



Perceived Civil Service Demands for Graduates' Employability Skills and Workforce Readiness in Ogun State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined perceived civil service demands for graduates' employability skills and workforce readiness in Ogun State, Nigeria. Ogun State was selected because it possesses one of Nigeria's largest and most dynamic state civil services, where ongoing public sector reforms and increasing demands for efficient service delivery have heightened the need for graduates with relevant employability skills beyond academic qualifications. Although previous studies have examined graduate employability from the perspectives of academic qualifications, institutional characteristics and employment outcomes, limited empirical evidence exists on the specific employability skills demanded by employers within the Nigerian civil service, particularly from the perspectives of senior officers who directly supervise graduate employees. This study therefore addressed this gap by examining the communication, time management and problem-solving skills demanded from graduates alongside their level of workforce readiness in the Ogun State Civil Service. A descriptive research design of the survey type was adopted because it enabled the collection of data from respondents to describe prevailing workplace realities and perceptions without manipulating any variables. The population comprised 424 directors across 86 Ministries, Departments and Agencies in the Ogun State Civil Service. A sample of 86 directors was selected using purposive sampling based on their direct supervisory responsibilities over graduate employees. Data were collected using the Graduate Employability Skills Demand Questionnaire ($r = 0.77$) and the Graduate Workforce Readiness Questionnaire ($r = 0.84$). Data were analysed using mean and standard deviation. The findings revealed that communication skills ($\bar{X} = 3.13$, $SD = 0.75$), time management skills ($\bar{X} = 3.02$, $SD = 0.80$) and problem-solving skills ($\bar{X} = 3.06$, $SD = 0.76$) were highly demanded by the Ogun State Civil Service, while graduate workforce readiness was moderately high ($\bar{X} = 3.05$, $SD = 0.80$). The study recommends that tertiary institutions integrate structured employability skills into their curricula, while the Ogun State Government should strengthen induction, mentoring and continuous professional development programmes for graduate employees. The study provides empirical evidence to support curriculum reform, workforce development policies and human resource planning, thereby offering valuable insights for policymakers, educational institutions and stakeholders in human resource management and labour studies in Nigeria.

Keywords: Perceived civil service demands, Employability skills, Workforce readiness, Graduate employability, Ogun State.

1. Introduction

The nature of work has changed considerably over the past two decades as technological advancement, digital transformation, globalisation and public sector reforms continue to reshape workplace expectations across the world. Contemporary organisations no longer rely solely on employees' academic qualifications but increasingly require graduates who possess a combination of technical knowledge, interpersonal competence and adaptive capabilities that enable them to function effectively in dynamic work environments. Consequently, graduate employability has become a major concern for governments, employers and higher education institutions because graduates are expected

to demonstrate the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours necessary for sustainable employment and effective workplace performance. This shift has become particularly evident within public sector organisations where accountability, innovation and citizen-centred service delivery require employees who can respond effectively to increasingly complex administrative responsibilities.

Despite significant expansion in higher education enrolment and graduate output, employers across many countries continue to express concern regarding the preparedness of graduates for workplace realities. Numerous studies have reported a persistent mismatch between the competencies developed within higher education institutions and those expected by labour markets, resulting in graduates who possess academic qualifications but lack the practical skills required for effective job performance (Jackson & Bridgstock, 2021; OECD, 2021). In Nigeria, this mismatch is particularly evident within the public service, where

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graduate employees frequently encounter difficulties in adapting to organisational procedures, communicating effectively, managing work demands and solving workplace problems independently. Such deficiencies often increase supervisory responsibilities, reduce organisational efficiency and delay public service delivery, thereby raising questions about the extent to which higher education adequately prepares graduates for contemporary employment.

Employability skills refer to the transferable knowledge, competencies, attitudes and personal attributes that enable individuals to obtain employment, perform effectively, adapt to workplace changes and sustain long-term career success beyond the possession of academic qualifications alone (Tomlinson, 2017; Jackson & Bridgstock, 2021). Within the civil service, these competencies extend beyond technical expertise to include communication skills, time management skills, problem-solving skills, teamwork, adaptability, digital literacy, ethical behaviour and professionalism. Communication skills facilitate effective exchange of information, policy interpretation and interaction with colleagues and members of the public. Time management skills enable employees to prioritise tasks, meet deadlines and maintain productivity. Problem-solving skills support analytical thinking, sound decision-making and innovation in addressing administrative challenges. Teamwork promotes collaboration across departments, while adaptability enables employees to respond effectively to organisational reforms and changing work environments. Digital literacy has become increasingly indispensable as public sector organisations adopt electronic governance systems and technology-driven administrative processes. Ethical behaviour and professionalism further strengthen accountability, integrity, transparency and responsible conduct, all of which are fundamental to effective public administration.

