are the least competencies represented in required MBA curricula. While MBAG have advance theoretical skills, their practical skills are weak. They need to keep more in touch with what's actually needed in the business world.

Furthermore, *developing others, flexibility, leadership, and self-control, relationship building, interpersonal understanding, impact and influence others* are soft skills evaluated by the MBAG and HRM in this work. Remarkably, none of these latter skills were ranked highly in this study. These findings are also consistent with previous study by Rainsbury *et al*, (2002).

Secondly; A chance is given for MBAG and HRM in the two questionnaires to add some competencies that are perceived as important and not included within the twenty-five competencies. The MBAG 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*.

On the other hand, the HRM added also some competencies that they think are crucial to enhance performance in organizations and should be acquired by MBAG. these are: *good listening and getting feedback, decision making, ethics and business intelligence*.

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 added by MBAG), and *ethicality (is added by HRM)* 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* (mentioned by MBAG) considered by Iqbal & Zenchenkov (2014) as one of the most critical competencies. Additionally, the proposed *good negotiator* competency by MBAG 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).

Furthermore, *decision making* (added by HRM) is considered one of the top competencies that consistent with a study handled by Tiwari (2012) and considered as hard skill. Rao *et al* (2014) mentioned *business instinct* as one of the critical competencies for employability and classified it as soft skill. Indeed, it is very close to *business intelligence* that mentioned by HRM respondent.

On the other hand, *IQ testing, high qualification* (added by MBAG), *good listening and getting feedback* (added by HRM) 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 both MBAG and HRM are classified as soft skills. Certainly, this will put more emphasis on the importance of the soft skills development in MBA programs.

Research Objective (2): To match the perceptions of MBAG and employers against each other in terms of the acquired and the required competencies in order to identify the gap (if any).

H1: *There is significant difference between the acquired competencies through the MBA program as perceived by MBAG and the required competencies as perceived by HRM in organizations.*

The conducted paired t-test for comparing means supported the hypotheses, and the null hypothesis rejected at Alpha = .05 since P-value = (.000), which means the finding support that there is significant difference between the acquired competencies through the MBA program as perceived by MBAG and the actual competencies as perceived by employers in Sudanese organizations. Consequently, the study revealed that there is a gap between the two perceptions (MBAG and HRM) in terms of the competencies that acquired through the MBA programs and the extent of satisfaction concerning the current actual MBAG competencies according to the employers' satisfaction of each competency. This result is consistent with previous studies which argued that there is a significant gap between what employers expect from employees and what they get

(Rainsbury *et al*, 2002; Hodges & Burchell, 2003; Andrews & Higson, 2008; Ting & Ying, 2012; Jackson, 2012; Martinovic, 2013; Kini, 2014; Osmani *et al*, 2015).

Furthermore, the estimated means for the employers' rating of MBAG current competencies are shown in Figure (2). Obviously, there is a lack of spread in these data and the mean scores for the actual competencies are generally lower than the mean scores for the acquired competencies. These results are consistent with the findings of the study handled by Hodges & Burchell (2003). Another study conducted by Dhanawade & Bhola (2015) confirm the previous researches findings that the level of employability competencies perceived by the employers is low as compared to the level of employability competencies perceived by the MBAG.

Research objective (3): To show the relevance of the current business education outcomes to the needs and requirements of Sudanese employers.

First; According to the analysis findings in table (3) & (4), showed that there is significant difference between the acquired competencies through the MBA program as perceived by MBAG and the actual competencies as perceived by employers in Sudanese organizations. These findings reveal the mismatch between what is delivered in universities and what is actually needed by employers. Thus the results support the irrelevancy of business education that delivered through the MBA programs to the needs and requirements of organizations. These findings are aligned with previous studies conducted by (Rubin & Dierdorff, 2009; Varela *et al*, 2013; Saxena & Bendale, 2014).

