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THE IMPACT OF MBA STUDY ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS' GENERIC SKILLS

– Students' perceptions and employers' needs



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Assessing the value and the role of business education and specifically, MBA programs have been a frequent topic over the last three decades. MBA has been criticized for failing to prepare a well-equipped leader, and this caused to make a gap between the employers' needs from an MBA graduate and what indeed MBAs provide.

This study aimed to explore the effectiveness of an MBA program provided by Turku University of Applied Sciences (Turku UAS) and its impacts on graduate students' generic skills that are desirable by their employers.

Thus, the literature review will focus on highlighting the curriculum of Turku UAS MBA and its outcomes, then investigating the critiques and challenges of MBA programs in the existing theories and research. Finally, identifying the associated generic skills of MBA graduates as an outcome from studying the MBA program, and as expected from their employers.

This study applied qualitative methods design to address the value of an MBA program regarding the development of graduates' generic skills and compare it to their employers' expectations and MBA course outcomes at Turku UAS in Finland. The qualitative data through eight semi-structured theme interviews were conducted to understand in-depth the topic and explore in detail the outcomes of the Turku UAS MBA program and its impacts on students' generic skills.

The findings show that the MBA study enables the students to achieve considerable development in some important skills; these skills are respectively, communication, cross-cultural, critical thinking, teamwork, leadership, and managerial skills. Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that the MBA has provided students and graduates with some important skills and helped them to improve these skills. However, these outcomes do not perfectly fit with employers' needs but achieved many of the desirable critical skills by MBA employers.

KEYWORDS:

MBA outcomes, Turku UAS, generic skills, employers' needs, MBA graduate students, Finland.

Sadek Mousa

YAMK-OPINTOJEN MERKITYS OPISKELIJOIDEN YLEISTEN TAITOJEN KEHITTÄMISESSÄ

- Opiskelijoiden käsityksiä ja työnantajien tarpeita

Liiketoiminnan koulutuksen rooli ja merkitys, erityisesti MBA-ohjelmien, ovat olleet yleinen, jatkuva aihe viimeisten kolmen vuosikymmenen aikana. MBA-ohjelmia on arvosteltu epäonnistumisista, sillä tulevat johtajat eivät ole olleet tarpeeksi kyvykkääitä. Tämä on aiheuttanut kiuun työnantajien odotusten sekä tarpeen ja MBA tutkintojen tarjoaman väillä.

Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoitus oli selvittää Turun ammattikorkeakoulun tarjoamien MBA (Turku AMK) ohjelmien tehokkuutta ja niiden vaikutuksia jatko-opiskelijoiden yleisiin taitoihin, joita työnantajat toivovat.

Kirjallisuuskatsaus keskittyy Turun ammattikorkeakoulun MBA-koulutusten opetussuunnitelmiin ja niiden tavoitteisiin sekä ohjelmien haasteisiin olemassa olevien teorioiden ja tutkimusten näkökulmasta. Lisäksi tunnistetaan MBA-tutkinnon suorittaneiden opiskelijoiden yleisiä taitoja ja työnantajien odotuksia.

Tässä opinnäytetyössä käytettiin laadullista tutkimusmenetelmää, jolla pyrittiin selvittämään MBA-ohjelman merkitys valmistuneiden opiskelijoiden yleisten taitojen kehittymisessä verrattuna heidän työnantajiensa odotuksiin sekä MBA-kurssien osaamistavoitteisiin Turun ammattikorkeakoulussa. Tutkimus suoritettiin teemahaastatteluna, johon osallistui kahdeksan Turun ammattikorkeakoulusta valmistunutta MBA-opiskelijaa ja koulutuksen edustajaa.

Tulokset osoittavat, että MBA-koulutus antaa opiskelijoille mahdollisuuden kehittyä tietyissä taidoissa, kuten viestintä, monikulttuurisuus, kriittinen ajattelu, ryhmätyöskentely, johtajuus ja johtamistaidot. Tutkimuksen tulosten perusteella voidaan päättää, että MBA-ohjelma on tarjonnut opiskelijoille ja tutkinnon suorittaneille tärkeitä taitoja sekä auttanut kehittämään niitä. Tulokset eivät kuitenkaan täysin vastaa työnantajien tarpeisiin, mutta monet kriittiset, heidän toivomansa taidot saavutettiin.

ASIASANAT:

MBA-koulutus, Turun ammattikorkeakoulu, yleiset taidot, työnantajien tarpeet, MBA-jatko-opiskelijat, Suomi.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS (OR) SYMBOLS

AACSB	Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business.
MBA	Master of Business Administration.
Turku UAS	Turku University of Applied Sciences.
UAS	Finnish University of Applied Sciences.
FINEEC	Finnish Education Evaluation Centre.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and problem statement

Over the last century, the world has been changed, and business has played a principal role in forming nations through economic growth and job opportunities. Business education has contributed to supply qualified leaders and managers who can effectively manage organizations that make money and create jobs. These successful organizations become colossal assets to their societies.

It is well documented that management education has immense value to our societies, organizations and individuals as well. Management education equips graduates with specific knowledge and skills such as communication skills, leadership skills, problem-solving and decision-making. Also, business education has effects on individuals' wealth and well-being who can get job opportunities with a higher salary than their peers, or who established their own rewarding enterprises. Moreover, there has been an integral connection between organizations and business education and research that facilitate innovation, develop new theories, ideas and creativity. (AACSB 2005)

Furthermore, it is generally accepted that an interdependent relationship between society and business exists. On the one hand, society relies on business for economic prosperity and growth which improve the quality of life in the country. On the other hand, society paves the way and prepares the suitable environment for doing business (AACSB 2005).

Assessing the value and the role of business education and specifically, MBA programs have been a frequent topic over the last three decades. The mounting tone of criticism by scientists and MBA employers is one of the challenges for MBA programs and MBA graduates face MBA providers. Myriad of studies, such as those represented in the second chapter of this paper, all which point to the gap between desirable skills by employers and the skills of MBA graduates, and argue that business schools have failed in preparing well-equipped leaders for the current global business environment, with exception of MBA programs provided by the top ranked business schools such as Harvard, Stanford, and Instead, etc. (Rubin & Dierdorff, 2009).

Datar et al. in 2010, identified eight unmet needs that MBA programs have failed to provide business students. Among other things, developing leadership skills, critical thinking and communication skills were the most important unmet needs. The study was concluded by recommending business schools to rebalance between "the knowing components" and "the doing components, reassessing their curricula and paying more attention to skills and capabilities development. Therefore, the continuous assessment of the outcomes of MBAs is a must to know the efficacy of MBA programs.

1.2 The aim of the study and research questions

This study aims to explore the effectiveness of an MBA program at one Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) and its impacts on graduate students' generic skills that are desirable by MBAs' employers. This aim will be reached through the objectives of this thesis, firstly, are to present the outcomes of the courses provided in the MBA program at UAS. Secondly, to identify the critical skills an employer expects from an MBA graduate. Finally, to examine the graduate students' perceptions of the impact of studying MBA at UAS on developing their leadership and managerial skills.

Thus, the findings of this research may provide us better insight into the impacts of MBA and the added value to both, students and employers, and explore whether those outcomes match or mismatch with employers' needs and MBA curriculum outcomes as well.

The following questions will guide this research:

- 1- What is the impact of MBA study on the development of students' generic skills?
- 2- To what extent do the developed skills by MBA match with the desired skills by MBAs' employers?

In addition, there are two sub-questions:

- 1- What are the students' perceptions of the impact of MBA on their generic skills?
- 2- What are the desired skills by employers in MBA graduates / employees?

One of the challenges in this thesis was selecting the suitable terms for the associated skills of MBA that are considered as critical in workplaces for employers. During review the literature on the topic of this thesis, we have found that various studies have adapted dissimilar terms to identify and define similar skills. The most frequent terms authors

have used in previous studies are; MBA skill sets, leadership and managerial skills, soft skills, employability skills, and generic skills.

This research will use these terms interchangeably throughout the text of this paper; however, leadership and managerial skills are the intended meaning by all of them.

Skills: Yukl (2010) defines a skill as the ability to do something efficiently.

Generic skills: a set of skills and capacities that are remarkably seen as significant in business education (Hager et al. 2002). These skills include communication skills, teamwork skills, analytical thinking skills, problem-solving, and decision-making.

MBA skillsets: they are 12 leadership and managerial skills include all skills as mentioned above among other, and Brooks (2006) defined these skills.

1.3 The research methods used in the thesis

The study focuses on MBA outcomes in terms of students' generic skills and knowledge development, as perceived by Turku UAS MBA graduates and educators, and as desired and expected by MBAs' employers. Evaluating the MBA program of Turku UAS lies beyond the scope of this research, the study only measures the development of student's skills as a result of studying the MBA program at one UAS in Finland. Also, other outcomes and impacts of the MBA other than the generic skills and knowledge are not central to this study.

This thesis deployed qualitative methods to explore the impact of MBA study on the development of graduates' generic skills, the data was collected using theme interviews with five graduates of MBA provided by one UAS in Finland, and three MBA educators as well. Theme interview is a useful qualitative instrument to gather data in research when the researcher wants to obtain participants' perspectives and motives that are difficult to collect by quantitative methods (Puustinen,2013). The interviews were conducted by email that made it easier for saving, coding, and analyzing the data immediately to present the findings. Also, thematic analysis was used to develop the result of this research.

The significance of this research is associated with the increasing indication that the value of MBA is still called into question. Additionally, the findings of this study may be valuable to the major stakeholders of business and business education. Mainly, to

UASes, to employers, to graduates students, and to the whole society as mentioned in the background section.

Furthermore, researchers have tended to focus on the economic, employability and career development outcomes rather than the main role of MBA regarding personal outcomes, and skills and knowledge. Also, there is a paucity of the studies that compare the impacts of MBA from three different perceptions such as those in these studies.

2 MBA AND CRITICAL SKILLS FOR SUCCESS

This chapter of the thesis presents a review of literature related to trends in the evaluation of MBA programs and the criticism directed to it, the critical skills required for success in work environments regarding leadership and managerial competencies, then goes more specific to review those skills in the Finnish working life context. Following that, a review of UAS MBA curricula of 2019 and courses' outcomes, however, a brief overview of MBA history and types presented.

2.1 Theoretical framework

Management and business education have been viewed in the literature through different lenses, the learner, the academic and the practitioner. However, the question is how to create the connection and integration between those visions. Figure 1 below illustrates the theoretical framework of this thesis and displays the three major stakeholders of business education, educator, employer, and MBA student or graduate.

