



Bridging the Employability Gap: Evidence from Oman's Logistics and Supply Chain Sector

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the employability gap affecting Omani nationals seeking employment in the logistics and supply chain sector, with particular reference to the objectives of Oman Vision 2040. Using a qualitative triangulation approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with industry professionals and a focus group involving experienced experts from the logistics and supply chain sector. The findings reveal that the employability gap is driven by a combination of technical skill mismatches, limited soft skills, and insufficient industry exposure, which collectively hinder graduates' readiness for the workplace. In addition, employers highlight that graduates often demonstrate misaligned career expectations, limited adaptability, and a preference for specific job roles, which further restrict their employment opportunities within the private sector. A key contribution of this study is that it reframes the employability gap not simply as a deficit of technical and soft skills, but as a broader mismatch shaped by labour market expectations, occupational perceptions, and socio-cultural influences. The findings also show that factors such as job prestige, working conditions, and gender-related constraints play a significant role in shaping career choices and employment outcomes. This indicates that improving employability requires not only curriculum reform but also a deeper alignment between educational institutions, industry requirements, and societal perceptions of work. The study offers practical and policy-relevant insights for policymakers, educators, and industry stakeholders by emphasising the need for stronger collaboration between higher education institutions and the logistics sector. It also contributes to wider discussions on workforce localisation, graduate employability, and the alignment between higher education and labour market needs in emerging economies.

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1. Introduction.

Oman's logistics and supply chain market is a key component within the wider economic diversification strategy as outlined in Oman Vision 2040 (Al Haziati et al., 2024; Sanni, 2025). According to Dione and Al Jabri (2025), the vision aims to reduce its dependency on oil revenues, leading to the development of non-oil sectors, with logistics identified as one of the key areas for growth. Oman's logistics location at the crossroads of Asia, Africa and Europe positions itself as a key gateway and potential regional logistics hub (Al-Wahaibi, 2019).

The government is dedicated to improving the logistics industry through modern ports, new infrastructure, and a highly developed transport system. Additionally, by establishing the Oman Logistics Academy in 2021, the country has indicated an intense commitment to developing a team of capable, Omani experts in the field of logistics to enhance the effectiveness (Al Ajmi, 2025). The core goal of the academy is to address the shortcomings of skills gaps in the workforce through relevant training systems reflective of international standards and emerging industry requirements. Additionally, the importance of the logistics industry in economic growth has also been evidenced by its contribution towards the GDP, which is projected to increase in the next few years (Smith, 2025).

Despite these concerted efforts, challenges persist within the logistics sector, such as skills disparity between the Omani

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graduates and practical competencies required by employers in the industry. According to Statista (2024), the youth unemployment rate in Oman remains a pressing concern, with a 13.92% unemployment rate in that country, highlighting the continued gap between the educational needs of new graduates and the individual demands of employers. As per Al Abbadi et al. (2021), the logistics and supply chain sector in Oman continues to face a shortage of skilled Omani labour. Employers highlight that lots of graduates lack the necessary technical skills related to the input of supply chain management, logistics technology, and inventory systems, and the most essential areas of soft skills, communication, problem-solving, and teamwork (Al Harrasi et al., 2023). It shows a consistent problem of the Oman education system, as the traditional academic framework has not thoroughly transformed in response to the needs and requirements of logistics and supply chains, as they are very dynamic and quickly developing.

Moreover, Oman highly depends on expatriate labour, especially in the technical and mid-level logistics sector (Lagger, 2023). This dependence on foreign workers with years of experience makes it hard for Omani nationals to fill key areas in the industry. Cultural and social factors continue to favour white-collar government employment, leading to general reluctance among locals to pursue technical or manual roles in sectors such as logistics (Pitychoutis & Spathopoulou, 2024). The use of expatriates also brings the need to fill the skills gap and increase the participation of more people in the logistics industry locally. The current strategies to sustain this dependency, i.e. Omanisation policies, are effectively working to empower Omani nationals and ensure long-term sustainability. To further enhance them, the government should keep investing in such programs and projects as internships, vocational training, and upskilling programs. Logistics should be encouraged as an enjoyable and meaningful career choice for Omani youth (Al Harrasi et al., 2023). Therefore, the study aims to investigate employer perspectives on skills gaps and workforce readiness of Omani graduates. It also evaluates key factors contributing to the gap, proposing actionable strategies to align graduate qualifications with industry needs.

