Students and Academics Perception of Flexible Learning Tools and their Effectiveness in Developing Employability Skills within UK Business Schools

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Abstract

With the growth and acceptance of flexible learning after the COVID-19 pandemic, it is crucial to identify the pedagogical tools which are effective in developing employability skills among the undergraduate business students. The paper is the second in the series to investigate the effective pedagogical tools to develop the employability skills. This study seeks to provide an insight into the most effective flexible pedagogical tool especially in the context of UK Business Schools. Indeed, the use of resourceful pedagogical tools are vital in developing the key 21st century employability skills among the business students. In order to ensure that organizations have the right skills to support and sustain their hard-earned success, and people have a relevant set of skills they need to be both employable and individually fulfilled. For this study, a single case study was selected; where a business school in central London was selected which provided both face to face and flexible learning to students in the UK. The study critically reviewed students' and academics perspectives on the issue of pedagogical tools. Both data strands agreed that case studies, class debates, lectures, group projects, role play, and internships are effective flexible learning tools for the development of 21st century skills or in gaining employability for life values.

1. Introduction

The paper presents the thematic analysis of the student surveys and academic interviews carried out to determine the effectiveness of various pedagogical tools in developing undergraduate students' skills. For this study, a London-based university was selected that provides business and hospitality courses to undergraduate students via flexible learning methods. To understand the student's perspective, surveys were distributed in the business school via an online platform. From academic perspective, interviews were carried out with the three academics to determine the effectiveness of the various pedagogical tools in developing the undergraduate students' skills.

Business school is a part of a private global university network group with campuses in the UK (London, Manchester and Birmingham), the USA, (Chicago), Canada (Toronto and Vancouver), Singapore, Germany and Israel. The university campus in London provides business, hospitality, visual media, and fashion courses to undergraduate and postgraduate students. The institute prides itself in providing students with hands-on experience in their chosen industry before they embark on a successful employment career of their choice. The College of Business and Hospitality uses both face-to-face and virtual learning environments for the students to gain their degrees. The college has 16 highly qualified academic staff members from various parts of the world, and it uses contemporary online tools like Zoom and Canvas (Moodle platform) to support the students in their learning.

The total number of undergraduate students within the school was 410 students at the time of the study.

2. Method

This research follows an exploratory approach using case study design as proposed. To examine the causal relationships between the key factors under investigation and the outcomes which need to be thoroughly studied. The preferred method plays a leading role in ascertaining the most effective pedagogical flexible learning tools and how they can develop key 21st-century employability skills among undergraduate business students in the UK (Habib and Pius, 2022). Given the current study, Yin's (2018) reasonable model of proof, analysis, and interpretations of the causal relationships between the variables was used to better understand the study participants' lived experiences. Yin (2018, p. 15) postulates that "case study is an empirical method that investigates the phenomenon (the case) in-depth within the real-world context". Yin's assertions are consistent with the fact that there are two main variables in this study; the most effective pedagogical flexible learning tools' which is the phenomenon, and the development of 21st century employability skills among the undergraduate business students in the UK; is the background of this study. Yin (2014) argue that a case study is believed to be a suitable research method for this investigation, as the proposed study to address a contemporary phenomenon, which researchers have no control over; the research is largely exploratory because it explores 'how' and 'why' questions as recommended. The data was collected using a case

study method and it was executed in two stages. Stage 1; details the findings from the student's survey collected through Qualtrics and analysed using Excel and SPSS analytical tools, while Stage 2 presents the information collected from the semi-structured interviews conducted with the academics in the undergraduate business students. A case study design was thematically used in gathering evidence from multiple sources across four universities in the UK.

For research purposes, the BA in Business Administration was selected where most of the students attending these courses are UK home and EU nationals. To enrol in these courses, they are required to have some previous work-related experience. The student population comprises of young and mature students. Some of them were continuing their education, returning to studies for a career change or seeking a promotion.

The total number of students at the London campus on the Business and Hospitality course was 410, out of which a sample size of 201 students was randomly selected The total completed surveys received was 69 which indicates a very good survey return rate of 34%. Random selection is a form of sampling where a representative group of research participants is selected from a larger group by chance. This selection was based on Monday and Thursday group. This allows for each person attending lectures on these days, to have equal chance of participating in the study. Several strands of data were obtained, analyzed, triangulated, and used to address the main research problem under investigation.

Stage 1. Student Surveys Analysis

During Stage 1, the students were asked to express their opinion via an online survey. It consists of four parts and enquires about employability skills, pedagogical tools, communication preferences and demographic information. The results for each part have been analysed below.

Part A. Important skills for employability

This part includes three questions which enquired about the key skills for employability, the role of skills in getting employment and the employers' demand for employability skills.

The participants were provided with a list of 20 skills adapted from the QS Global Employers and Oxford Top Employment Skills list. The students were provided with the option to choose from strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree and strongly disagree in response.

There were 69 participants who provided their consent and responded to the survey. Their responses have been summarised below in Table 01.

Table 01. Key skills for employability – UA

#	Field	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
1	Problem Solving	38.10%	55.56%	4.76%	0.00%	1.59%
2	Team Building	38.10%	55.56%	4.76%	1.59%	0.00%
3	Communication	50.79%	44.44%	4.76%	0.00%	0.00%
4	Adaptability	33.33%	57.14%	6.35%	3.17%	0.00%
5	Data Analysis	30.65%	59.68%	8.06%	1.61%	0.00%
6	Resilience	20.97%	54.84%	17.74%	6.45%	0.00%
7	Organisational skills	30.16%	49.21%	15.87%	4.76%	0.00%
8	Technical Skills	39.68%	44.44%	15.87%	0.00%	0.00%
9	Subject Knowledge	36.51%	49.21%	12.70%	1.59%	0.00%
10	Creativity	25.40%	44.44%	20.63%	7.94%	1.59%
11	Leadership	23.81%	47.62%	22.22%	6.35%	0.00%
12	Negotiating	18.03%	45.90%	29.51%	6.56%	0.00%
13	Commercial awareness / Previous work experience	27.87%	52.46%	16.39%	3.28%	0.00%
14	Interpersonal	36.07%	49.18%	13.11%	1.64%	0.00%
15	Managing up	26.67%	45.00%	20.00%	8.33%	0.00%
16	Honest & Ethical approach	29.51%	44.26%	18.03%	8.20%	0.00%
17	Career Management	29.51%	45.90%	14.75%	8.20%	1.64%
18	Self- Efficacy	37.70%	39.34%	19.67%	3.28%	0.00%
19	Life-long learning	34.43%	40.98%	18.03%	6.56%	0.00%
20	Critical Thinking	41.94%	48.39%	9.68%	0.00%	0.00%

The student responses clearly show that communication was the most important skill on the list. 51% of students chose 'strongly agree' and 44% of students selected 'somewhat agree' in response to their choice.

The other skills that the students agreed were of 'somewhat importance' were problem solving and team building both at 55%, critical Thinking at 48%, data analysis at 60%, adaptability at 57%, interpersonal skills at 49%, subject knowledge at 49%, technical skills at 44%, commercial awareness/previous work experience at 52%, organisational skills at 49%, self-efficacy at 39%, lifelong learning at 41%, career management at 46%, resilience at 55%, an honest and ethical approach at 44%, managing up at 45.00%, leadership skills at 48%, creativity at 44% and negotiating at 46%. None of the skills received a score of very low importance. It is clear that the students are familiar with the skills required by an employer to get employment.

Q2. The role of skill development in getting their desired employment

The students were asked to share their opinion regarding the importance of skill development in getting their desired employment. The students were provided with five options ranging from 'definitely yes' to 'definitely not'.
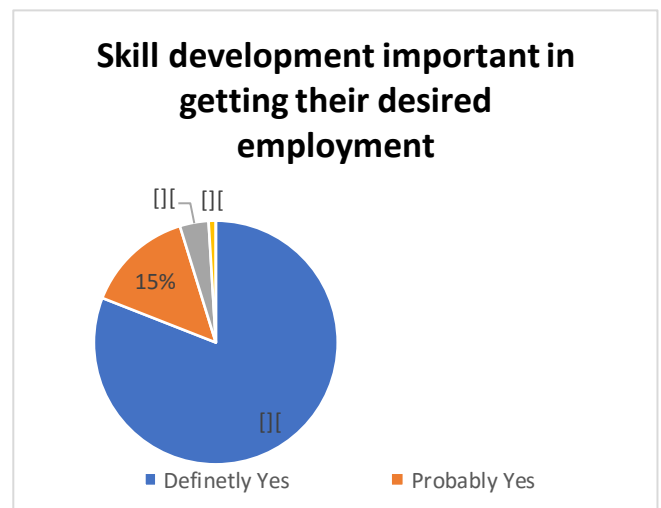

Figure 01. Role of skill development in getting desired employment

The results from the above pie chart (fig. 01) shows that 80% of students said yes and 15% said probably yes. Additionally, 4% students were not sure whether the key skills were important or not and 1% said probably not. None of the students selected the definitely not option. The findings from the survey shows that students believe that skills development plays an important role in getting the desired employment. The results are summarised above in the pie chart.