Closely related to employability is the concept of workforce readiness which refers to the extent to which graduates possess and demonstrate the competencies, behaviours, attitudes and professional dispositions required to perform successfully in actual workplace settings from the point of employment. Although closely associated, workforce readiness differs from employability. Employability primarily reflects an individual's capacity to obtain and sustain employment through the possession of relevant skills and qualifications, whereas workforce readiness focuses on the practical demonstration of those competencies within the organisation, including the ability to integrate quickly into workplace culture, execute assigned responsibilities independently and contribute meaningfully to organisational objectives (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2017; Jackson & Bridgstock, 2021). Thus, employability provides the potential for employment, while workforce readiness reflects actual preparedness for workplace performance.

Workforce readiness has become increasingly important because organisational productivity and service quality depend largely on employees' ability to perform assigned responsibilities competently and efficiently. Organisations increasingly require employees who possess not only technical expertise but also the practical competencies, professional attitudes and adaptive capabilities necessary to perform effectively in dynamic work environments (Jackson & Bridgstock, 2021; OECD, 2021). Within public organisations, workforce-ready employees require less supervision, adapt more rapidly to organisational procedures, demonstrate higher levels of professionalism and contribute more effectively to institutional performance. Conversely, inadequate workforce readiness often results in poor service delivery, administrative delays, reduced employee productivity and increased organisational costs associated with induction, retraining and supervision (OECD, 2021). Consequently, strengthening workforce readiness has become a strategic priority for governments seeking to improve public sector performance, institutional effectiveness and sustainable service delivery (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2022).

The Ogun State Civil Service provides an appropriate context for examining employability skills and workforce readiness because it represents one of Nigeria's largest and most active state public service systems, comprising numerous Ministries, Departments and Agencies responsible for implementing government policies and delivering essential public services. Like many public sector organisations in developing economies, the Ogun State Civil Service has continued to implement administrative reforms, digital transformation initiatives and performance improvement strategies aimed at enhancing public sector efficiency and responsiveness (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2021; OECD, 2021). These reforms require graduate employees who possess the employability skills and workplace competencies needed to function effectively within contemporary public sector environments. Directors and senior officers therefore provide valuable perspectives regarding the competencies expected of graduates and the extent to which newly employed graduates demonstrate workforce readiness because they are directly responsible for supervising, mentoring and evaluating graduate employees in the workplace.

Although previous studies have investigated graduate employability, many have concentrated on academic qualifications, institutional reputation, graduate employment outcomes or employer satisfaction, with relatively limited attention given to the specific employability skills demanded within state civil services in Nigeria (Jackson & Bridgstock, 2021; Suleman, 2021). Furthermore, existing studies have seldom examined workforce readiness from the perspectives of senior civil servants who directly supervise graduate employees and are therefore best

positioned to assess the competencies required for effective workplace performance. Consequently, empirical evidence remains inadequate to guide curriculum reforms, workforce development policies and human resource planning within Nigeria's public service. By examining the communication, time management and problem-solving skills demanded from graduates alongside their level of workforce readiness within the Ogun State Civil Service, this study addresses this important gap in the literature and contributes context-specific evidence to the growing discourse on graduate employability and public sector workforce development in developing economies.

Against this background, the study examined perceived civil service demands for graduates' employability skills and workforce readiness in Ogun State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study investigated the communication, time management and problem-solving skills expected of graduates by senior civil servants and examined the extent to which graduate employees demonstrate workforce readiness within the civil service. The findings are intended to provide empirical evidence capable of informing higher education curriculum development, graduate employability initiatives and public sector human resource management.

The significance of this study extends to several critical stakeholders within Nigeria's civil service and higher education sectors. The findings provide evidence to assist policymakers in designing workforce development strategies, guide tertiary institutions in strengthening employability-oriented curricula, support civil service administrators in improving graduate induction and professional development programmes, and offer human resource practitioners empirical insights for recruitment, training and performance management. In addition, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on graduate employability and workforce readiness within the Nigerian public sector, thereby providing a useful reference for future researchers in human resource management, labour studies and educational management.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite increasing scholarly attention to graduate employability, employability skills and workforce readiness in Nigeria and other developing economies, concerns continue to persist regarding the preparedness of graduates to meet the evolving demands of contemporary workplaces, particularly within the public sector. Previous studies have examined graduate employability in relation to academic qualifications, institutional characteristics, labour market outcomes, employer expectations and general workforce readiness. While these studies have contributed significantly to understanding graduate employability, they have provided limited empirical evidence on the specific employability skills demanded by employers within state civil service systems, particularly in Ogun State.