While the government is taking various measures under the ongoing Omanisation drive and training in existing schemes like the Oman Logistics Academy, there is still a challenge in identifying Omani candidates with appropriate technical and skill requirements of the industry (Al Harrasi et al., 2023). The skills gap is more visible in supply chain management, logistics technology, inventory management, and other interpersonal skills like communication, teamwork, problem-solving, etc. Therefore, there is an immense dependency on expatriate labor, which is another hurdle in the way of attaining a self-sustaining, skilled Omani labor force. This is a challenge for the logistics industry in Oman, which is posing serious hurdles in attaining the goals set in Oman Vision 2040, which is based on a diversified economy with low dependency on oil products (Dione & Al Jabri, 2025). To resolve this problem, it is pertinent to explore all aspects of the skills gap in detail.

This study is also significant in the sense that it deals with an essential issue that involves Oman's diversification of the

economy, especially in the supply chain and logistics sector. The precision of the challenges faced by employers in integrating Omani graduates into the labor market is crucial in offering essential insights to stakeholders such as the government, institutions of learning, and business entities.

Although previous studies, such as those by Lagger (2023), have explored different facets of employability, the present study contributes to the employment literature by showing that employability gap in Oman's logistics and supply chain sector not driven by skills shortages alone, but also by labour market expectations, occupational perceptions and socio-cultural constraints that shape graduate employment outcomes. The significance of the present study lies in its potential to inform effective strategies for improving workforce readiness and reducing long-term dependence on expatriate labour in logistics industry. By exploring both the educational and socio-cultural barriers impeding the integration of Omani graduates, the study provides pragmatic policy guidelines for building a more independent and informed workforce, essential to realising sustainable economic growth and long-term prosperity in Oman's supply chains and logistics industries.

2. Literature Review.

2.1. Theoretical Framework.

The study is grounded in Human Capital Theory which stipulates that human capital investments in areas such as education and skills development increase productivity of individuals and lead to economic growth. This perspective is particularly relevant to the skills mismatch in the logistics and supply chain sectors of Oman, where there is still a lack of connection between graduate qualifications and industry requirements. When applied to the Omanisation policy, which focuses on the greater involvement of the Omani nationals in the workforce, it is also useful in explaining the difficulties in not only facilitating the education but also making sure that it corresponds to the changing needs of an industry (Al Harrasi et al., 2023). It is still noticeable even with the attempts to implement Omanisation policies and vocational training like the Oman Logistics Academy that the skills gap is notable especially in the new technologies like AI, blockchain, and supply chain software (Sanni, 2025). The lack of technical expertise and absence of soft skills such as communication and teamwork pose a challenge to the employment of Omani graduates in the logistics industry (Iqbal et al., 2021).

Moreover, Al Harrasi et al. (2024) emphasise that graduates do not necessarily have advanced skills in the domain of high technology such as AI and blockchain as the essential elements of modernistic logistics activities. However, Human Capital Theory alone does not fully explain the reluctance of some private sector employers to recruit Omani graduates. According to Al Harrasi et al. (2023), the employers within the private sector view local workforce as less productive because they lack experiences and policies aimed at Omanisation incur higher expenses, which makes employers less willing to hire local workers. The theoretical framework provided by this study

is also critical to demonstrate that although the Human Capital Theory highlights the role of skill development as one of its fundamental concerns, Omanisation policies need more focused interventions, such as industry-specific training, to guarantee that the skills gap is closed and that the labor market addresses its dynamic needs (Al-Mansoori et al., 2021; Wahab et al., 2024). However, the findings of this study also suggest that employability is not shaped by education and training alone. It is equally influenced by labour market expectations, social attitudes, and wider cultural factors that affect how certain careers are viewed and pursued.