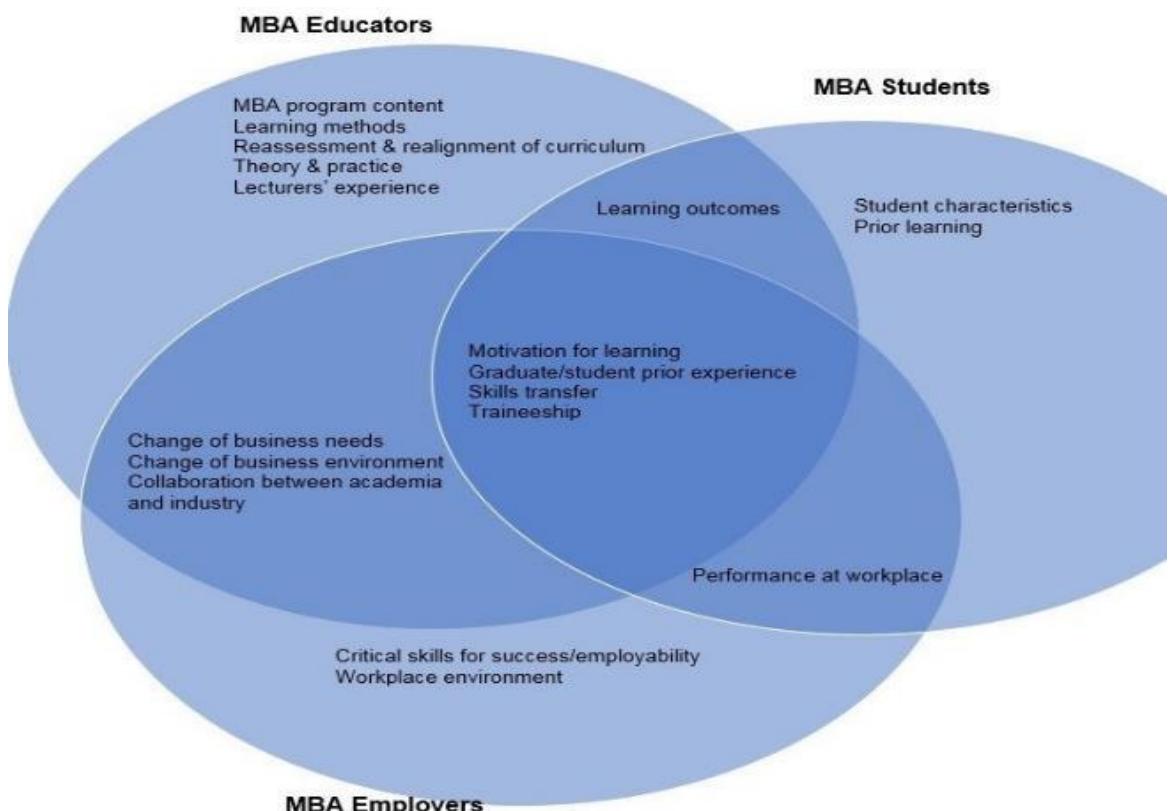


Figure 1. Theoretical framework, updated from (Jackson 2013).

The theoretical framework of this study drawn from the three lenses mentioned above, as represented in figure 1. Every circle depicts one of the stakeholder groups of MBAs with its components and responsibilities. While the overlapping portions reveal the relationship, common effect, or shared responsibilities between two or three stakeholders. For example, learning outcomes are common component between graduates and schools, performance at workplaces is a common factor between graduate and employer, and collaboration between academia and industry is a shared responsibility between employer and MBA educator. Thus, the literature review will focus on highlighting the curriculum of UAS MBA and its outcomes, then, investigating the critiques and challenges of MBA programs in the existing theories and research. Finally, identifying the associated skills of graduates' students as an outcome from studying MBA program, and as expected from their potential or current employers.

2.2 MBA programs' history and general types

In 1908, Harvard Business School was established and offered the first graduate degree that is called Master of Business Administration (Datar et al. 2010). After that, in 1957, the degree was introduced in Europe by INSEAD Business School in France, later became the most sought-after degree program worldwide. (AACSB, 2017.)

As a result of the popularity of the MBA degree, business schools around the world offer a variety of programs to their potential students trying to differentiate their MBA programs. Every institution tries to develop a distinct MBA program that meets the needs of its stakeholders and satisfies them about program length, course design, curriculum, pedagogy and delivery methods.

Types of MBA

An MBA seeker can easily find a program that conforms to his/her needs and commitments disregarding personal circumstances. There are multiple MBA programs offered by business institutions; the following options are the most popular among others:

Full-time MBAs: this type of MBA includes one-year and two-year full-time MBA programs. In this type of MBA, a student is deeply involved in the field, and it suits those who are not engaged in work and family life.

Part-time MBAs: since full-time MBA programs are not well-suited for people whose busy schedules and have many commitments or who cannot relocate to study, part-time MBAs have been developed to meet the needs of those people. This type also includes three formats of programs, first on is part-time on campus, or both campus-based and online which is called hybrid MBA. The second format is the online MBA program; the study is conducted through video courses, live web conference courses, or hybrid courses. Online MBA is considered the best match for the employees who are seeking a promotion in their current workplace, and for those who are obligated by family and location of living. The third format is EMBA or Executive MBA; this program may be available online and on the campus. EMBA is designed for middle managers and professionals who are looking forward to an anticipated promotion and move to the next level. Typically, most of the part-time MBAs including all formats offer its classes on weekends, or Thursdays and Fridays. There are also some specialized MBA programs that provide the students with a solid foundation and knowledge in particular disciplines such as finance, accounting, and hospitality.

2.3 Criticism of MBA

Despite the mounting numbers of MBA graduates and MBA programs offered all over the world, scholars and business practitioners still criticize MBA for declining to adequately prepare students with critical skills that are inevitable for organization success. Butler et al. (2008) argue that there is a broad consensus in research that there is an overstatement of the importance of applied research and analysis at the expense of skills development in MBA education. Therefore, management and leadership development seem to be restrained in MBA programs since it is trivialized to a set of analytical techniques (Garcia, 2008).

In the same vein, some other studies point out to the gap between theory and practice in MBA curricula that has also caused a gap between employers' needs and MBA graduates' skills. Elmuti et al. (2005) list two deficiencies in leadership education in MBA. First is the theoretical focus of the curricula that lacks a holistic approach to education, and the second is the inadequacy of ethics training. This deficiency has forced many organizations to seek external consultants, and do not hire MBA graduates because of

the lack of leadership skills (Tay 2001; Elmuti 2005). Thus, the call for business schools to update their curricula today is a must (Datar et al.2011).

McGill University's Henry Mintzberg, in his seminal book "Managers Not MBAs" in 2004 criticized business schools' methods of selection of MBA students and pedagogy methods as well. Mintzberg (2004) claims that business schools deal with management as a profession student can learn it without adequate experience, and business needs to leaders who help others to do, not who do themselves. Livingstone (1971) and Whitehead (1932) identified two kinds of people in managerial positions, Mintzberg (2004) used this classification to support his view of wrong people in MBA (figure 1). Few people have "will to manage," and those are good leaders who can foster others to success. On the other side, many people have the "zest for business," those are much in MBA education, and their influential motivations are higher salaries and positions. (Livingstone 1971; Whitehead 1932, cited in Mintzberg 2004, 16.)

Figure 2 below shows that there are four classifications of people. Some have only the will to manage, and public sector positions may fit them the most. Some people have only the zest for business, Mintzberg (2004) claims that most of them fail to run a big business as it was their hope.

		Zest for Business (after Whitehead)	
		NO	YES
Will to manage (after Livingstone)	NO	Do research or whatever.	Do deals, or run your own small business.
	YES	Consider the public or social sector; get experience as a manager, then study management.	Consider big business: get experience as a manager, then study management.

Figure 2. Business or management (Mintzberg 2004).

Finally, there are two sorts of people; one has both characteristics of will and zest, and the other has neither of them. The former may become successful leaders in large

organizations, while the latter non-leadership positions appropriate them. (Mintzberg 2004.) These claims seem to be somewhat exaggerated and lack the comparative approach between employees with MBAs and non-MBAs.

So far, there has been a lack of comprehensive evaluative studies of the MBA effect on students' skills development. However, there are a few studies have investigated the topic from the perspective of three major stakeholders, students or graduates, organizations or employers, and business schools' faculty or lecturers.

Baruch and Leeming (2001) in a comprehensive study have found somewhat of contributions of MBA on skills development, but contrary to past experiences, MBA has become inessential for success in career path except for the MBAs of the top business schools such as Harvard business school. Ten years later, Datar et al. (2010) published a groundbreaking book "Rethinking the MBA" in which a comprehensive empirical study was conducted, they criticize MBA for its curriculum which extensively relies on research orientation and includes a lot of analytical courses. Moreover, the classroom may not be the central environment for MBA, and outdoor activities and traineeship could replace them (Datar et al.2010; Datar et al.2011).

Despite the extensive researches that have been carried out on the value of MBA and the skill gap, only a few studies have dealt with the preference of skill set between the principal stakeholders of MBA, students, MBA faculty, and employers. However, Shuayto (2013) used a survey to compare the perceptions of HR managers and business schools' deans on the ranking of skills considered valuable for success in workplaces in the US. The findings suggest that there is a massive chasm between the skills' ranking of deans and employers (Shuayto 2013), these findings are similar to a previous study had been conducted in 2010 by Wickramasinghe and Perera, which has revealed the existence of the gap in skill preferences between employers, MBA graduates, and MBA lecturers.

Furthermore, the literature reveals that there is a dearth of studies that focus on part-time MBAs. Surprisingly, a few papers have investigated the impact of part-time MBA on the development of students' leadership and managerial skills, they have shown a positive effect on graduates' knowledge and skills, and the relationship between MBA and workplaces (Prince et al.2014; Prince et al.2015; Lämsä & Savela 2014). Also, a few researchers have made critiques right MBA institutions in their deceptive marketing to sell MBA programs, such as "our graduates are leaders," and the excessive emphasis

on mastering skills "not only developing" as learning outcomes may lead to erroneous notions of MBA programs' failure (Varela et al. 2013). Consequently, the MBA applicants should have reasonable expectations regarding employability, income and learning outcomes (Baruch & Peiperl 2000).

Table 1 summarizes the criticism of MBA mentioned above in the section, and the reasons for the skills' gap in the literature. Many authors have attributed the gap of skills between employers need and MBA graduates to many reasons.

Table 1. Summary of the criticism of MBA and reasons for the skill gap.

Criticism of MBA	Reasons for the skills gap
MBA graduates ill-equipped. A gap between employers' needs and MBA and MBA graduates' skills. A gap between theory and practice. A gap in skills' preference between MBA faculty/deans and employers. MBA graduates unable to transfer content knowledge to real situations. MBA graduates lack a global perspective.	Wrong people because of wrong selection methods of MBA students. Motivations of MBA students are not to learn but to earn. MBA curricula rely on theory-based model. Lack or absence of collaboration between academia and industry. MBA programs use "on size fit" educational model. Lecturers lack business experience. Disconnection between MBA courses and industry practices. Classroom is not the suitable environment for MBA. Unrealistic expectations of MBA students. Unabashed marketing of MBA. MBA outcomes are overly ambitious.