Q.3 Employers' demand for transferable skills

The question allowed the students to answer on a scale of 0 'not at all likely' to 10 'extremely likely.' In response to this question, a mixed response from the students was collected. However, most of the students rated the employers' need for transferable skills on a scale of 8 to 10 as shown below in scattered bar chart (fig. 02) .
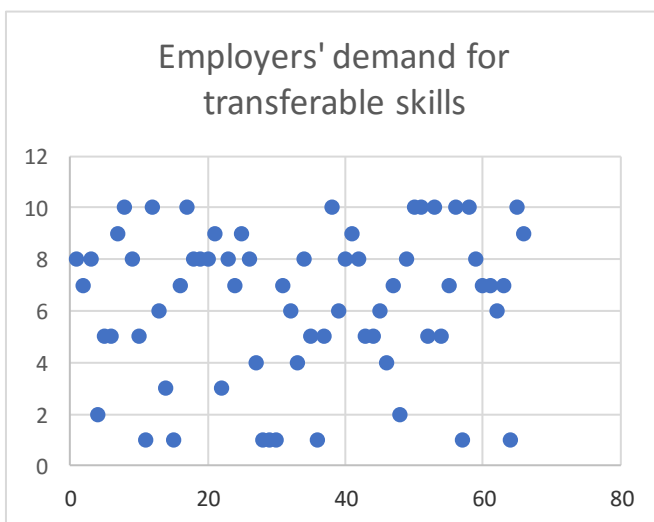

Figure 02. Employers' demand for transferable skills

Part B. Pedagogical tools and their effectiveness in developing skills

Students were asked about their opinion regarding pedagogical tools and their role in developing their skills. All students who responded to the questionnaire agreed that it is vital that their skills are developed through use of various pedagogical tools.

Q1. Pedagogical tools that are important for learning

The students were asked if the pedagogical tools used are important for learning, especially in a flexible learning context. All students agreed that pedagogical tools play an important role in the learning process.

Q2. Familiar methods of delivery

The students were asked which methods of teaching delivery they are familiar with. Specifically, 20% of students selected blended learning. 20% of students opted for traditional classroom teaching while 60% of students showed familiarity with online only teaching methods such as Zoom, Satellite etc. ss shown below in the graph chart (fig. 03)
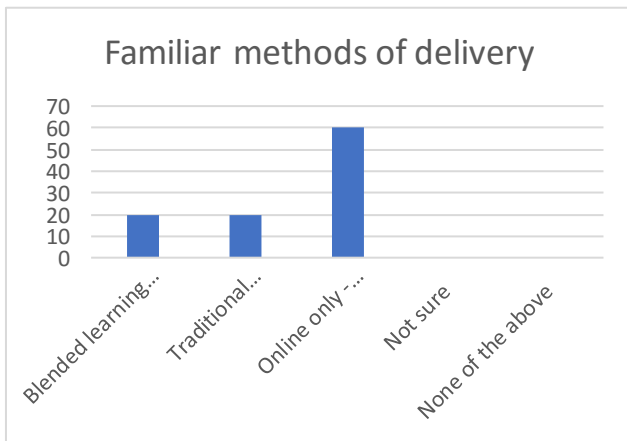
Familiar methods of delivery

Figure 03. Familiar methods of delivery

Delivery methods provide an opportunity for skill development

Figure 04. Delivery methods provide an opportunity for skill development

Q3. Role of the method of delivery in skill development

The students were asked about the link between the method of delivery and its involvement in skill development. In detail, 80% of students selected strongly agree and 20% somewhat agree. None of the students selected neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree or somewhat disagree regarding the method of delivery and its role in skill development. The student's opinions have been summarised below in the pie chart (fig.04).
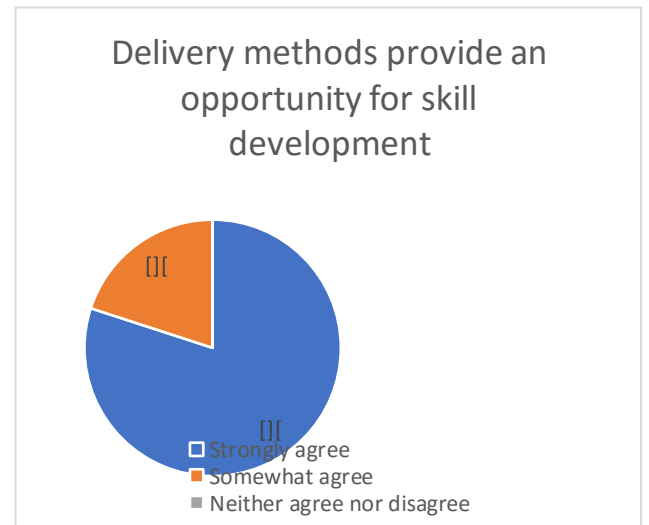
Q4. Effectiveness of the pedagogical tools

In this question, the students were given a list of 14 different pedagogical tools and they were asked to rate them on a scale of extremely important, very important, moderately important, slightly important, and not at all important. The comparison graph chart (figure 05) below summarises the results and the analysis of the findings from UK students survey thereafter.
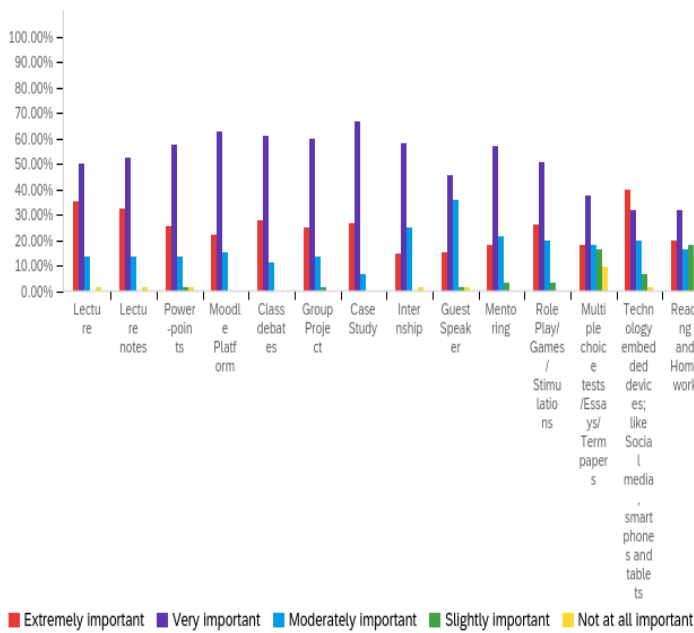
Effective Pedagogical tools

Figure05. Effective pedagogical tools- UA

The results from the above chart have been summarised separately for each pedagogical tool.

1. Case study

Case studies were found to the most effective pedagogical tool by the students in the UK. Specifically, 27% found it extremely important and 67% very important. Only 6% students found it moderately important. None of the students opted for the not at all important option. The results reflect the findings from the literature review indicating that case studies are the most popular pedagogical tool among business students as suggested by Ambrosini, Bowman and Collier, (2010) and among undergraduate students as well (Mesny, 2013; Trejo-Pech & White, 2020). The findings are provided below in the pie chart (fig. 06)
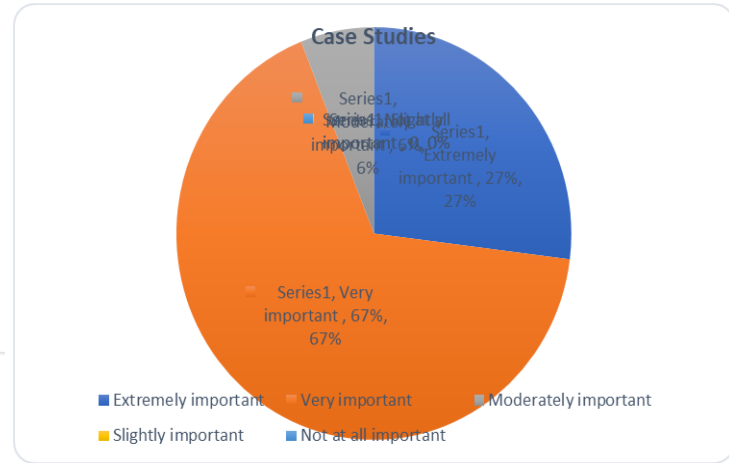

