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The Skill Gap in Bangladesh's Financial Sector: Employer Expectations, Graduate Competencies, and Mitigation Strategies

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Abstract: *This paper analyzes the skill gap among fresh graduates entering the financial sector of Bangladesh from the employer's perspective and suggests possible mitigation strategies to reduce the gap. This study analyzes the difference between employers' expectations of skills that a graduate should possess, and the actual skills and competencies fresh graduates have. Three skill categories: soft skill, technical skill, and personal attributes of graduates have been used to analyze the skill gap. Data for the study was collected through a survey from professionals in the financial sector of Bangladesh. A quantitative research approach was followed. Data was analyzed using mean and standard deviation, paired sample t-tests, independent sample t-tests, and regression analysis. The findings suggest that there is a significant gap between employer expectations and the actual skill levels of graduates across all three skills categories. The gap is most prominent in personal attributes such as time management and professional ethics. For graduates, soft skills are found to be more important than technical skills. According to employers, structured and on the job training and mentoring programs help mitigate graduate skills gap. To match classroom learning of graduates with the skills requirement, deeper industry academia collaboration is needed. The findings of this study can be useful for universities, students, employers, and policymakers in improving graduate employability and organizational effectiveness in the financial sector.*

Keywords*:* financial sector of Bangladesh, graduate skill gap, employability, training, industry academia collaboration

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, the financial sector of Bangladesh which includes Banks and Finance Companies have been experiencing rapid growth and expansion. It is also one of the most crucial sectors of the country because of its role in economic growth and development. It helps in facilitating investment and promoting financial inclusion. The financial sector is being driven by rapid changes in technological innovations, changing customer expectations and increased competition among the organizations. As financial institutions grow and evolve, recruiting skilled, competent and adaptable workforce has become very important for the success of the financial sector.

Employers are no longer satisfied with recruiting fresh graduates who possess only theoretical knowledge. They are placing importance in hiring high potential talents with blend of both good technical and soft skills and well as the right professional attributes required to do the job well. This change in requirement by employers indicates that they want fresh graduates to possess practical industry relevant knowledge along with theoretical knowledge.

Many fresh graduates enter the job market of Bangladesh every year. Despite the high number of fresh graduates, employers of the financial sector often report that they struggle to find the right talents who possess required skill and competencies for the job. This is often an indication of a mismatch between the skill set of graduates and the job requirement of the financial sector. This mismatch of competencies includes gaps in soft skills, technical skills and personal attributes. The skill gap among graduates has dual impact on both the employers and job seekers. Employers often need to invest large number of resources into training and development of new hires which include structured classroom training as well as on the job training and coaching. This not only increases the operational expenses of the financial institutions but also delays the effective performance of the new hires. On the other hand, fresh graduates also face challenges in adapting to workplace expectations.

Although the issue of skill mismatch has been widely recognized, there is limited empirical study on the context of Bangladesh that objectively analyzes the skill gap along with its extent, particularly from the employer's perspective. There is also limited study on which skills and competencies are most important to perform well in organizations. Analysis on the effective mitigation strategies is also not evident.

Considering these gaps, this study aims to examine the graduate skill gap in Bangladesh's financial sector from the perspective of employers. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the importance of key skills, assess the current skill levels of fresh graduates, and measure the gap between expected and actual skill level across technical skill, soft skill, and personal attributes. It also aims to explore the role of employer-led initiatives in addressing the skill gap and evaluate the contribution of industry-academia collaboration in reducing this gap.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employer Expectations and Graduate Competencies: Employers expect graduates to contribute meaningfully to their roles, often as soon as they join an organization. Many studies show that employers expect graduates to have both soft skills and the technical skills required to perform well in an organization and progress in their career. According to several studies, a balanced combination of technical expertise and soft skills is crucial for success in the financial sector. While technical skills enable professionals to perform their core responsibilities effectively, soft skills contribute to creating a collaborative and innovative workplace. (Warner Scott Recruitment, 2025).