2.2. Skill Gaps in the Logistics and Supply Chain Sector.

The logistics and supply chain sector in Oman continues to face a shortage of skilled individuals, which limits its ability to meet evolving industry requirements. Al Harrasi et al., (2023) analysed the value of knowledge and skills discussed in the Logistics and Supply Chain Management (LSCM) program, as well as the competency gap in the entrants in the first-year programs. According to the findings, logistics professionals understand the relevance of all the major learner attributes, knowledge, cognitive and general competencies that are obtained through an LSCM degree. Supply Chain Digital (2020) report cited that surveys concluded that at least 21% of organisations with working staff have employees who are not fully competent in their jobs. The gap is greater for middle and junior managers at 31%. Notably, managerial levels are most unlikely to plan training for the staff, and thus the skill gap becomes even larger. The survey also unveiled that limited funding, resources, and time available to spend on training are major drivers of the issue, complemented by inability to obtain the right training solutions in firms.

Other countries in the Gulf region also experience considerable skills shortage in the logistics and supply chain sector in comparison with Oman. According to a study conducted by Al-Mansoori et al. (2021) in the UAE, the increased need in logistics professionals in the environment of digitalisation and e-commerce curbed the supply of skilled labor, especially, supply chain management, AI, and data analytics. The same goes in Saudi Arabia where, according to Al-Dosari et al. (2020), although there is a huge investment in developing a logistics infrastructure, there is an acute shortage of a professional well trained in modern technologies (blockchain, IoT), as well as in soft skills (leadership, problem-solving, etc.). These issues are regional in nature, and it is necessary to coordinate the education programs with the demands of industry to eliminate the skills gap within the logistics sphere in the Gulf.

Moreover, Paužuolienė, Kaveckė, and Pyra (2024) stated that, with the digital transformation of the logistics industry, the technologies that powered the change include AI, blockchain, and the Internet of Things (IoT); this process contributes to the growing demand of skilled workers. Nevertheless, the availability of professionals who are knowledgeable in these fields is still a big lag. Kurniadi (2025) examined the effect of digital transformation on Indonesia's transportation and logistics economy, with an emphasis on the uptake of IoT, AI, blockchain, and cloud computing. However, obstacles like expense, poor

digital skills and fears of cyber security are preventing broader use.

As in most other nations, there are significant skill shortages in the logistics and supply chain business in Oman that compromise its ability to fulfil the needs of the industry. Wahab, Tan, and Roche (2024) stated that both developed and developing states lacked key competencies such as essential skills in the supply chain management, inventory control, and customer service. It has been determined that the ability to meet the demands of logistical work may necessitate competence in such expertise as the trade law, forecasting, and e-commerce, which most graduates struggle to master (Leni, 2023). Also, the increasing rate of digitalisation of the supply chains has resulted in the demand of specialists in the use of new technologies like AI, blockchain, and data analytics (Chauhan et al. 2022). According to International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2023) the disconnection between the results of education and the expectations of employers deepens the gap, especially in such areas as problem-solving, business process re-engineering, and negotiation.

2.3. Factors Contributing to Employment Challenges in Oman's Logistics Industry.

Oman's logistics industry, while crucial to the nation's economic diversification goals faces significant employability challenges. Al Harrasi et al. (2024) clarify that a distinct disparity between Omani graduates' qualifications and employers' requirements in the supply chain and logistics industries exists. The study reaffirmed that the graduates are typically lacking in hands-on technical skills in areas such as supply chain software, inventory management, and regulatory compliance. Moreover, Mohammed Al-Farsi, (2022) discussed that, soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving were also revealed to be lacking, leaving it challenging for graduates to behave under real working conditions. The gap in skills is at the core of the industry's overreliance on expatriate manpower because employers do not have the properly skilled local manpower.