Furthermore, although communication, time management and problem-solving skills have been widely recognised as essential employability competencies, relatively few scholarly studies have investigated these skills from the perspectives of senior civil servants who directly supervise graduate employees and are therefore well positioned to assess the competencies required for effective workplace performance. Consequently, there is a dearth of empirical understanding regarding the specific employability competencies valued by employers in the Ogun State Civil Service and the implications of these competencies for graduates' workforce readiness. This knowledge gap limits the availability of context-specific evidence needed to inform curriculum development, graduate employability initiatives, workforce development policies and human resource management practices within Nigeria's public service.

The absence of such evidence underscores the need for this study. Accordingly, this study examined the perceived civil service demands for graduates' communication, time management and problem-solving skills and assessed the level of graduates' workforce readiness in the Ogun State Civil Service, Nigeria. The study seeks to provide empirical evidence that will support higher education institutions, policymakers and public sector employers in strengthening graduate employability and enhancing workforce readiness for improved public service performance.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The study examined soft skills demand and graduate workforce readiness in Ogun State Civil Service, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Examine the communication skills demanded from graduates in Ogun State Civil Service, Nigeria.
2. Assess the time management skills demanded from graduates in Ogun State Civil Service, Nigeria.
3. Investigate the problem-solving skills demanded from graduates in Ogun State Civil Service, Nigeria.
4. Examine the extent to which graduate employees possess workforce readiness skills in Ogun State Civil Service, Nigeria

1.3 Research Questions

1. What components of communication skills are demanded from graduates in Ogun State Civil Service, Nigeria?
2. What components time management skills are demanded from graduates in Ogun State Civil Service, Nigeria?
3. What components of problem-solving skills are demanded from graduates in Ogun State Civil Service, Nigeria?

4. To what extent do graduate employees demonstrate workforce readiness in Ogun State Civil Service, Nigeria?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Concept of Civil Service

Civil service refers to the permanent administrative machinery of government through which public policies are interpreted, implemented, and sustained across ministries, departments, and agencies. In the Nigerian context, the civil service is shaped by institutional norms, formal procedures, accountability expectations, and service-delivery obligations, making employee competence central to administrative effectiveness (Udofia et al., 2021). Recent evidence shows that the contemporary public service environment places increasing demands on workers because administrative reforms, digital transformation, and public accountability now require employees who can work efficiently, communicate clearly, and solve operational problems with limited supervision. Nigerian studies also show that public perceptions of the service remain constrained by concerns about inefficiency, corruption, and weak productivity, even where job security remains attractive, which reinforces the importance of strengthening employee capability and professional conduct (Oyekola et al., 2021). Within this context, the civil service is not merely a place of employment but a rule-bound organisational system whose effectiveness depends heavily on workers' adherence to norms such as merit, impartiality, punctuality, and responsibility. Evidence from Nigeria further suggests that poor organisational culture, lateness, insubordination, and weak commitment undermine service quality, indicating that workforce readiness in the civil service must include both technical and behavioural competence (Udofia et al., 2021).

2.2 Employability Skills

Employability skills are the transferable capabilities, personal attributes, and work-related competences that help graduates obtain employment, function effectively in organisational settings, and sustain career progression rather than merely secure a first job (Abelha et al., 2020; Soproni, 2023; Behle, 2020). Recent literature treats employability skills as broader than disciplinary knowledge alone and increasingly emphasises communication, problem-solving, teamwork, self-management, adaptability, and lifelong learning as core capabilities in changing labour markets (Soproni, 2023; Succi & Canovi, 2020; Monteiro et al., 2024). Employer-facing evidence indicates that soft skills have become more rather than less important in the last decade. In a multi-country study, 86% of respondents reported increased emphasis on soft skills, and employers rated these skills as more important than students and graduates did (Succi & Canovi, 2020). Related work also identifies communication, problem-solving, time management, self-management, and teamwork as recurrent employer priorities, showing considerable overlap with the soft-

skill domains examined in the attached Ogun State study (Cheng et al., 2021; Kornelakis & Petrakaki, 2020; Chigbu & Nekhwevha, 2022). The study aligns closely with this broader literature by identifying communication skills, time management skills, and problem-solving skills as highly demanded in the Ogun State Civil Service (). This alignment is important because recent higher education research continues to show a persistent mismatch between the competences developed in universities and those required by employers, especially in sub-Saharan African contexts (Abelha et al., 2020; Guàrdia et al., 2021).