Figure 06. Effectiveness of Case study- UA

2. Class debates

This tool was found to very important by 61% of students followed by 28% who found it extremely important. In addition, 11% students found this tool to be moderately important and none of the students found it to be slightly important or not at all important. The findings suggested by Titarenko and Little (2017) and Yang and Rusli (2012) also illustrated that class debates are still considered to be effective by the majority of undergraduate students. The pie chart (figure 07) below summarises the findings of the UK student survey.
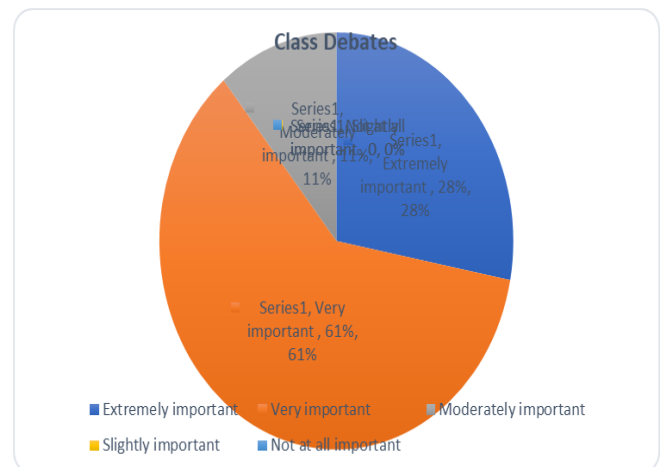
Figure 07. Effectiveness of class debates- UA

Figure 08. Effectiveness of Lecture- UA

3. Lectures

Lectures are one of the most commonly used pedagogical tools within the business and management courses as suggested by Frick, et al., (2020, Vadnjal (2016), Callaghan and Neumann (2015), and Mahrous & Ahmed, (2010). This tool also allows the academics to deliver the information and instructions to the students either face-to-face or online.

The findings from the survey taken by the students in the UK show that lectures were considered to be very important tool by 50% of students while 35% found it extremely important and 13% found it moderately important. None of the students found it slightly important but 2% disagreed with its effectiveness and selected the not important at all option as shown below in the pie chart. The importance of lectures as an effective pedagogical tool remains high among the UK students as shown by Figure 08 presented below.
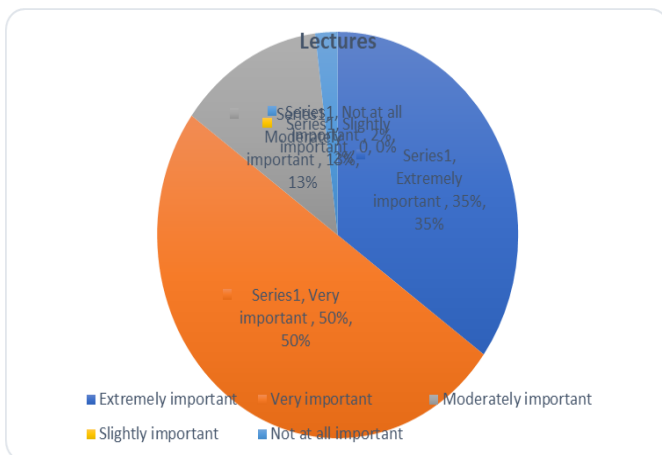
4. Group projects

The third most effective tool selected by the students was group projects. In detail, 60% of students found it very important and 25% extremely important. In addition, 13% found it moderately important and 2% slightly important. None of the students found it not at all important. The findings of Mahdi, Nassar, and Almuslamani (2020), Stenberg, et al. 2019) Choi and Rio, (2012), Mahrous et al. (2010) all suggest that group projects are an essential pedagogical tool for business students. The figure 09 below shows the findings from the UK student survey in the form of a pie chart.
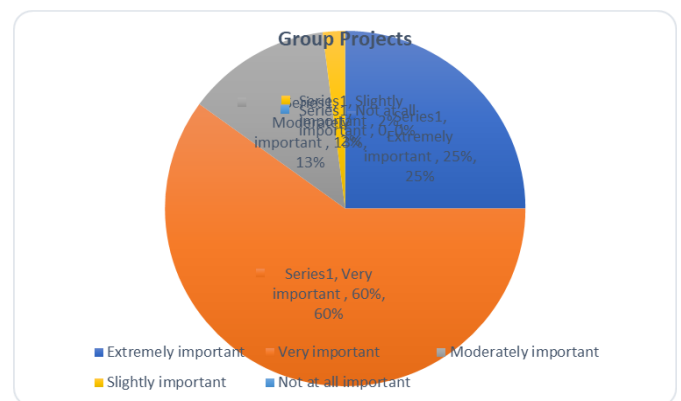

Figure 09. Effectiveness of group project (UA)

5. Virtual learning environment (Moodle / Blackboard)

VLE platforms such as Moodle, provides students with support while improving their knowledge as a result of the active and collaborative support provided by the teachers as shown in the studies carried out by Jackson (2017), Tarun (2019), Aljawarneh (2019) and Kennedy & Dunn (2019). It

is another pedagogical tool that is widely used in business studies to provide information, resources and to monitor assessments.

The tool was found by 63% to be very important, 22% extremely important and 15% moderately important. None of the students found it slightly important or not at all important. The tool was found to be effective among the UK students as shown below in the pie chart (fig. 10)
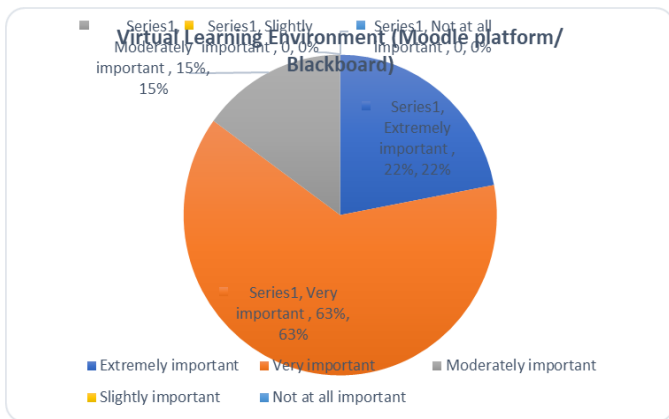

Figure 10. Effectiveness of VLE- UA

6. PowerPoint presentations and lecture notes

This alternative pedagogical tool that supports the delivery of lectures and note-taking was found to be effective by Roberts, (2018) and Treleven et al. (2014) as discussed in Chapter 2 (sec. 2.7.2). The findings from the survey shows that 58% of students found it to be very important, 25% extremely important, 13% moderately important, 2% slightly important and 2% not at all important. PowerPoints were found to be popular among the business students as shown below in pie chart (fig. 11)
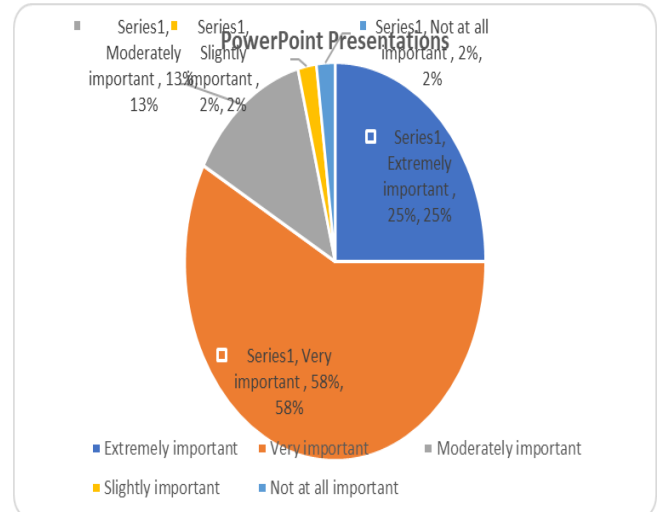

Figure 11. Effectiveness of Power point presentation - UA

On the other hand, lecture notes were found to be more effective as 52% students found them to be very important, 32% extremely important, 14% moderately important and 2% not at all important. None of the students found the tool to be slightly important as shown below in the pie chart (fig. 12)
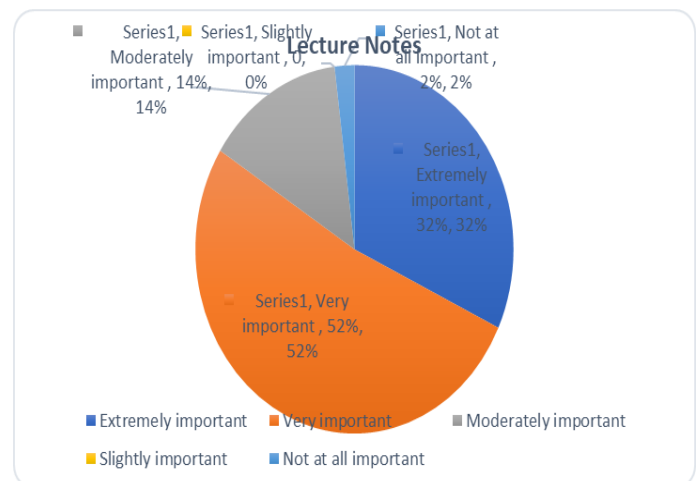

Figure 12. Effectiveness of Lecture notes- UA

The overall effectiveness of both PowerPoints and lecture notes was found to be moderate among UK students.