Another critical cause of employability problems is the knowledge deficit in the logistics industry. As global supply chains become ever more digitalised, the need for professionals possessing skills in emerging technologies like AI and blockchain, and data analytics arises (Masengu et al. 2025). Oman's logistics industry, however, is plagued by a shortage of professionals trained in these next-generation technologies. According to a report presented by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (2023), the main challenge facing the employers in hiring the workforce is that they find it difficult to acquire the workforce with the appropriate expertise to manage the technologies. Chauhan et al., (2022) opined that, the shortage of professionals in the mentioned fields hinders the industry from innovating as well as competing globally, thus increasing the employability crisis.

According to Lager, (2023), cultural tendencies and social inclinations equally play a significant role in determining the employability climate within Oman's logistics industry. Pitychoutis, and Spathopoulou, (2024) argued that many young Oma-

nis continue to prefer government jobs or white-collar employment, viewed as superior. Such a preference hinders local talent drift into the logistics business, causing skills deficits in strategic positions. According to the Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology (2025), despite Oman having put Omanisation targets in place in the logistics sector, these cultural barriers are a significant concern. The reluctance to work in logistics and supply chain management leads to dependency on expatriates, who fill important technical and mid-level positions (Teresa, and Srambikal, 2022).

2.4. *Role of Omanisation Policies and Government Initiatives in reducing Skills gap.*

The Omanisation policy mandates companies to hire a specific percentage of local personnel based on their sector in an attempt to increase the number of Omani nationals in the workforce. For instance, in the banking sector, companies are required to hire at least 60% Omanis. While the policy promotes the hiring of local professionals, it also causes delays for companies that cannot find qualified Omani personnel within the required quota (AGBI, 2025). In this case, Lagger (2023) argued that this mismatch between the supply of local talent and sector-by-sector demand has manifested itself in the increased reliance on expatriate labour in certain industries, especially for mid-level and technical posts. As per Al Harrasi et al. (2023,) the government has, in response to this challenge, established the Oman Logistics Academy, with the aim of bridging the skills gap in the logistics sector. Waqas (2025) stated that, this project is directed at providing specialised training programs to equip Omani graduates with the skills required in logistics and supply chain management, thus increasing Omanisation rates within the sector.

The National Employment Programme (NEP) has come up with a logistics Omanisation master plan and a gap analysis of the existing conditions and where they need to be (D'Achon, 2025). This is followed by a plan of addressing closing such gaps and achieving national employment targets. AGBI, 2025 and D'Achon, (2025) explained that, despite these measures, the companies in the private sector continue to be reluctant to employ Omanis because they fear that their costs might increase and they will lose the productivity. To address this difficulty, the government has provided tighter sanctions to non-compliant companies; this includes increased fee and corroborated incentive reduction. Moreover, a Local Content Office is also proposed, which will track and measure the upsurge of Omanisation and In-Country Value (ICV) initiatives, and make sure that these policies are succeeding in bridging the skills gap and leading to the sustainable development of the local labor workforce (Al-Alawi et al. 2023). Additionally, in the report by Sawai, al (2025) assessed that, Omanisation and In-Country Value (ICV) is what Oman is all about in diversifying its economy since it attempts to reduce the employment of foreign workers and maximise the employment of local workers. The approaches include national skills building, local economy enhancement, and sustainable development.

2.5. *Empirical Gap.*

Although empirical research on Omanisation, In-Country Value (ICV) and human capital area in the logistics sector is growing, limited attention has been given to how these issues specifically affect employability outcomes in the logistics and supply chain sector (Al Harrasi et al., 2023; Al Harrasi et al., 2024). Existing studies have largely focused on policy responses, workforce localisation, and general skills shortages, while offering less insights into whether such interventions are producing meaningful improvement in workforce readiness. In particular, there is still limited empirical understanding of how employer expectations, labour market perceptions, and socio-cultural influences interact with technical and soft skill gaps to shape employability outcomes in this sector (Iqbal et al., 2021; Pitychoutis & Spathopoulou, 2024). This is especially important in the context of Oman, where factors such as workplace expectations, job preference, and private sector perceptions may influence graduate employment beyond education and training alone (AGBI, 2025). Therefore, this study addresses an important gap by providing a more context specific understanding of the employability challenges faced by Omani graduates in logistics and supply chain sector.