2.3 Workforce Readiness

Workforce readiness refers to the extent to which individuals possess the attitudes, behaviours, knowledge, and transferable skills needed to enter and perform effectively in real work environments (Chigbu & Nekhwevha, 2022). Although the literature does not offer a single universally accepted definition, recent studies consistently describe work readiness as a multidimensional construct that extends beyond academic achievement to include communication, adaptability, self-management, collaboration, initiative, and professional conduct (Chigbu & Nekhwevha, 2022). This multidimensional understanding is especially relevant to the public sector, where employees must operate within bureaucratic structures, comply with procedures, meet deadlines, and respond appropriately to workplace challenges. The attached study reflects this by defining graduate workforce readiness as the capacity to function effectively in real work settings and by reporting a moderately high overall readiness level among graduates in Ogun State civil service, with notable room for improvement in independent task execution and practical application of knowledge. Recent educational studies also show that work readiness is shaped by both educational experiences and organisational exposure. Perceived work readiness varies across academic environments, while industry-engaged project-based learning has been associated with measurable gains in employability skills and workforce readiness (Chigbu & Nekhwevha, 2022; Naseer et al., 2025). This suggests that readiness develops progressively and is strengthened when graduates encounter authentic workplace tasks and expectations (Naseer et al., 2025).

2.4 Graduate Employability

Graduate employability is now widely understood as a complex and multidimensional phenomenon rather than a simple employment outcome (Abelha et al., 2020; Monteiro et al., 2024; Behle, 2020). Contemporary scholarship distinguishes employability from employment by arguing that employability concerns the graduate's ability, attributes, resources, and opportunities for finding, maintaining, and progressing in work, while actual employment is also shaped by labour-market conditions and wider socioeconomic factors (Cheng et al., 2021; Behle, 2020; Suleman, 2021). Recent reviews show broad agreement that graduate employability depends on an

interaction between individual capabilities and contextual conditions. Systematic and scoping reviews identify knowledge, competences, personal attributes, higher education practices, educational arrangements, and socioeconomic conditions as major determinants (Abelha et al., 2020; Monteiro et al., 2024). Related studies further argue that contextual factors can exert effects as strong as, or stronger than, purely personal ones, especially where labour-market constraints are significant (Ergün & Şeşen, 2021; Suleman, 2021). This broader view is highly relevant to the present study because graduate readiness for civil service employment cannot be explained by academic qualifications alone. The attached study itself notes that graduates may hold formal credentials yet still struggle with practical communication, time use, and independent problem-solving, which mirrors wider evidence on skills mismatch and partial employability

3. Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on the Employability Framework developed by McQuaid and Lindsay. The framework was originally advanced to provide a broader, more analytically useful understanding of employability than narrow skill-based definitions, and it conceptualises employability through individual factors, personal circumstances, and external factors (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005; Ergün & Şeşen, 2021). The core assumption of the framework is that employability is not determined by individual skills alone. Rather, a person's employability reflects the interaction of individual attributes and competences, personal and social circumstances, and wider labour-market or institutional conditions (Ergün & Şeşen, 2021; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). This assumption is important because it corrects reductionist views that treat employability as nothing more than possession of generic skills, overlooking the influence of context, opportunity structures, and support systems (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005; Behle, 2020; Monteiro et al., 2024).

Its relevance to this study is direct. The present study investigates three individual employability components which are communication, time management, and problem-solving skills as determinants of graduates' workforce readiness in the Ogun State Civil Service. Under McQuaid and Lindsay's framework, these variables fall within the individual factors domain because they are core employability skills and behavioural capacities that influence job performance and adjustment to work (Ergün & Şeşen, 2021; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). The framework is also suitable because the civil service is a structured labour-market setting in which personal circumstances and institutional conditions shape how far graduates can translate their skills into effective workplace performance. Supervisory support, organisational culture, public-sector norms, labour-market structures, and access to development opportunities all condition whether individual competencies lead to full readiness and sustained effectiveness (Behle, 2020; Udofia et al., 2021). For that reason, the framework helps explain

why the attached study found moderately high readiness rather than uniformly high readiness: graduates may possess some required skills, yet still need workplace induction, mentoring, and continuing development to perform optimally in the civil service environment. McQuaid and Lindsay's Employability Framework is appropriate for this study because it accommodates both the **skill-centred variables** measured in the research and the broader institutional realities of public-sector employment. It therefore provides a strong theoretical lens for interpreting how graduates' soft skills shape workforce readiness in Ogun State civil service, while recognising that readiness is also conditioned by organisational and labour-market context.

