Human Capital Competencies and Work Readiness Among Early Career Business Professionals

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between human capital competencies and work readiness among MBA students, as well as their perceptions of how MBA education contributes to competency development and managerial preparedness. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was employed involving 70 MBA students with one to three years of work experience. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Spearman correlation, Kruskal-Wallis test, and regression analysis, while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis.

Findings indicated that respondents demonstrated relatively high levels of human capital competencies and work readiness across all domains. Significant positive relationships were found between all competency domains and work readiness, with communication and interpersonal competencies emerging as the strongest predictor. Current job role also showed a statistically significant influence on career self-management and resilience. Qualitative results generated five themes: applied skills, confidence and adaptability, experiential learning, professional mindset, and strategic competence.

The study concludes that human capital competencies are significantly associated with work readiness among MBA students, while MBA education serves as a developmental platform for strengthening both technical and managerial capabilities. A Human Capital Work Readiness Development Framework is proposed to support competency enhancement in graduate business education.

Keywords: human capital competencies, work readiness, MBA students, early-career professionals

INTRODUCTION

Human capital competencies and work readiness have become increasingly important in business education and workforce development, as organizations require professionals capable of performing effectively in complex and dynamic environments. For MBA students and early-career professionals, academic knowledge alone is insufficient; employers increasingly expect a combination of technical, managerial, analytical, communication, and digital competencies, along with professional attributes such as adaptability, teamwork, ethical responsibility, and career self-management.

Work readiness is widely recognized as a critical outcome of human capital development, reflecting an individual's preparedness to transition into professional roles and meet workplace expectations. Prior research indicates that employers value both technical expertise and transferable competencies such as communication, problem-solving, and collaboration (Succi & Canovi, 2020; Alwi & Abdul Karim, 2025). However, several studies have reported persistent gaps between graduate competencies and workplace demands, particularly in applied and behavioral skill domains (Semenova et al., 2021; Corpin, 2025).

Despite growing attention to competency development, limited empirical evidence exists on how specific human capital domains influence work readiness among MBA students, particularly those who are simultaneously

engaged in professional employment. This gap highlights the need to examine not only competency levels but also their predictive relationship with work readiness outcomes.

Research Objectives

This study generally aimed to examine the relationship between human capital competencies and work readiness among early-career business professionals, particularly MBA students with one (1) to three (3) years of work experience, within the context of the Human Capital System.

Specifically, it sought to:

1. Determine the demographic and professional profile of MBA students in terms of age, sex, industry sector, current job role, length of work experience, and type of organization.

2. Assess the level of human capital competencies among MBA students in terms of technical and functional competencies, managerial and leadership competencies, analytical and problem-solving competencies, communication and interpersonal competencies, and digital innovation competencies.

3. Determine the level of work readiness among MBA students in terms of job competence and task performance readiness, adaptability and learning agility, professional work ethics and responsibility, collaboration and teamwork, and career self-management and resilience.

4. Examine the significant relationship between human capital competencies and work readiness among MBA students.

5. Identify which demographic and professional profile variables and human capital competency domains significantly predict work readiness among MBA students.

6. Determine whether significant differences exist in the level of work readiness of MBA students when grouped according to their demographic and professional profile.

7. Explore how selected MBA students explain the influence of their human capital competencies on their work readiness in actual workplace settings.

8. Examine how early-career business professionals perceive the role of MBA education in strengthening their competencies and preparing them for higher-level managerial responsibilities.

9. Develop a Human Capital Work Readiness Development Framework for Early-Career MBA Professionals based on the findings of the study.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Human Capital Competencies

Human capital competencies refer to the knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal attributes that enable individuals to perform effectively and contribute to organizational goals. Developed through education, training, workplace experiences, and continuous learning, these competencies include both technical and non-technical capabilities such as communication, leadership, problem-solving, adaptability, and professional expertise. Human capital competencies are widely recognized as important factors that influence employability, workplace performance, and career advancement.

The importance of human capital competencies has been emphasized in both international and local studies. Congna (2025) noted that competencies enable individuals to transform knowledge and skills into productive contributions within organizations. Similarly, Aguilar and Torres (2023) and De Guzman and Tan (2021) found that competencies are continuously shaped by educational preparation, workplace experiences, and professional

development opportunities. Employers increasingly value a combination of technical expertise and soft skills, including communication, leadership, teamwork, adaptability, and critical thinking, because these competencies contribute to workplace effectiveness and organizational success.

Competency gaps, however, continue to be observed among graduates and early-career professionals. Parilla and Evangelista (2025) reported that many professionals experience difficulties in applying workplace-related competencies despite possessing relevant academic qualifications. To address these challenges, researchers emphasize the importance of industry-academe partnerships, internships, mentoring programs, and competency-based training. These findings suggest that human capital competencies remain essential for enhancing employability, workplace readiness, and long-term career success.

Technical and Functional Competencies

Technical and functional competencies refer to the knowledge and skills required to perform job-specific tasks effectively. These competencies include domain expertise, information and communication technology (ICT) literacy, analytical tool utilization, and other functional skills necessary in business and management professions. As a core dimension of human capital, technical competence provides the foundation for employability and workplace performance. However, contemporary workplaces increasingly require technical competencies to be complemented by broader professional capabilities.

International studies emphasize the continuing importance of technical competence in workforce readiness and career success. Jackson and Wilton (2021) found that employers value technical expertise but increasingly expect graduates to demonstrate communication, leadership, and interpersonal skills alongside functional knowledge. Similarly, Suleman (2023) argued that employability is strengthened when technical, cognitive, and interpersonal competencies are developed holistically rather than in isolation. These findings suggest that technical competence serves as a foundation for workplace entry, while broader competencies support career advancement and organizational effectiveness.

Montales (2023) reported that technical competencies remain among the most important requirements for effective job performance among business graduates, particularly in the banking sector. However, the study also identified gaps between competencies acquired in higher education and those required in actual workplace settings. Furthermore, Abelha et al. (2020) emphasized that modern workplaces increasingly demand analytical thinking, problem-solving, and evidence-based decision-making in addition to traditional technical knowledge. Birt (2023) further noted that rapid technological change makes continuous learning and skills upgrading essential for maintaining technical competence. These findings suggest that technical and functional competencies remain critical components of human capital and play a significant role in enhancing employability, workplace effectiveness, and professional growth.

Managerial and Leadership Competencies

Managerial and leadership competencies refer to the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to effectively lead, coordinate, motivate, and manage individuals and organizational resources. These competencies include decision-making, team management, communication, strategic thinking, problem-solving, and the ability to influence others toward achieving organizational goals. In contemporary workplaces, managerial and leadership competencies are increasingly recognized as essential components of human capital that contribute to employability, workplace readiness, and career advancement.

The importance of managerial and leadership competencies has been highlighted in international studies. Banks et al. (2022) emphasized that management and leadership skills are essential for effective team supervision, coordination, and organizational performance. Their findings suggest that leadership competency is strongly associated with workplace readiness, particularly among individuals who demonstrate motivation, coordination skills, and the ability to influence others in team-based environments. Furthermore, employability literature consistently identifies leadership, communication, and critical thinking as among the most important competencies required in the modern labor market.

Padua et al. (2025) found that leadership competencies, together with communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, are highly valued by employers in the business sector. However, the study also revealed gaps between academic preparation and workplace expectations, particularly in areas such as decision-making, team management, and adaptive problem-solving. These findings suggest that managerial and leadership competencies are important factors in enhancing employability, work readiness, and long-term career success. They also highlight the need for stronger leadership development initiatives in higher education and workplace training programs to better align graduate competencies with industry requirements.

Analytical and Problem-Solving Competencies

Analytical and problem-solving competencies refer to the ability to evaluate information, interpret data, identify issues, and develop effective solutions to workplace challenges. These competencies enable individuals to think critically, make informed decisions, and respond effectively to complex situations. In contemporary organizations, analytical and problem-solving skills are increasingly recognized as essential components of human capital that contribute to employability, workplace performance, and professional success.

The importance of analytical and problem-solving competencies has been emphasized in both international and local studies. Aguilar and Torres (2023) identified analytical and problem-solving skills as among the core competencies required by employers, together with communication and time management skills. Their findings revealed that although graduates recognize the importance of these competencies, many experience difficulties applying them in actual workplace situations. Similarly, Middleton et al. (2022) highlighted those problem-solving skills are critical for managing workplace challenges and preparing graduates for professional practice. The study further noted that employers increasingly seek workers who can analyze situations, make evidence-based decisions, and adapt to changing organizational demands.

Studies on business and management graduates indicate that while graduates often possess adequate theoretical knowledge, they frequently struggle with applied analytical tasks such as interpreting business data, solving operational problems, and making evidence-based decisions in real workplace settings. These findings suggest a gap between competency acquisition and practical application. Consequently, researchers emphasize the importance of experiential learning approaches such as case studies, simulations, internships, and industry immersion programs to strengthen analytical and problem-solving competencies. Overall, these competencies remain essential for enhancing employability, workplace readiness, and effective performance in modern business environments.

Communication and Interpersonal Competencies

Communication and interpersonal competencies refer to the ability to effectively express ideas, listen actively, interact professionally, and build positive relationships with others in the workplace. These competencies include verbal and written communication, teamwork, collaboration, emotional intelligence, and the ability to adapt communication styles to different situations and audiences. As organizations become increasingly interconnected and collaborative, communication and interpersonal competencies have become essential components of human capital that contribute to workplace effectiveness and professional success.

The importance of communication and interpersonal competencies has been emphasized in international studies. Dauber and Spencer (2023) found that individuals with strong communication skills demonstrate higher levels of teamwork effectiveness, leadership potential, and adaptability in dynamic work environments. Similarly, Succi and Canovi (2020) reported that communication, teamwork, and emotional intelligence facilitate graduates' transition into employment by promoting professional confidence and social integration. These findings suggest that effective communication enhances collaboration, workplace relationships, and overall job performance.

Studies on employability and graduate readiness indicate that communication skills remain among the most valued competencies sought by employers, particularly in professions that require frequent interaction with clients, colleagues, and stakeholders. Researchers further emphasize that communication competencies support teamwork, decision-making, and organizational participation, making them critical for workplace success.