Second; The section which indicate the reasons of the irrelevancy of MBAG acquired competencies and the suggestions to bridge the gap consist of two questions:

The first question: is concerned with the reasons of the gap (if any). It asked the HRM: *What do you think the reasons for the gap between the competencies acquired by MBA graduates and the competencies that are required by business organizations (if any exist)?*

The HRM executives gave valuable justifications for the gap existence, as major responses indicate the existence of a competency gap between MBAG and Sudanese organizations requirements. Only one response state that the gap is conditional upon weak MBA programs. The rest of responses that supplied by employers involve the following justifications for the gap: As one of the respondent said that business in reality depends on situational reaction more than theories. Which is very near to other response who attribute the gap for purely academic teaching staff. Also, other respondent thinks that the reason for the gap is that most MBA programs in Sudan are theoretically oriented rather than practically oriented, which matches other respondent opinion who suggested that the reason for the gap is that the work environment is different from MBA theories. Moreover, another respondent attribute it to the weakness of the syllabus.

These findings are consistent with Elliott and Goodwin (1994) who confirm that there is shortage of qualified faculty staff, as faculty lack suitable business experience. In addition to business schools do little effort to produce future executives who are able to meet the challenges of the changing global business environment. As a result, all these reasons for the gap between MBA programs and the required employability requirements are consistent with Rubin and Dierdorff (2009) who argue that MBA is wholly out-of-touch with the "real world" and is irrelevant to the needs of practicing managers.

The Second Question: is concerned with the needs and requirements of Sudanese employers to bridge the gap: *What are your suggestions to bridge such a gap?*

HRM gave suggestions and recommendations that might help in bridging the gap these are:

Some HRM suggested attending of more practical training, and enhance positive thinking. This support the study carried by Salas (2014) who argued that to acquire effective interpersonal skills before entering the workforce. This could be achieved by the use of science of training as a stepping-stone to facilitate instructors' integration of interpersonal skills into existing MBA courses.

Other suggestion by HRM is the use of case analysis methods, and involve practitioners in MBA programs. This is consistent with Cullen (2013) who propose the using of the case method and co-teaching to improve competencies and bridge the gap between MBA and workplace.

Another suggestion is to add some subjects based on Sudanese organization environment and culture, which consistent with Hodges & Burchell (2003) who views that curriculum developers need to be alert and ensure that they understand the world of work, and thus the competencies demanded of business graduates. Also one HRM suggests to adopt more innovative ways of designing and delivering the MBA courses, which is consistent with Boyatzis & Saatcioglu (2008) who claimed that continuing to innovate is crucial in achieving creative thinking and healthy degrees of organizational cooperation.

Additionally, other HRM suggests building collaboration programs between the Sudanese organizations and universities this is consistent with AACSB International (2012) that proposed the establishment of a partnership between business and business schools in order to bridge the competency gap. Also this consistent with Amen (2014) who proposed that business schools as well as employers need to review their teaching methodologies and development programs to enhance the skills and competencies of their employees.

Therefore, according to this research findings, all suggestions by employers to bridge the gap include: attending more practical training, thinking positively, adding some subjects based on Sudanese organization environment and culture, adopting more innovative ways of designing and delivering the MBA courses, building collaboration programs between the Sudanese organizations and universities, using case analysis methods and training and involve practitioners.

VIII. Conclusion

This study revealed that there is competency gap between MBAG and HRM which support the previous studies conducted by Rainsbury *et al* (2002); Hodges & Burchell (2003); Andrews & Higson (2008); Ting & Ying (2012); Jackson (2012); Martinovic (2013) and Kini (2014). Thus, major findings indicate significant difference between the competencies acquired by MBAG through the MBA program and those that are required by HRM in Sudanese organizations, which show mismatch between what is needed and what is really acquired by MBAG. Additionally, the study showed that the most crucial competencies that valued most by employers are eleven. They are sequentially: ***ability and willingness to learn, achievement orientation, concern for order, quality & accuracy, energy & passion, self-confidence, teamwork & cooperation, analytical thinking, technical expertise, customer service orientation, initiative and problem solving.*** Moreover, most of the competencies that ranked high by employers are soft skills, whereas only ***analytical thinking*** and ***technical expertise*** are categorized as hard skills.

