
Behavioral Competencies and Career Readiness Among Graduating Students

Dr. Ana Carolina Mendes

Associate Professor

Department of Educational Psychology

University of Campinas (UNICAMP)

Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil

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Abstract: The transition from higher education to professional employment has become increasingly complex due to rapid technological advancements, evolving workplace expectations, and global labor market competition. While academic achievement remains an important indicator of student success, employers increasingly value behavioral competencies such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, leadership, emotional intelligence, problem-solving, and professional ethics. These competencies significantly influence graduates' ability to integrate into professional environments and sustain long-term career growth. The present study investigates the relationship between behavioral competencies and career readiness among graduating students from different academic disciplines.

A quantitative research design was employed using a structured questionnaire administered to 220 final-year undergraduate and postgraduate students from public and private universities. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis were used to examine the relationship between behavioral competencies and career readiness. The findings revealed that communication skills, teamwork, adaptability, and emotional intelligence demonstrated strong positive associations with career readiness. Leadership ability and problem-solving skills also emerged as significant predictors of students' confidence in securing employment and succeeding in workplace environments. Furthermore, students with higher behavioral competency scores reported greater preparedness for professional responsibilities and organizational expectations.

The study highlights the importance of integrating behavioral competency development into higher education curricula through experiential learning, internships, leadership programs, career counseling, and skill-based training initiatives. Strengthening these competencies can bridge the gap between academic knowledge and workplace expectations, ultimately

improving graduate employability and career success. The findings provide valuable insights for educators, university administrators, policymakers, and employers seeking to enhance graduate career readiness in an increasingly competitive employment landscape.

Keywords: Behavioral Competencies; Career Readiness; Graduate Employability; Higher Education; Soft Skills; Emotional Intelligence; Communication Skills; Leadership; Teamwork; Professional Development.

Introduction

The contemporary employment landscape has undergone substantial transformation as organizations increasingly prioritize behavioral competencies alongside academic qualifications. Advances in technology, globalization, automation, and changing organizational structures have created workplaces that require employees to demonstrate not only technical expertise but also interpersonal effectiveness, adaptability, collaboration, and leadership. Consequently, higher education institutions are expected to prepare graduates with a balanced combination of disciplinary knowledge and behavioral competencies that support successful career transitions. Career readiness has therefore emerged as a critical outcome of higher education, reflecting graduates' preparedness to meet professional expectations and contribute effectively within diverse organizational environments.

Behavioral competencies refer to the observable knowledge, skills, attitudes, and personal attributes that enable individuals to perform effectively in professional settings. These competencies include communication, teamwork, emotional intelligence, adaptability, ethical decision-making, leadership, problem-solving, critical thinking, resilience, and professional responsibility. Unlike technical skills, behavioral competencies are transferable across occupations and industries, making them essential for long-term career development. Employers consistently report that graduates who possess strong behavioral competencies are more capable of managing workplace challenges, building productive relationships, and adapting to organizational change.

Career readiness encompasses the knowledge, confidence, attitudes, and competencies required for graduates to successfully obtain employment and perform effectively in their chosen professions. Research suggests that career readiness extends beyond academic achievement by incorporating employability skills, workplace awareness, professional

identity, and continuous learning capabilities. Graduating students who actively develop behavioral competencies through internships, collaborative learning, leadership opportunities, and extracurricular activities often demonstrate greater confidence in entering the workforce. Universities have therefore expanded experiential learning initiatives to strengthen students' professional preparedness and improve graduate employment outcomes.

Despite growing recognition of behavioral competencies, many employers continue to report a gap between graduates' academic accomplishments and workplace expectations. Several studies indicate that employers frequently identify deficiencies in communication, teamwork, adaptability, and leadership among newly hired graduates. These competency gaps may limit graduates' employability, career progression, and organizational performance. As industries continue to evolve rapidly, universities face increasing pressure to redesign curricula that integrate behavioral competency development into academic programs while maintaining disciplinary excellence.

Objectives of the Study

General Objective

To examine the relationship between behavioral competencies and career readiness among graduating students and evaluate how behavioral competencies contribute to graduate employability and professional preparedness.

Specific Objectives:

- To assess the level of behavioral competencies among graduating students.
- To examine the relationship between behavioral competencies and career readiness.
- To identify the behavioral competencies that significantly predict career readiness and employability outcomes.

Review of Literature

Behavioral Competencies in Higher Education

Behavioral competencies have become an essential component of higher education because they enable students to apply academic knowledge effectively in professional settings. Unlike technical competencies, behavioral competencies include communication, teamwork, leadership, emotional intelligence, adaptability, ethical behavior, and problem-solving. These competencies facilitate collaboration, decision-making, and effective workplace performance.