Overall, the literature suggests that communication and interpersonal competencies serve as important foundations of work readiness by enabling individuals to collaborate effectively, adapt to workplace demands, and perform successfully in professional environments.

Digital Innovation Competencies

Digital innovation competencies refer to the ability to effectively use digital technologies, adapt to technological changes, and apply digital tools to support communication, collaboration, problem-solving, and innovation in the workplace. As organizations increasingly undergo digital transformation, these competencies have become essential components of human capital and workforce preparedness. Individuals with strong digital capabilities are better equipped to access information, make data-driven decisions, engage in continuous learning, and contribute to organizational performance.

Research consistently highlights the importance of digital competencies in enhancing employability and work readiness. Tinmaz et al. (2022) emphasized that digital literacy is a critical 21st-century competency that enables individuals to function effectively in technology-driven environments. Similarly, Espina et al. (2024) identified digital innovation competencies as significant contributors to work readiness, noting that individuals with stronger digital capabilities demonstrate higher levels of career competence and adaptability. Zahidi (2023) further argued that digital competencies support innovation, problem-solving, and effective job performance in modern organizations. In the Philippine context, local studies have likewise recognized digital proficiency as an important factor in employability and workplace success, particularly as organizations increasingly rely on digital technologies for communication, collaboration, and decision-making. These findings suggest that digital innovation competencies are essential in preparing MBA students and early-career professionals to meet the demands of increasingly digitalized work environments.

Work Readiness

Work readiness refers to an individual's ability to effectively apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes in professional settings. It encompasses not only technical competence but also communication, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability, and professional behavior that enable graduates and early-career professionals to meet workplace expectations and perform effectively in their roles. As organizations increasingly seek employees who can quickly adapt to changing work environments, work readiness has become a critical outcome of higher education and workforce development.

Studies consistently emphasize the importance of workplace competencies in shaping work readiness. Tushar and Sooraksa (2023) identified communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability as among the most valued competencies by employers. Similarly, Young and Ferand (2025) noted that work readiness involves practical preparedness for workplace demands rather than academic knowledge alone. Ginger (2025) and Hoque et al. (2023) further reported that employers highly value graduates who can apply learning in real-world situations, communicate effectively, collaborate with others, and adapt to organizational changes. In the Philippine context, Aguilar and Torres (2023) found that employers prioritize communication skills, critical thinking, teamwork, and professional ethics, while De Guzman and Tan (2021) emphasized the role of workplace competencies in career progression. These findings suggest that work readiness is shaped by a combination of technical and behavioral competencies and is essential for successful workforce integration and professional growth.

Job Competence and Task Performance

Job competence and task performance refer to an individual's ability to effectively apply knowledge, skills, and professional behaviors in performing workplace responsibilities. These are considered fundamental dimensions of work readiness because they directly influence productivity, efficiency, and successful workplace integration. Employers increasingly assess work readiness based not only on educational qualifications but also on an individual's capacity to perform job-related tasks effectively.

Studies have consistently emphasized the importance of job competence in workplace success. Young and Ferand (2025) identified task performance, communication, problem-solving, and adaptability as essential competencies for entry-level professionals. Similarly, Succi and Canovi (2023) found that functional skills, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities are strongly associated with employability and early-career success. In the Philippine context, employability studies likewise indicate that employers value graduates who can translate academic learning into effective workplace performance. These findings suggest that job competence and task performance are important indicators of work readiness and essential outcomes of human capital development among early-career professionals.

Adaptability and Learning Agility

Adaptability and learning agility refer to an individual's ability to adjust effectively to changing work environments, acquire new knowledge, and apply learning to unfamiliar situations. These competencies have become increasingly important in modern workplaces characterized by rapid technological advancements, organizational changes, and evolving job demands. Individuals who demonstrate adaptability and learning agility are better equipped to respond to uncertainty, sustain performance, and remain relevant in dynamic professional settings.

Research highlights the significant role of adaptability and learning agility in employability and career success. Van et al. (2020) emphasized that adaptability enables individuals to remain flexible and responsive to workplace changes, while Ghosh et al. (2021) identified learning agility as a critical competency for acquiring and applying knowledge in new situations. Similarly, Harvey and Valerio (2022) found that learning agility supports leadership effectiveness, particularly during organizational transformation, while Fitriyana et al. (2021) reported that self-efficacy strengthens adaptability, resilience, and workplace learning. In the Philippine context, employers increasingly value graduates who can adjust to changing workplace demands and technological innovations. These findings suggest that adaptability and learning agility are essential dimensions of work readiness that enable professionals to effectively navigate workplace challenges and continuous change.

Professional Work Ethics and Responsibility

Professional work ethics and responsibility refer to an individual's commitment to ethical conduct, accountability, integrity, and professionalism in the workplace. These competencies are considered essential dimensions of work readiness because they influence workplace performance, organizational trust, and professional relationships. Employers increasingly value individuals who demonstrate responsibility, honesty, and sound judgment in carrying out their duties.

Studies consistently emphasize the importance of ethical behavior in workplace success. Garcia et al. (2022) found that ethical conduct and responsibility are among the most valued employability competencies across various countries. Similarly, Hoque et al. (2023) reported that employers regard honesty, integrity, and accountability as fundamental attributes of early-career professionals. In the Philippine context, employability studies likewise highlight professionalism, work values, and accountability as important factors in hiring and career advancement. These findings suggest that professional work ethics and responsibility are critical indicators of work readiness and contribute significantly to effective workplace performance and long-term career success.

Collaboration and Teamwork

Collaboration and teamwork refer to the ability of individuals to work effectively with others in achieving common organizational goals. These competencies include communication, cooperation, conflict resolution, mutual accountability, and the capacity to work productively with diverse groups. In modern workplaces, teamwork has become increasingly important as organizations rely on cross-functional teams and collaborative networks to accomplish strategic objectives.

The literature consistently recognizes collaboration and teamwork as essential competencies that enhance employability, adaptability, and workplace effectiveness. Gauci et al. (2021) found that teamwork competence

facilitates graduates' transition into employment by enabling effective participation in coordinated work environments. Similarly, local studies identify teamwork and interpersonal relations among the most desirable competencies sought by Philippine employers. Across both international and local contexts, collaboration is viewed as a core human capital competency that strengthens problem-solving, organizational performance, and work readiness by preparing professionals to operate effectively in increasingly collaborative workplace settings.

Career Self-Management and Resilience

Career self-management and resilience refer to an individual's ability to actively direct career development, adapt to workplace changes, overcome challenges, and sustain professional growth. These competencies include goal setting, career planning, proactive learning, strategic decision-making, adaptability, and the capacity to recover from setbacks. In today's dynamic labor market, career success increasingly depends on individuals' ability to manage their careers and respond effectively to changing professional demands.

The literature consistently recognizes career self-management and resilience as important contributors to employability and work readiness. Hirschi (2021) emphasized that career self-management enables individuals to take an active role in achieving career goals through continuous learning and adaptation. Similarly, Ismail et al. (2023) found that professionals who demonstrate strong self-management skills exhibit greater adaptability, employability, and readiness for career transitions. In the Philippine context, studies likewise highlight the importance of lifelong learning, proactive career planning, and continuous professional development. Overall, the literature suggests that career self-management and resilience strengthen work readiness by enabling individuals to navigate workplace challenges, sustain professional growth, and successfully manage evolving career pathways.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on three interrelated theoretical perspectives: Human Capital Theory, Employability and Work Readiness Theory, and Social Cognitive Career Theory. These theories collectively explain how competencies, educational experiences, personal attributes, and self-beliefs contribute to the work readiness of MBA students and their preparedness for professional success.

Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory, proposed by Becker (1964), explains that investments in education, training, and professional development enhance individuals' knowledge, skills, and competencies, leading to improved employability and workplace performance. Human capital is developed through learning experiences that increase productivity and professional effectiveness.

This theory supports the study because MBA students acquire technical, managerial, analytical, communication, and digital competencies through graduate education and professional development. Contemporary studies affirm that competency development remains a significant factor in work readiness and employability among graduates. Human Capital Theory therefore provides the foundation for examining how human capital competencies contribute to workplace preparedness and career success.

Employability and Work Readiness Theory

Employability and Work Readiness Theory, particularly the Employability Model of Yorke and Knight (2006), explains that employability is achieved through the integration of knowledge, skills, personal attributes, and reflective abilities that enable individuals to obtain and sustain employment. Work readiness extends beyond technical competence and includes adaptability, collaboration, communication, professional ethics, and career self-management.

This theory is relevant because MBA students are expected to develop both technical and non-technical competencies required in contemporary workplaces. Recent studies emphasize that work readiness is a multidimensional construct influenced by cognitive, behavioral, and interpersonal competencies. Employability

and Work Readiness Theory therefore supports the study's focus on workplace preparedness and professional effectiveness among MBA students.

Social Cognitive Career Theory

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), developed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994), explains how self-efficacy, learning experiences, outcome expectations, and environmental factors influence career development and work-related behaviors. The theory suggests that individuals are more likely to pursue career goals and achieve professional success when they possess strong confidence in their abilities and receive adequate environmental support.

This theory supports the study because MBA students' work readiness is influenced not only by acquired competencies but also by their confidence, career aspirations, and professional experiences. Recent studies continue to demonstrate that self-efficacy and environmental support contribute significantly to career readiness and successful school-to-work transitions. Social Cognitive Career Theory therefore provides a basis for understanding how competencies, experiences, and personal beliefs shape workplace preparedness.

Synthesis of Theoretical Bases

Taken together, the three theories provide a comprehensive foundation for the study. Human Capital Theory explains how education and competency development enhance employability and workplace performance. Employability and Work Readiness Theory explains how technical and non-technical competencies contribute to workforce preparedness and career success. Social Cognitive Career Theory explains how self-efficacy, experiences, and environmental influences shape career development and work readiness. Collectively, these theories support the study's examination of human capital competencies and their contribution to the work readiness of MBA students.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods research design. This design was deemed appropriate as it allowed the researcher to first examine statistical relationships between human capital competencies and work readiness and subsequently explore the underlying experiences and perspectives that explain these quantitative findings. The study proceeded in two phases: a quantitative phase followed by a qualitative phase for explanatory purposes.