4. Methodology

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study because it enabled the researchers to obtain data from respondents regarding their perceptions of the employability skills demanded from graduates and the level of workforce readiness within the Ogun State Civil Service without manipulating any of the study variables. The design was considered appropriate for describing existing conditions and generating empirical evidence on workplace realities.

The population of the study comprised 424 directors across 86 Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) in the Ogun State Civil Service. Directors were considered suitable respondents because of their supervisory responsibilities over graduate employees and their direct involvement in assessing workplace performance.

A sample of 86 directors was selected using the purposive sampling technique. The technique was adopted because it enabled the selection of respondents who possessed the requisite knowledge and experience to provide reliable information on the employability skills expected of graduates and their workforce readiness.

Data were collected using two validated instruments: the Graduate Employability Skills Demand Questionnaire ($r = 0.77$) and the Graduate Workforce Readiness Questionnaire ($r = 0.84$). The instruments measured the perceived demand for communication, time management and problem-solving skills, as well as the workforce readiness of graduate employees. Responses were obtained using a four-point Likert rating scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1).

The data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions and describe the perceived employability skills demanded by the Ogun State Civil Service and the level of graduates' workforce readiness.

Table 1: Relative Mean Values of Communication Skill Components Demanded in Ogun State Civil Service

Items	Response (%)				$\bar{X}$	S.D
	SA	A	D	SD		
Clear verbal communication	44.2	37.2	11.6	7.0	3.18	.74
Effective listening skills	40.7	34.9	15.1	9.3	3.05	.79
Confident expression of ideas	41.9	36.0	14.0	8.1	3.11	.76
Effective written communication	39.5	38.4	12.8	9.3	3.12	.71
Professional interaction	46.5	33.7	10.5	9.3	3.17	.73
Weighted mean					3.13	.75

Table 2: Relative Mean Values of Time Management Skill Components Demanded in Ogun State Civil Service

Items	Response (%)				$\bar{X}$	S.D
	SA	A	D	SD		
Completion of tasks within deadlines	43.0	36.0	12.8	8.1	3.09	.76
Effective task prioritization	39.5	38.4	14.0	8.1	3.02	.81
Handling multiple assignments	37.2	40.7	12.8	9.3	2.97	.83
Adherence to schedules	41.9	34.9	14.0	9.3	3.01	.79
Workplace punctuality	45.3	32.6	11.6	10.5	3.02	.82
Weighted mean					3.02	.80

5. Results

The study involved 86 directors drawn from Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) in the Ogun State Civil Service. The respondents represented experienced officers directly responsible for recruitment and the supervision of graduate employees within their respective organisations. The demographic information revealed that the majority of the respondents had occupied their current positions for one to two years (35.8%), followed by those who had served for three to five years (28.4%), while 19.8% had spent less than one year, 11.1% had served for more than ten years, and 4.9% had remained in their current positions for six to ten years. With respect to educational qualification, the majority (63.0%) possessed a first degree, 18.5% held a master's degree, 16.0% possessed a Higher National Diploma (HND), while only 2.5% reported other qualifications. These characteristics indicate that the respondents possessed adequate educational backgrounds and relevant administrative experience to provide informed opinions on the employability skills demanded from graduates and their workforce readiness within the Ogun State Civil Service.

Table 1 showed that a substantial proportion of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that communication skills are highly demanded in the Ogun State Civil Service. The weighted mean of 3.13 exceeded the decision benchmark of 2.50, indicating a high level of demand for communication competence. Meanwhile, clear verbal communication with a mean of 3.18 showed that it was the most demanded of all components of communication skills. It was closely followed by the professional interaction with a mean of

3.17. However, none of the communication skill components was below 2.50 benchmark. This implies that clarity in verbal and written communication, effective listening, and professional interaction are considered essential workplace skills for graduates in the civil service.