As it can be seen in table 1, some researchers suggest that it is because of the absence of collaboration between academia and industry, and the educational system provides an "on size fit for all" model (Malik & Venkatraman 2017). While some others refer to the motivations of MBA students are not mainly to learn, but to gain higher salaries and positions (Mintzberg 2004). Besides, lecturers have been criticized as well for their poor business experience (Shuayto 2013; Sulaiman & Mohezar 2008). Also, Datar et al.

(2010) blame MBA for the theory-based curricula and maintain that classrooms may not be the competent educational environment for teaching MBA students.

It is worth mentioning, in contrast to all the above-reviewed literature that an enormous number of studies have demonstrated the value added by MBA to students' skills and competencies. Many studies have concluded that following an MBA program has developed or provided students with a significant skill set including teamwork skills, problem-solving, critical thinking, communication skills, decision-making, interpersonal skills, leadership skills, manager mindset, and managerial skills. (Ly et al. 2015; Mihail & Kloutsiniotis 2014; Lämsä & Savela 2014; Prince et al. 2014; Hobson et al. 2014; Robles 2012; Kang & Sharma 2012; Sulaiman & Mohezar 2008; Baruch & Peiperl 2000; Baruch & Leeming 2001.)

Overall, there seems to be some evidence to indicate that MBA programs are not delivering advanced levels of leadership and managerial skills neither to students nor employers. A common denominator in the above review of literature is that there is a skill gap between what employers desire in workplaces and what MBAs do indeed provide to their graduates. On the contrary, many scholars hold the view that MBA has positive impacts on the development of managerial and leadership skills of students. The next section moves beyond this debate and will focus on the skills deemed to be critical for success from the perspective of employers, business school faculty, and students in previous literature.

2.4 Critical managerial and leadership skills/MBA skillset

Harsh competition and rapid changes distinguish today's business environment and labour market; thus, these require a well-equipped employee and manager with the requisite skill sets for success in such surroundings. Regardless of the different terms and definitions that have been given for those skills, various studies show a convergence of the definition of the critical MBA skills for success (Table 2).

Tanyel et al. (1999) used a questionnaire to identify the skill set deemed to be necessary for success from two different prospects, university faculty, and potential employers. The study has shown that employers and university faculty give more concern to communication skills, interpersonal skills, decision-making, time management, critical thinking, and writing skills (Tanyel et al. 1999). The same skill set mentioned above has

been referred to as "generic skills," which can be used in a variety of tasks, despite the nature of the industry (Jääskelä et al. 2018; Round Table 2002).

However, some skills considered the most important for employers and employability. According to the Corporate Recruiters Survey by GMAC (2017) see (Figure 3 & Figure 4).

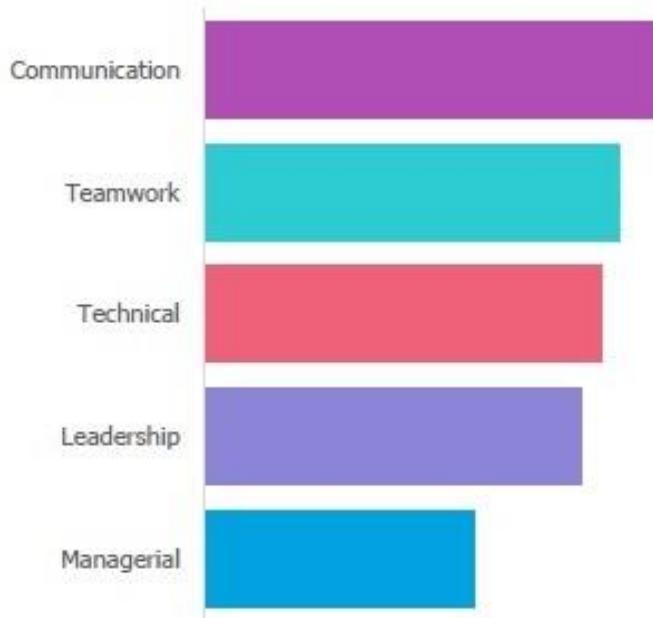


Figure 3. Importance of major skills set for employers (GMAC 2017).

The findings of 959 employers from 628 companies in 51 countries worldwide show that communication skills and teamwork skills seem to be the most significant for employers (GMAC, 2017).

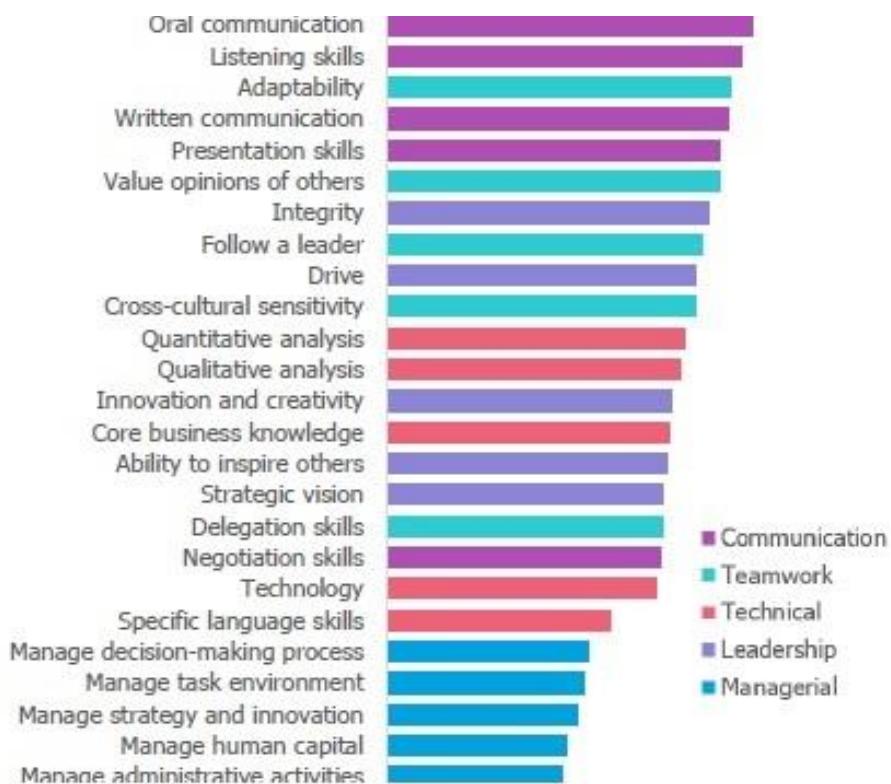


Figure 4. Ranking of the specific skills for recruitment (GMAC 2017).

Also, the top five specific skills belong to the communication and teamwork skill sets. As shown in figure 4 above, employers rank oral communication, listening skills, adaptability, written skills, and presentation skills at the top of the required skills in workplaces.

Interestingly, students' perceptions of desirable MBA skills indicate the similarity to employers' perceptions of MBA skill set. Baruch and Leeming (2001) conducted a study in the UK to explore MBA graduates' perceptions of the necessary skills in their current jobs. Graduates reported skills set similar to competencies that employers expect and require in their employee. These skills are effective reading, oral presentations, written presentations, time management, research inquiry, team leadership, and negotiating skills. Noticeably, that most of the skills appertain to communication skills, and the others belong to leadership and managerial skills. Also, in some other studies students or graduates have supported the same skills set mentioned above, among others (Ly et al. 2015; Wickramasinghe & Perera 2010; Sulaiman & Mohezar 2008).

Furthermore, perceptions of university faculty about the critical MBA skill set seem to be consistent with employers' and graduates' perceptions in the literature. Tanyel et al. (1999) found that oral communication, interpersonal skills, written communication, time management, critical thinking, and decision-making are the most significant for university faculty. Similarly, university lecturers and business schools' deans retrospectively in (Wickramasinghe & Perera 2010; Shuayto 2013) suggest the same skills set as in Tanyel et al. (1999) to be the most valuable competencies MBA students need.

Table 2 below presents the skills that frequently mentioned in many studies on this topic. As shown in the table 2, several terms have been used to describe the same skill set, from different perspectives, from different countries and cultures over the time. In addition, the table 2 shows that there is a broad consensus among employers, graduates, and lecturers on the skills considered important in MBA graduates. Communication skills, teamwork skills, interpersonal skills, time management, problem-solving, decision-making, and leadership skills are the most frequently cited in previous research to be significant in MBA education.

Table 2. The skills deemed critical for MBA graduates in the literature.

Skills	Used term	Whose perception?	Study & Where?
5 major skills: 1- communication skills (oral, listening, written, presentation skills). 2- teamwork skills 3- technical skills 4- leadership (integrity, drive others, creativity, vision, inspire others) 5- managerial skills (decision-making, manage strategy, manage tasks).	Skill sets	Employers	GMAC (2017) 51 countries worldwide
Top 10 skills: communication, social skills, integrity, teamwork, work ethic, responsibility, courtesy, positive attitude, flexibility, professionalism.	Soft skills	Business Executives	Robles (2012) USA
Problem-solving, self-confidence, teamwork, oral communication, positive attitude, decision-making, written communication, learning skills,	Employability skills	Employers, Lecturers & Graduates	Wickramasinghe & Perera (2010) Sri Lanka

Problem-solving, technology literacy, integrative thinking, decision-making, critical thinking, strategic thinking, oral & written communication, cross-culture skills, emotional intelligence, ethical outlook, global perspective.	Managerial & Leadership skills	Literature & Author	Brooks (2006) USA
Communication skills (oral & written), teamwork, conflict-managing, cultural diversity, strategic planning, ethical leadership, change management, academic knowledge.	Leadership skills Soft managerial skills	Literature review	Elmuti et al. (2005) USA Varela et al. (2013) USA
Time management, oral, writing & presentation skills, negotiating skills, team leadership, interviewing skills, stress management, effective reading, research inquiry, problem-solving, decision-making, converge management	Necessary skills Required skills Required skills Generic skills Managerial skills Managerial skills & Soft skills	Graduates Students Students Literature review Graduates Employers & B.S Deans	Baruch & Leeming (2001) UK Ly et al. (2015) Vietnam Sulaiman & Mohezar (2008) Malaysia Jackson (2013) AUS Mihail & Kloutsiniotis (2014) Greece Shyayto (2013) USA
4 major skill sets: interpersonal skills, information gathering skills, analytical skills, behavioral skills.	Leadership Skills Profile LSP= 12 skills	Entering students Vs Exiting students	Kretovics (1999) USA
Oral communication, responsibility, time management, decision-making, teamwork, analytical skills, ethical value, interpersonal skills.	Generic skills & Skill set for success Generic skills Generic skills	Employers & University Faculty	Tanyel et al. (1999) USA Round table (2002) AUS Jääskelä et al. (2018) Finland

Together these studies outline that there is a general agreement among employers, educators, and students on the relevant skills for MBA graduates in working life.

2.5 Desirable skills by Finnish employers

While the above-mentioned body of this study points to the desirable generic skills by employers in an MBA graduate, but those review has focused on the skills required by employers all over the world regardless of the culture and language difference of the countries. Despite the fact that all industries exist in many or almost everywhere in the

world, and the generic skills an employer needs in the US, for example, could be the same required for an employer in Finland from the same field or sector, there are some divergences of the importance of those skills or in the preference from one country and culture to another. Thus, this section focuses on the generic skills that considered most important for Finnish employers and expected from an MBA graduate to have.