Participants and Sample Size

The participants of the study were MBA students with one to three years of work experience. This group was selected due to their dual exposure to graduate-level education and professional workplace environments, making them appropriate respondents for examining human capital competencies and work readiness.

A priori power analysis was conducted using G*Power 3.1.9.7 to determine the minimum required sample size. With an alpha level of 0.05, statistical power of 0.80, and an assumed medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.30$), the minimum required sample size was computed as 64 respondents. The final sample consisted of 70 respondents, which exceeded the required minimum and ensured adequate statistical power for inferential analyses.

Research Instruments

Two structured instruments were used in the quantitative phase of the study. The first instrument measured human capital competencies across five domains: technical and functional competencies, managerial and leadership competencies, analytical and problem-solving competencies, communication and interpersonal competencies, and digital innovation competencies.

The second instrument measured work readiness across five dimensions: job competence and task performance, adaptability and learning agility, professional work ethics and responsibility, collaboration and teamwork, and career self-management and resilience. Both instruments used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Validity and Reliability of Instruments

Content Validity

Content validity was established through expert review by specialists in human resource management, business education, and research methodology. The experts evaluated item clarity, relevance, and alignment with study objectives. Revisions were made based on their feedback to improve clarity and construct alignment.

Construct Validity

Construct validity was established through theoretical alignment with Human Capital Theory, Employability and Work Readiness Theory, and Social Cognitive Career Theory. Each construct was grounded in established literature on competency development and employability.

Reliability

The internal consistency of the instruments was assessed using Cronbach's alpha through pilot testing.

All constructs demonstrated acceptable to excellent reliability coefficients:

- Human Capital Competencies ($\alpha = 0.82–0.93$ across domains)
- Work Readiness Scale ($\alpha = 0.84–0.91$ across dimensions)

These results indicate good to excellent internal consistency, confirming that the instruments reliably measured the intended constructs.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection commenced after securing necessary institutional permissions and ethical clearance. The structured questionnaires were distributed to MBA students who met the inclusion criteria. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were given sufficient time to complete the instruments.

Following preliminary quantitative analysis, the qualitative phase was conducted. Selected respondents provided open-ended responses guided by the qualitative instrument. This sequencing ensured that qualitative findings directly explained and expanded upon the quantitative results.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Spearman's rho was used to examine relationships between variables, while Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney U tests were used for group comparisons. Regression analysis was used to identify predictors of work readiness.

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis involving coding, categorization, and theme development.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to data collection. Participants were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

All collected data were used solely for academic purposes and stored securely to protect respondent privacy. The study adhered to institutional ethical guidelines governing research involving human participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the demographic and professional profile of MBA student respondents in terms of age, sex, industry sector, current job role, length of work service, and type of organization.

Table 1. Demographic and Professional Profile of MBA students

Demographic Profile	**Classification**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Age	36 and above	14	20.0
	31-35	24	34.3
	26-30	29	41.4
	21-25	3	4.3
	Total	**70**	**100.00**
Sex	Male	27	38.6
	Female	43	61.4
	Total	**70**	**100.00**
Industry Sector	Government	34	48.6
	Hospitality and Tourism	2	2.9
	Education	23	32.9
	Banking and Finance	11	15.7
	Total	**70**	**100.00**
Current Job Role	Staff/Rank-and-File	36	51.4
	Supervisor/Team Leader	7	10.0
	Officer/Analyst	7	10.0
	Assistant Manager	1	1.4
	Others	19	27.1
	Total	**70**	**100.00**
Length of Work Service	3 years	38	54.3
	2 years	17	24.3
	1 year	15	21.4
	Total	**70**	**100.00**
Type of Organization	Public	49	70.0
	Private	19	27.1
	SME	1	1.4
	Large/Corporate Organization	1	1.4
	Total	**70**	**100.00**

The findings indicate that the largest proportion of respondents belongs to the 26–30 age group, followed by those aged 31–35 and 36 years and above. This suggests that the MBA program is primarily composed of early-to mid-career professionals who are currently employed and pursuing graduate education for career advancement.

In terms of sex, female respondents constitute the majority, suggesting strong participation of women in graduate business education. With respect to industry sector, most respondents are employed in the government sector, followed by education and banking and finance.

The results further indicate that the majority of respondents occupy staff or rank-and-file positions, suggesting that many are in the early stages of their professional careers. Most respondents also reported three years of work experience, indicating sufficient workplace exposure while still remaining within the early-career stage targeted by the study. The majority are employed in public organizations.

These findings strongly align with international empirical evidence across multiple regions. In Australia and the United Kingdom, Jackson and Wilton (2021) similarly found significant positive relationships between graduate competencies and employability outcomes, emphasizing that communication, leadership, and analytical skills are strong predictors of workplace readiness. In Southeast Asia, Hoque et al. (2023) also reported that competency development significantly influences employability and career success among postgraduate students. The consistency of findings across regions suggests that human capital competencies function as universal determinants of work readiness regardless of geographic or institutional context.

Level of Human Capital Competencies of MBA Students

Table 2 presents the level of Human Capital Competencies of MBA students in terms of technical and functional competencies, managerial and leadership competencies, analytical and problem-solving competencies, communication and interpersonal competencies, and digital innovation competencies. The table summarizes the mean scores and corresponding verbal interpretations.

Table 2. Level of Human Capital Competencies of MBA students

Indicators	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretations
Technical and Functional Competencies	3.54	0.530	Highly Competent
Managerial and Leadership Competencies	3.41	0.602	Highly Competent
Analytical and Problem Soving Competencies	3.60	0.493	Highly Competent
Communication and Interpersonal Competencies	3.61	0.490	Highly Competent
Digital Innovation Competencies	3.57	0.527	Highly Competent
Overall	**3.54**	**0.528**	**Highly Competent**

The findings indicate that MBA students demonstrate a high level of human capital competencies across all domains (Overall Mean = 3.54). This suggests that respondents possess strong cognitive, interpersonal, and digital capabilities necessary for professional effectiveness.

Among the domains, digital innovation competencies obtained the highest mean, indicating strong adaptability to technological tools and innovation-driven work environments. This aligns with studies emphasizing digital fluency as a core employability requirement in contemporary labor markets (Subramaniam et al., 2025; Makhmudov & Husankho, 2025).

Communication and interpersonal competencies, analytical and problem-solving competencies, and managerial competencies were also rated highly. This suggests that MBA students possess integrated competencies essential for decision-making and leadership functions. These findings align with Jackson and Wilton (2021), who reported that business graduates commonly demonstrate strong communication and analytical capabilities.

Although still rated as highly competent, technical and functional competencies obtained the lowest mean. This suggests that applied technical skill utilization may require further strengthening through experiential learning opportunities such as internships and workplace immersion programs.

Level of Work Readiness of MBA Students

Table 3 presents the level of Work Readiness of MBA students in terms of job competence and task performance, adaptability and learning agility, professional work ethics and responsibility, collaboration and teamwork, and career self-management and resilience.

Table 3. Level of Work Readiness of MBA students

Indicators	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
Job competence and task performance	3.60	0.522	Highly Competent
Adaptability and learning agility	3.67	0.473	Highly Competent
Professional work ethics and responsibility	3.64	0.512	Highly Competent
Collaboration and teamwork	3.74	0.440	Highly Competent
Career self-management and resilience	3.60	0.549	Highly Competent
Overall	**3.65**	**0.499**	**Highly Competent**

The findings indicate that MBA students demonstrate a high level of work readiness (Overall Mean = 3.65). The results suggest strong preparedness across job performance, adaptability, ethics, collaboration, and career self-management.

Collaboration and teamwork obtained the highest mean, indicating strong interpersonal functioning in organizational settings. This aligns with Caballero and Walker (2019), who emphasized teamwork as a core employability competency in graduate professionals.

The consistently high ratings across all domains suggest that MBA education contributes to both technical preparation and behavioral readiness required in modern workplaces.

Relationship Between Human Capital Competencies and Work Readiness among MBA Students

Table 4 presents the results of Spearman's rank-order correlation analysis examining the relationship between the five domains of human capital competencies and the five dimensions of work readiness among MBA students. Because the data failed to meet the assumption of normality as confirmed by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ($p < .05$), the nonparametric Spearman's rho was employed as the appropriate alternative. All computed correlation coefficients yielded p-values below .001, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis across all paired variables, thereby establishing statistically significant relationships throughout.

Table 4. Relationship Between Human Capital Competencies and Work Readiness among MBA Students

Indicators		Spearman's rho	p-value	Decisions	Interpretation
Technical and Functional Competencies	Job Competence and Task Performance Readiness	0.399	<.001	Reject Ho	Significant
	Adaptability and Learning Agility	0.458	<.001	Reject Ho	Significant
	Professional Work Ethics and Responsibility	0.485	<.001	Reject Ho	Significant
	Collaboration and Teamwork	0.464	<.001	Reject Ho	Significant
	Career Self Management and Resilience	0.407	<.001	Reject Ho	Significant

Managerial and Leadership Competencies	Job Competence and Task Performance Readiness	0.625	<.001	Reject Ho	Significant
	Adaptability and Learning Agility	0.637	<.001	Reject Ho	Significant
	Professional Work Ethics and Responsibility	0.472	<.001	Reject Ho	Significant
	Collaboration and Teamwork	0.650	<.001	Reject Ho	Significant
	Career Self Management and Resilience	0.544	<.001	Reject Ho	Significant
Analytical and Problem Solving Competencies	Job Competence and Task Performance Readiness	0.588	<.001	Reject Ho	Significant
	Adaptability and Learning Agility	0.453	<.001	Reject Ho	Significant
	Professional Work Ethics and Responsibility	0.562	<.001	Reject Ho	Significant
	Collaboration and Teamwork	0.743	<.001	Reject Ho	Significant
	Career Self Management and Resilience	0.650	<.001	Reject Ho	Significant
Communication and Interpersonal Copetencies	Job Competence and Task Performance Readiness	0.701	<.001	Reject Ho	Significant
	Adaptability and Learning Agility	0.625	<.001	Reject Ho	Significant
	Professional Work Ethics and Responsibility	0.712	<.001	Reject Ho	Significant
	Collaboration and Teamwork	0.746	<.001	Reject Ho	Significant
	Career Self Management and Resilience	0.425	<.001	Reject Ho	Significant
Digital Innovation Competencies	Job Competence and Task Performance Readiness	0.425	<.001	Reject Ho	Significant
	Adaptability and Learning Agility	0.539	<.001	Reject Ho	Significant
	Professional Work Ethics and Responsibility	0.546	<.001	Reject Ho	Significant
	Collaboration and Teamwork	0.549	<.001	Reject Ho	Significant
	Career Self Management and Resilience	0.507	<.001	Reject Ho	Significant

The findings indicate significant positive relationships between all domains of human capital competencies and work readiness ($p < .001$). This suggests that higher competency levels are associated with stronger workplace preparedness.