Table 2 revealed that the majority of respondents affirmed the importance of time management skills in the Ogun State Civil Service. With a weighted mean of 3.02, the result indicated that adherence to deadlines, punctuality, prioritisation of tasks, and efficient handling of multiple responsibilities were highly demanded. Of all the components of time management skills, 'completion of tasks within deadlines' showed the highest mean of 3.09, and the least of the components was 'handling multiple assignments with a mean of 2.97. However, none of the components of communication skills was less than the benchmark of 2.50. This suggests that effective time management is crucial for administrative efficiency and service delivery in the civil service.

Table 3 showed that problem-solving skills were highly demanded in the Ogun State Civil Service. The weighted mean of 3.06 indicated that respondents largely agreed that analytical thinking, initiative, independent decision-making, and adaptability to unexpected situations are essential competencies. From the components of problem-solving skills, proposing practical solution was rated highest with a mean value of 3.15, while the least component was independent decision-making with a mean value of 3.01. However, none of the components of the problem-solving skills was rated below the benchmark of 2.50. This implies

Table 3: Relative Mean values of Problem-Solving Skill Components Demanded in Ogun State Civil Service

Items	Response (%)				$\bar{X}$	S.D
	SA	A	D	SD		
Analysis of work-related problems	40.7	38.4	11.6	9.3	3.07	.72
Proposing practical solutions	44.2	36.0	10.5	9.3	3.15	.69
Independent decision-making	38.4	39.5	12.8	9.3	3.01	.78
Handling unexpected situations	41.9	37.2	10.5	10.5	3.02	.80
Initiative in problem resolution	43.0	34.9	11.6	10.5	3.04	.81
Weighted mean					3.06	.76

Table 4: Overall Graduate Workforce Readiness in Ogun State Civil Service

Items	Response (%)				$\bar{X}$	S.D
	SA	A	D	SD		
Preparation for civil service duties	38.4	40.7	11.6	9.3	3.08	.75
Confidence in responsibilities	39.5	37.2	12.8	10.5	3.06	.79
Application of academic knowledge	36.0	39.5	14.0	10.5	3.01	.82
Adaptation to work environment	40.7	36.0	12.8	10.5	3.05	.80
Independent task execution	34.9	38.4	16.3	10.5	2.98	.85
Collaboration with colleagues	41.9	37.2	11.6	9.3	3.12	.74
Professional conduct	44.2	34.9	10.5	10.5	3.13	.77
Meeting performance expectations	37.2	38.4	14.0	10.5	3.02	.83
Response to workplace challenges	39.5	36.0	14.0	10.5	3.01	.81
Readiness for long-term service	40.7	34.9	12.8	11.6	3.00	.84
Weighted mean					3.05	.80

also that the problem-solving was in high demand in the civil service or public sector. This reflects the need for graduates who can address administrative challenges with minimal supervision.

Table 4 indicated that graduates in the Ogun State Civil Service exhibit a moderately high level of workforce readiness, with a weighted mean of 3.05. From the list of the items under the graduates' workforce readiness, it was revealed that 'professional conduct' with a mean value of 3.13 was rated highest, and it was closely followed by the 'collaboration with colleagues (teamwork)' with a mean value of 3.12 showing their level of readiness. The item 'independent task execution' was rated lowest in demonstration by the graduates employed with a mean value of 2.98. However, none of the items was rated below the benchmark of 2.50. The finding implies that the graduates employed within Ogun State Civil Service are work-ready with the weighted mean of 3.05. This means that they were ready for work. So, if this is the implication, then the results suggested that while graduates demonstrate reasonable preparedness, professionalism, and adaptability, there remains room for improvement, particularly in independent task execution and application of knowledge. This implies that workforce readiness is present but not optimal, necessitating continuous skill development.

6. Discussion of findings

The findings of this study are significant because they show that graduate effectiveness in the Ogun State Civil Service depends not simply on possession of academic qualifications, but on the extent to which graduates can translate knowledge into workplace behaviours that support administrative efficiency, responsiveness, and professional conduct (Nwajiuba et al., 2020; Mwita et al., 2024). The high demand for communication, time management, and problem-solving skills indicates that these competencies function as operational requirements in public service rather than optional personal attributes (Poláková et al., 2023; Chigbu & Nekhwevha, 2022).