Although we have highlighted several studies examine the topic of the desired skills by employers in Finland, it obviously seems that there is a scarcity in research that deals with the issue from employers' perspective in Finland, most of the previous work has addressed the problem from graduates' and/or educators' perspective, while a few studies concentrated on employers perception of the desired skills.

Finland is a bilingual country with Finnish speaking majority, and the Swedish speaking minority. Therefore, the communication skills required are different from other working cultures and countries. Lehtonen and Karjalainen (2008) conducted a study to explore the language skills and cultural aspects that could be valuable by Finnish employers in their employees. The comparative study between 1190 survey participants of employed graduates and 19 HR managers from 15 Finnish employers were interviewed to highlight those skills related to language and culture and affect the employability decision to hire a graduate. The findings show that the English language considered important for all sectors and in particular the public sector with the Finnish language, then comes Swedish, Russian and German languages. The significance of language skill and its impact on some other skills such as cross-cultural skills, presentation skills, communication skills (writing, oral, and listening), negotiation skills, and teamwork skills were emphasized by employers. One employer summarized the critical role of languages in one sentence "breaking the ice would be in the mother tongue, the negotiating in another such as English." (Lehtonen & Karjalainen 2008.)

MBA is an international degree and in Finland, there are many international students in Finnish universities and UAS as well. Thus, the employability of international graduates from Finnish universities was the topic in number of previous studies in Finland. Shumilova et al. (2012) presented interesting results of Valoa Project that endeavored to discover the most important factors that influence the employment decision in Finland, and the critical skills relevant to employ a graduate of Finnish Universities. This study used the same technique as in Lehtonen and Karjalainen (2008), a survey for 363 international graduates and interviews for 20 Finnish employers and compared both findings.

Both, employed graduates and employers stated almost the same skillsets that considered significant in workplaces but a notable discrepancy between them in the required level of those skills, international graduates believe that they have obtained a higher level of skills than required in workplaces, while employers perceive that the skills level of international graduates is lower than required in workplaces. Figure (5) presents the divergence of the skills level of each group (Shumilova et al. 2012).

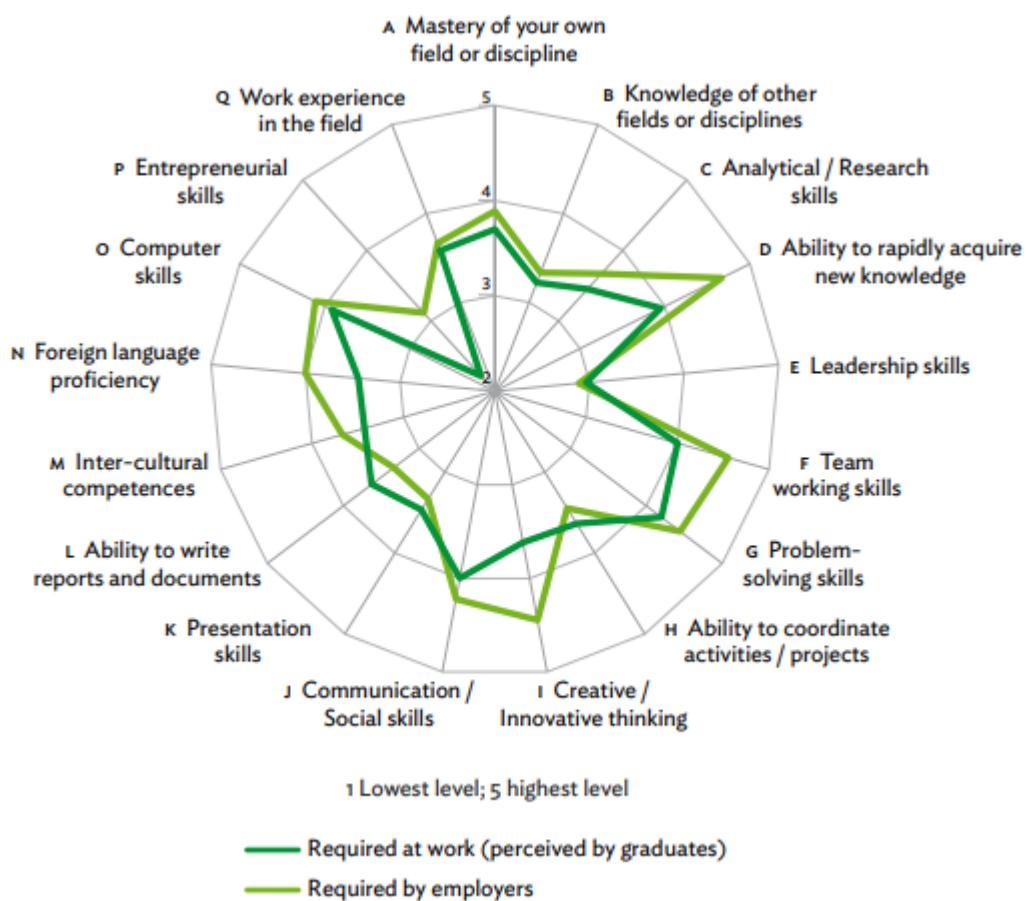


Figure 5. Desirable skills by employer vs graduates Shumilova et al. (2012).

The gap of perception between the skills level required can be seen in foreign language skills, teamwork, problem-solving, and innovation skills that were given a higher level of importance by employers than graduates. The Finnish language was the most desirable with the English language in communication skills. Also, presentation skills, teamwork skills, Finnish cultural skills, and working independently are highly appreciated by Finnish SMEs and large companies' employers to recruit international graduates in their organizations (Shumilova et al. 2012.)

In the same vein, Cai (2012) carried out a study to examine the possibility of recruitment of an international graduate of Finnish universities or UAS in Finnish companies that located overseas, the study took Chinese graduates and Finnish employers in China as an example of this. Interviewing 16 Finnish companies in China produced a skillset that employers need from Chinese graduates, cross-cultural skills came in the first rank as important to facilitate the communication between Finnish managers and Chinese employees, and to understand the Chinese market. The ability to solve problems was one of the important skills expected from a Chinese graduate who studied in Finland relying on the wider knowledge and practical skills that Finnish higher education provides than those in Chinese education. Moreover, language skills and particularly in Finnish are highly valued by Finnish employers if they could be found in a Chinese graduate. Also, some other soft skills that have been referred by employers were leadership skills, communication skills, and teamwork skills. (Cai 2012.)

Noticeably, the skills gap between employers' expectations and actual graduates' skills was the center of most previous studies on the topic. Another comparative study by Manninen and Hobrough (2000) focused on identifying the required skills by SMEs employers in five European countries (Finland, Denmark, UK, Germany, and Ireland) and those provided by the education systems of these countries. The study used the five types of skills were identified by Väärälä (1995) calls it qualifications, these skillsets are "doing" or professional skills that are necessary for working practices, "willing" or motivation and loyalty, "adapting" means discipline and following the rules, "working with others" or socio-cultural skills and this includes communications, teamwork, and cross-cultural skills, and "learning" or innovative skills to be able to analyze own performance and work, to be able to develop own skills through continuous learning. Interestingly, the data findings of the qualitative open questionnaire show that Finnish graduates and SMEs employers agreed on the skills' types required with the same order of the skills as follows, vocational and professional, socio-cultural, innovative, motivational, and learning skills. The study concluded with results suggest that Finland has a vocational orientation of the desirable skills in workplaces the same as Germany, while the UK and Denmark have a "modern workstyle" based on soft skills. (Manninen & Hobrough 2000.)

Similarly, Cinque (2016) investigated the same problem (skills gap) based on previous literature and analyzing data of two large European projects aimed to identify the soft skills that the researcher considered them a subset of the generic skills required for

employment and success in working life. Cinque (2016) identifies generic skills as "the skills that could be used and transferred among different contexts and occupations in workplaces", in this study, 22 academic teacher and 47 employers from 9 European countries including Finland (UK, Italy, Spain, Poland, France, Belgium, Germany, Greece) participated in focus groups to present the most important employability skills taken into account when hiring an employee. The most mentioned skills by both, employers and academic teachers were communication skills, teamwork, learning skills, motivation, and technical skills. The study suggests that there are some skills may be needed for one company but not for another depending on the industry field, size and organization culture, problem-solving and analytical skills are examples of these skills, while they are significant but people won't be hired for them. Also, technical skills, if some employee lacks them, probably the company will train that employee and not lay off. Thus, more emphasis was demonstrated on "soft skills" than other ones, a total of 22 soft skills were classified into three groups social skills, personal skills, and learning skills (Cinque 2016). This study has not only examined the skills gap problem from the three main stakeholders of the education, students/graduates, academic teachers, and employers but also it has provided and recommended methods to develop those skills essential for employers and employability.

Furthermore, the employment situation of 1294 master's degree graduates from the University of Eastern Finland (previously, Joensuu and Kuopio) has been used by Puhakka et al. (2010) to measure the success of the degree to prepare those employed graduates with the skills required in their current jobs and what are these skills. The graduates of UEF in 2001 and 2002 were investigated in the 2006 and 2007 survey, 83% were employed and divided into two main groups, professionals and generalists who represent different sectors and industries with at least five years of working experience. The skillsets that most relevant to employed graduates and used in workplaces were teamwork, communication skills particularly in Finnish, problem-solving, information acquisition skills, organization and cooperation skills (Puhakka et al. 2010).

In view of all that has been mentioned so far, it seems that there is concurrence on the generic skills that are required for success in workplaces regardless of the various names and definitions have been given to describe those skills, for example, soft skills, social competencies, transversal competencies, basic skills, employability skills, key competencies, 21st-century skills, and generic competencies (Cinque 2016). The studies on the topic also intended to focus on the research problem from different

perspectives in the Finnish environment such as employed graduates, international graduates, Finnish employers in Finland and abroad, and academic teachers' perception as well.

An overview of the UAS education system and the MBA curriculum at Turku University of Applied Sciences (Turku UAS), and presenting courses' outcomes of Turku UAS MBA program will be introduced in the next section.