To better understand these expectations, it is important to examine the key competencies that employers seek in graduates, particularly soft skills and technical skills. Soft skills refer to a range of personal and interpersonal abilities that enable employees to function effectively and perform efficiently in a workplace environment. (Cheang & Yamashita, 2023) Soft skills encompass abilities such as communication and interpersonal skills, time management, teamwork and collaboration, as well as leadership capabilities including motivating team members and managing workplace conflicts. (Akoum, 2023). Soft skills are considered essential not only in Bangladesh but also in other countries as well. According to a study conducted among Indonesian state-owned logistic companies, employees with strong communication, collaboration, discipline, adaptability and professionalism positively impact an organizations performance. (Widakdo, 2022).According to a study conducted in Czech Republic for graduates entering trading and sales related jobs, graduates who possess string communication skill, problem solving ability and adaptability are more likely to succeed in these job roles. (Dušek, 2021).

In contrast to soft skills, technical skills relate to specialized competencies required to perform particular tasks in practical settings. These skills also involve the knowledge and ability to operate specific technologies, tools, or software programs. (Quigley, 2024) Technical skills include knowledge of basic economics, knowledge of financial sector, ability to analyze and interpret financial data etc. (Warner Scott Recruitment, 2025).

In addition to these skills, employers often emphasize the importance of personal attributes that influence professional behavior and workplace performance. Along with soft skills and technical skills, employers look for specific personal traits and attributes such as ability to collaborate, punctuality, empathy, integrity, work ethics etc. (Cheang & Yamashita, 2023). According to a study conducted among global entrepreneurial organizations, employees' attitude and behavior impact organizations' service quality greatly. (Carraher & Sullivan, 2023).

Collectively, these skills and attributes form what is commonly referred to as graduate competencies. Graduate competencies refer to the set of soft skills, technical skills and personal traits that allow them to effectively perform in an organization. Research on graduate employability suggests that graduate competencies are more important than the degree, graduate academic result or the educational institution of the graduates. (Mokhtar, et al., 2022).

Graduate Employability and Skills Gap: Many organizations report that fresh graduates entering the labor market often lack the necessary competencies required to perform effectively in professional environments. Skills gap arises when graduates entering the job market lack the necessary skills and competencies to perform well in an organization. According to a paper titled "Skills Gap of Business Graduates in the Banking Sector of Bangladesh: Employers' Expectation Versus Reality", most graduates entering the labor market face difficulty finding a job and remain unemployed for one to two years after graduation. (Chowdhury, 2020) For every 3 unemployed Bangladeshi's, one is a graduate, which equaled to almost 900,000 unemployed resources who had a graduate degree. (Khatun, Skills mismatch threatens employment growth in Bangladesh, 2025).

This indicates that while the number of fresh graduates entering the job market is very high, employers often struggle to find competent graduates who are fit to work in a corporate organization. This high rate of unemployment of the fresh graduates entering the job sector is also a cause for concern about whether they possess the skills required by the industry to perform well in the job. (Chowdhury, 2020) At present, the skills gap among graduates has become a noticeable issue in Bangladesh's labor market. Many university graduates believe that they lack the competencies and skill sets required to secure employment. (Alam, Ogawa, & Islam, 2022) Studies of the Bangladesh Labor market indicates that employers believe that graduates lack effective communication skill and practical idea about how the industry and companies operate. (Khatun, Saadat, Ashraf, & Taki, 2022) Furthermore, many employers in Bangladesh have highlighted a lack of practical knowledge and workplace skills to be a major hindrance of graduate employability in Bangladesh. (Matin, Ali, & Wiebe, 2020).

Graduate skills gap is particularly evident in the Bangladesh's banking sector. Research focused on the graduate skills gap in the banking industry revealed that employers have identified significant skills gaps in particular competencies including communication skills, analytical abilities and practical financial knowledge. (Chowdhury, 2020).

Causes of Graduate Skill Gap: Understanding the causes behind this skills gap is essential for identifying effective strategies to address the issue. Several studies suggest that lack of practical competencies and work experience hinders a graduate's probability of good employability. (Baron-Puda, 2017).

One of the primary causes of the graduate skills gap is the limited integration of practical skills development within university curricula. Many tertiary educational institutions focus heavily on academic knowledge and examinations while providing limited opportunities for students to develop workplace-relevant competencies. Research indicates that many universities rarely introduce structured skills development programs in addition to their regular academic curriculum. (Alam, Ogawa, & Islam, 2022).

Many reports reveal that their tertiary educational institutions rarely introduce skills development programs in addition to their regular curriculum. (Alam, Ogawa, & Islam, 2022). The mismatch between industry requirements and educational institutions curriculum has been identified as major challenge of graduate employment by several studies. (Uddin, 2021).