The finding on communication skills is significant because communication underpins policy interpretation, documentation accuracy, inter-office coordination, and interaction with citizens in bureaucratic settings. This result converges with recent evidence that employers place increasing value on soft skills, with 86% of respondents in a multi-country study reporting stronger emphasis on such skills and employers rating them as more important than students do (Succi & Canovi, 2020). It also agrees with studies showing that communication remains one of the most valued employability skills across sectors and entry-level roles (Qizi, 2020; Hirudayaraj et al., 2021; McGunagle &

Zizka, 2020). Within Nigeria, the result also converges with evidence from Ogun and Oyo States that employers strongly demand communication and other generic skills beyond certificates alone (Bose & Adisa, 2022; Adio & Gbadamosi, 2023). The finding extends existing knowledge by showing that, within a state civil service setting, clear verbal communication and professional interaction are especially salient indicators of readiness, which sharpens the broader employability literature for the Nigerian public sector.

The finding on time management is significant because bureaucratic effectiveness depends on punctuality, scheduling, deadline compliance, and the orderly handling of multiple assignments. This aligns with recent literature that identifies self-management and time management as core employer expectations and as integral components of broader employability skill sets (Kornelakis & Petrakaki, 2020; Chigbu & Nekhwevha, 2022). It also supports evidence that graduates' employment preparedness includes organisation, initiative, administrative skills, and work discipline, all of which are closely tied to effective time use (Chigbu & Nekhwevha, 2022; Adio & Gbadamosi, 2023). At the same time, the present study adds nuance by showing that while all time-management components were rated highly, handling multiple assignments was relatively weaker than deadline completion, suggesting that graduates may cope with routine scheduling better than with workload complexity in live public-service context. That is an important extension because it points to the specific type of time-management deficit most likely to affect service delivery.

The finding on problem-solving skills is significant because the civil service increasingly requires employees who can analyse administrative issues, propose practical solutions, respond to unexpected situations, and act with limited supervision. This converges with recent evidence that employers consistently prioritise problem-solving, critical thinking, and analytical reasoning in rapidly changing labour markets (Poláková et al., 2023; Nwajiuba et al., 2020; Adio & Gbadamosi, 2023). It also agrees with Nigerian and wider African evidence that problem-solving is a core dimension of graduate employability and work readiness (Chigbu & Nekhwevha, 2022; Adio & Gbadamosi, 2023; Kumo & Dayo, 2024). The study extends knowledge by showing that in Ogun State civil service, proposing practical solutions is rated more strongly than independent decision-making, implying that graduates are seen as more prepared to contribute ideas than to exercise autonomous judgement. This distinction is analytically useful because it identifies a specific readiness gap that may reflect organisational culture, limited induction, or insufficient workplace confidence.

The finding that graduates demonstrate a moderately high level of workforce readiness is significant because it presents a balanced picture: graduates are not wholly

unprepared, yet they are not fully work-ready for seamless performance in the civil service. This converges with recent Nigerian and African studies showing that universities often produce graduates with partial readiness, uneven skill development, and continuing need for institutional support or curriculum reform (Nwajiuba et al., 2020; Chigbu & Nekhwevha, 2022; Ebiringa et al., 2024). It also agrees with evidence that graduates frequently fall short of employer expectations despite showing some baseline proficiency (Hirudayaraj et al., 2021; Ayodele et al., 2020; Ebiringa et al., 2024). The attached study contributes a useful new perspective by showing that professional conduct and collaboration with colleagues were stronger than independent task execution, suggesting that graduates adapt socially to public-service norms more readily than they master autonomous performance demands.

The findings lend support to the employability framework of McQuaid and Lindsay because they show that employability and readiness are shaped by identifiable individual assets, especially communication, self-management, and problem-solving capacities, rather than by qualifications alone. Recent scholarship similarly treats employability as multidimensional and influenced by both personal competences and wider educational or labour-market conditions (Mwita et al., 2024; Wujema et al., 2022; Nwajiuba et al., 2020). The present findings therefore support the framework by demonstrating that specific employability assets explain variation in workplace readiness, while the residual gaps in independent task execution also imply that organisational support, induction, and real-work exposure remain necessary for full employability to develop (Succi & Canovi, 2020).

This study adds to existing knowledge in four ways. First, it provides evidence from an under-researched state civil service context in Nigeria, whereas much recent employability literature has focused more broadly on higher education or private-sector demand (Wujema et al., 2022). Second, it shifts the assessment of readiness from graduates' self-reports to the perceptions of senior supervisory officers, offering a more workplace-proximal view of employability signals and performance expectations. Third, it disaggregates soft skills into specific dimensions and shows that the readiness gap is not uniform across them. Fourth, it helps bridge the persistent gap between higher education outputs and labour-market needs identified in Nigeria and elsewhere (Succi & Canovi, 2020; Bose & Adisa, 2022; Nwajiuba et al., 2020).