7. Role-playing

Role-playing is another important and popular pedagogical tool within the business studies as suggested by Kettula and Berghall (2012) and Russell and Shepard, (2010). The tool was found to be most effective in various settings and it helps in developing variety of skills to the undergraduate students.

The results from the UK survey shows that role-playing was selected as an effective tool by the students. In detail, 51% found it to be very important, 26% extremely important, 20% moderately important and 3% slightly important. However, none of the students considered it to be not at all important. The figure below provides the findings in the form of a pie chart (fig. 11)
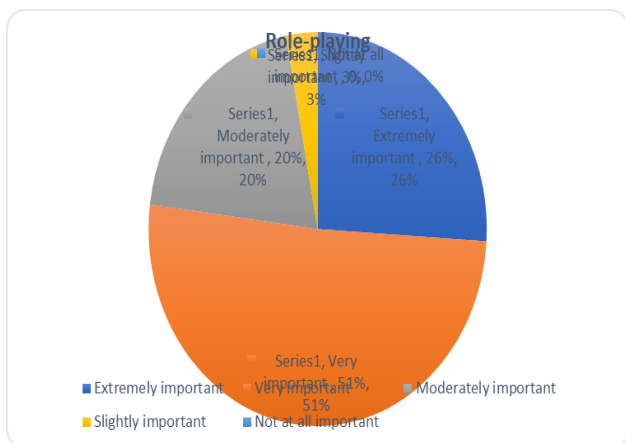

Figure 11. Effectiveness of Role play- UA

8. Mentoring

Mentoring is another most popular pedagogical tool in business and the social sciences. The survey results show that 57% of the students found it to be very important, 18% extremely important, 22%

moderately important and only 3% who found it slightly important. None of the students found it not important at all. The findings restate that mentoring is an effective pedagogical tool for undergraduate students as suggested by Snowden and Halsall (2019) and Pleschova and McAlpine (2015). The effectiveness of this tool in developing the student's skills. The figure below presents the findings in the form of a pie chart (fig. 12).
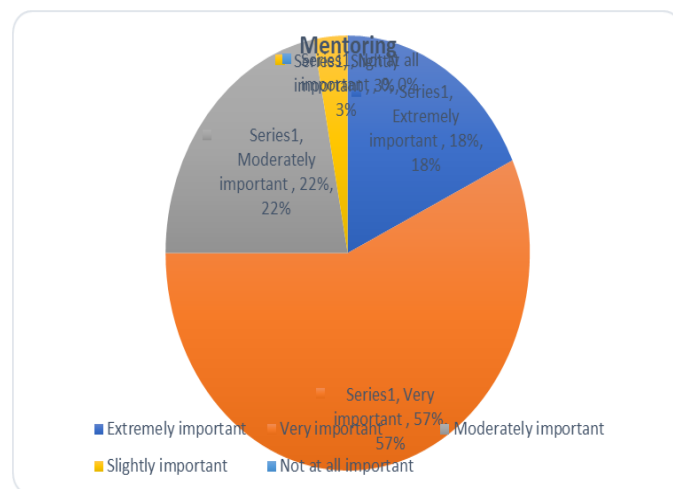
Figure 12. Effectiveness of Mentoring- UA

9. Internships

Internships were found to be the most crucial but neglected pedagogical tool. It allows the students to gain real-world learning experience (Mohaidin et al., 2017; Velez & Giner, 2014).

The results show that 58% students found this pedagogical tool to be very important, 15% extremely important, 25% moderately important and 2% not at all important. None of the students found the tool to be slightly important. Overall effectiveness of this tool was found high among the

UK students as shown below in the pie chart (fig. 13).

Internships

Figure 13. Effectiveness of Internship -UA

10. Technology-embedded devices

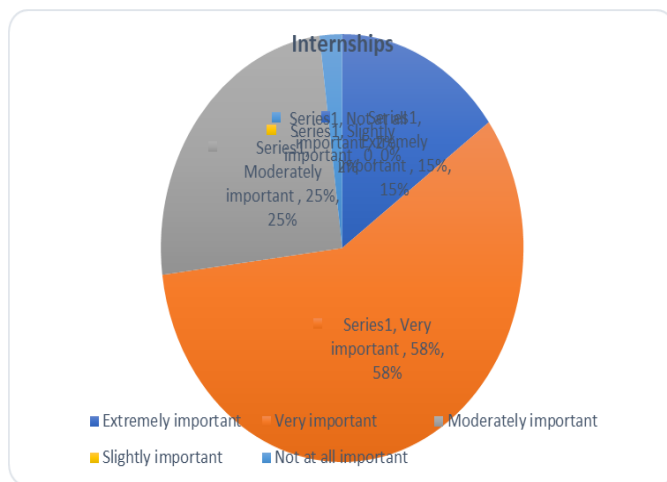Technological devices such as mobile phones, gaming and simulations were found be effective tools due to the technological developments in the education sector. The literature review reveals that da Silva et al. (2019), Piotrowski (2015), Gikas &Grant (2013), Pillay & James (2013) and Vos & Brennan (2010) found technology-embedded devices to be useful pedagogical tools.

The students in the UK found technology-embedded devices to be the most effective tool. The results from the students shows that 40% found it extremely important, 32% very important, 20% moderately important, 6% slightly important and only 2% found it not at all important. The findings are shown below in the pie chart (fig. 14).

Technology-embeded tools
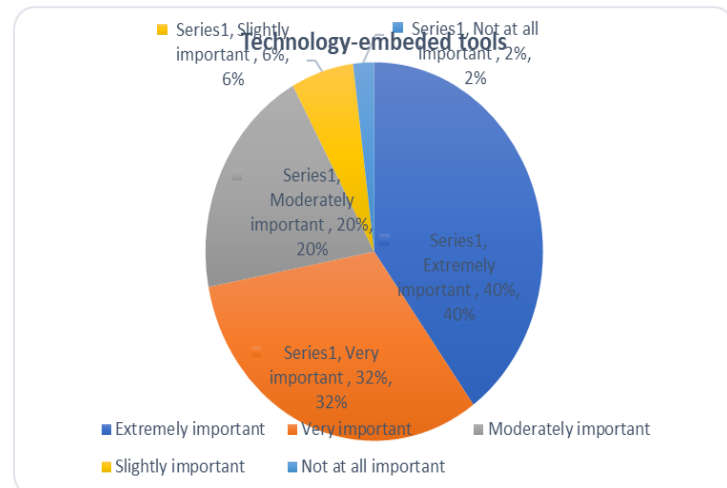
Figure 14. Effectiveness of Technology embedded tools- UA

11. Guest speakers

Guest speakers in recent years are mentioned in a limited body of literature. The tool researched by Mahrous & Ahmed, (2010), Fawcett & Fawcett, (2011) and Riebe et al, (2013) provided effectiveness but it also highlighted the need for careful planning as discussed in Chapter 2 (sec. 2.7.8). The tool among the UK students was found to very important by 46%. Additionally, 15% found it to be extremely important, 35% moderately important, 2% slightly important and 2% not at all important. The effectiveness of this tool among the UK students was found to be moderate as shown below in the pie chart (fig. 26)
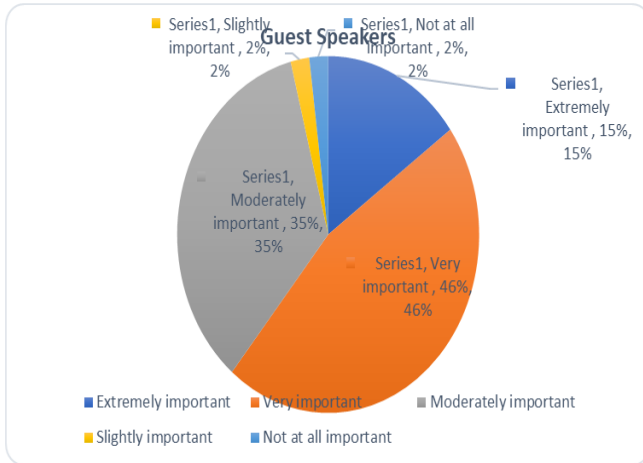
Figure 14. Effectiveness of Guest speaker- UA