The results align with international studies demonstrating that human capital competencies are significant predictors of employability outcomes (Jackson & Wilton, 2021; Hoque et al., 2023).

Notably, professional work ethics and responsibility showed the strongest association with work readiness. This suggests that behavioral and value-based competencies play a critical role in workplace effectiveness. This aligns with Succi and Canovi (2023), who emphasized professionalism as a key employability determinant.

Domains of profile and human capital competence greatly affect the level of work readiness of MBA students

Table 5. Influence of Human Capital Competence on the Level of Work Readiness of MBA Students Using Regression Analysis

Predictors	**Output Variables**	**Unstandardized Coefficients**		**Standardized Coefficients**		
		B	**SE**	β	**t**	**p**
Technical	Job Competence and Task Performance Readiness	0.02991	0.111	0.03061	0.2686	.789
Managerial		0.15219	0.153	0.15672	0.9960	.323
Analytical		0.08394	0.125	0.09045	0.6717	.504
Communication		0.50012	0.153	0.49805	3.2688	.002
Digital Innovation		-0.00646	0.144	-0.00553	-0.0449	.964
Technical	Adaptability and Learning Agility	0.09868	0.0925	0.11198	1.0663	.290
Managerial		0.15749	0.1269	0.17989	1.2406	.219
Analytical		0.00829	0.1038	0.00990	0.0798	.937
Communication		0.49176	0.1271	0.54317	3.8685	<.001
Digital Innovation		-0.01745	0.1196	-0.01658	-0.1458	.885
Technical	Professional Work Ethics and Responsibility	0.1060	0.0838	0.150	1.265	.210
Managerial		-0.1166	0.1150	-0.166	-1.014	.315
Analytical		-0.0678	0.0940	-0.101	-0.721	.474
Communication		0.4267	0.1151	0.587	3.705	<.001
Digital Innovation		0.2121	0.1084	0.251	1.957	.055
Technical	Collaboration and Teamwork	-0.0571	0.0877	-0.0661	-0.650	.518
Managerial		-0.0726	0.1204	-0.0846	-0.603	.549
Analytical		0.0754	0.0984	0.0920	0.766	.447
Communication		0.7008	0.1205	0.7904	5.815	<.001
Digital Innovation		0.0359	0.1134	0.0348	0.316	.753
Technical		-0.0492	0.0834	-0.0517	-0.589	.558
Managerial		-0.0183	0.1144	-0.0194	-0.160	.873

Analytical	Career Self-Management and Resilience	0.2017	0.0936	0.2236	2.156	.035
Communication		0.7459	0.1146	0.7642	6.511	<.001
Digital Innovation		-0.0769	0.1078	-0.0678	-0.713	.478

Table 6 examined the extent to which five domains of human capital competence predict the five dimensions of work readiness among MBA students. The regression results revealed that communication competence consistently emerged as the most influential predictor across all dimensions of work readiness. Specifically, communication competence significantly predicted job competence and task performance readiness, adaptability and learning agility, professional work ethics and responsibility, collaboration and teamwork, and career self-management and resilience.

Beyond statistical significance, the findings suggest important practical implications for MBA education and workforce preparation. The consistent influence of communication competence across multiple dimensions indicates that effective communication is not only a desirable professional skill but also a foundational competency that supports successful workplace functioning. MBA students who demonstrate stronger communication abilities may be better positioned to articulate ideas clearly, engage in professional interactions, collaborate with colleagues, and respond effectively to workplace challenges. Given the increasingly collaborative and knowledge-intensive nature of contemporary organizations, these findings highlight the importance of integrating communication-intensive learning experiences into graduate business education.

The strong relationship between communication competence and collaboration and teamwork is particularly noteworthy because teamwork remains a critical requirement in modern organizational environments. Likewise, its association with adaptability and learning agility suggests that communication may facilitate knowledge sharing, feedback exchange, and continuous learning processes that are necessary in rapidly changing workplaces. Communication competence also demonstrated a significant relationship with professional work ethics and responsibility, indicating that effective interpersonal communication may contribute to clearer role expectations, accountability, and professional conduct.

In addition, analytical competence significantly predicted career self-management and resilience. This finding suggests that individuals with stronger analytical abilities may be better equipped to evaluate complex situations, make informed decisions, and navigate career-related uncertainties. From a practical perspective, analytical thinking may support long-term career development by enabling professionals to assess opportunities, solve workplace problems, and adapt to changing organizational demands.

The present findings are consistent with several international studies that emphasize the importance of communication-related competencies in graduate employability and workplace success. Abelha et al. (2020), in their systematic review of graduate employability, identified communication as one of the most consistently valued competencies sought by employers across industries. Similarly, Succi and Canovi (2020) reported that communication and interpersonal skills are among the most critical employability attributes required in contemporary workplaces. Research by Robles (2012) likewise found that communication competence is among the top soft skills expected by employers and is strongly associated with professional effectiveness and career advancement. The current findings extend this body of evidence by demonstrating that communication competence contributes not only to employability-related outcomes but also to multiple dimensions of work readiness among MBA students.

Although technical competence, managerial competence, and digital innovation competence did not emerge as statistically significant predictors when examined alongside the other competencies in the regression model, this finding should be interpreted cautiously. The results do not imply that these competencies are unimportant in professional practice. Rather, within the context of the present model and sample, their unique contribution to explaining variations in work readiness was less pronounced after accounting for the influence of communication and analytical competencies. These competencies may still contribute indirectly to work readiness or become

more influential in specific occupational contexts that place greater emphasis on technical expertise or digital innovation capabilities.

Significant Differences on the Level of Work Readiness of MBA Students when Grouped to Profile

Profile Variable / Grouping	Work Readiness Dimension	Test Used	Test Statistic	p-value	Effect Size	Decision	Interpretation
Age	Job Competence and Task Performance Readiness	Kruskal-Wallis	$\chi^2 = 8.02$	.046	$\varepsilon^2 = 0.1163$	Reject H_0	Significant
	Adaptability and Learning Agility	Kruskal-Wallis	$\chi^2 = 7.69$	.053	—	Accept H_0	Not Significant
	Professional Work Ethics and Responsibility	Kruskal-Wallis	$\chi^2 = 1.50$	.682	—	Accept H_0	Not Significant
	Collaboration and Teamwork	Kruskal-Wallis	$\chi^2 = 3.67$	.300	—	Accept H_0	Not Significant
	Career Self-Management and Resilience	Kruskal-Wallis	$\chi^2 = 1.40$	.706	—	Accept H_0	Not Significant
Sex	Job Competence and Task Performance Readiness	Mann-Whitney U	U = 554	.729	—	Accept H_0	Not Significant
	Adaptability and Learning Agility	Mann-Whitney U	U = 467	.121	—	Accept H_0	Not Significant
	Professional Work Ethics and Responsibility	Mann-Whitney U	U = 546	.567	—	Accept H_0	Not Significant
	Collaboration and Teamwork	Mann-Whitney U	U = 532	.463	—	Accept H_0	Not Significant
	Career Self-Management and Resilience	Mann-Whitney U	U = 543	.601	—	Accept H_0	Not Significant
Industry Sector	Job Competence and Task Performance Readiness	Kruskal-Wallis	$\chi^2 = 2.480$	.479	—	Accept H_0	Not Significant

	Adaptability and Learning Agility	Kruskal-Wallis	χ^2 = 0.423	.935	—	Accept H_0	Not Significant
	Professional Work Ethics and Responsibility	Kruskal-Wallis	χ^2 = 2.123	.547	—	Accept H_0	Not Significant
	Collaboration and Teamwork	Kruskal-Wallis	χ^2 = 2.443	.486	—	Accept H_0	Not Significant
	Career Self-Management and Resilience	Kruskal-Wallis	χ^2 = 1.025	.795	—	Accept H_0	Not Significant
Current Job Role	Job Competence and Task Performance Readiness	Kruskal-Wallis	$\chi^2 = 9.30$	.054	—	Accept H_0	Not Significant
	Adaptability and Learning Agility	Kruskal-Wallis	$\chi^2 = 8.49$	.075	—	Accept H_0	Not Significant
	Professional Work Ethics and Responsibility	Kruskal-Wallis	$\chi^2 = 9.67$	.046	ε^2 = 0.140	Reject H_0	Significant
	Collaboration and Teamwork	Kruskal-Wallis	$\chi^2 = 9.75$	.045	ε^2 = 0.141	Reject H_0	Significant
	Career Self-Management and Resilience	Kruskal-Wallis	χ^2 = 10.59	.032	ε^2 = 0.153	Reject H_0	Significant
Length of Work Experience	Job Competence and Task Performance Readiness	Kruskal-Wallis	χ^2 = 2.150	.341	—	Accept H_0	Not Significant
	Adaptability and Learning Agility	Kruskal-Wallis	χ^2 = 0.826	.662	—	Accept H_0	Not Significant
	Professional Work Ethics and Responsibility	Kruskal-Wallis	χ^2 = 1.898	.387	—	Accept H_0	Not Significant
	Collaboration and Teamwork	Kruskal-Wallis	χ^2 = 2.339	.311	—	Accept H_0	Not Significant
	Career Self-Management and Resilience	Kruskal-Wallis	χ^2 = 1.045	.593	—	Accept H_0	Not Significant
Type of Organization	Job Competence and Task	Kruskal-Wallis	χ^2 = 1.591	.661	—	Accept H_0	Not Significant

	Performance Readiness						
	Adaptability and Learning Agility	Kruskal-Wallis	χ^2 = 1.248	.741	—	Accept H_0	Not Significant
	Professional Work Ethics and Responsibility	Kruskal-Wallis	χ^2 = 0.552	.907	—	Accept H_0	Not Significant
	Collaboration and Teamwork	Kruskal-Wallis	χ^2 = 1.283	.733	—	Accept H_0	Not Significant
	Career Self-Management and Resilience	Kruskal-Wallis	χ^2 = 1.147	.766	—	Accept H_0	Not Significant

Table 7 shows that only selected profile variables were significantly associated with MBA students' work readiness. Specifically, age was significantly related to Job Competence and Task Performance Readiness, whereas current job role was significantly associated with Professional Work Ethics and Responsibility, Collaboration and Teamwork, and Career Self-Management and Resilience. In contrast, sex, industry sector, length of work experience, and type of organization were not significantly associated with any of the five dimensions of work readiness. These findings suggest that variations in work readiness among MBA students may be more closely related to developmental and role-based workplace experiences than to demographic characteristics alone.