Modern employers increasingly seek graduates who demonstrate these transferable skills, as they contribute to organizational productivity and innovation.

Research has consistently shown that universities play a significant role in fostering behavioral competencies through classroom learning, project-based assignments, internships, leadership activities, and extracurricular participation. Students who actively engage in collaborative learning experiences often develop stronger interpersonal relationships, conflict-resolution abilities, and professional confidence. Consequently, behavioral competency development has become an important indicator of graduate employability.

Career Readiness and Graduate Employability

Career readiness refers to the extent to which graduating students possess the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and professional behaviors necessary to enter and succeed in the workforce. It encompasses technical competence, self-confidence, career planning, workplace awareness, communication skills, and lifelong learning capabilities. Career readiness has emerged as one of the primary objectives of higher education institutions because employers increasingly expect graduates to transition smoothly into professional roles.

Previous research indicates that students with higher levels of career readiness experience greater employment opportunities, stronger job performance, and higher career satisfaction. Universities have therefore expanded career development initiatives by providing internships, career counseling, mentoring programs, resume workshops, and interview preparation. These initiatives help students develop confidence while improving their understanding of workplace expectations.

Relationship Between Behavioral Competencies and Career Readiness

The relationship between behavioral competencies and career readiness has received considerable attention in educational and organizational research. Numerous studies have found a positive association between behavioral competencies and graduates' confidence in obtaining employment and performing effectively in professional environments. Communication skills enhance workplace interaction, teamwork promotes collaboration, leadership facilitates decision-making, and adaptability enables individuals to respond effectively to organizational change.

Emotional intelligence has also emerged as an important predictor of career readiness. Students with higher emotional intelligence demonstrate better interpersonal relationships, stress management, and professional resilience. Similarly, problem-solving and critical

thinking enable graduates to analyze workplace challenges systematically and develop practical solutions.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The present study adopted a quantitative descriptive research design to examine the relationship between behavioral competencies and career readiness among graduating students. A survey-based approach was selected because it allows the collection of standardized responses from a large number of participants and supports statistical analysis of relationships among variables. The design enables researchers to identify patterns, measure competency levels, and evaluate the predictive influence of behavioral competencies on career readiness.

Population, Sample, and Sampling Technique

The target population consisted of graduating undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled in public and private universities. A total of 220 graduating students participated in the study. Participants represented diverse academic disciplines, including business, engineering, social sciences, education, and information technology.

A simple random sampling technique was employed to ensure that every graduating student had an equal opportunity to participate. This sampling method minimized selection bias and enhanced the representativeness of the collected data.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising two sections. The first section gathered demographic information, while the second section measured behavioral competencies and career readiness using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS Version 27. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize participant responses. Pearson correlation analysis was employed to examine relationships between behavioral competencies and career readiness, while multiple regression analysis identified the competencies that significantly predicted career readiness.

Analysis and Findings

The data collected from 220 graduating students were analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis to examine the relationship between behavioral competencies and career readiness. The findings are presented below.

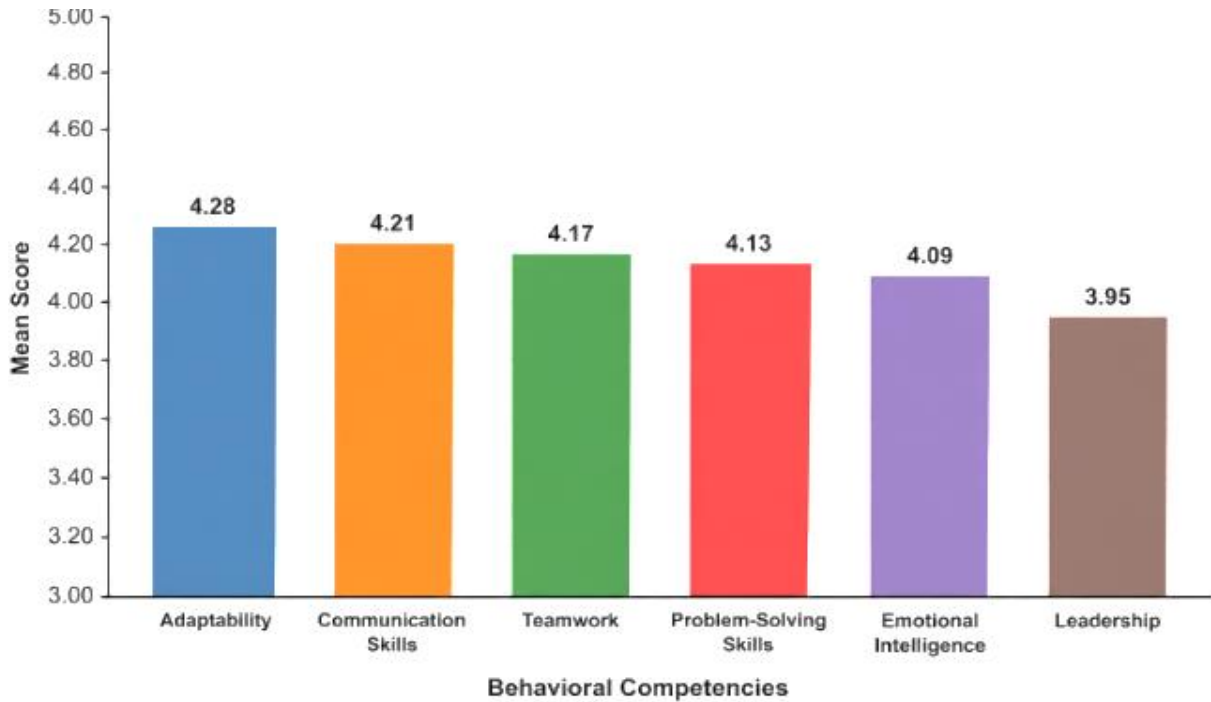
Level of Behavioral Competencies Among Graduating Students