Figure 15. Effectiveness of MCQs, Essays & Term papers- UA

12. Multiple choice tests/essays/term papers

Mahrous & Ahmed, (2010) highlighted that students in the UK are accustomed to essay writing and term papers, therefore they find them to be effective and an essential part for their learning and assessment. However, studies have also concluded that the students in UAE and USA seems to prefer MCQs over essays and term papers. Stenberg, et al. 2019) and Einig (2013) also determined that MCQs, essays and term papers were effective for undergraduate students as part of carrying out assessments and monitoring the progress of the students. This tool was found to be very important by 38% while 18% found it extremely important. In addition, 18% found it moderately important, 16% slightly important and 10% not at all important. The overall effectiveness of this tool was found to be low among the business students as presented in the below chart (fig. 15)

13. Reading and homework

Reading and homework were found to be more effective among the UK students as suggested by Mahrous & Ahmed (2010). This pedagogical tool received a mixed response from the UK students; 32% found it to be very important, 20% extremely important, 17% moderately important, 18% slightly important and 13% not at all important. The overall effectiveness of this tool was found to be low among the UK students as shown below in the pie chart (fig. 16)
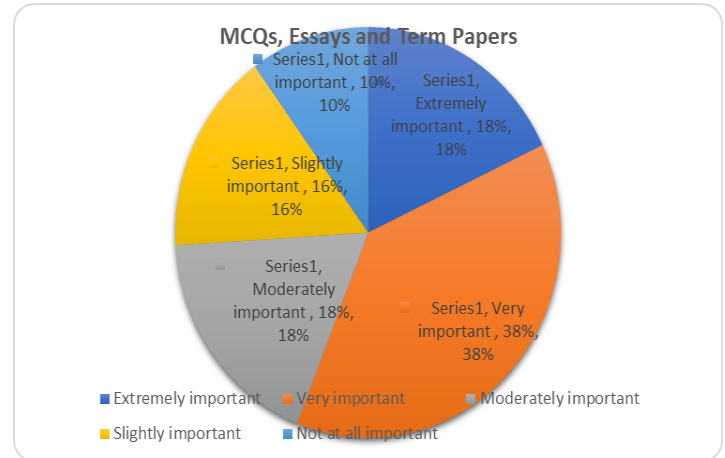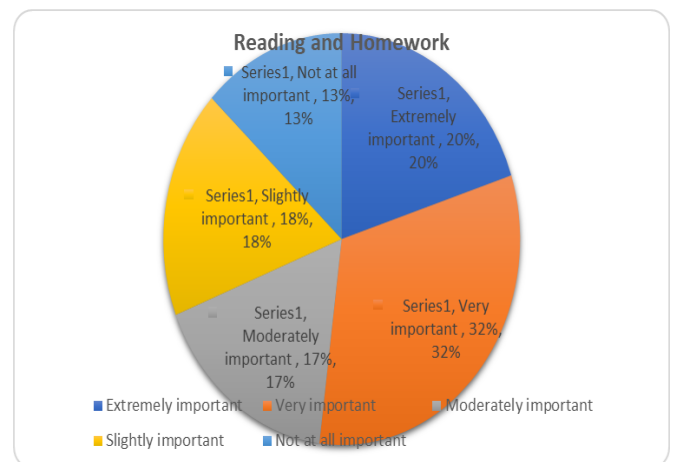

Figure 16. Reading and Homework- UA

Q6. Additional pedagogical tools

This question provided an opportunity for the students to write in any other pedagogical tool that they think was missed by the researcher. In the response to this question, most of the students seemed to be happy with the tools currently being used at the university. However, some students suggested Zoom (the online teaching platform), a day tour to a stock exchange or a hotel.

Q7. Satisfaction with the current pedagogical tools

In conclusion, 97% of students were happy with the pedagogical tools currently being used in the university and only 3% were not satisfied and required more pedagogical tools to be introduced. The results are shown below in the pie chart (fig. 17)

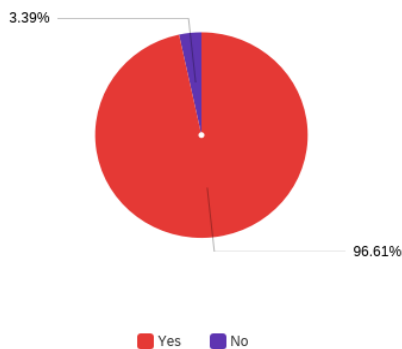Satisfaction Level with the current pedagogical tools

3.39%

96.61%

■ Yes ■ No

Figure 17. Student Satisfaction with current pedagogical tools

Q8. Satisfaction with the teaching staff

In response to the satisfaction level with the teaching staff, 81% of students were extremely happy. However, 19% students were extremely unhappy with the overall quality of the teaching staff in the university. The results are summarised below in figure18.

Overall quality of the teaching staff in the university

[][

[][

■ Extremely happy
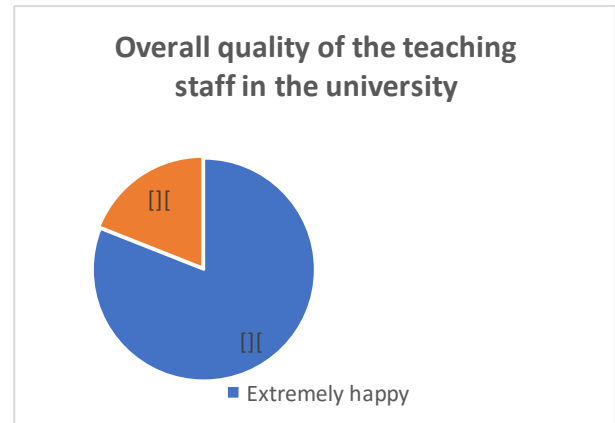
Figure 18. Overall quality of the teaching staff- UA

The results show that most important pedagogical tools used in University A were case studies, class debates, lectures, the virtual learning environment, group projects, PowerPoints and lecture notes, mentoring, internship, technology-embedded devices and guest speakers compared to MCQs, essays, term papers, reading and homework. In addition, students in the London campus were found to be happy with the quality of the teaching and the pedagogical tools currently being used in their institute.

Part C. Effective methods of communication

In the third part, the students were asked to share their opinion about the way they preferred to communicate with their lecturer. The students were provided with 5 different types of communication which they were asked to rate on a scale of extremely important, very important, moderately important, slightly important, or not at all important.

The results from the findings are provided below in Table 02.

Table 02. Effective methods of communication – UA

Ways of Communication

#	Field	Extremely important		Very important		Moderately important		Slightly important		Not at all important	
1	One-to-one / face-to-face	32.79%	20	52.46%	32	8.20%	5	6.56%	4	0.00%	0
2	Small groups in face-to-face settings	22.95%	14	49.18%	30	19.67%	12	8.20%	5	0.00%	0
3	One-to-one by telephone	8.33%	5	28.33%	17	31.67%	19	18.33%	11	13.33%	8
4	Small groups in audio/telephone conference	16.67%	10	33.33%	20	25.0					
5	Social media (Facebook/Twitter/Instagram etc.)	18.33%	11	33.33%	20	28.3					

From the table above, it is clear that students prefer face-to-face communication with their lecturer as 33% found it extremely important, 52% very important and 6% slightly important. None of the students rate this option as not important at all. The other most effective method of communication selected was within a small group face-to-face environment where 23% students rated it extremely important, 49% very important and 20% slightly important. No student found this communication method not important at all.

Among the other communication methods, social media communication was found to be extremely important by 18% of students and 33% found it very important. Additionally, 28% students rated it as moderately important, 12% slightly important and 8% chose not at all important. A small group involved in an audio/telephone conference was also scored low by the students. Specifically, 17% chose extremely important, 33% very important, 25% moderately important, 12% slightly important and 13% didn't find it at all important.