The significant association between age and Job Competence and Task Performance Readiness indicates that perceptions of readiness for job-related responsibilities differ across age groups. The observed difference between the 31–35 and 26–30 age groups may reflect variations in accumulated workplace exposure, professional maturity, and opportunities to engage in complex work tasks. However, the effect size was modest, indicating that age explains only a limited proportion of the variation in task-related readiness. From a practical perspective, this finding suggests that MBA programs should provide younger students with opportunities to acquire workplace-relevant experiences through simulations, consulting projects, case-based learning, and work-integrated assessments. Such interventions may help bridge experiential gaps and strengthen readiness for managerial responsibilities regardless of age.

This finding is consistent with international studies emphasizing the role of career adaptability, experiential learning, and workplace engagement in enhancing professional readiness. Studies by Lee et al. (2025), Orr et al. (2023), Grant et al. (2024), and Jung and Li (2024) similarly reported that readiness for employment is associated with opportunities to apply knowledge, reflect on professional experiences, and adapt to workplace demands rather than with academic preparation alone. The present result extends these findings to MBA students by demonstrating that age-related differences in readiness may reflect differences in accumulated professional exposure.

The significant relationship between current job role and Professional Work Ethics and Responsibility suggests that ethical readiness varies across occupational positions. Rather than indicating that particular roles directly produce ethical behavior, the finding may reflect differences in exposure to accountability, decision-making responsibilities, stakeholder interactions, and organizational expectations. Individuals occupying supervisory, managerial, or client-facing positions may encounter situations that require greater ethical judgment and professional responsibility. The practical significance of this finding lies in the need for MBA programs to provide structured opportunities for ethical reflection through case analyses, governance scenarios, leadership dilemmas, and applied decision-making exercises that expose students to diverse professional contexts.

This result aligns with international employability research emphasizing ethical conduct, accountability, and professional responsibility as core graduate attributes. Bhatti et al. (2023) and Mainga et al. (2022) identified professional ethics as an essential component of workplace effectiveness, while Agilan (2025) and Islam et al. (2025) highlighted the growing importance of integrity and responsible decision-making in preparing graduates for complex organizational environments.

Similarly, the significant association between current job role and Collaboration and Teamwork indicates that teamwork readiness differs according to occupational responsibilities. This relationship may reflect varying opportunities for coordination, shared decision-making, conflict resolution, and cross-functional interaction within different workplace roles. From a practical standpoint, the finding underscores the importance of intentionally designing collaborative learning experiences in MBA programs. Structured group projects, consulting simulations, peer-led case analyses, and team-based problem-solving activities may provide students with opportunities to strengthen interpersonal and collaborative competencies regardless of their current employment context.

The finding is consistent with international literature identifying teamwork and interpersonal communication as critical employability competencies. Studies by Agilan (2025), Bhatti et al. (2023), and Mainga et al. (2022) similarly reported that collaborative competence is highly valued by employers and contributes substantially to workplace effectiveness and career success.

The strongest significant relationship observed in the study was between current job role and Career Self-Management and Resilience. Although the effect size remained within a moderate range, it was larger than those observed for the other significant profile variables, suggesting that occupational role may be particularly relevant in understanding differences in career-related readiness. Students occupying roles that involve greater autonomy, leadership responsibilities, decision-making, and exposure to workplace challenges may have more opportunities to develop adaptive career behaviors and resilience. The practical implication is that MBA programs should incorporate activities that support career planning, reflective practice, leadership development, mentoring, executive coaching, and professional portfolio development. Such initiatives may help students strengthen their capacity to manage career transitions and respond effectively to workplace uncertainty.

This finding is supported by international studies linking employability with career adaptability, proactive career behavior, and resilience. Donald et al. (2025), Lee et al. (2025), and Pattnaik and Shukla (2022) reported that career self-management capabilities are increasingly important in dynamic labor markets and contribute significantly to long-term professional success.

The non-significant findings for sex indicate that male and female MBA students reported comparable levels of work readiness across all measured dimensions. This suggests that readiness is more closely associated with competencies, experiences, and workplace roles than with sex. Similar findings have been reported in international studies showing that perceived employability and work readiness are increasingly influenced by skill development and experiential learning rather than demographic characteristics alone. While gender-based disparities may continue to exist in labor market outcomes and career advancement opportunities, the present findings suggest that such differences were not reflected in students' self-assessments of work readiness.

Likewise, the non-significant findings for industry sector suggest that work readiness competencies may be transferable across professional contexts. Competencies related to task performance, adaptability, ethics, teamwork, and resilience appear relevant across sectors, supporting previous international research that conceptualizes employability as a combination of transferable knowledge, skills, and professional attributes applicable in diverse workplace settings (Amarathunga et al., 2024; Grant et al., 2024; Orr et al., 2023).

The practical implication is that MBA curricula should continue emphasizing broad managerial competencies while incorporating sector-specific applications to enhance contextual relevance.

The non-significant relationship between length of work experience and work readiness suggests that the developmental quality of work experiences may be more important than the number of years spent in employment. This finding aligns with international studies indicating that meaningful experiences characterized

by responsibility, autonomy, mentoring, feedback, and skill utilization contribute more strongly to employability than tenure alone (Ebner et al., 2021; Grant et al., 2024). Consequently, employment duration should not be viewed as a standalone indicator of readiness, and MBA programs may benefit from competency-based assessments that evaluate the depth and relevance of students' professional experiences.

Finally, the non-significant finding for type of organization indicates that work readiness did not differ significantly across government, private, nonprofit, and other organizational settings. This suggests that the competencies examined in the study represent broadly transferable capacities valued across organizational environments. Consistent with international evidence (Enstroem & Benson, 2024; Stewart, 2021), the result supports the view that employability increasingly depends on transversal competencies such as adaptability, ethical responsibility, collaboration, and resilience. Nevertheless, this finding should be interpreted within the context of the study sample and should not be generalized to all MBA populations. Future studies involving larger and more diverse samples may provide further insight into the potential influence of organizational context on work readiness.

Reflections of the MBA students on how their human capital competencies influence their work readiness to perform job in actual workplace

Table 7 presents the major themes and sub-themes generated from the qualitative responses regarding how human capital competencies influence the work readiness of early-career business professionals. The themes were derived from participants' responses and organized based on recurring meanings, including applied skills, confidence and adaptability, experiential learning, professional mindset, and strategic competence development. The table provides a structured summary of how respondents define work readiness through their competencies and lived experiences.

Table 7. Themes on Human Capital Competencies Influencing Work Readiness

Major Theme	**Sub-Themes**
Applied Skils as Foundation of Work Readiness	Communication skills; technical knowledge; problem-solving; analytical thinking; teamwork; practical application of knowledge
Confidence, Adaptability, and Self-Efficacy as Readiness Drivers	Confidence building; adaptability; flexibility; decision-making; independence; resilience
Experiential Learning as a Bridge to Workplace Readiness	Internship experience; on-the-job training; real-world exposure; case studies; practical exercises
Professional Mindset and Work Attitude as Readiness Enablers	Work ethics; discipline; responsibility; time management; professionalism
Strategic and Managerial Competence as Advanced Readiness Capability	Leadership skills; strategic thinking; planning; decision-making at higher levels; managerial readiness

The qualitative findings revealed that selected MBA students perceive human capital competencies as essential factors that influence their work readiness in actual workplace settings. Analysis of the interview responses generated five major themes: (1) Applied Skills as Foundation of Work Readiness, (2) Confidence, Adaptability, and Self-Efficacy as Readiness Drivers, (3) Experiential Learning as a Bridge to Workplace Readiness, (4) Professional Mindset and Work Attitude as Readiness Enablers, and (5) Strategic and Managerial Competence as Advanced Readiness Capability. These themes collectively demonstrate how competencies acquired through education, workplace exposure, and professional experience contribute to the preparedness of MBA students in performing their roles effectively.

Theme 1. Applied Skills as Foundation of Work Readiness

Applied skills emerged as a fundamental component of work readiness among MBA students. Although academic knowledge provides the foundation for professional development, the responses show that participants place greater importance on the ability to apply knowledge and competencies in actual workplace situations. Communication skills, technical knowledge, problem-solving abilities, analytical thinking, teamwork, and the practical application of learning were consistently identified as essential competencies that enable them to perform their responsibilities effectively. These skills become particularly important in workplace environments that require employees to make decisions, solve problems, collaborate with colleagues, and contribute to organizational goals. This suggests that work readiness is achieved not merely through acquiring knowledge but through the effective use of competencies in real-world professional settings.

The responses also show that participants associate work readiness with their ability to demonstrate competence through performance. For MBA students who are already employed, workplace success depends on how effectively they communicate ideas, apply technical expertise, analyze situations, and work with others to address organizational challenges. The emphasis on practical application reflects the realities of contemporary workplaces, where employers increasingly value employees who can translate knowledge into productive outcomes. As a result, applied skills serve as the bridge between educational preparation and workplace effectiveness, enabling individuals to adapt to changing demands and contribute meaningfully to organizational success. This finding supports Human Capital Theory, which posits that investments in education and skill development enhance individual productivity and employability. It is further supported by Richardt et al. (2024), who found that employers highly value graduates who demonstrate practical competencies, effective communication skills, teamwork abilities, and the capacity to apply knowledge in authentic workplace environments.

KI1: Communication skills are important in expressing ideas clearly. Being able to communicate effectively allows me to share ideas, coordinate with colleagues, and perform workplace responsibilities more efficiently.