2.6 Finnish UASes and MBA programs

Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) are of the international higher education institution community, and they provide multidisciplinary Master's programs that are practically oriented. UAS Master's degree programs began in 2003 and produced about 13,000 graduates to the Finnish labor market until 2015, this number represents 13,4% of Master's degree holders in Finland. UAS Master's degree is equal to those degrees from the Finnish Universities and conforms with level 7 of the European Qualification Framework (EQF). The applicants of UAS MBA need to have two years of work experience related to the business management sector to be eligible for the study, a relevant bachelor's degree, and a high level of English language as well. The study lasts 1.5-3 years to complete and a blended learning model is applied. (Arene 2018)

According to Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC), 12 Universities and 23 UASes provide 680-degree programs every year, FINEEC accomplished a wide evaluation process of higher education in four sectors and highlighted some important strengths, and presented some recommendations for development. The key strengths of higher education in the business field are: the degrees' structure is competence-based and produces generic working life skills, includes national cooperation structures, internationalization has also been addressed in planning and implementation of the degrees. Moreover, FINEEC presented some recommendations for development in business education. First, giving more attention to strengthening generic skills. Second, internationalization should be integrated into business education in a broader sense with significant skills such as multicultural competence. Third, Digital skills are critical in 21st-century working life and should be emphasized in MBA degree programs. Finally, systematic field-specific cooperation between UASes and Universities is a must, and UAS education is recommended to be not only competency-based but also research-based. (FINEEC 2020)

This thesis targets the MBA graduates of Turku University of Applied Sciences (Turku UAS). Thus, the curricula of the two MBA programs of Turku UAS in 2019 (MBA in project management) and 2017 (MBA in business development), these curricula were the MBA programs that the sample of this thesis had studied. Courses' outcomes are previewed in this section as mentioned on Turku UAS's official website. Table 3 presents a summary of the courses' outcomes of the Turku UAS MBA program.

Table 3. MBA in business development (2017) curriculum and courses' outcomes.

MBA in Business Development (2017) curriculum	Courses' outcomes
<p><i>Management studies</i></p> <p>Innovation Management</p> <p>Strategic Management</p> <p>Inspiring Operating Environment</p> <p>Leadership in Public Organization</p> <p>Management of Knowledge&competence</p> <p>Management Communication</p> <p>Public Affairs</p> <p><i>Research&Development Methods</i></p> <p>Research Methods</p> <p>Qualitative Research Methods</p> <p>Quantitative Research Methods</p> <p>Future Studies</p> <p>Development&Operational Research</p> <p><i>Business Development</i></p> <p>Leadership of Customer</p> <p>Financial Management</p> <p>Finances & Funding</p> <p>Contracting Skills</p> <p>Alternative Dispute Resolution</p> <p>Regulation of Communication</p> <p>Advanced Literature</p> <p><i>Library&Information Service</i></p> <p>Information as a Leadership</p> <p>Library Science&Information Research</p> <p>Library Service Design</p> <p><i>Virtually Implemented Studies</i></p> <p>Social Marketing Management</p> <p>Emotions in Business&Social Media</p> <p>Communication Competence</p> <p>Knowledge&Competence Management</p> <p>Master's Thesis</p>	<p><i>Outcomes</i></p> <p>Creativity&innovation,service development, leadership&management skills, strategic thinking, teamwork skills, supervisor&supervisee skills, analytical thinking, decision-making, communication</p> <p><i>Outcomes</i></p> <p>Gathering data, analytical skills, writing report, communication skills, presentation Critical thinking</p> <p><i>Outcomes</i></p> <p>Customer management, information management, financial management, analyzing&reporting systems,decision-making, technical skills, communication skills</p> <p><i>Outcomes</i></p> <p>Analytical skills, using information, service design, collecting data</p> <p><i>Outcomes</i></p> <p>Marketing management, analytical skills, decision-making, emotional intelligence, communication skills in virtual work, leading virtual team members, English language skills, problem-solving</p> <p>Writing report, data gathering, analytical skills, communication skills.</p>

Table 3 above illustrates each course and its outcomes of Turku UAS MBA program in development management (2017); the curriculum includes sets of courses that primarily focus on the skills and knowledge required for the working life of the business management field.

- 1- Management studies include seven courses as can be seen in table (3), this course endeavors to provide students with skills like creativity&innovation, service development, leadership &management skills, strategic thinking, teamwork skills, supervisor&supervisee skills, analytical thinking, decision-making, and communication skills.
- 2- Research and development methods: this set of courses includes five courses, and they enable students to acquire many important skills for academic and working life as well, gathering data, analytical skills, writing reports, communication skills, presentation, critical thinking.
- 3- Business development studies seven courses; the courses provide students with customer management, information management, financial management, analyzing&reporting systems, decision-making, technical skills, and communication skills.
- 4- Library and information service; these are courses that provide students with some skills such as analytical skills, using information, service design, collecting data.
- 5- Global Supply Chain Management; the course provides students with strategic plans for supply chain management, create solutions to problems, and develop students' ethical position.
- 6- Virtually implemented studies include four courses focus on different competencies, emotional in business course endeavors to develop students' emotional intelligence skills, and communication competence course aims to improve students' communication skills. Also, the social marketing management course aims to give students a deep understanding of customer relationship management and analytical skills.
- 7- Master's Thesis; a student could identify the research or development in the professional field, could plan, implement, assess and report research or development, also, students could analyze and produce outcomes related to the working field. Improving English language skills is one of the most outcomes of the thesis process as well.

Table 4 below presents the curriculum of Turku UAS MBA program in Project Management (2019), the program is divided into sets of courses that concentrate to develop specific skills.

Table 4. MBA in project management curriculum and courses' outcomes.

MBA in Project Management (2019) curriculum	Courses' outcomes
<i>Project Management in Development</i> Project Operation Framework&Processes System Analysis & Development Methods	<i>Outcomes</i> Managerial skills, leadership skills, gathering data, analytical skills
<i>Project Management</i> Project Preparation Project Planning Project Implementations	<i>Outcomes</i> Managerial skills, analytical skills, planning Project&risk management skills, leading virtual team, communication skills
<i>Research&Development Method</i> Research Methods Data Analysis Action Research Future Studies	<i>Outcomes</i> Collecting data, analytical skills, writing reports, presenting result, critical thinking, reporting orally&in writing
<i>Management Studies</i> Strategic Management Inspiring Work Community Managing Knowledge&Competences Leadership Communication	<i>Outcomes</i> Strategic thinking, decision-making, change management, interpersonal skills, supervisor&supervisee skills, English language skills, leadership skills, develop competences of personnel, communication skills, management skills
<i>Elective Studies</i> Projects as Business	<i>Outcomes</i> Managerial skills, teamwork skills
<i>Thesis project</i> Master's Thesis	<i>Outcomes</i> Communication skills orally and writing, gathering data, lead complex assignment, analytical skills, problem solving

- 1- Project management in development: two courses center on project management to foster students' managerial skills, and analytical skills as well.
- 2- Project management preparation, planning, and implementations, three significant courses deepen students' understanding of project management systems and skills. Leading teamwork, communication skills, technical skills, analytical skills, and management skills are the outcomes of these courses.
- 3- Research and Development Studies; also contain different courses that enhance students' analytical skills, writing skills, and research and planning skills.
- 4- Management Studies; these contain many subjects that focus on management, strategy, HR competence, communication skills, and leadership skills.

5- Master's thesis: when a student completes his/her Master's thesis, this proves the student's skills in research development, gathering information, analytical skills, and improving language skills in communication.

It can be seen that the outcomes of Turku UAS MBA program include mostly all the critical generic skills employers need, and MBA students expect. Therefore, where is the gap? Are these the real outcomes that students get from studying this MBA program? The next chapter of this thesis attempts to explore answers to the research questions that may clarify the whole image.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how MBA students and graduates perceive the study of an MBA program that has developed their generic skills and what employers expect from an MBA graduate. This section of the thesis introduces how the research has been conducted. Thus, in this chapter, the research design and data collection techniques are presented, together with rationales for using them and their appropriateness for this study. Also, the target populations and sampling techniques, the location of the research, data collection and data analysis, and validity and reliability are discussed.

The addressed problem of this research was whether MBA programs produce a well-equipped employee/leader that meet employers' expectations and their needs for a graduate with a reliable level of leadership and managerial skills, or MBA programs have failed to achieve its central goal, students' expectations and their employers' as well. As explained in the introduction, the main aim of this research was to measure the impacts of MBA programs on students' skills development through exploring the perceptions of MBA students and of the outcomes of studying the MBA program and employer expected skills of MBA graduates.

The target population for this study is UAS MBA students/graduates in general but the sample of the study is the students and graduates of MBA at Turku UAS in Finland wherein the researcher is studying. The researcher of this study is a member of that population, but he was not a participant of this research. Therefore, the sample was a purposive non-probability sample technique, which enabled the convenience and easiness to access the participants and MBA educators as well. The graduates of Turku UAS MBA programs are the samples of this thesis. Thus, the email interview was sent to five Turku UAS MBA graduates, and to three Turku UAS MBA teachers, this access to the participants was through the help of this thesis supervisor. The non-probability sample techniques are useful when the researcher has not a complete list of the population (Saunders, 2012). The sample size is not known, but it represents the population of MBA students and graduates, also, all the participants have the same

intervention environment, such as program courses, learning methods, and teachers since they were graduated from the same school.

3.2 Research design

Research design includes all procedures of the research journey; it draws the blueprint, the direction, and the routes that may work best to reach the research purpose. This design consists of data collection, data analysis, measurements, philosophy, and techniques that will form an overall strategy or umbrella under which more details. (Saunders & Lewis 2012; Creswell 2014.)

Figure 6 below outlines the research design elements in the "research onion" by Saunders et al. (2009); it includes the chosen components of this research as well.

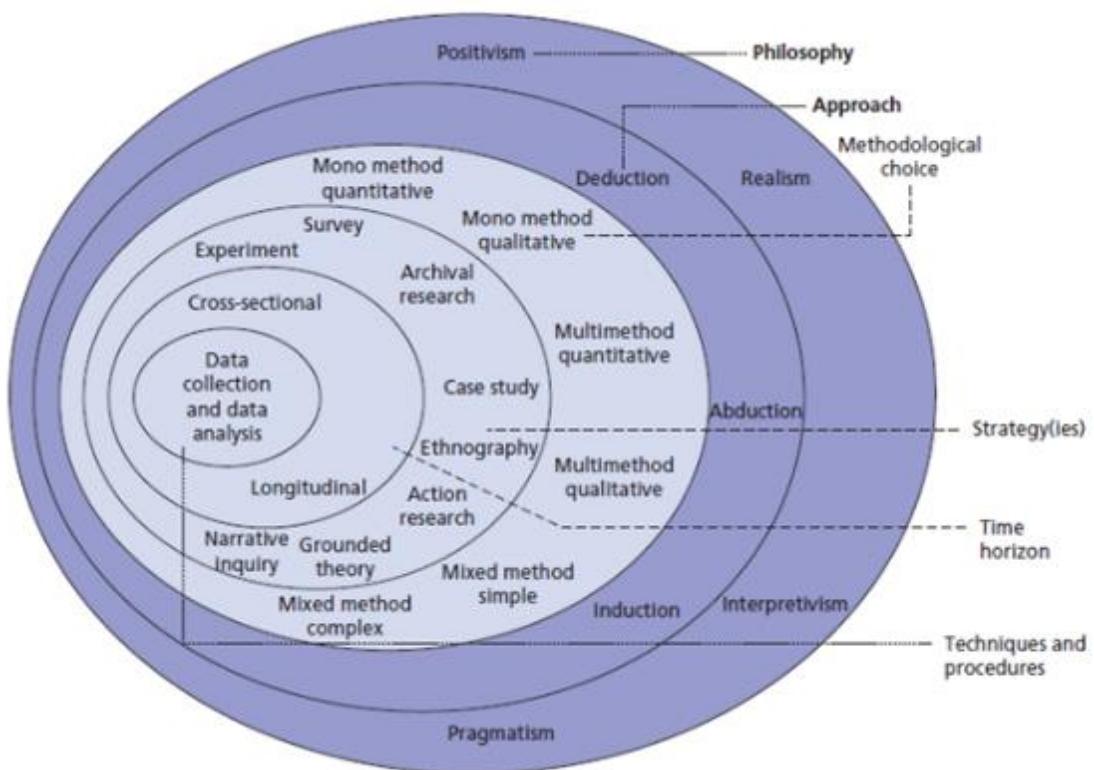


Figure 6. Research onion by Saunders et al. (2009).