The communication method that received the lowest importance score by the students was one-to-one telephone communication where 8% found it extremely important, 28% very important, 31% moderately important, 18% slightly important and 13% found it not at all important. The summary is provided below in the stack bar (fig. 19).
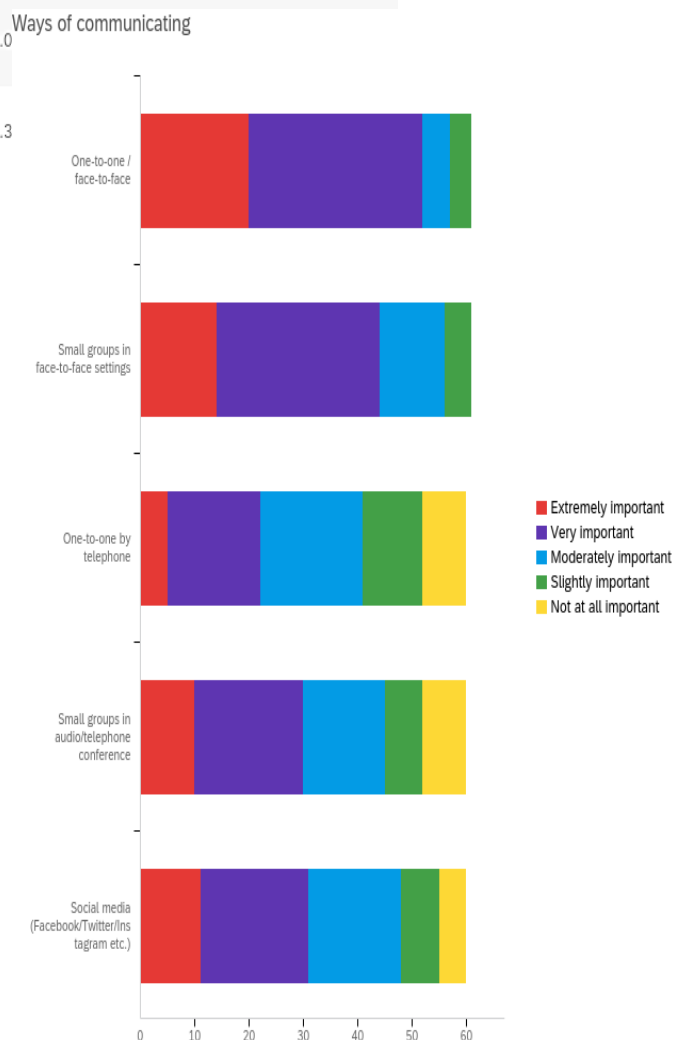

Figure 19. Preferred ways of communication- UA

Q2. Influence of cultural background on communication

The students were asked if the methods of communication used were influenced by their cultural background. In response to this question, 50% of students strongly agree, 26% somewhat agree and only 19% students stated neither agree nor disagree with this influence. In contrast, only 4% of students answered somewhat disagree and 1% strongly disagree that culture influences the way that the students like to communicate with the academics. The findings are shown below in form of a pie chart (fig. 20).
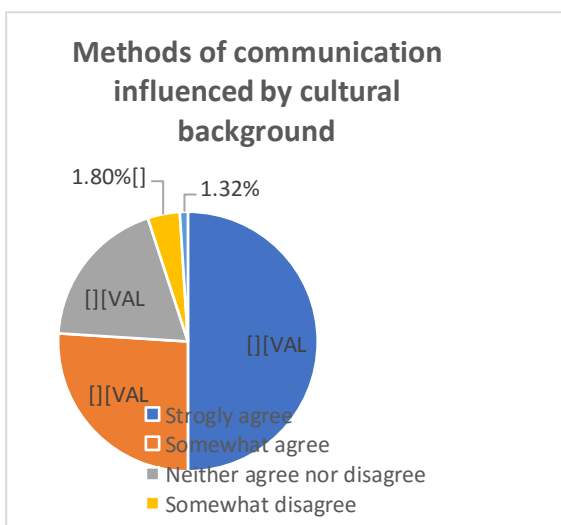
Methods of communication influenced by cultural background

1.80%[]   1.32%

[]VAL

[]VAL

[]VAL

■ Strogly agree
□ Somewhat agree
■ Neither agree nor disagree
■ Somewhat disagree

Figure 20. Methods of communication and cultural influences- UA

Q3. The role of cultural factors in learning

The students were asked to provide their opinion regarding cultural factors such as the language customs, beliefs etc and its influence on their learning. In response, the chart below reveals that 80% of students agree and 10% somewhat agree that culture influences learning. In contrast, 4% of students neither agree and 10% somewhat disagree with the role of culture in learning. However, 5% students believe that culture and learning are not linked. The results are shown below in the pie chart (fig. 21)

Role of Cultural in learning

[][

[][

[][

80%

□ Strogly agree
■ Somewhat agree
■ Neither agree nor disagree
■ Somewhat disagree
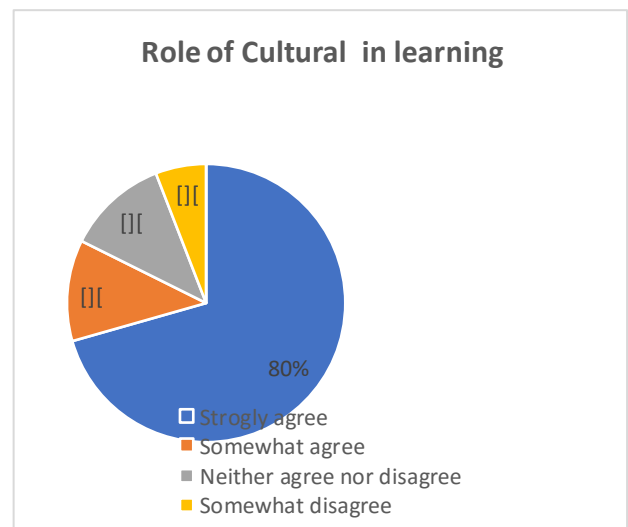
Figure 21. Role of culture in learning- UA

The results for Part C reveal that the students still prefer the face-to-face communication with their lecturer, ideally on a one-to-one basis or within small groups. This applied only in the classroom setting and they were not in favour of virtual ways of communicating with their lecturer. The students also believed that their cultural background influences their chosen methods of communication and that various cultural factors influence the way that the learning takes places in their institutions.

1) 5.5.4.   Part D. Demographic data of the students

The last part of the student survey was designed to collect some personal information regarding the

individuals filling out the survey. This part contains sensitive personal information about the students that was collected to understand the origin and educational background of the students.

Q1. Age

Most students (30.43%) in University A were between the ages of 19 - 24 years old and 32.61% of students were between the ages of 25 – 30 years old. The data is presented below in figure 22.

Age
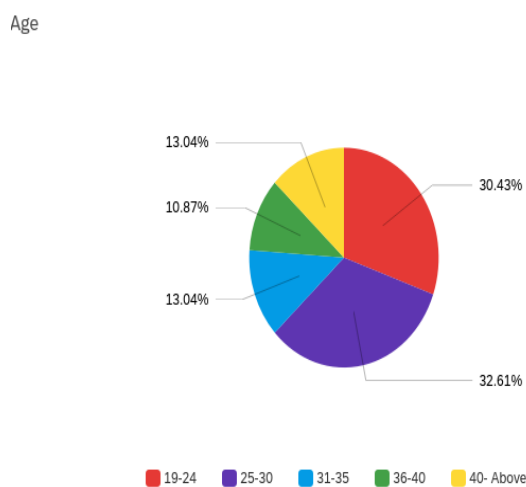
Figure 22. Age of students- UA

Q2. Gender

In terms of gender, the population of students who participated in the survey were 56.90% female and 43.10% male. The data from the student's survey is presented below in pie chart (fig. 23).
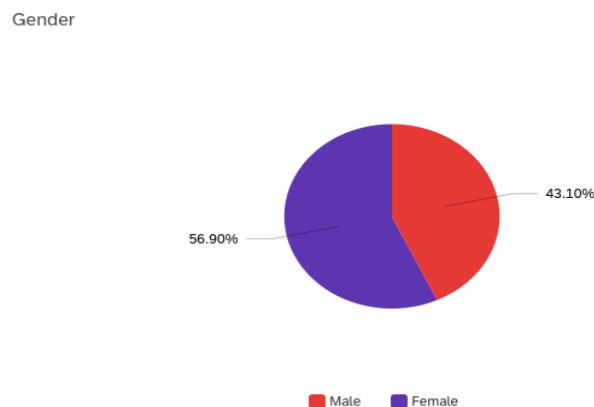
Gender

Figure 23. Gender classification- UA

Q3. Educational background

The students were asked to share their education background or previous work experience, and the following answers were complied. Most of the students were found to have somesort of previous qualification as shown below in graph (fig. 24).
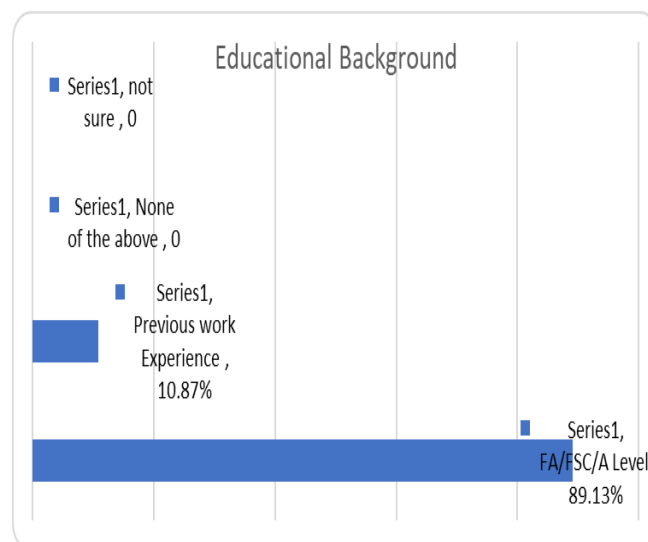
Figure 24. Educational background - UA

Q4. Disability

No information about having a disability was selected by any of the students.