On the other hand, the competencies that are highly developed through the MBA programs according to the MBAG perceptions are ***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 categorized as soft skills. Which imply that the major acquired competencies by MBAG are categorized as hard skills. Also one of the interesting findings that the highest ranked competency by MBAG ***organizational awareness*** is considered the least important competency according to HRM. But, on the bright side both HRM and MBAG ranked ***ability and willingness to learn*** high, as it occupies the first and second rank respectively, which imply that in order to continue to be useful, one must be willing to learn new skills to catch up with what is now seen as dramatically ever-changing business world. Furthermore, both MBAG and employers added some more competencies that they think they are important to be developed and assessed in the MBA programs. Unsurprisingly, most of these competencies that proposed by respondents are classified as soft skills. Furthermore, HRM propose some actions to be undertaken by universities in order to increase the match and bridge the gap in the near future. Therefore, it can be concluded that business schools fail to meet the needs and requirements of Sudanese organizations in terms of competencies.

IX. Recommendations

- 1) Achieving MBA-industry collaboration and engagement, through employing cooperative education programs which can provide an ideal vehicle to bridge the gap between the world of work and the world of education.
- 2) Business schools should perform curriculum restructures for prioritizing skills and designing coursework to incorporate top ranked skills viewed as most important by business and employers. Precisely, 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. Also, create differentiated curricula and allow students to concentrate in specific industries.
- 3) 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.
- 4) In order to Keep up with the pace and challenge of globalization, business schools need to facilitate an education process that include the development of the top ranked competencies by employers to engage and encourages a deep identification with change.
- 5) Fostering lifelong learning through the development of a range of employability related competencies, specifically the vital need for soft skill development in the future MBA programs.
- 6) Use of training and coaching as a stepping-stone to facilitate instructors' integration of soft skills into existing MBA courses.
- 7) A good quality and relevant training programs, in the first years of working life for MBAG could be seen as a link between higher education and competent mastery as a professional.
- 8) Involve practitioners and trainers in designing the MBA curriculum and in teaching process, that can facilitate the acquisition and development of the top ranked skills by Sudanese employers.

X. Practical Implications of the Study

There are many practical implications that can lead the way towards narrowing the gap. However, the most important implication for this study which can help in bridging the gap between MBAG current competencies and employability requirements in future is building effective *school-business partnerships* as it is a proven solution to this gap challenge, and an enriching way to bring relevance and rigor to students' learning environments. It is clear that business schools can no longer achieve their mission alone. An outside partner can provide the crucial resources and expertise to drive improvement in business schools and to strengthen student outcomes. Businesses, industry associations, and individual members of the business community are critical partners in educating Sudanese people. According to the issued report of Business Engagement in Education (2009) they state that partnerships between education and business have consistently shown their value in communities across the nations. Through the following:

- Providing work-based learning experiences and strengthen career awareness.
- Help schools build success-oriented college and career cultures that empower students.
- Help educators align curriculum and readiness standards with business needs.
- Provide funding and equipment to modernize classrooms, workspaces, and labs.
- Help youth build meaningful relationships with strong role models and mentors.
- Provide financial guidance and advice that lessens affordability as a barrier to college.

Finally, it can be concluded that there is no single model of partnership, nor one best way a business can be involved in the learning lives of students. Each partnership and activity works best when they reflect the needs of students and build upon the strengths and synergies of the partners. Partnerships will flourish when there is a strong commitment to engagement and a willingness to work together over the long-term in support of common goals and interests. They are most effective when they place the student at the center of the learning experiences they create and strive to empower them toward a meaningful future.

XI. Limitations of the Study

1. Time and cost constraints concerning the collection of secondary and primary data.
2. Barriers exist in collection of secondary data due to some factors like scattered information sources and treating data acquisition as highly confidential issue by data suppliers.
3. 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. Also, the timing of the snapshot is not guaranteed to be representative. Moreover, findings can be flawed or skewed if there is a conflict of interest with the funding source. Additionally, we may face some challenges putting together the sampling pool based on the variables of the population being studied.
4. Moreover, there are some limitations of using online surveys such as the *Absence of Interviewer*; An online survey is not suitable for surveys which ask open-ended questions because there is no trained interviewer to explore the answers of the respondents. Also, the *Inability to Reach Challenging Population*; This method is not applicable for surveys that require respondents who do not have an access to the Internet. Some examples of these respondents include the elderly and people who reside in remote areas.
5. The MBAG sample size represent about 4.13% of the total population size.

XII. 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.

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