Strategies to Mitigate Graduate Skills Gap: Given the growing concern regarding the graduate skills gap, several strategies have been proposed by researchers and practitioners to address this issue. Experiential learning has been widely recognized as an effective approach to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and workplace skills. Experiential learning opportunities also help students apply theoretical knowledge in practical contexts, thereby improving their problem-solving abilities and professional confidence. (Rahmaningtyas, Joyoatmojo, Indrawati, & Tri, 2025) .

One of the major ways to get exposure to experiential learning by graduates is internship. Research reveals that experiential learning such as internships and part time job exposures during undergraduate degree improved future employability of graduates. (Rahmaningtyas, Joyoatmojo, Indrawati, & Tri, 2025). Studies indicate that students who participate in internship programs during their undergraduate studies develop stronger professional skills, improved workplace readiness, and a better understanding of employer expectations. (Baron-Puda, 2017).

In addition to experiential learning, educational institutions need to develop practical, industry relevant curriculum to help graduates gain the necessary skills and improve their employability. According to many research and studies, collaboration between industry and educational institutions will enable graduates to have the required skills and competencies by the industry. (Thakur, et al., 2024). Other research conducted in Czech Republic shows that to develop industry relevant competencies for students, universities should focus on project-based learning and case solving and other simulation exercises. (Dušek, 2021).

Organizations themselves often play a role in addressing the skills gap through structured employee development initiatives. For organizational success, companies need to develop their employees through learning interventions and knowledge sharing. (Yudhistira, Riana, Supartha, & Wibawa, 2025). Organizations organize structured training programs for newly recruited fresh graduates to mitigate graduate skills gap. The learning and development initiatives equip graduates with essential skills and knowledge to succeed and perform well in their job (Noe, 2023). Learning and development initiatives by organizations cannot help mitigating the graduate skills gap. Combined effort from other important bodies like government policy makers and educational institutions is also needed to match graduate competencies with the industry requirements. (Fresher Training: The Key to Unlocking Corporate Success, n.d.).

Many graduates enter the job market of Bangladesh every year. Despite that, the country is experiencing scarcity of qualified human resources. Therefore, it is crucial for tertiary education institutions to design their curricula in alignment with industry requirements. Additionally, universities, policymakers, and industry stakeholders should collaborate to establish frameworks that identify skill gaps and develop strategies to enhance students' competencies. (Chowdhury, 2020)

Hypothesis Development:
H1: There is a significant overall skills gap among graduates.
H2: There is a significant technical skills gap among graduates.
H3: There is a significant soft skills gap among graduates.
H4: There is a significant gap in level of personal attributes among graduates.
H5: Employers perceive soft skills to be more important than technical skills.
H6: Structured training programs is important in mitigating skill gap.
H7: On the job training, Coaching & Mentoring is important in mitigating skill gaps.
H8: Collaboration between Banks/FIs and universities is essential in mitigating skill gap.

METHODOLOGY

A. Research Approach: This study follows a mixed method research approach, using both qualitative and quantitative techniques. The quantitative part of the study is conducted through a structured online survey to gather quantitative data about important skills required for fresh graduates to work in the financial sector, their current level of the skills and the extent of the skill mismatch. The qualitative part of the study is done through semi-structured interview. The interviews were conducted to gather information on how the skills gap affect the job performance of fresh graduates and what educational institutes and the Banks and Finance Companies can do to mitigate the skills gap. For the study, cross-sectional time horizon was used.
B. Data Collection: Primary data has been collected through structured surveys and semi-structured interviews. The main sources of secondary data for the study are various research reports, academic journals, publications and graduate employability studies.
C. Sampling Technique: The target population of the study includes professionals working in Banks and Financial Institutions of Bangladesh, who are involved in recruitment of fresh graduates or

supervision of fresh graduates. Non-probabilistic sampling methods are used for the study, and the study has been conducted using convenience sampling methods.
The study collected responses from 108 professionals. Considering the limited access to the target population, and the exploration nature of the study, the sample size of 108 respondents is considered sufficient to provide a meaningful and significant insight.
D. Questionnaire Development: A 5-point Likert scale was used in the survey questionnaire, where higher values indicate greater importance or stronger agreement. The question formats used in the survey for the study are: Multiple Choice Questions, ranking questions, open ended questions for qualitative feedback. Before circulating the survey, a pre-testing was conducted among 5 respondents. Based on the feedback received, necessary adjustments were made before final circulation.
E. Analysis Undertaken: The analysis undertaken using data from the responses collected are: Paired Sample T-Test, Multiple Regression Analysis, Descriptive Statistics.
F. Reliability of Data: Cronbach's alpha has been used to measure the reliability of the data.