PART B. Academic Interviews

Second stage of the data analysis was designed to interview the academics and gain an understanding of their perspective concerning the use of various pedagogical tools and how they could be used effectively to develop the skills of undergraduate students. From University A, three academics volunteered and shared their experiences about effective pedagogical tools in developing employability skills among undergraduate students.

1. Academic Profiles

Academic A

One of the senior lecturer/programme managers on the undergraduate business and hospitality programme, has over 15 years of undergraduate teaching and industry experience. The key contact for the hospitality students, helps students secure internships or work- based learning experience and has a very good understanding of how various pedagogical tools help students obtain the jobs they desire.

Academic B

Another senior lecturer in the business studies programme, whose research interest closely matches that of the study. Academic conducts research on students' skill sets and how they could benefit them in life-long learning. Possess over 10 years of experience of teaching undergraduate and graduate and regularly supervise the student's dissertations in business and management programmes.

Academic C

New to the world of academia, but with substantial industry experience, academic is an expert on student skill development and has delivered many workshops. Currently involved with recruiting the new students and teaching on undergraduate marketing related modules.

2. Interview Responses from Academics

The academics were asked a series of questions about the skills required of undergraduate students and how their teaching practices could help students to develop these employment skills.

Q1. Skills required by undergraduate students

The academics were asked their opinion regarding the skills undergraduate students should possess to be successful in their chosen job market.

Academic A believed that: *"Employability skills can't be taught to students, but it's something they develop over the three years of their studies. Students perform series of tasks individually and within groups and, with practice, they become more familiar with these skills and learn how to use them in various assigned tasks or situations."* Some of the key skills Academic A recommended for students included improving their communication skills, especially their presentation delivery and interpreting information. The other skills employers in the hospitality and business sector look out for are critical thinking, working in teams, problem-solving, time-management and technical skills.

On the other hand, Academic B suggested that the most appropriate skills depend on the student's cultural background and learning style: "*Highly desired skills for employers are communication skills, critical analysis, teamwork, subject knowledge and technical skills.*"

Academic C recommended communication as a vital skill: "*I would put it on the highest level because it's very important that you are able to transmit and able to receive ideas as.*" Other skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving, technical skills and leadership qualities, are also essential for undergraduate students to find their desired employment. Skills suggested by all academics are shown below in Table 24.

Table 24. Skills suggested by UK Academics

Academic A	Academic B	Academic C
Communication Critical thinking Teamwork Problem solving Time-management Technical skills	Communication Critical thinking Teamwork Subject knowledge Technical skills	Communication Critical thinking Problem solving Technical skills Leadership

Q2. Which pedagogical tools are more effective for developing undergraduates' skills?

1. Lectures and Lecture Notes

Academic A believed that both lectures and lecture notes are good for developing academic skills, but do not contribute towards developing employability skills.

Academic B reported that both young and mature students offer mixed feedback about these tools. For mature students who are not tech savvy, lectures and lecture notes, particularly printed copies, help them to revise the subject outside class. On the other hand, younger students seem to prefer more tech-based pedagogical tools, such as Moodle platform materials. Despite this division, B believed that attending lectures and receiving lecture notes are still preferred by both types of students. The skills which students can acquire through this tool are communication (question and answer) and extending subject knowledge.

Academic C stated: "*For me, a lecture is essential, but only when used with additional pedagogical tools, i.e., I use PowerPoint presentations during my lectures so students can go back and revise.*" According to the academic, some students prefer visual learning and, therefore, the use of visual aids is a good choice for them, while overall, such tools helps all students concentrate better during the lesson. The skills students can develop from attending lectures and taking lecture notes are taking notes (communication skills) and obtaining subject knowledge, which helps them understand the various theories within business and management.

2. Group Activities: Group projects, Class Debates, Case Studies

This question contains all the group activities carried out by the students, such as class debates, teamwork/group work, and case studies.

Academic A stated that class debates and case studies are currently being used among undergraduate students and that A always received a very mixed response from the students. This academic felt that case studies are good for developing managerial skills, but, as an active employee of an organisation, students should be able to work as a part of a team. Suggesting "*Group projects are the best way to develop employability skills for students. However, my students seem to be reluctant in its use. When asked to form groups, they try to stick with classmates they already know, which takes away the basic idea of teamwork. Working in an organisation will require them to work in teams and work with colleagues they do not know well and yet still be able to deliver effectively. Teamwork helps them develop various skills; communication, creativity, problem solving and critical thinking. One skill which I have found to be very important is negotiating. It's a skill employers look for in students to ensure they can hold a conversation with confidence.*"

In Academic B's opinion, class debates, role-play, and practical case studies are very effective for enhancing employability skills. They stated: "*If we consider the learning styles of the students and provide them with the various activities based on their styles, it will allow them to bridge the skills gap. It is important that lecturers play the role of facilitator rather than instructor while using these tools. The class debates allow students to develop team building, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.*"

Academic C remarked: "*It reminds me of a Chinese proverb, that you need to involve them to make sure they don't forget about it. We need to make sure we let the students participate in various activities, such as case studies, role-plays or class debates, as they can gain vital skills, like listening (communication), problem-solving, critical thinking and, most importantly, working in teams.*"

3. Guest Speakers

Academic A stated: "*I began doing this in the very first year when I started to teach in the UK and it was received very well by both the university and students.*" In terms of effective employability skills, guest speakers are an invaluable resource. Students learn what's expected from them in the workplace and it is very good for developing their commercial awareness.

Academic B felt that guest speakers help to some extent: "*It provides the students with a glimpse of something that's going on in the organisation. It affords the students the complete picture of practical work experience but is not as effective as internships.*"

Academic C felt the use of guest speakers is very effective, as long as they are used as part of employability seminars, since students will then have a better idea of real workplace conditions and their expectations. It helps students to develop good industry knowledge and some organisational skills.

4. Internships

Academic A felt that internships provide hospitality students with more exposure and direct work

experience within the desired industry. Internships allow them to gain skills such as adaptability and commercial awareness.

Academic B believed internships provide a link between higher education institutions and what is happening in the practical world. *"Work-based practice in the form of internships or short-term experiences would give students the opportunity to bridge the skill gap, as, sometimes, classrooms or online learning are not a true reflection of what's going on in the workplace."* They also thought that an internship provides them with commercial awareness.

Academic C believed internships meant that students have a chance to put what they are learning into practice. Working in this context allows them to practise the theory in the real world so as to find the desired job and provides them with both practical and commercial awareness.

5. Mentoring

Academic A stated: *"We are trying to mentor the students by providing them with the support in the study skills class to help them develop professional and employability skills. These classes help the students to write their CV, personal statements and provide other vital skills they need to complete the course successfully. This type of class is essential for them before they go and dip into the actual work environment. I also think it is useful to involve the alumni in this instance and this is something I am working on to help current students better understand what's expected from them at the end of the course and how they can find themselves suitable employment."*

Academic B felt that mentoring is an effective tool, which allows students to get the right support to develop their skills. It allows students to listen effectively, building trust and receiving encouragement from the person alongside inspiration, direction, and corrective feedback.

Academic C stated: *"I am not sure about mentoring, as it's something that could more effectively be done at a postgraduate level or when one is working. At an undergraduate level, it's something that is going to be a time-consuming practice."*

6. Multiple-choice tests /Essay tests/Term papers

Academic A felt that: *"Multiple-choice questions are definitely not an effective pedagogical tool for skill development."* They believed that multiple-choice questions are not appropriate for undergraduate students, but more suitable for Level 3. This tool might be more useful as formative assessment, but it is not something which can be used to build up employability skills. *"Essays and term papers are good as assessment but shouldn't be used on their own. Additional tools, such as group presentation, could be used to make this tool more effective."*

Academic B stated: *"In my view, it could be something which we can use as formative assessment. As to whether it could be used for employability, I don't think so; I don't think undergraduate students could benefit from it. Essays*

are good for summative assessment for undergraduate students and help teachers to analyse how well students have learned. They allow students to develop skills, such as communication skills (writing), critical thinking (summarising and synthesising) about information and presenting it in the best possible way."