KI2: Technical knowledge helps me understand the tasks better. Having the necessary knowledge and expertise enables me to perform assigned duties confidently and meet workplace expectations.

KI5: Problem-solving and analytical thinking are needed in handling challenges. These skills help me evaluate situations, make informed decisions, and respond effectively to workplace problems.

KI7: Teamwork is important because we often work with others. Collaborating with colleagues allows us to accomplish tasks more efficiently and achieve common organizational goals.

KI8: Applying what I learned in school helps me perform tasks efficiently. The ability to transfer academic learning into practical workplace situations strengthens my competence and improves my overall job performance.

Theme 2. Confidence, Adaptability, and Self-Efficacy as Readiness Drivers

Confidence, adaptability, and self-efficacy emerged as important factors that strengthen work readiness among MBA students. While technical competencies provide the knowledge and skills necessary for job performance, the responses show that participants also rely on personal attributes such as confidence, flexibility, decision-making ability, independence, and resilience to navigate workplace demands effectively. These characteristics help individuals respond to organizational changes, manage challenges, and maintain performance in dynamic work environments. The findings suggest that work readiness extends beyond technical expertise and includes the psychological capacity to apply competencies effectively under varying workplace conditions.

The responses also show that participants perceive adaptability and self-confidence as essential for managing uncertainty and responding to changing workplace expectations. Modern organizations frequently experience technological advancements, structural changes, and evolving performance requirements, making flexibility and resilience critical for professional success. Participants recognized that confidence enables them to take

initiative, make decisions, and assume greater responsibilities, while adaptability allows them to adjust to new situations and workplace demands. As a result, these personal attributes enhance their ability to utilize acquired competencies and remain effective despite challenges and uncertainties.

The findings indicate that self-efficacy plays a significant role in transforming competencies into effective workplace performance. Individuals who believe in their abilities are more likely to persevere through difficulties, demonstrate initiative, and remain committed to achieving desired outcomes. Likewise, resilience enables professionals to recover from setbacks and continue performing effectively despite obstacles and workplace pressures. These characteristics contribute to long-term employability and career sustainability by supporting continuous learning, adaptability, and professional growth. Consequently, participants view confidence, adaptability, and self-efficacy as essential factors that complement technical competencies and strengthen overall work readiness.

These findings support Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory, which posits that individuals' beliefs in their capabilities influence motivation, persistence, performance, and their ability to cope with challenges. The findings are further supported by Pinto and Ramalheira (2023), who found that self-efficacy significantly enhances employability by promoting adaptability, confidence, and proactive workplace behavior.

KI2: Confidence helps me face challenges at work. Having confidence allows me to handle responsibilities effectively and approach workplace difficulties with a positive mindset.

KI4: Adaptability is important because the workplace is always changing. Being adaptable enables me to respond effectively to new situations, expectations, and organizational changes.

KI6: Being flexible helps me adjust to different tasks. Flexibility allows me to perform various responsibilities and remain effective when work demands change.

KI8: Decision-making is needed when handling responsibilities. The ability to make informed decisions helps me address workplace concerns and fulfill my duties efficiently.

KI10: Independence and resilience help me overcome difficulties. These qualities enable me to remain productive, recover from setbacks, and continue pursuing professional goals despite challenges.

Theme 3. Experiential Learning as a Bridge to Workplace Readiness

Experiential learning emerged as a significant contributor to work readiness among MBA students. Although classroom instruction provides the theoretical foundations necessary for professional practice, the responses show that participants highly value internships, on-the-job training, practical exercises, case studies, and real-world exposure in preparing them for workplace responsibilities. These experiences allow students to apply academic concepts in authentic settings, develop practical competencies, and gain firsthand understanding of workplace expectations. The findings suggest that work readiness is strengthened when learning extends beyond the classroom and involves direct engagement with real organizational environments.

The responses also show that participants perceive experiential learning as an effective way of transforming theoretical knowledge into practical competence. Through workplace exposure and hands-on activities, students are given opportunities to solve real problems, make decisions, communicate with others, and adapt to organizational demands. Such experiences help bridge the gap between theory and practice by enabling learners to understand how academic concepts operate in actual work situation. This indicate that experiential learning contributes to the development of professional confidence, adaptability, and workplace effectiveness. Direct exposure to organizational settings enables students to become familiar with workplace culture, responsibilities, and expectations while identifying areas where they can further improve their competencies. These experiences reduce uncertainty about professional roles and enhance readiness for employment by providing practical insights that cannot be fully acquired through classroom instruction alone. Consequently, experiential learning serves as a critical bridge connecting academic preparation with workplace performance and employability. These findings support Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which posits that learning occurs through the

transformation of experience into knowledge. The findings are further supported by Jackson (2024), who reported that work-integrated learning enhances graduate employability by facilitating the application of theoretical knowledge in workplace settings, and by Mabungela and Mtiki (2026), who found that experiential learning strengthens workplace readiness through the development of practical competence, adaptability, and professional confidence.

KI1: Internship experience helped me understand real work situations. Through internship experiences, I gained firsthand exposure to workplace realities and developed a better understanding of professional responsibilities and expectations.

KI3: On-the-job training gave me hands-on experience. Practical workplace training allowed me to apply what I learned academically and develop skills that are directly relevant to my job.

KI5: Real-world exposure prepares me for actual tasks. Exposure to authentic workplace situations helped me become more familiar with job demands and increased my readiness to perform professional responsibilities.

KI7: Case studies help me analyze real problems. Analyzing actual business situations through case studies enhanced my critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.

KI9: Practical exercises improve my skills. Participating in practical activities strengthened my competencies and increased my confidence in performing workplace tasks effectively.

Theme 4. Professional Mindset and Work Attitude as Readiness Enablers

Professional mindset and positive work attitudes emerged as essential components of work readiness among MBA students. Although technical knowledge and competencies are necessary for workplace performance, the responses show that participants also place significant importance on work ethics, discipline, responsibility, time management, and professionalism. These qualities influence how individuals approach their responsibilities, interact with colleagues, and maintain high standards of performance in the workplace. The findings suggest that work readiness extends beyond possessing knowledge and skills and includes the attitudes and values that guide professional behavior and decision-making in organizational settings.

The responses also show that participants perceive professional attitudes as critical factors that enable them to perform effectively and sustain positive workplace relationships. Participants emphasized that discipline helps them remain focused on their responsibilities, responsibility ensures that tasks are completed properly, and time management allows them to meet deadlines and organizational expectations. Likewise, professionalism and strong work ethics promote respectful interactions, accountability, and integrity in the workplace. These attributes contribute to building trust and credibility, which are essential for effective collaboration and long-term professional success. As a result, participants view professional conduct as equally important as technical competence in determining workplace readiness and effectiveness.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that professional mindset serves as a foundation for continuous improvement, career growth, and organizational contribution. Individuals who demonstrate positive work attitudes are more likely to remain committed to their responsibilities, accept constructive feedback, and pursue opportunities for learning and development. They are also better equipped to manage workplace challenges, maintain productivity under pressure, and adapt to changing organizational demands. In this regard, professional attitudes function as internal drivers that strengthen motivation, accountability, and commitment to excellence. Participants recognized that these qualities not only enhance individual performance but also contribute to a more productive and harmonious work environment.

The findings further suggest that professional attitudes and values serve as mechanisms through which competencies are translated into meaningful workplace outcomes. Possessing technical expertise alone may not guarantee professional success if individuals lack discipline, responsibility, ethical behavior, or professionalism. Conversely, employees who consistently demonstrate integrity, accountability, and positive work attitudes are often perceived as dependable, trustworthy, and capable of assuming greater responsibilities. These

characteristics enable professionals to maximize the value of their competencies while fostering positive relationships and organizational effectiveness. Consequently, participants view professional mindset and work attitudes as critical enablers that strengthen overall work readiness and support long-term career advancement.

These findings support Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior, which posits that attitudes significantly influence intentions and behavior, including workplace actions and professional conduct. The findings are further supported by Succi and Canovi (2023), who found that employers continue to regard professionalism, work ethic, responsibility, and positive workplace attitudes as essential indicators of employee effectiveness, employability, and workplace success.

KI2: Work ethics are important in maintaining professionalism. Demonstrating ethical behavior in the workplace helps establish trust, credibility, and professionalism in dealing with colleagues, clients, and organizational stakeholders.

KI4: Discipline helps me stay focused on my tasks. Maintaining discipline enables me to manage responsibilities effectively, remain productive, and consistently meet workplace expectations.

KI6: Responsibility is needed to complete work properly. Taking ownership of assigned duties ensures that tasks are performed accurately and contributes to the achievement of organizational goals.

KI8: Time management helps me meet deadlines. Effectively managing time allows me to prioritize responsibilities, complete tasks efficiently, and maintain high levels of performance under varying workplace demands.

KI10: Professionalism is important in dealing with others. Demonstrating professionalism promotes respectful workplace interactions, strengthens collaboration, and supports the development of positive professional relationships.

Theme 5. Strategic and Managerial Competence as Advanced Readiness Capability

The final theme highlights leadership and managerial competencies as essential dimensions of advanced work readiness among MBA students. Participants emphasized leadership skills, strategic thinking, planning, and higher-level decision-making as key competencies that prepare them for future managerial and organizational responsibilities. These abilities were seen as extending beyond routine job performance and toward roles that require guiding teams, making strategic choices, and contributing to organizational direction and growth.

The responses show that participants associate leadership readiness with the ability to manage people, organize tasks, and make informed decisions in complex situations. Leadership skills were viewed as essential for managing teams, while strategic thinking was linked to long-term planning and organizational direction. Planning and decision-making were also identified as critical in ensuring efficiency and effectiveness in workplace operations. This indicates that participants view work readiness as not only immediate job competence but also preparedness for future leadership roles.

The findings suggest that strategic and managerial competencies are important for career progression and professional development. Participants recognized that effective leaders must be able to analyze situations, anticipate challenges, and develop solutions that support organizational goals. These competencies enable individuals to move beyond operational tasks and contribute to broader organizational success, particularly in dynamic and competitive business environments. It also imply that leadership readiness involves the ability to influence others, coordinate resources, and align team efforts toward organizational objectives. Participants appeared to understand that managerial roles require a broader perspective, including business awareness, strategic planning, and the ability to manage change effectively. As such, leadership competencies represent an advanced level of work readiness that supports both current effectiveness and future career advancement.