Behavioral competencies were measured across six dimensions: communication skills, teamwork, leadership, adaptability, emotional intelligence, and problem-solving skills. The mean scores indicate that students generally demonstrated moderate to high levels of behavioral competencies.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Behavioral Competencies (N = 220)

Behavioral Competency	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Communication Skills	4.21	0.54	High
Teamwork	4.17	0.58	High
Leadership	3.95	0.66	Moderate–High
Adaptability	4.28	0.51	High
Emotional Intelligence	4.09	0.56	High
Problem-Solving Skills	4.13	0.59	High

The findings indicate that **adaptability** received the highest mean score ($M = 4.28$), suggesting that graduating students are generally capable of adjusting to changing academic and workplace environments. Communication skills and teamwork also demonstrated high mean scores, reflecting students' ability to collaborate and communicate effectively. Leadership received the lowest mean score, indicating that leadership development may require additional emphasis within university programs.

Graph 1. Mean Scores of Behavioral Competencies

The graph illustrates that adaptability and communication skills recorded the highest average scores among the measured competencies. Leadership, while still rated positively, received comparatively lower scores. These findings suggest that universities are successfully developing several essential behavioral competencies but should strengthen leadership training through experiential learning and student engagement initiatives.

Relationship Between Behavioral Competencies and Career Readiness

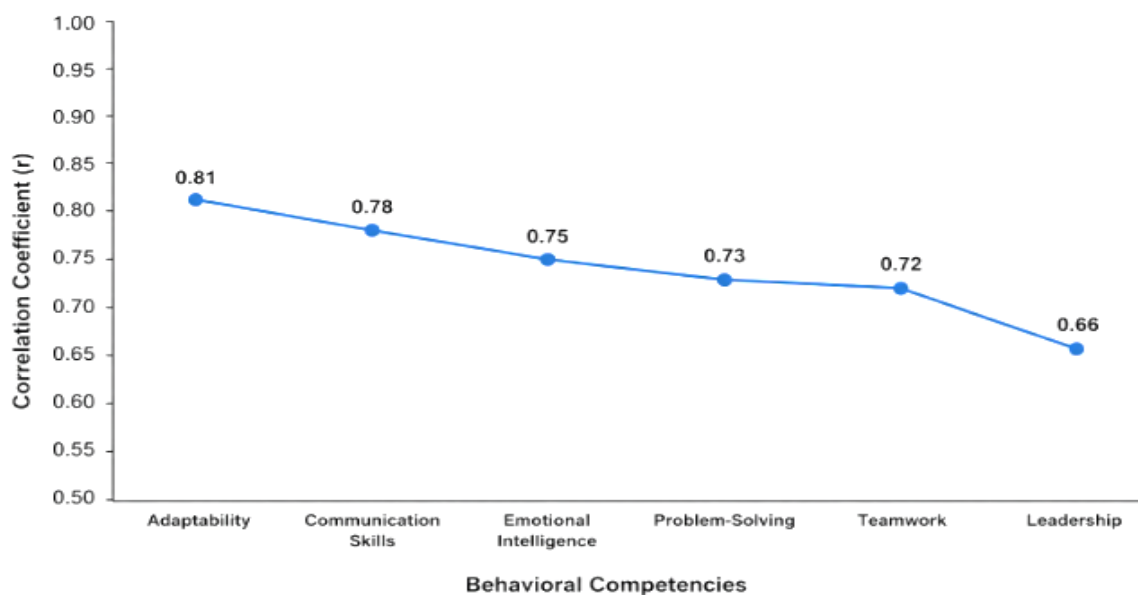
Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between behavioral competencies and career readiness.