Skills Category	Cronbach's Alpha
Soft Skills	0.8509
Technical Skills	0.8600
Personal Attributes	0.5688

Cronbach's alpha value shows strong reliability for soft skills and technical skills suggesting that the individual skills within these skills categories consistently measure the skills gap concept. However, personal attributes show relatively lower reliability which may suggest that personal attributes may consist of multiple other individual competencies not fully captured in this survey. Overall, the results indicate that the skills gap measurement criteria are sufficiently reliable for analysis

RESULTS

A. Overview of the Data: All the skills were categorized into 3 groups:
Soft Skills: Includes Business Communication, Teamwork and collaboration, Problem-solving and decision-making, Report Writing and Presentation
Technical Skills: Knowledge on Banks and Financial Institutions, understanding of financial markets and economic concepts, Ability to interpret and analyze financial data, Digital literacy and familiarity with banking technologies
Personal Attributes: Professional ethics and integrity, Time management and ability to meet deadlines
Respondent Statistics: Among the 108 respondents surveyed, 94 respondents i.e. approximately 87% of the sample are professionals from Banks. On the other hand, 14 respondents- which is approximately 13% of the sample, are from Finance Companies.
Professionals from a total of 11 different Banks and Financial institutions took part in the survey, with a majority of the respondents from Eastern Bank PLC and City Bank PLC.
Among the 108 respondents surveyed, 25 respondents, i.e. approximately 23% of the sample are professionals in the financial sector who are actively involved in hiring employees in the organization.
Among the 108 respondents surveyed, 43 respondents, i.e. approximately 40% of the sample are professionals in the financial sector who are involved in managing fresh graduates in the organization.

B. Importance of Skill and Perceived Skill Level

Table 1: Importance of Different Types of Skills

Skills	Mean	Std Dev
Business communication	4.27	0.81
Problem-solving and decision-making	4.11	0.93
Teamwork and collaboration	4.41	0.77
Report writing and presentation	3.79	0.88
Knowledge on Banks and Finance Companies	3.33	0.89
Understanding of financial markets and economic concepts	3.50	0.81
Ability to interpret and analyze financial data	3.81	0.88
Digital literacy and familiarity with banking technologies	3.63	0.86
Professional ethics and integrity	4.58	0.72
Time management and ability to meet deadlines	4.49	0.75

The results indicate that employers rate all categories of skills as important, with mean values closer to the upper end of the scale. According to the responses received, the top 3 important skills for fresh graduates are: Professional ethics and integrity, Time management and ability to meet deadlines, Teamwork and collaboration.

Table 2: Perceived Skill Level of Graduates

Perceived Skills Level	Mean	Std Dev
Business communication	3.09	0.91
Problem-solving and decision-making	2.99	0.96
Teamwork and collaboration	2.83	0.97
Report writing and presentation	3.36	0.89
Knowledge on Banks and Finance Companies	2.46	0.83
Understanding of financial markets and economic concepts	2.56	0.84
Ability to interpret and analyze financial data	2.80	0.90
Digital literacy and familiarity with banking technologies	2.88	0.92
Professional ethics and integrity	3.05	0.95
Time management and ability to meet deadlines	2.81	1.06

The results indicate that employers perceive that skills level of graduates is low to moderate with mean values closer to the lower end of the scale. The top 3 skill that graduates possess are: Report writing and presentation, Professional ethics and integrity, Business communication. And the bottom three skills that graduates possess are: Knowledge on Banks and Finance Companies, understanding of financial markets and economic concepts, Ability to interpret and analyze financial data.

Table 3: Skills Gap of Graduates

Individual Skills Gap

Skill	Gap
Business communication	1.18
Problem-solving and decision-making	1.12
Teamwork and collaboration	1.57
Report writing and presentation	0.43
Knowledge on Banks and Finance Companies	0.87
Understanding of financial markets and economic concepts	0.94
Ability to interpret and analyze financial data	1.01
Digital literacy and familiarity with banking technologies	0.75
Professional ethics and integrity	1.54
Time management and ability to meet deadlines	1.69

Among the different types of skills, time management and ability to meet deadlines, problem-solving and decision-making and professional ethics and integrity exhibit the highest skills gap. Report writing and presentation, digital literacy and familiarity with banking technologies, knowledge on Banks and Finance Companies exhibit the lowest skills gap.