As shown in the onion, the research journey starts from the peal of the onion and ends at the onion core (philosophy, data collection, and data analysis).

This study applied qualitative comparative method design to address the value of an MBA program regarding the development of students'/graduates' generic skills at Turku UAS in Finland and compare it to employers' expectations of MBA graduates. The qualitative research method using theme interview was employed to collect and analyze data that describe the impacts of MBA program at Turku UAS in Finland on students' generic skills, and secondary data to describe the perception of employer' expectations from an MBA graduate.

Looking back to the research onion, the first layer of the research is the philosophy; it is merely some researcher's beliefs about the way she/he will examine a social phenomenon, and how a researcher views the world around her/him. These assumptions or beliefs are also referred to as research paradigms, and it plays a significant role in choosing the strategy and data collection methods of a study, and it is considered the fundamental guide for conducting a research. The selection of techniques to obtain data in research represents the last step of a bigger research design (Saunders et al. 2009; Saunders & Lewis 2012; Rubin & Rubin 2011.)

For example, researchers employ quantitative methods to address an issue in their research; the rationale for this choice is their positivism philosophy that the truth can be reached through measures and variables. In contrast, another team of researchers bears interpretivism philosophy and use qualitative methods through dialogue, observation, and description to address the topic of a study (Rubin & Rubin 2011.) Between positivists and naturalists (interpretivists) stands the pragmatic researcher who prefers to exploit "what is possible" in practice (Saunders & Lewis 2012), and believes that research questions determine the choice of your philosophy or philosophies. In other words, the most appropriate philosophy or philosophies can be used to address the issue and answer the questions of a study (Saunders & Lewis 2012.)

Thus, for this study, the interpretivism philosophy was chosen to guide this research process. When researcher endeavors to gather rich insight into an issue, it is mostly represented by interpretivist. Researcher in this philosophy likely to use qualitative data from small samples, considering the value bound of the research, and focuses on participants' point of views. (Teddlie & Tashakkori 2009; Saunders et al. 2009; Saunders & Lewis 2012; Creswell & Clark 2011; Creswell, 2014.)

Therefore, this cross-sectional study used an inductive approach with grounded theory strategy, it is exploratory in nature. In other words, the inductive approach was used to explore the problems and to answer the initial questions (Saunders & Lewis 2012), unlike a deductive approach, the theory would follow data to build a theory not to test it (Saunders et al. 2007). Exploratory studies focus on “what is happening”, and one of the three ways to conduct is interviewing experts in the subject to reach deeper insight into the topic (Saunders et al. 2007; Saunders & Lewis 2012). Thus, Qualitative research design using theme interviews could be perfect for this causal-comparative research to compare the findings of students developed generic skills and educators' perspectives with employers' needs of those skills.

3.3 Data collection

The data collection of this thesis focused on two stakeholder groups of the MBA program; MBA graduates and teachers from which primary data was collected. While secondary data was used to answer the question regarding the desirable generic skills by employers in an MBA graduate.

The data collection methods using semi-structured interviews and/or questionnaire were the most popular data collection instruments in 232 articles (Bryman 2006).

3.3.1 Using secondary data

When a study has data that had been collected before the time of that study regardless this was raw data or published summaries and has been used or not in other research paper, this kind of data called secondary data because it was collected for another purpose than the current study purpose and also it was collected by someone else. There are many types of secondary data, for example, documentary data, survey-based data, governmental data, and scientific data, these types of secondary data can be seen in figure (7) below in details.

Using secondary data for research (2)

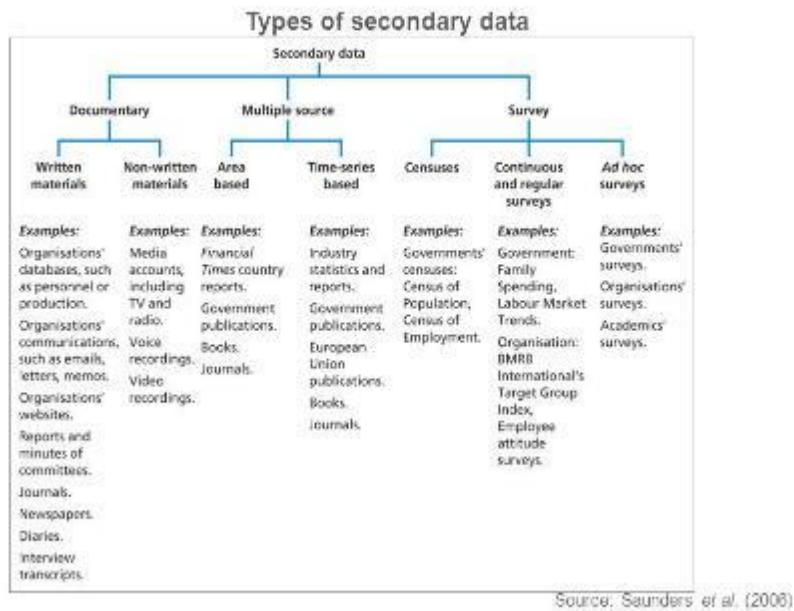


Figure 7. Types of secondary data by Saunders et al. (2006).

The figure 7 shows three major types of secondary data: documentary, multiple source data, and data collected by survey design, and every type has many sub-types of data. In this paper, the secondary data that has been used is multiple sources of data including articles, books, and reports that have been reviewed in the literature section, but also survey-based data report that has been developed by the Graduate Management Admission Council (GMAC 2017). GMAC conducts annual surveys that offer a deep insight into the trend of the current market and the factors that drive hiring demands for recent MBA and business master's graduates. GMAC Corporate Recruiters Survey (2017) provides valued findings from MBA recruiters on the employability topic and the desired important skills an employer looks for in an MBA graduate. More than 950 employers from 628 companies in 51 countries worldwide gave their responses that could be the essential source to answer the second sub-question of this study which asks about the desired skills by employers in MBA graduates, together with the data included in the literature review section from articles and previous studies that need to contents analysis, together this data can give us the answer for that question.

3.3.2 Qualitative data collection instrument

This qualitative study focused on exploring the context and MBA program's environment by the voice of eight participants who were purposefully selected to provide us with rich data and understanding. Thus, eight email semi-structured theme interviews were conducted with five MBA graduates and three MBA teachers represent both genders, different ages, experiences, and working careers. This technique was applied to get a deeper insight into the topic from two different perspectives, MBA students and educators. According to Puustinen (2013), theme interview is half structured and endeavors to cover the meaning and factual of a topic, and interviewees usually use stories and examples to explain their points of view. Moreover, using email-interview has some advantages such as low cost because there is no traveling, transcribing nor recording costs, also, it allows interviewees to say what they might not say in a face-to-face interview, and the researcher could conduct many interviews at the same time that save the time (Hunt & McHale 2007). On the other hand, an e-mail interviewer misses the non-verbal cues and facial expressions that would be in face-to-face interviews, participant of email interview may take a long time to reply and lose focus that may cause to give short answers to the questions, and access to the sample is another issue of email interviews (Hunt & McHale 2007).

Semi-structured interviews are highly used in researches, and it is a useful way to collect data when questions are complicated when the interviewer (researcher) not sure of some answers of the respondent, and when there is a need for a different order of the asked questions (Saunders & Lewis 2012). The interview protocol includes the agreement of interview with participants, sending themes of interview questions in advance to the participants, the interview guide, recording the interview is Important but in this case we used email interview and participants gave their replies in word document, posing the questions and probes after the respondents' answers, and finally thanking the interviewee for participation and time (Creswell 2014). The interview questions were divided into sections that cover a certain theme, personal and demographic information of the participants, and the motivations and expectations of studying the MBA, and the outcomes of the MBA program regarding generic skills' development.

Back to the research questions, our main goal was to explore the MBA students' perceptions of the value and impacts of the program on their generic skills development.

Thus, the researcher asked the interviewees to explain in detail what skills they have gained or developed during the study, and which of the courses were the most beneficial to them and why. Moreover, teaching methods and efficiency were covered as well, and the skills considered the most important in their working places. The structure of interviews was based on other researches' interviews, and reviewed literature on the topic to answer the research questions. Different types of questions were used in the email semi-structured interviews to cover the themes and to answer the research questions, open questions such as (how, what, why?), probing questions for exploring or explaining using expressions like (tell me more about, please give example, explain in detail), also, specific and closed questions were utilized to gather personal and demographic information (Creswell 2014).

3.4 Data analysis

Before commencing the analysis of the interviews, some important procedures have been to prepare the non-text data (audio-taped interview) for analyzing but in this study the data was textual ready data since the interviews had been conducted via email in word-document, these procedures involve recording the interview date and time of conducting, anonymizing the respondent's name by using symbols or numbers, writing asked questions in italics, using signals or symbols, highlight some important cues, expressions, and reviewing the word spelling and correct the typographical errors. (Saunders & Lewis 2012.), the analysis process starts.

The steps of analyzing qualitative data follow Creswell (2014, 197). These steps begin with a general exploring of the data through reading, followed by coding the data using open coding. Open coding refers to organizing the collected data from text or images using a representative term or word in the margins (Saunders et al. 2009). After coding, the data were classified into themes that were attached and connected to form a story or narrative text to present it in the discussions.

The interviews analysis of this study was carried through reading, the answer of the questions has been used to categorize the sentences, quotes, codes, and themes before have been labeled with a term. The first theme was the motivations of studying MBA at Turku UAS, the second theme was the expectation from MBA regarding generic skills' development, the third theme was the most important skills required in student/graduate's workplace, the fourth theme was the courses and learning methods

efficiency to developing the generic skills, and finally the skills that have been improved or gained from MBA program at Turku UAS. The matrix was used in this process of analysis. The phase of the analysis to present the findings of them interview was descriptive to enable the readers to understand the general findings, while the second phase was interpretative to answer the research question, and make connection between the data and reviewed theory, for example (Puustinen 2013; Creswell 2014).

3.5 Validity and reliability

In academic research, there are two critical tests for ensuring the accuracy and applicability of measures, instruments, and findings of the research; it is validity and reliability. Validity means that the research findings reflect the actual world of what has been measured a well-founded measurement and procedures (Saunders et al. 2009; Saunders & Lewis 2012; Creswell 2014). For instance, in this study, if a student scored a high development of leadership and management skills, this should predict the likelihood of that student performing well at work. (Creswell, 2014; Saunders & Lewis 2012.) Generalization or outer validity in qualitative research is almost impossible and the researcher must refer to it in the limitations of the qualitative research (Puustinen 2013; Creswell 2014).