These findings have practical implications for improving graduates' employability skills in Nigeria. Higher education institutions need to move beyond certificate-oriented preparation and embed structured training in communication, self-management, and problem-solving within mainstream curricula (Qizi, 2020; Bose & Adisa, 2022; Ebiringa et al., 2024).

Recent evidence indicates that soft skills improve employability when universities collaborate with employers and create clearer pathways for students to recognise and practise these skills (Succi & Canovi, 2020; Nwajiuba et al., 2020; McGunagle & Zizka, 2020). The results also suggest that Nigerian institutions should prioritise experiential and problem-based learning, internships, mentoring, and work-integrated learning so that graduates can develop not only interpersonal competence but also independent judgement and task execution (Adio & Gbadamosi, 2023; Kumo & Dayo, 2024; Ebiringa et al., 2024). Within the civil service itself, structured induction, coaching, and continuous professional development would likely strengthen the transition from partial readiness to full workplace effectiveness.

7. Conclusion

This study examined the perceived civil service demands for graduates' employability skills and workforce readiness in the Ogun State Civil Service, Nigeria. The findings revealed that communication, time management and problem-solving skills are highly valued by civil service employers and are regarded as indispensable competencies for effective workplace performance. The study also found that graduates demonstrate a moderately high level of workforce readiness, suggesting that although many graduates possess the foundational competencies required for employment, there remains scope for strengthening their preparedness for the evolving demands of the contemporary public service. These findings underscore the need for higher education institutions to move beyond the transmission of disciplinary knowledge by embedding employability skills more deliberately within teaching, learning and assessment. They also highlight the importance of stronger collaboration between universities, employers and government agencies in ensuring that graduates acquire the competencies required to meet labour market expectations and contribute effectively to national development.

The study further reinforces the importance of workforce readiness as a critical determinant of organisational productivity, efficient public service delivery and employee performance within Nigeria's civil service. Graduates who possess relevant employability skills are more likely to adapt quickly to workplace expectations, perform their responsibilities effectively and contribute to improved institutional effectiveness. Consequently, sustained investment in employability skills development and workforce readiness should remain a priority for higher education institutions, policymakers and public sector employers seeking to build a competent, responsive and future-ready workforce.

As the world of work continues to evolve in response to technological advancement, digital transformation and changing public sector expectations, future efforts should focus on strengthening partnerships between

higher education institutions, employers and government to ensure that graduates are equipped with the competencies required for sustainable employment and effective public service. Such collaborative efforts will not only enhance graduate employability but also contribute to a more productive, innovative and resilient civil service capable of supporting Nigeria's long-term socio-economic development.

8. Recommendations

Recommendations based on the findings of this study are as follows:

1. Higher education institutions should deliberately integrate communication skills development into undergraduate curricula through practical learning activities such as oral presentations, report writing, debates, workplace simulations and collaborative projects. University management, curriculum developers and regulatory agencies such as the National Universities Commission (NUC) should ensure that communication competence is embedded across academic programmes rather than being taught as a stand-alone course. If effectively implemented, graduates will be better equipped to communicate professionally, interact confidently with colleagues and clients, and perform more effectively within the civil service and other workplace environments.
2. Tertiary institutions should strengthen the development of students' time management skills by incorporating structured learning experiences that promote planning, prioritisation, deadline management and personal organisation. Lecturers, student affairs divisions and university administrators should reinforce these competencies through academic activities, mentoring programmes and career development initiatives. This will enable graduates to manage workplace responsibilities more efficiently, improve productivity and adapt more readily to the performance expectations of the civil service.
3. Higher education institutions should place greater emphasis on developing graduates' problem-solving skills through experiential learning approaches, including case studies, project-based learning, internships and industry engagement. Academic staff, university management and relevant professional bodies should collaborate with employers to provide authentic learning experiences that strengthen analytical thinking and decision-making abilities. Effective implementation of these strategies will produce graduates who are capable of addressing workplace challenges creatively, making informed decisions and contributing to improved organisational performance within the public service.
4. The Ogun State Government, Civil Service Commission and Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) should strengthen graduate workforce readiness through comprehensive induction

programmes, continuous professional development, mentoring and periodic competency-based training. These interventions should be coordinated by the Civil Service Commission in collaboration with higher education institutions and human resource managers to facilitate the transition of graduates into the workplace. If properly implemented, graduates will adapt more quickly to organisational culture, demonstrate higher levels of professionalism and competence, and contribute to enhanced service delivery, institutional effectiveness and sustainable public sector performance.

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