Table 4: Category Wise and Overall Skills Gap

Skill	Importance (Mean)	Actual (Mean)	Importance (Std Dev)	Actual (Std Dev)	Gap
Technical	3.57	2.68	0.70	0.73	**0.89**
Soft	4.14	3.07	0.67	0.77	**1.07**
Personal Attributes	4.54	2.93	0.69	0.94	**1.61**
Overall	**3.99**	**2.88**	**0.58**	**0.71**	**1.11**

The analysis shows that respondents think all categories or skills are very important with the mean value of skills categories closer to the upper end of the scale. On the other hand, perceived levels of the categories of skills among fresh graduates are at the moderate to lower end of the scale which shows that there is gap in all categories of skills.

Among the three categories, personal attributes show the highest gap, suggesting that graduates are particularly lacking in areas such as Professional ethics and integrity and time management and ability to meet deadlines. Soft skills and technical skills also show noticeable gaps, but they are relatively smaller in comparison to personal attributes.

The result shows that the overall skills gap across all categories of skills is also noticeably high, indicating that there is clear gap between expected skills level of graduates and the actual skills that they possess.

Table 5: Employer perceptions of graduate skills gap across Banks and Financial Institutions

Variable	n	Mean
Employer’s perception of skill gap (Banks)	94	1.07
Employer’s perception of skill gap (Finance Companies)	14	1.37

In the above analysis it is found that there is difference in mean value of employer’s perception of skill gap between employees of Banks and Finance Companies.

Table 6: Employer perceptions of graduate skills gap across roles

Variable	n	Mean
Employer’s perception of skill gap (hire fresh graduates)	25	1.20
Employer’s perception of skill gap (do not hire fresh graduates)	83	1.08

Respondents who directly hire fresh graduates have reported the skills gap among fresh graduates to be higher than employees who do not directly fresh graduates.

Table 7: Employer’s perception of skill gap (employers involved in recruitment)

Variable	n	Mean
Employer’s perception of skill gap (manage fresh graduates)	65	0.92
Employer’s perception of skill gap (do not manage fresh graduates)	43	1.4

Respondents who manage fresh graduates have reported the skills gap among fresh graduates to be higher than employees who do not manage fresh graduates.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Impact of Different Skills Categories on the Overall Skills Gap

Model Summary:

Table 8: Impact of Different Skills Categories on the Overall Skills Gap

R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Standard Error	F	p
0.659	0.434	0.417	0.529	26.55	< .001

Regression Coefficients:

Predictor	Coefficients	Standard Error	t Stat	P-value
Intercept	2.894	0.215	13.48	1.44919E-24
Soft Skills (Actual)	-0.156	0.128	-1.223	.224
Technical Skills (Actual)	-0.246	0.105	-2.340	.021
Personal Attributes (Actual)	-0.221	0.087	-2.556	.012

Multiple regression analysis has been conducted to determine the impact of different skill categories on the overall skills gap. The dependent variable for the regression was overall skills gap among fresh graduates, and the independent variables were the actual skill level of soft, technical and personal attributes category. The p value is less than 0.05 which indicates that the model is statistically significant and explains 43.37% of the overall skills gap variation.
Technical skills (Coefficient = -0.246, $p < 0.05$) and personal attributes (Coefficient = -0.221, $p < 0.05$) skill level have significant negative relationship with overall skills gap. Which shows that improvement in that category of skills level will significantly help in reducing skills gap. Soft skills level also has negative relationship with skills gap (Coefficient = -0.156, $p > 0.05$), however the relationship is not statistically significant.