Thus, carefully designing the interview questions was a critical step in this research; it was founded on themes that were emerged in reviewing the literature. Also, we used simple words to make the questions clear to the respondents. Moreover, the correlation between variables will be presented in the findings section, also to compare the finding of the graduates' interviews with the findings of educators' interviews, with the secondary data findings, and with the findings of the previous studies that used the same instrument or on the same topic.

Using secondary data in research could be a beneficial and good source to answer part or all research questions. Most studies use secondary data together with primary data to answer research questions. Researchers use secondary data for its saving in resources, especially time and money. Also, secondary data may provide us with comparative data that can be used in the research. The comparative way between secondary data and primary data has been used in this study to answer one of the main questions of this research.

Besides, for the qualitative studies, some procedures were conducted to improve the validity and reliability of the instrument and findings. Semi-structured interviews were the most commonly used instrument of data collection in 232 articles, alongside with questionnaires (Bryman 2006), this ensures the consistency of the reliability for this approach. Also, the textual responses were checked to make sure that it is error-free and without bias, and the researcher cross-checked the codes that were used in other similar studies and compared results with it. (Creswell 2014.) Regarding to validity of the qualitative data, data triangulation of different sources was conducted, codes and findings were checked with the participants to check the accuracy of it (Creswell 2014).

On the other hand, reliability is concerning whether the findings of the research would be produced similar if others used the same instruments, measures, and procedures in their research (Saunders et al. 2009; Saunders & Lewis 2012 & Creswell 2014). Stability and consistency of measures are the indications of reliability in research (Saunders et al. 2009; Creswell, 2014; Heale & Twycross 2015; Saunders & Lewis 2012). The stability of the data collection instrument in this study will be reached through the interview guide to verify and check the instrument and to ensure that the questions are clear, the interview questions had been sent to this thesis supervisor for checking before sending to the participants from MBA graduates and MBA educators to minimize misconceptions, bias, misspelling, and disorientations (Creswell 2014).

Limitations of the study related the methodology and population size. Lack of generalizability is one problem inherent in the usage of small samples in quantitative methods. Notwithstanding this paper investigates MBA outcomes from different perspectives, the participants of the study include MBA students and MBAs' employers. However, MBA faculty and deans have been excluded; the researcher believes that reviewing the MBA program curriculum and its outcomes represent the school's deans and faculty. The limited amount of the sample is another limitation of this thesis.

4 RESEARCH ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS' GENERIC SKILLS THROUGH MBA

4.1 Result of the theme interview

This chapter presents the findings of this qualitative methods design study of educators' and students' perceptions about MBA outcomes and the development of skills at Turku UAS in Finland. The findings are reported using narrative forms by themes from two perspectives, MBA graduates and MBA educators. The qualitative data were obtained from eight semi-structured theme interviews, five MBA graduates, and three MBA lecturers. Thereafter, the key findings and discussions to answer the research questions. Finally, a summary of the result is presented.

The personal and demographic data of the respondents of the interviews are shown in table 5 below.

Table 5. Personal & demographic data of the respondents.

	MBA graduates	MBA educators
Male	1	2
Female	4	1
Project Management MBA	3	
Business Development MBA	2	
Years of work experience of MBA graduates & teachers	30 years 10 years 13 years 11 years 12 years	30 years 29 years 20 years
Industry types where MBA graduates working	Service integration &Management Shipbuilding Educational institution Marketing & Advertising Construction	Educational institution
Job titles of MBA graduates	Project Manager Workplace Manager RDI Coordinator Sales Manager Key Account Manager	MBA teachers & lecturers

The respondents' information in the table shows that they are five MBA graduates, four females and one male, three have an MBA degree in project management and two in

business development. It is also clear from the table that the participants have different years of experience (10 to 30 years) from different industries, and all of them are in higher management level positions. Also, three MBA educators at Turku UAS responded to the theme interview, and their work experience is between 20-30 years (Table 5).

4.1.1 Motivations for studying MBA

All interviewees from the graduates answered the question about the motivation for studying the MBA program at Turku UAS, developing generic skills, and learning new skills were the main motivations for studying. The promotion in their job positions was the main reason for these motivations. One respondent said,

If I am applying for a job after 2020, it does not look good if my degree is from the year 2003, another respondent stated,

Continuous learning is crucial to cope in a changing working , one graduate said,

I wanted to go forward with my career. However, networking, building relationships with new people, the possibility of studying alongside to work, and encouragement from one friend or coworker were other motivations for the students and graduates to study MBA.

On the other hand, from MBA educators' point of view, most students are basically motivated by career advancement or qualifying for a higher position, then comes developing their skills. The three respondents of MBA teachers referred to the importance of study motivation and success and development happened in MBA graduates. One respondent wrote,

In my opinion the students who are motivated to develop their competencies challenge themselves more and more satisfied with their studies ,another said,

Motivation matters. If the only goal is just to get a Master's degree, the student may accept low grades. However, usually, students are highly motivated, which results in high outcomes and they get good grades. Also, MBA teachers mentioned other reasons for studying MBA, changing working career, new opportunities, and more options in working life were the most important.

4.1.2 Expectations from MBA study

MBA graduates answered the question regarding their expectations from studying MBA program at Turku UAS in different ways. High quality of teaching and teachers, knowledge sharing, learning new skills, useful tools for work, growing social network, and increasing digital knowledge were the most mentioned by three interviewees, while one respondent expressed her surprise at how easy the study and tasks more than expected. One graduate was not sure if there were any expectations from the study, she was familiar with the school and teachers because her previous study was at the same school.

On the other side, MBA educators believe that students' expectations are realistic, they expect to have good teaching and teachers, to provide them with the tools and skills that are required for today's working life challenges. However, MBA teachers emphasized the significance of the self-directiveness of MBA students because the study provides less lecturing and contact hours per course, and teaching staff is few. Also, two teachers pointed out a communication problem of the given information about MBA program for applicants, they noticed that some students are surprised or wondering about the teaching methods, obligatory courses in English, or few contact lessons, students expected more. One teacher said,

We have not communicated clearly what kind of requirements do we have for the students, another respondent said

I don't think the marketing of MBA is too ambitious. A different question is does it give enough relevant information. MBA educators believe that the marketing of MBA programs is not overly ambitious and it is realistic, it may only need more information and more clear communication.

4.1.3 Critical generic skills for working life

The interview guide included a skillset of 12 skills that were most mentioned and considered critical for employers and management positions in many previous studies, this skillset was:

Communication skills and improving English language skills (oral, written, listening, presentation).

Teamwork skills Time management

Decision-making	Conflict-managing
Cross-cultural skills	Analytical/critical thinking skills
Interviewing skills	Emotional intelligence
Ethical outlook	Global perspective
Leadership skills	(integrity, vision, creativity, inspire others, drive others).

The respondents answered the question regarding the skills required in their workplaces, all the five graduates mentioned the same of these skills, communication skills, teamwork skills, analytical skills, time management, language skills, intercultural skills. Nevertheless, each of the graduates considered one or more skills different from the other one according to his/her industry type, one said,

All of the skills in this list I need in my job, one respondent told how important English language skills, global perspective, and emotional intelligence because the international environment at the workplace. Technical skills, remote skills, and negotiation skills were also considered significant for two graduates because they are working more remotely. Similarly, all MBA teachers refer to the 12 skills in the list as important for working life, one respondent said,

almost all are required at least on certain occasions, but the top 5 in my perspective are: communication skills, teamwork skills, conflict-managing, analytical/critical thinking skills, and emotional intelligence.

4.1.4 Generic skills development from MBA

The central question of this thesis was to explore the impact of MBA study on students' generic skills development, this question was included in the theme interview and respondents from MBA graduates and educators gave their replies and opinions deliberately. All graduates responded positively about the impact of MBA on the improvement of their skills, some skills were mentioned by all participants, communication skills, time management, teamwork skills, project management, language skills, and analytical skills. Whereas, one graduate worded how was useful the MBA study for fostering his leadership skills saying,

I learned many things from the leadership perspective -i.e. hrm, beneficial leading methods, how the business environment has changed and how much it will change. I would say that the studying has given me much to think about on the management side, you need to be inspiring and skilled leader, strategic management, vision, and leading others at work were the most important skills that have been developed through MBA, for the same graduate.

In the same fashion, MBA teachers named almost the same skillset and same skills mentioned by MBA graduates, managerial skills, teamwork, communication, leadership, time management, critical thinking, cross-cultural skills, time management, decision making, and language skills. Generic skills are mainly integrated into the courses, innovation and creative skills are emphasized in our pedagogy, one teacher said. Notably, only two MBA educators listed global perspective and emotional intelligence as important ones of the generic skills, one teacher stated,

Global Perspective and emotional intelligence, but I hope also ethical outlook as well as, Ethical outlook was the first time mentioned by any of the interviewees.

4.1.5 MBA components and graduates' satisfaction

The last theme of the interview was about MBA components and their impacts on boosting the generic skills; in other words, interviewees were asked what MBA components they attribute the developed skills to. Students ascribed the development of their communication skills and teamwork skills to the learning methods at the class, such as presentations and working in groups in the classroom, one respondent said,

Group assignments and tasks in the classroom have helped me to improve my teamwork skills. Also, English language communication, gathering data, and critical thinking skills attributed to the assignments and thesis writing process, interviewing skills were improved through the research process and conducting interviews for collecting data. Additionally, MBA graduates appreciated MBA teachers and lecturers, their feedback and guidance, one graduate specified thesis supervisor who was very supporter saying, When doing the thesis, I also deep-dived into a very important service/solution area I need in my work. This was very much supported by the thesis lecturer and appreciated also for the learning purposes. Moreover, MBA graduates referred to MBA curricula and specified some courses that were very useful for fostering their generic skills, these courses are project preparation, planning, and implementation, project management, leadership and change management. Graduates also mentioned some technical tools and programs that strengthened their technical skills such as Canva and Team programs.

Likewise from MBA educators' perspective, MBA study has many valuable components that help students in different ways. Teachers consider supervised group work, peer review of learning assignments, skilled teachers, various courses, mixed backgrounds

of students, and active teaching methods to develop all generic skills highly. One teacher emphasized the importance of integrating generic skills into the MBA program and courses, with an example of the project management course where a student could develop some skills like the English language, team management, and intercultural skills. Also, MBA teachers see that a Master's thesis project provides and improves various skills.