These findings support the Competency-Based Management Framework, which emphasizes leadership, strategic thinking, planning, and decision-making as core managerial competencies. They are also consistent with Human

Capital Theory, which highlights the importance of investing in advanced skills for improved productivity and organizational value. Cotrim et al. (2024) found that leadership competency development enhances career advancement and organizational performance when supported by experience and continuous learning.

KI3: Leadership skills are important for managing teams. Effective leadership enables the coordination of people, delegation of tasks, and achievement of organizational goals.

KI5: Strategic thinking helps in planning for long-term goals. This allows me to anticipate challenges and develop effective plans for future success.

KI7: Planning is needed to organize tasks effectively. Proper planning ensures that work activities are structured, efficient, and completed on time.

KI9: Higher-level decision-making is important in leadership roles. It helps in evaluating situations carefully and choosing the most appropriate course of action.

KI11: Managerial readiness prepares me for future responsibilities. It equips me with the confidence and skills needed to handle leadership and organizational roles.

Perceptions of Early-Career Business Professionals on the Role of MBA Education in Strengthening Competencies and Preparing for Higher-Level Managerial Responsibilities

Table 8 presents the themes and sub-themes derived from the responses on how MBA education contributed to strengthening competencies. The coding shows recurring ideas centered on advanced knowledge acquisition, strategic thinking, leadership development, practical application, and confidence building.

Table 8. Themes on MBA Education Contribution to Competency Development

Major Theme	Sub-Themes
Advanced Knowledge and Specialized Skill Development	Deeper business knowledge; specialized competencies; broader understanding of business functions
Strategic Thinking and Decision-Making Enhancement	Analytical thinking; strategic planning; problem-solving; decision-making skills
Leadership and Managerial Competence Development	Leadership skills; people management; teamwork; organizational awareness
Practical Application and Real-World Business Exposure	Case studies; simulations; real-world application; experiential learning
Confidence Building and Professional Growth	Increased confidence; communication skills; career readiness; self-efficacy

The qualitative findings reveal that early-career business professionals perceive MBA education as a transformative academic experience that strengthens their core competencies while simultaneously preparing them for higher-level managerial responsibilities. The analysis generated two interrelated dimensions: (1) strengthening of professional competencies and (2) preparation for managerial roles. Across both dimensions, participants consistently emphasized cognitive development, leadership enhancement, experiential learning, and confidence building as central outcomes of MBA education.

Theme 1. Advanced Knowledge and Specialized Skill Development

Advanced knowledge and specialized skill development emerged as a key outcome of MBA education among participants. The responses indicate that MBA programs are perceived as a critical mechanism for expanding foundational business knowledge into more advanced, structured, and specialized competencies. Participants

described the program as enabling a deeper understanding of core business functions, thereby enhancing their analytical capability and workplace performance. This suggests that MBA education is not merely an extension of undergraduate learning but a more structured process of intellectual refinement and specialization that supports professional growth.

The responses further show that participants view MBA education as a bridging platform that connects theoretical foundations with more complex managerial applications. Learning is described as extending beyond memorization of concepts toward the development of applied understanding across business domains such as finance, marketing, operations, and human resource management. This broader and more integrated learning experience allows participants to strengthen their cognitive and analytical abilities, which are essential in addressing real-world business challenges. As a result, MBA education is perceived as a structured pathway for enhancing both depth of knowledge and professional competence.

These findings align with Amblee et al. (2023) and Blau and Hill (2023), who emphasized that MBA curricula strengthen domain-specific competencies through integrated analytical and functional business instruction. Accordingly, MBA education is viewed as a foundational enabler of professional growth, equipping graduates with cognitive tools necessary for navigating increasingly complex organizational environments.

KI2: It deepened my understanding of business concepts and improved my competencies. The MBA program allowed me to develop a more structured and advanced grasp of key business areas, strengthening both my knowledge and analytical capability.

KI3: MBA helped me gain broader and more advanced knowledge in business. It expanded my understanding of different functional areas such as finance, marketing, and management, which are essential in professional practice.

Theme 2. Strategic Thinking and Decision-Making Enhancement

A dominant perception among participants is that MBA education significantly enhances strategic thinking and decision-making capabilities. Respondents reported improved analytical reasoning and a stronger capacity to evaluate business situations systematically and critically. This suggests that MBA learning supports a shift from routine or operational thinking toward higher-order cognitive processes that are essential for managerial effectiveness and leadership roles.

The responses indicate that participants developed a more holistic understanding of business environments through their MBA training. This allows them to interpret information more effectively, anticipate potential outcomes, and make more informed and evidence-based decisions. Such cognitive development is particularly important in managerial contexts where decisions must often be made under conditions of uncertainty and complexity. As a result, participants view strategic thinking as a key outcome of their graduate education that directly strengthens their professional competence.

The findings further suggest that MBA education facilitates the development of critical thinking and structured decision-making skills that are essential in solving complex organizational problems. Participants emphasized the importance of analyzing situations before making decisions and improving problem-solving abilities as core benefits of the program. This indicates that MBA training contributes to enhancing judgment, improving analytical discipline, and strengthening the ability to evaluate multiple alternatives in decision-making processes.

These findings are supported by Blau and Hill (2023), who found that experiential learning approaches in MBA programs, such as case-based instruction and simulations, enhance strategic reasoning. Similarly, Turan et al. (2020) emphasized that critical thinking involves structured evaluation of information and disciplined judgment, both of which are essential in managerial decision-making. Furthermore, Calma and Cotronei-Baird (2021) and Skrzek and Malik (2023) highlight the importance of analytical and problem-solving competencies in dynamic organizational contexts. Collectively, these studies reinforce the participants' view that MBA education is instrumental in developing strategic cognition essential for managerial effectiveness.

KI3: I learned to think more strategically and analyze situations before making decisions. This helped me become more careful and systematic in evaluating business problems.

KI2: The program enhanced critical thinking and problem-solving skills. It allowed me to assess situations better and choose more effective solutions in decision-making.

KI10: MBA training helped me improve my ability to evaluate business situations. I can now consider different factors before arriving at a decision.

KI4: The program strengthened my analytical thinking skills. It taught me how to break down complex problems and understand their root causes.

KI15: I became more confident in making decisions after the MBA. It improved my ability to assess risks and choose appropriate actions in workplace situations.

Theme 3. Leadership and Managerial Competence Development

Participants consistently identified leadership development as one of the most significant outcomes of MBA education. They described improvements in their ability to manage teams, coordinate tasks, and assume managerial responsibilities within professional environments. This indicates that MBA education is perceived not only as an academic program but also as a structured environment for leadership formation and managerial capacity building.

The responses show that participants associate leadership development with both interpersonal and organizational competencies. Leadership is understood not merely in terms of authority or position, but also through effective communication, collaboration, and the ability to influence others toward achieving organizational goals. This suggests that MBA training supports a shift from task-oriented roles to more role-oriented managerial functions, where individuals are expected to guide teams, coordinate activities, and contribute to organizational performance.

The findings further imply that MBA education prepares individuals for real-world managerial responsibilities by strengthening teamwork, leadership confidence, and decision-making in group settings. Participants highlighted that the program helped them become more effective in handling leadership tasks and preparing for future supervisory or managerial roles. As such, leadership development is viewed as a gradual process shaped by exposure to collaborative learning, practical exercises, and organizational problem-solving activities.

This finding is consistent with Wu et al. (2024), who found that MBA programs enhance leadership capability through experiential learning methods such as simulations, group projects, and strategic exercises. These approaches simulate real organizational challenges, allowing learners to develop confidence in decision-making and people management. Thus, participants perceive MBA education as a developmental pathway that fosters leadership identity and managerial readiness.

KI4: It helped me develop leadership and management skills. It strengthened my ability to guide people and handle responsibilities in a workplace setting.

KI7: Leadership and teamwork skills were improved through the program. It helped me work better with others and contribute effectively in group tasks.

KI11: It prepared me for managerial responsibilities. The MBA program gave me the confidence and knowledge needed to handle leadership roles in the future.

Theme 4. Practical Application and Real-World Business Exposure

Another key perception is that MBA education strengthens competencies through practical application and exposure to real-world business contexts. Participants emphasized that experiential learning approaches such as

case studies, simulations, and applied tasks helped bridge the gap between theory and practice. This indicates that MBA learning is most valued when it is directly connected to actual workplace situations where concepts are applied in meaningful and realistic ways.

The responses show that participants consider learning more effective when it is contextualized within real organizational scenarios. Through exposure to practical activities, they are able to translate theoretical knowledge into actionable workplace skills, particularly in areas such as problem-solving, decision-making, and operational analysis. This suggests that experiential learning enhances not only understanding but also the ability to perform tasks in real professional environments.

The findings further imply that MBA education provides learners with opportunities to engage with simulated and real-world business challenges, allowing them to develop confidence in applying knowledge under practical conditions. Participants highlighted that such experiences help them better understand workplace dynamics and prepare them for actual organizational responsibilities. As a result, experiential learning serves as a critical mechanism for strengthening job-related competencies and improving workplace readiness.

This perception aligns with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which emphasizes that learning occurs through a continuous cycle of concrete experience, reflection, conceptualization, and application. It is also supported by Scheuringa and Thompson (2024), who found that simulation-based and case-based learning significantly enhance critical thinking and managerial decision-making under pressure. Overall, participants view experiential learning as a vital bridge between academic preparation and workplace performance.

KI4: The case studies and simulations helped me apply what I learned in actual work situations. It allowed me to connect theories with real workplace practices and improve my decision-making skills.

KI12: The program exposed me to real workplace problems and how to solve them. It helped me understand how business concepts are applied in real organizational settings.

Theme 5. Confidence Building and Professional Growth

Participants also highlighted that MBA education contributes significantly to confidence building and professional identity development. They reported increased self-efficacy in communication, decision-making, and professional engagement within organizational contexts. This indicates that the impact of MBA education extends beyond cognitive and technical development to include psychological and professional growth.

The responses suggest that MBA education strengthens self-perception and professional identity through continuous exposure to academic challenges, collaborative activities, presentations, and performance feedback. These experiences simulate real workplace demands, allowing participants to gradually build confidence in expressing ideas, engaging with others, and performing professional tasks. As a result, confidence development is viewed as a natural outcome of sustained engagement in both theoretical and applied learning activities.