Impact of Individual Skill Components on the Overall Skills Gap

Model Summary:

Table 9: Impact of Individual Skill Components on the Overall Skills Gap

R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	SE	F	p
0.719	0.516	0.467	0.506	10.36	< .001

Regression Coefficients:

Predictor	Coefficients	SE	t	P
Intercept	2.633	0.232	11.35	1.71E-19
Business Communication	0.058	0.082	0.710	.480
Teamwork and Collaboration	-0.264	0.095	-2.769	.007
Problem-solving and Decision-making	-0.070	0.086	-0.814	.418
Report Writing and Presentation	0.024	0.069	0.345	.731
Knowledge on Banks and Finance Companies	-0.009	0.114	-0.078	.938
Understanding of Financial Markets and Economic Concepts	-0.242	0.124	-1.957	.053
Ability to Interpret and Analyze Financial Data	0.130	0.081	1.615	.109
Digital Literacy and Familiarity with Banking Technologies	-0.084	0.072	-1.178	.242
Professional Ethics and Integrity	0.037	0.084	0.439	.661
Time Management and Ability to Meet Deadlines	-0.139	0.091	-1.514	.133

Multiple regression analysis has been conducted to determine the impact of different individual skills on the overall skills gap. The dependent variable for the regression was overall skills gap among fresh graduates, and the independent variables were the actual skill level of the 10 individual skills included in this paper. The p value is less than 0.05 which indicates that the model is statistically significant and explains 51.6% of the overall skills gap variation (r square is 0.516).

Among the 10 individual skills, teamwork and collaboration (Coefficient = -0.264, $p < 0.01$) and understanding of financial markets and economic concepts (Coefficient = -0.242, $p \approx 0.053$) is found to have statistically significant negative relationship with overall skills gap. Which means these two skills significantly help in reducing skills gap in fresh graduates.

However, the other skills: Business Communication, Problem-solving and decision-making, Report Writing and Presentation, Knowledge on Banks and Finance Companies, Ability to interpret and analyze financial data, Digital literacy and familiarity with banking technologies, Professional ethics and integrity, Time management and ability to meet deadlines did not demonstrate statistically significant effect in reducing the overall skills gap in fresh graduates.
The analysis shows that although multiple skills are perceived as important by employers, only 2 skills play a significant role in explaining the variation in overall skills gap.

D. Hypothesis Testing: Paired Sample t-test

Table 10: Summary of Hypothesis Testing using Paired Sample t-test

Hypothesis	t Stat	P	Decision
There is a significant overall skills gap among graduates	16.61	2.13771E-31	Supported
There is a significant technical skills gap among graduates	12.18	6.31506E-22	Supported
There is a significant soft skills gap among graduates	13.46	9.0157E-25	Supported
There is a significant gap in level of personal attributes among graduates	17.52	3.20172E-33	Supported
Employers perceive soft skills to be more important than technical skills	9.31	1.87407E-15	Supported

For a 5% level of significance, the p values are less than 0.05. Therefore, it can be deducted that all the hypotheses are supported. The results imply that there is significant overall skills gap among graduates. Skill gap is also significant in the three different categories: soft skills, technical skills and personal attributes. Employers also perceive soft skills to be more important than technical skills.

E. Hypothesis Testing: Mean based interpretation

Table 11: Summary of Hypothesis Testing using mean based interpretation

Hypothesis	Mean	Std Dev	Interpretation
Structured training programs are important in mitigating skill gap	4.46	0.71	Agree
On the job training, Coaching & Mentoring is important in mitigating skill gap	4.47	0.76	Agree
Collaboration between Banks/FIs and universities is essential in mitigating skill gap	4.01	0.86	Agree

Structured training programs are highly important in reducing skills gap of fresh graduates which is indicated by the high mean value of importance (4.46 on a scale of 1 to 5).
On the job training, coaching & mentoring are highly important measures that can be taken in reducing skills gap of fresh graduates which is indicated by the high mean value of importance (4.47 on a scale of 1 to 5). Collaboration between Banks/FIs and universities are highly important initiatives that can be taken in reducing skills gap of fresh graduates which is indicated by the high mean value of importance (4.01 on a scale of 1 to 5).

DISCUSSIONS

Importance of Graduate Skills and Perceived Level of Graduate Skills: The research shows that employers in the financial sector of Bangladesh consider all the skills and competencies analyzed for the study as important. Among the categories of skills and competencies, personal attributes are considered the most important, followed by soft skills and technical competencies. In the category of personal attributes, the most important skills identified are professional ethics and integrity, time management and ability to meet deadlines. Teamwork and collaboration is another important skill and falls under soft skill category. This finding indicates that employers perceive personal attributes and soft skills to be important alongside technical know-how. In contrast, employers of the financial sector have rated that graduates possess moderate to low skills level at all the skills and competencies analyzed for the study. While graduates are relatively better at soft skills such as communication and report writing and presentation, they lack in-depth understanding of industry-specific practical knowledge, particularly in technical areas.