Academic C stated: "*I don't think it's an effective pedagogical tool for undergraduate students as they will memorise the answers the day before and will have forgotten about it in the next few days. Essay/Term papers are effective as part of assessment, even if they are effective or not. Most higher education in the UK revolves around essays and term papers. I think a blend of presentations and essays might be more valuable for students to develop skills other than just written skills.*"

7. Reading & Homework

Academic A stated: *"Homework might not be an effective tool; students are studying, working and sometimes have young families with kids, or have two jobs, and homework might be the last thing they are bothered about."*

Academic B stated: *"It's effective, but we need to align it with the student mindset, as students are more focused on passing their assessment rather than on developing their employability skills."*

Academic C stated: *"Not really for undergraduate students on top of their assessment, as it's going to be an extra burden and it's not suitable for the UK HE system."*

8. Technology-Embedded Devices

Academic A felt that these are: "*Good for class engagement on topics like marketing, but not suitable for all courses and may distract the students, i.e., as a teacher you can set up a restricted Facebook page for student activity, but it's hard to monitor what they are doing on their individual devices. Does it provide any employability skill? In my opinion, no*". In addition, academic also viewed games and simulation effective for formative assessment only. The academic stated these technology embedded tools were not enough to develop the employability skills.

Academic B felt these were s*omething that was considered to be a distraction. "However, these tools allow students to engage with the outside world. In a city like London, where so many new start-ups are engaging with social media, i.e. Instagram, it's a good way for our students to connect with people out there and explore business possibilities."*

Academic B, strongly agreed with the idea of games as an effective pedagogical tool, especially the game for small start-up businesses. "*The students seem to struggle with certain parts of the business, such as accounting or statistical numbers. This game allows the students to look at the practical side of the accounting rather than the theory and most of the students use these games to develop a good understanding of the topics and the feedback was always positive.*" They believed that the employability skills which could be developed through such activities are more technical skills, subject knowledge, and some work experience.

Academic C: stated: "*In my opinion, I never found it useful as a pedagogical tool as it distracts the students. The only advantage of a smartphone and a tablet is that, within a multicultural classroom, they allow students to translate the idea or work in their own native language.*" They felt that, once on the phone, a student might use it as an excuse to chat with other people or classmates, which would eventually distract more than one student in the class.

In terms of games and simulations, academic C stated that *"useful as most of the games are available online. They help students to engage better in class. They could also be a good formative assessment."* Games such as setting up a business help student to apply problem-solving, group work and teambuilding skills. For games, students need to decide how much money they need to allocate for research and development, stock management, etc., which are key decision-making processes within actual businesses.

9. Role-Play

Academic A believed that role play could be useful in class engagement and could most effectively be used as part of formative assessment, but they could not see it being useful for all business and management subjects.

Academic B & C felt that, within business studies, role play could play an important role but only for limited business modules such as accounting and human resources modules. The academics C, also added that "within *online setting despite the use of break-out rooms options its challenging to perform*

role play activities but other pedagogical tools such as class debates and case studies fits better".

10. Moodle Platform

Academic A suggested that the Moodle platform could assist in developing employability skills. The platform contains functions related to announcements, discussions, and forums, which, if properly used, could aid in effective communication channels - just as with any business. Academic A believed that this method is currently less effective due to low participation by the students and that greater effort is required to use it. They felt this platform could offer much more than just storing learning material and assessments.

Academic B felt that Moodle platforms provide many opportunities for the students to engage and interact. *"However, the problem is that many students do not engage beyond the classroom. They mostly see it as a platform from which they can download the learning material and upload their work.*"

Academic C stated: "*I usually use it for uploading documents like PowerPoint presentations, announcements, discussion board and marking a student's assignment. [Gaining] Employability skills from this is hard to determine in my opinion.*"

Q3. Any Other Effective Pedagogical Tools

Academic A stated: "*I think we have covered almost all of the pedagogical tools. In terms of flexible learning, online platforms' communication apps such as Zoom, or Adobe are really useful.*"

Academic B stated: *"I think the tools we discussed are somewhat currently being used in most HE institutes around the UK. Maybe subject-related workshops might be useful, as these can give students more freedom to ask any questions or to discuss any problems related to their studies. So, I think it could be something which could be used as an effective pedagogical tool."*

Academic C stated: *"I think we have covered the whole range of them and, ultimately, it's the student's own willingness to learn that matters most. As teachers, we can support them, but we can't do the work for them."*

The academic interviews reveal that each pedagogical tool has its own effectiveness, but, as academics, it is crucial for us to decide which tools to apply for a certain module or learning outcomes. The choice of these pedagogical tools is based on the student's study year, i.e. Year 1, students require more support via lectures and lecture notes within the class. However, a Year 3 student would be more confident in searching for the information and getting back to the lecturer if they had any questions or concerns.

Q4. Impacts of Culture on Delivery of Pedagogical Tools

Academic A stated: *"To some extent, yes, being educated and trained in Europe and now teaching in the UK, it's a very different experience. I think the UK has more relaxed teaching patterns, whereas, in Europe, students not only have to cover quite a few different courses but get multiple assessments as well. Coming from Europe and teaching here, I am*

sure I acquired some different approaches, which I keep on testing in my classroom, i.e. I try to make sure every student is present, even if it's not required for assessment. This process allows the students to be more confident and better communicators."

Academic B stated: *"Yes, being from different cultures, our preferences for the delivery of these tools can be very different. In the same way, students' cultural backgrounds are very different and so are their learning needs. It's a good idea to keep applying various tools and get regular feedback from the students to see how well they are working for them."*

Academic C stated: *"I think that culture has a big impact. And especially because of the way we apply our knowledge into using things is different. For instance, I come from Latin America and you are from a different part of the world. We tend to do things differently and, obviously, we teach the same students, but we use these pedagogical tools in a different way. I think this variation in teachers' cultural backgrounds allows students to broaden their horizons and is also an opportunity to see things in different ways."*

In addition, Academic C believed that: *"Difference in our languages also impacts learning as how we define or present ideas is different. However, all teachers should work together as team players, which can motivate students to follow in the same footsteps."*

B. 5.7. Summary

The data analysis of University A showed that some pedagogical tools seem to be more effective than others for developing the skills required by undergraduates. Both students and academics seem to favour some pedagogical tools, but their effectiveness relies on the delivery by the academics, students' learning styles, and their willingness to learn. The analysis revealed some key findings from University A, explained below in relation to the objectives set for this study.

The various tools currently being used at University A are lectures, lecture notes, PowerPoint presentations, group work (case studies, class debates), role-play/games/simulations, technology-embedded tools (social media, smartphones, tablet), guest speakers and internships. The academics seem to be very satisfied with the tools they are currently using and believe that they help students in developing the key skills for employment.

The effectiveness of these tools for both students and teachers is quite similar in the use of some tools. Students seem to prefer case studies, class debates, mentoring, group projects, internships, lectures, role-play, class debates, technology embedded devices and reading and homework more than guest speakers, MCQ's/essays/term papers, PowerPoint presentations and lecture notes, and the virtual learning environment (Moodle/ blackboard). Technology-embedded tools, such as social media, smartphones, and tablets, were chosen as highly important by students, but not all students agreed with the importance of this tool.

The academics favoured lectures, lecture notes/PowerPoint presentations, group work (case studies, class debates), Moodle platform, guest speakers, role-play, games, simulation, internships, and essay/term papers as more effective than any other tools. Some lecturers also favour mentoring. However, a mixed response was provided for the use of technology-based tools. The lectures completely disregarded the use of multiple-choice questions and reading/homework at the undergraduate level. Despite the learning environment, both students and academics mutually favoured certain pedagogical tools, such as lectures, lecture notes, PowerPoint presentations, group work (case studies, class discussions), using the Moodle platform, and role-play/games/simulation. Both students and academics did not favour multiple-choice questions and reading/homework as they found them time-consuming and unnecessary undergraduate skills.

The academics' interviews suggested that culture significantly influences the delivery of the pedagogical tools being discussed. The interviewees were from different parts of the world and all shared the opinion that their personal beliefs, previous learning, teaching experience and language impact the delivery of various pedagogical tools. They believed that, despite teaching the same students, their choice of pedagogical tool was different to

others depending on their own cultural background. However, these differences in delivery were considered important by the academics as they allow the students to understand various business and management concepts from different points of view. The academics also believed that, when students see them working effectively in multicultural teams, they [the students] are motivated to follow similar practices in their own workplace.

Regarding the students, cultural background and various relevant factors impact the way they communicate but also the way they learn. The students' surveys clearly show that despite their cultural background, language and beliefs, they are happy with the pedagogical tools currently used by the institution and the way academics deliver them.

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