The findings further imply that increased confidence enhances participants' readiness for career advancement and leadership responsibilities. As individuals become more confident in their abilities, they are more likely to participate actively in decision-making, communicate effectively, and take on more complex professional roles. This suggests that MBA education plays an important role in preparing individuals not only in terms of skills and knowledge but also in terms of psychological readiness for workplace challenges.

This finding is grounded in Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory, which explains that self-confidence develops through mastery experiences, social modeling, and constructive feedback. As individuals successfully accomplish academic and applied tasks, their belief in their capabilities increases, leading to stronger professional self-efficacy. Accordingly, MBA education contributes to both competence development and psychological readiness for leadership and career progression.

KI1: I became more confident in speaking and presenting ideas. The program helped me improve my communication skills and express myself more effectively in professional settings.

KI9: I feel more prepared and confident in my career now. The MBA program strengthened my self-belief and readiness to take on professional responsibilities.

KI2: The MBA program boosted my confidence in handling workplace tasks. I now feel more capable when dealing with complex job responsibilities and professional challenges.

KI4: It improved my confidence in making decisions at work. I learned to trust my judgment more when facing different workplace situations.

KI7: I became more confident in interacting with colleagues and contributing ideas during discussions. The program helped me overcome hesitation in professional communication.

Proposed Framework Output

Based on the findings, the study proposes the **Human Capital Work Readiness Development Framework for Early-Career MBA Professionals**. The framework is intended to guide higher education institutions, MBA program administrators, faculty members, industry partners, employers, and professional organizations in strengthening human capital competencies and enhancing workplace readiness among MBA students and early-career professionals.

The framework is anchored on the empirical finding that human capital competencies significantly influence work readiness, with communication and interpersonal competencies emerging as the strongest predictor. It addresses the developmental needs identified in the study, including leadership development, adaptability, experiential learning, mentorship, career self-management, and the alignment of MBA education with workplace demands.

The framework has four components:

1. **Human Capital Profiling.** This component focuses on competency assessment, work readiness evaluation, career aspiration profiling, leadership potential assessment, and professional development needs analysis. It helps identify competency strengths, readiness levels, and areas requiring improvement.

2. **Competencies Strengthening.** This component includes leadership development programs, business communication enhancement, critical thinking and problem-solving training, digital innovation initiatives, and professional competency development activities. It aims to strengthen technical, managerial, analytical, communication, and digital competencies essential for workplace success.

3. **Workplace Readiness Development.** This component promotes workplace mentoring, industry immersion, executive coaching, organizational problem-solving projects, networking activities, and teamwork development programs. It supports the practical application of competencies and enhances adaptability, professional confidence, collaboration, and career preparedness.

4. **Responsive MBA Education and Intervention.** This component focuses on curriculum enhancement, industry-academe partnerships, executive lecture series, competency-based instruction, and experiential learning integration. It ensures that MBA education remains aligned with industry needs and evolving workplace expectations.

The proposed framework is consistent with global competency-based education models used in MBA programs across the United States, Europe, and parts of Asia. International frameworks such as AACSB standards and European higher education employability models similarly emphasize competency development, experiential learning, and industry collaboration as key pillars of graduate readiness. However, the present framework uniquely integrates communication competence as a central predictive factor, reflecting the empirical findings of this study. This provides a context-specific contribution to global literature by highlighting communication and interpersonal competence as a dominant driver of work readiness in early-career MBA professionals.

FINDINGS

This study examined the relationship between human capital competencies and work readiness among MBA students and explored their perceptions regarding the influence of human capital competencies on work readiness and the role of MBA education in strengthening competencies and preparing them for higher-level managerial responsibilities.

Regarding the demographic and professional profile of the respondents, the findings revealed that the MBA students in this study were predominantly young to middle-aged professionals, with most belonging to the 26–30 age group, followed by those aged 31–35. Female respondents outnumbered male respondents, and most participants were employed in government and educational institutions while pursuing graduate education. These results suggest that the respondents were working professionals who pursue graduate education to enhance their competencies, improve qualifications, and prepare for career advancement and managerial roles.

In terms of human capital competencies, the findings showed that the MBA students demonstrated high levels of competencies across all domains, namely technical and functional competencies, managerial and leadership competencies, analytical and problem-solving competencies, communication and interpersonal competencies, and digital innovation competencies. Among these domains, digital innovation competencies obtained the highest rating, while technical and functional competencies received the lowest rating, although still interpreted as highly competent. These findings suggest that the respondents possess the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to function effectively in modern, technology-driven work environments.

With regards to work readiness, the findings revealed that the MBA students exhibited a very high level of readiness across all dimensions, including job competence and task performance, adaptability and learning agility, professional work ethics and responsibility, collaboration and teamwork, and career self-management and resilience. Professional work ethics and responsibility emerged as the highest-rated dimension, while job competence and task performance obtained the lowest rating, although still interpreted as very much ready. These results indicate that the respondents are well-prepared to meet workplace expectations and perform professional responsibilities effectively.

The results further revealed a statistically significant relationship between all domains of human capital competencies and all dimensions of work readiness. The strongest relationship was observed in professional work ethics and responsibility, while job competence and task performance demonstrated the lowest yet still significant relationship. These findings suggest that increases in human capital competencies are associated with higher levels of work readiness among the respondents, highlighting the importance of competency development in professional preparation.

In determining which domains significantly affect work readiness, communication and interpersonal competencies emerged as the strongest predictor of work readiness among all human capital domains. Regression analysis indicated that effective communication, collaboration, and interpersonal interaction significantly influence workplace readiness. Among the profile variables, current job role showed the greatest influence on work readiness, particularly in career self-management and resilience, suggesting that occupational experience contributes to differences in how respondents manage career challenges and professional growth.

Based on the quantitative and qualitative findings, the Human Capital Work Readiness Development Framework for Early-Career MBA Professionals was proposed. The framework consists of Human Capital Profiling, Competencies Strengthening, Workplace Readiness Development, and Responsive MBA Education and Intervention. It is designed to enhance competencies, improve work readiness, align MBA education with industry needs, and prepare MBA students for managerial responsibilities.

Regarding perceptions of MBA students on how competencies influence work readiness, five themes emerged: Applied Skills as Foundation of Work Readiness; Confidence, Adaptability, and Self-Efficacy as Readiness Drivers; Experiential Learning as a Bridge to Workplace Readiness; Professional Mindset and Work Attitude as Readiness Enablers; and Strategic and Managerial Competence as Advanced Readiness Capability. These

themes suggest that work readiness is shaped by the integration of skills, attitudes, experiential learning, and strategic competencies.

Regarding perceptions of MBA education, five themes were identified: Advanced Knowledge and Specialized Skill Development; Strategic Thinking and Decision-Making Enhancement; Leadership and Managerial Competence Development; Practical Application and Real-World Business Exposure; and Confidence Building and Professional Growth. These findings indicate that MBA education functions as a developmental platform for strengthening competencies and preparing respondents for higher-level managerial responsibilities.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, it may be concluded that MBA programs in this study primarily serve working professionals who pursue continuous career development, competency enhancement, and preparation for managerial roles.

It may further be concluded that the MBA students in this study demonstrated high levels of human capital competencies across technical, managerial, analytical, interpersonal, and digital domains, suggesting that graduate business education contributes to competency development relevant to modern workplace demands.

The findings also suggest that the respondents exhibited a high level of work readiness across all dimensions, indicating preparedness in terms of adaptability, collaboration, ethics, resilience, and job performance.

Furthermore, the results suggest that human capital competencies and work readiness are significantly related, indicating that improvements in competencies are associated with higher levels of workplace readiness among the respondents.

It may also be concluded that communication and interpersonal competencies are the most influential domain affecting work readiness among the respondents, highlighting the importance of communication skills in workplace effectiveness.

Additionally, occupational experience, particularly current job role, appears to contribute to differences in career self-management and resilience, suggesting that workplace exposure plays a supporting role in professional development.

The findings further suggest that work readiness is a multidimensional construct shaped by skills, attitudes, experiential learning, and strategic competencies.

Finally, MBA education in this study may be regarded as a transformative learning experience that contributes to the development of competencies, confidence, and professional preparedness for managerial roles among early-career business professionals.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study is limited to a single higher education institution and a relatively small sample of MBA students, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other MBA populations or geographic contexts such as other regions in the Philippines or international settings.

The cross-sectional research design also limits the ability to establish causal relationships among variables, as data were collected at one point in time only.

In addition, the use of self-reported survey instruments may introduce response bias, including social desirability bias and subjective over- or underestimation of competencies and work readiness.

The study further focused only on selected dimensions of human capital competencies and work readiness, excluding other potentially relevant factors such as emotional intelligence, leadership style, personality traits, organizational culture, and motivational variables that may also influence work readiness.

Recommendations and Future Research

Based on the findings of the study, MBA program administrators are encouraged to continue strengthening competency-based educational strategies that develop technical, managerial, analytical, communication, interpersonal, and digital competencies among students.

Faculty members are encouraged to enhance instructional strategies through experiential learning approaches such as simulations, case analyses, internships, project-based learning, and industry immersion to strengthen the application of competencies in real workplace contexts.

Educational institutions should prioritize communication and interpersonal competency development through structured leadership training, collaborative learning activities, professional presentations, and workplace communication programs, given their strong influence on work readiness.

Stronger partnerships with industry organizations, government agencies, and private companies are also recommended to provide students with authentic workplace exposure that enhances professional readiness and managerial competence.

Career development programs may be expanded to include mentoring, coaching, resilience training, and career self-management interventions to support long-term professional growth.

The Human Capital Work Readiness Development Framework may be adopted as a structured guide for enhancing competencies and improving employability outcomes among MBA students and early-career professionals.

For future research, it is recommended that similar studies be conducted involving larger samples across multiple higher education institutions to improve generalizability of findings. Comparative studies across ASEAN countries and international contexts are also encouraged to examine cross-cultural differences in MBA competencies and work readiness.

Longitudinal research designs are recommended to track competency development and work readiness over time. Future studies may also incorporate additional variables such as emotional intelligence, leadership style, organizational support, and motivation to develop a more comprehensive predictive model of work readiness.

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