Finally, it was important to find out what kind of lacks in MBA study and what recommendations MBA teachers and graduates may provide for improving. First, three MBA graduates believe that MBA study at Turku UAS didn't lack anything, MBA studies didn't lack anything. I am lucky that qualified and nice people have taught me during the years, one graduate said, while another one said,

MBA studies met with my expectations, and I don't find any lacks. The other two respondents indicated some shortages from their point of view such as old-fashioned evaluation methods stating

I think the evaluation method was questionable and old school, it lacks the modern way, and the same respondent recommended renewing the competence of MBA teachers in the real-life organizations. Another graduate perceives that MBA study was not enough linked to the working life, criticizing the UAS system saying

If the system is such where (nearly) everybody gets the degree, no matter if he or she might not have the skills you need, lowers the respect of the degree in the eyes of the employers and in working life.

Also, MBA educators emphasized some skills that should be integrated into MBA programs, artificial intelligence, well-being, data skills, and health-related skills are critical in the future in one MBA teacher's opinion. Moreover, another teacher believes that analytical thinking skills are required in this modern world, also he referred to the shortness of MBA study and older ages in MBA students than in university may cause some limits in the study contribution. The last MBA teacher underlined two important points, first, better communication with students to help them to find easily the provided good courses for generic skills, and learning goal should be more clearly provided to them. Second, the significance of the student's self-directiveness to the overall outcomes of MBA study.

4.2 Findings and discussions

4.2.1 Key findings and research questions

The findings of this study are consistent with some of those presented in the literature section, but at the same time, some of those findings differ significantly from some other findings of previous research described in the literature review chapter. As mentioned in the introduction, the research problem that this study has endeavored to address was the gap between "theory and practice" in MBA education or the gap between employers' needs and what MBAs offer of equipped graduates with the important skills for the business field. Two of the main stakeholders' perceptions were directly involved in this research, MBA students, MBA faculty, and employers as an indirect participant through secondary data from previous research to answer the research questions about students' outcomes from studying MBA at Turku UAS regarding generic skills, the required skills by employers, and the fit between what employers need and what MBA provides.

Particular attention was paid to the motivations for studying MBA since many of the critiques directed to the motivations of MBA students that are "not to learn but to earn." The results of this study support these claims by Mintzberg (2004), the main reason for studying MBA are the higher salary and position, or for a better job, the development of skills came in the second rank of the motivations for studying. I prefer to discuss the findings that answer each of the two research sub-questions separately to answer the main questions of this study and give the big picture of these results.

The first sub-question of this study sought to explore the perception of Turku UAS MBA graduates of the outcomes of studying the MBA program regarding their generic skills. The findings show that the MBA study enables the students to achieve reasonable development in some important skills; these skills are communication skills including English language, cross-cultural, critical thinking, leadership, teamwork skills, management skills, and time management. Surprisingly, these results are in good agreement with other studies which have almost shown the same findings; these studies are (Ly et al. 2015; Mihail & Kloutisiniotis, 2014; Lämsä & Savela 2014; Prince et al. 2014; Hobson et al. 2014; Robles 2012; Kang & Sharma, 2012; Sulaiman&Mohezar, 2008; Baruch & Peiperl 2000; Baruch & Leeming 2001).

Remarkably, the findings of this study confirm the findings of a few studies that have investigated the impacts of "part-time MBA" on the development of students' generic skills such as those presented in the literature section by Prince et al. 2014, Prince et al. 2015, and Lämsä & Savela 2014.

However, these findings are in contradiction with previous results reported in the literature, and specifically, Datar et al. (2010) which identified eight unmet needs that MBA graduates miss, communication, critical thinking, and leadership skills were the most important unmet skills that this study refutes, and they were among the most developed skills through MBA study, according to the findings from MBA graduates and educators.

On the other hand, the second research sub-question sought to determine the critical skills that an employer desires of an MBA graduate and considered important for management positions. The skillset of 12 skills that were most mentioned and considered critical for employers and management positions in many previous studies, this skillset was:

Communication skills and improving English language skills (oral, written, listening, presentation).

Teamwork skills	Time management
Decision-making	Conflict-managing
Cross-cultural skills	Analytical/critical thinking skills
Interviewing skills	Emotional intelligence
Ethical outlook	Global perspective
Leadership skills	(integrity, vision, creativity, inspire others, drive others).

However, previous studies showed that employers prefer five skills that MBA graduate to have, teamwork, communication, cross-cultural skills, analytical skills, managerial and leadership skills, were the most critical for employers, all these skills meet with students' outcomes of studying MBA at Turku UAS, while two skills (emotional intelligence, global perspective) were not in the foremost skills that have been developed, and the ethical outlook was not even mentioned by any of MBA educators nor graduates. This result lends support to previous findings in the literature that were found by GMAC (2017), Tanyel et al. (1999), Jääskelä et al. (2018), and Round Table (2002).

Furthermore, if we compare the findings of the developed generic skills of MBA graduates through the MBA program at Turku UAS with the courses' outcomes of Turku

UAS MBA programs as previewed in Table 3 and Table 4 in the literature review section, we can notice that all of students' developed skills are listed in Turku UAS MBA courses' outcomes. This means that Turku UAS MBA programs were largely successful in imparting many valuable working life practices and skills to MBA graduates. Overall of these findings respond to the research questions, and what has been presented of results demonstrates that the MBA has a role in developing and improving students' generic skills that are significant for management and leadership positions. In addition, the outcomes of studying MBAs regarding these important generic skills were largely being met with courses' outcomes of Turku UAS MBA programs, and with employers' needs as well.

4.2.2 Implications for MBA key stakeholders

This finding has significant implications for developing the MBA education and specifically for Turku UAS, and also for employers. For MBA providers, the top skills desired by recruiters of MBA graduates are communication skills including English language, cross-cultural, critical thinking, leadership, teamwork skills, management skills, and time management. MBA schools should focus more on these skills. One of the most significant "probabilities" of this study is that the results point to the crucial role of motivations for studying and the MBA enroller's work experience on the outcomes of the MBA study. UAS MBA requires at least three years of experience for applying, and the finding shows development in students' skills as similar findings of part-time MBA that required enrollers to have some years of experience before studying, this was one of the most critical criticism of MBAs by Mintzberg (2004) that MBA schools use wrong selection methods of students. Thus, business schools should require the potential students to have some experience to can apply for MBA; this rule is applied in Finland by UAS, which provides part-time MBAs, but this rule should be applied by academic universities not only in Finland but worldwide. A student when involves in the working environment and gains some experience, he or she will discover what is lacked or weaknesses and strengths as well, this will help to determine what she wants to learn and will ease the learning process since the motivation will be "to learn not to earn."

The result of this research also suggests that students are probably able to develop their skills better not only when they have some working experience but also when they are studying and working at the same time. The involvement in the work environment may

be a good atmosphere and circumstances for improving one's skills and may facilitate the transfer between MBA and workplaces. Also, the finding did not show any correlations between gender and the required skills or even the MBA outcomes. Moreover, students and employers appreciate generic skills than specific skills that are related to a specific type of business. Thus, MBA educators are asked to update their programs to meet these desirable requirements, for instance, MBA teachers in this study called to give more attention to digital skills that are crucial for today's business, this corresponds with the recommendations for business education in Finland by FINEEC 200. Finally, regarding the MBA components, MBA schools are recommended to create more effective teaching methods not only in the classroom but arranging outdoor activities that could develop some skills such as leadership skills through camping or group competitions.

4.2.3 Emerging issues

Some of the emerging issues from this finding are that neither students nor MBA programs give any attention to ethical outlook, almost no one mentioned it as an important requirement for employability and management positions, only one MBA teacher referred to this skill and wished to be underlined and integrated into MBA programs at Turku UAS. Global perspective and emotional intelligence are two skills that are considered a must for today's leaders and employees, but the findings show that MBA graduates do not consider them one of the important skills for their business and organizations, only mentioned by one graduate. It could be explained that global perspective skills may not be critical for the entry-level position, but participants in this study who are in higher-level positions from MBA graduates, and also employers in previous studies did give less attention to these two skills. The current situation of the changeable business environment, competition, globalization, and technology makes global awareness critical skills for employees and employers as well; many of our planet issues need ethical value to address, for instance, climate change. Thus, employers and business schools should cooperate and focus on such skills in business and education to prepare responsible people who can face these issues and address them.

4.3 Conclusions and recommendations

This thesis aimed to explore the effect of Turku UAS MBA on the development of students/graduates' generic skills, and how those skills match with the desirable skills by employers. Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that the MBA has provided students and graduates with some important skills and helped them to improve these skills. Also, the results showed that the developed generic skills of MBA graduates match with MBA courses' outcomes, and meet the sought-after generic skills of MBA employers. The most critical generic skills for employers are communication skills, teamwork, cross-cultural, analytical skills, leadership and managerial skills, these skills were the most developed skills through MBA study at Turku UAS.

As our findings show, MBAs can play the "gap-filling" role in the existing gap that was presented in several of the previous literature, but this requires efforts from the three key stakeholders of MBA (students, employers, and educators) to work in collaboration to produce a better leader and manager. A potential MBA student should think about the "time" of studying MBA, according to our study, it is more effective to study after gaining some years of experience, and also studying during working to have the chance of applying and transferring what you learn.

For employers or business organizations, they have a significant role in facilitating suitable working environments to enable and ease the transferring between academia or MBA and workplaces, working in collaboration with MBA educators to address the common issues to prepare a well-equipped leader. MBA educators are asked to be up to date with today's business requirements and provide our societies with a capable, skilled leader, and this calls MBA providers to update their curricula according to the present and future demands and rules of admission as well. For instance, requiring some years of experience would be beneficial for all stakeholders, and it is recommended to be applied not only for UAS MBAs in Finland but also for MBAs of academic universities. Moreover, learning methods should not be restricted to classrooms and campuses or online learning, but outdoor activities, practicing, and seminars. Teachers and lecturers of MBAs affect the development of students' generic skills, and the findings show that they have contributed to students' skills development, and the quality of MBA teachers is crucial in this learning system.

Recommendations for future research

Despite the limitations of this study, this research could be significant for the field and the topic of research. This study can be used as a forerunner for future research at Turku UAS on the same topic. Based on the findings of this study, some recommendations for further studies are presented; two approaches we believe could benefit the topic of study and would produce valuable data for us. First, comparative studies on this topic would be interesting, for example, comparing the perception of MBA students with working experience and those who have no experience after graduating, and examining what outcomes they have gained from studying MBA regarding skills development. Also, comparative studies of the performance of employed MBA students before studying and after completing the study could be conducted from employers' and students' perspectives. Another area for future research is to investigate the desirable skills for management positions by employers in the spectrum of "cultural differences" for example, in Russia and Finland, are they the same skills? Are those skills in the same preferences? Furthermore, comparative studies on the skills required for employers of different "industries" would be an interesting topic, this is an important topic the researchers could focus on in future research.

The second approach that could be profitable is the longitudinal studies cross-national or even international sample with collaboration with other UASes and Universities in Finland and abroad, such research projects would produce worthwhile data that may address the problems related to MBA education. For instance, measuring student performance and abilities before, after, and three years later, to examine the development of skills and performance at work. Different data collection methods and instruments with larger samples could produce richer data, interviews and observation with surveys in a study that includes the main stakeholders of MBA educations (employers, educators, students, and graduates) may be more valuable.

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