Skills Gap in Graduates: A significant gap between employer expectation of skills requirement and actual skill level of graduates exists across all the skills and competencies analyzed for the study. The skills gap among graduates is multi-faceted. The gap is highest in personal attributes category, followed by soft skills, while the gap in technical skills is relatively lower. The highest gaps exist in time management and meeting deadlines, problem-solving and decision-making, and professional ethics and integrity. Overall, employers perceive that graduates entering the financial sector are not fully equipped with soft skills, technical skills and personal attributes to succeed in their role and contribute to a company's performance.

Soft Skills vs Technical Skills: The research analysis indicates that when it comes to graduates' success in workplace, employers of the financial sector perceive soft skills to be more important than technical skills. The research analysis shows that there is a considerable gap in soft skills among fresh graduates. The study finds that soft skills such as teamwork and collaboration communication, and problem-solving are more important for graduates to be successful in their role. Inadequacy of soft skill, limit graduates' performance in workplace even if they possess the required technical skill set. These findings indicate the growing significance of soft skills in professional settings.

Industry Relevant Knowledge of Graduates: According to employers, there is significant gap in technical skills such as ability to analyze financial data, understanding of financial markets and knowledge of banks and finance companies. This finding reveals an important aspect: that is graduates lack experiential learning related to industry-specific knowledge. Several factors contribute to this lack of experiential learning. One of the reasons may be limited internship programs available for fresh graduates. Another reason may be that academic curriculum in educational institutions emphasizes more book-based theoretical knowledge and does not include adequate practical application of theoretical know-how.

Differences in Respondent's Perception: The research finding indicates that employers from the finance companies rated skills gap among graduates to be more than employers from banks.
Employers who are directly involved in the recruitment of fresh graduates perceive skills gap among graduates to be higher than employers who are not directly involved in recruitment. Employers who play supervisory roles of fresh graduates perceive skills gap to be higher than employers who do not play supervisory roles of fresh graduates. These indicate that according to the research analysis, employers who are involved with recruitment of fresh graduates and employers who supervise fresh graduates have greater chances of understanding the level of graduate skills gap.

Role of Employers: Employers perceive that mentoring provided to graduates in workplace along with different training programs equip graduates with the required skills and competencies to perform well in organizations. These learning and development interventions by employers reduce the gap between theoretical knowledge of graduates and the real-world applications. However, even though these interventions by employers help reduce the skills gap, they do not help overcome the underlying causes of the skills gap.

Industry-Academia Collaboration: According to employers, greater industry academia collaboration is important in mitigating graduate skills gap. Industry academia collaboration can help education institutions to align academic curriculum with practical industry know-how. Such collaboration can include industry specific projects for students, student placement programs or part-time/full time internships and collaborations with professionals from financial institutions to build academic curriculum.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the study is to analyze the skill gap among the fresh graduates entering the financial sector of Bangladesh from the perspective of the employer and to identify possible mitigation strategies to reduce the skills gap. The research findings indicate that there is a significant gap between employer expectations and the actual skill levels of graduates across all three skills categories: soft skill, technical skill and personal attributes. Among these three categories, personal attributes have the largest gap. Employers perceive that, for graduates, soft skills are found to be more important than technical skills. Learning and development initiatives by employers of the financial sector help reduce the skills gap, but they do not help overcome the underlying causes of the skills gap.

To fully address the skills gap, collaborative effort and initiatives from policymakers, educational institutions and industry professional are needed. Educational institutions need to provide practical, experiential learning for students. They also need to help students develop the required soft skills and personal attributes. It is important for employers of the financial sector to continue the relevant learning and development interventions initiatives for fresh graduates. Policymakers can help by supporting more industry academia collaboration. Students can prioritize building the relevant practical skills in addition to the academic curriculum that they are being provided.

Contribution of Research

The findings of this study can be useful for universities, students, employers, and Bangladeshi policymakers in improving graduate employability and organizational effectiveness in the financial sector.

Future Research

Future research can be done to include the perspective of graduates and academic institutions along with employers. Similar studies can also be conducted across different industries other than the financial sector of Bangladesh.

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