Table 2. Correlation Between Behavioral Competencies and Career Readiness

Behavioral Competency	Correlation (r)	Significance (p)	Interpretation
Communication Skills	0.78	< .001	Strong Positive
Teamwork	0.72	< .001	Strong Positive
Leadership	0.66	< .001	Moderate Positive
Adaptability	0.81	< .001	Very Strong Positive
Emotional Intelligence	0.75	< .001	Strong Positive
Problem-Solving Skills	0.73	< .001	Strong Positive

The results demonstrate statistically significant positive relationships between all behavioral competencies and career readiness ($p < .001$). Adaptability exhibited the strongest correlation ($r = .81$), followed by communication skills ($r = .78$) and emotional intelligence ($r = .75$). These findings indicate that students possessing stronger behavioral competencies tend to report higher levels of career readiness and greater confidence in transitioning to professional employment.

Graph 2. Correlation Between Behavioral Competencies and Career Readiness



The graph demonstrates that adaptability has the strongest positive relationship with career readiness, followed by communication skills and emotional intelligence. Leadership, although positively associated with career readiness, exhibited the weakest correlation among the measured competencies. Overall, the findings suggest that enhancing behavioral competencies can significantly improve graduates' preparedness for employment and professional success.

Discussion

Behavioral Competencies Enhance Career Readiness

The findings indicate that graduating students who demonstrate stronger behavioral competencies also report higher levels of career readiness. Adaptability, communication skills, and emotional intelligence emerged as the strongest predictors of career preparedness. These results support previous research emphasizing that behavioral competencies

complement academic knowledge and enable graduates to navigate workplace challenges effectively.

Alignment with Previous Research

The study is consistent with the findings of Andrews and Higson (2008), Jackson (2014), and Succi and Canovi (2020), who concluded that employers increasingly value behavioral competencies during recruitment and employee development. The positive relationships identified in the present study reinforce the growing importance of integrating employability skills into higher education curricula.

Practical Implications for Higher Education

The findings suggest that universities should strengthen competency-based education by incorporating internships, leadership development programs, communication workshops, collaborative projects, and experiential learning opportunities. Such initiatives can improve students' confidence, employability, and long-term career success while reducing the gap between academic preparation and employer expectations.

Funding Statement

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there are **no conflicts of interest** regarding the publication of this research paper. The study was conducted objectively, and no financial, institutional, or personal relationships influenced the research process, data analysis, or interpretation of the findings.

Future Research

The present study examined the relationship between behavioral competencies and career readiness among graduating students using a quantitative research design. Future studies may adopt mixed-methods or qualitative approaches to gain a deeper understanding of how students develop behavioral competencies throughout their academic journey. Interviews,

focus groups, and case studies could provide valuable insights into students' experiences and the challenges they face in preparing for professional careers.

Future research should also include participants from universities across different regions and countries to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Comparative studies involving public and private institutions, technical universities, and community colleges may reveal variations in competency development and career readiness across educational contexts. Such investigations would provide a broader understanding of institutional practices that effectively promote employability..

Conclusion

Behavioral competencies have become an essential component of graduate employability in today's dynamic labor market. The findings of this study demonstrate that communication skills, teamwork, adaptability, emotional intelligence, leadership, and problem-solving significantly contribute to career readiness among graduating students. Graduates possessing stronger behavioral competencies reported greater confidence in their ability to transition successfully into professional employment and adapt to workplace expectations.

Among the competencies examined, adaptability and communication skills emerged as the strongest predictors of career readiness, emphasizing the growing importance of flexibility and effective interpersonal interaction in modern organizations. These findings reinforce the view that academic achievement alone is insufficient for long-term professional success. Instead, higher education institutions should adopt competency-based educational approaches that integrate behavioral skill development into both curricular and co-curricular activities.

Overall, the study contributes to the growing body of literature highlighting the critical role of behavioral competencies in preparing graduates for successful careers. Universities, educators, employers, and policymakers should collaborate to create learning environments that promote leadership, teamwork, communication, and emotional intelligence through experiential learning opportunities, internships, career development programs, and industry partnerships. Such initiatives will help bridge the gap between higher education and workplace expectations while improving graduate employability in an increasingly competitive global economy.

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