3. *Methodology.*

3.1. *Research Design.*

This research employed a qualitative design in exploring the views of employers regarding the skill gaps of Omani graduates and the workforce readiness of Omani workers in the logistics and supply chain sector. The research used semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews to gain the general understanding of the challenges and combined the perceptions of different industry experts. The research design was exploratory qualitative that is appropriate in studying complex issues, such as those of employability problems. Taguchi (2018) claims that focus groups and interviews would best fit qualitative strategies as they may be used to achieve depth-specific information.

3.2. *Sampling Strategy.*

The research employed the concept of purposive sampling in order to identify participants who have relevant experience and skills in the field of logistics and supply chains. 30 semi-structured interviews were undertaken and participants included those working in different sub sectors such as Maritime, warehousing, logistics, supply chain, and Ports operations. The selection criteria to participate in the interview were the participants needed to have practiced in their respective professions at least 5 years so that they could know better about what skills are needed and what are the challenges the industry is facing. The participants also belonged to different job roles like operational, managers, and leaders, which gave different opinions.

The number of samples collected, which consists of 30 interviews and 13 participants in the focus group, is deemed acceptable in qualitative research practices. In the study of Ruslin et al. (2022), it was established that the number of samples in a qualitative study, specifically in a series of interviews, should

be between 20-30 samples to ensure saturation without excess information. Furthermore, in the study of Lim (2025), it was established that the number of samples in a focus group should be between 8-15 samples to ensure a dynamic discussion.

On the other hand, the study also employed a focus group of 13 members of the industry. The aim of the focus group was to have a broad sector perspective on the collective theme that emerged during the interviews and triangulate the results. The interviewees were chosen due to their immense experience in the field of supply chain and logistics, so the selection will present diversity of views and expertise. The focus group was purposively sampled to comprise local and expatriate professionals as well so could shed a lot of light regarding the structural and cultural obstacles in the industry. Lim (2025) illustrates that a focus group usually consist of between 8 and 15 individuals as such a group allows dynamic conversation and makes sure that each member may contribute to the discussion.

3.3. Data Collection.

This information was collected through semi structured interviews which were done in person or online in response to the schedules of participants. The semi-structured format allowed flexibility to respond to the feedback of the individual participants and kept in mind that most important issues should be covered in every interview. With the consent of participants, the interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis. This method allowed us to collect rich, qualitative data, so vital to unlocking the employer requirements and skills gaps of the logistics and supply chain sectors.

The 13 sector experts were interviewed in a 3-hour focus group in August 2025. The interview was led by the researcher, employing a pre-agreed set of questions to guide the discussion, but leaving also open the possibility of free-range discussion. The focus group was held in a neutral setting so that respondents would be comfortable to share their opinions in an unstructured way. The focus group provided an opportunity for the dynamics of the group, allowing cross-validation and explication of the interview results, and providing a richer understanding of the employability problems in Oman's logistics sector.

3.4. Data Analysis.

The data was analysed through thematic analysis, which is a typical method for identifying, examining, and documenting patterns or themes in qualitative data as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). The procedure was done in a systematic way beginning with getting familiar with the data, where the transcripts of the interviews and discussion from the focus group were read multiple times to get an overall impression of the data. Manual initial coding involved designation of sections of the data pertinent to the research questions. NVivo software was used for assisting in the management of data, while manual coding was used wherever possible. The second step involved looking for themes, whereby the codes were being categorised into possible themes, from interview and focus group data. After the themes were analysed and refined, they were

named and annotated and were eventually incorporated into the findings and discussion. In this study, triangulation is applied to ensure the validity of the research results through the use of interviews and focus groups in cross-validation of the results obtained. This is because interviews offer in-depth information concerning the perceptions of the employers, while focus groups offer a wider scope of information through the dynamic interaction of the participants. This ensures that the researcher has a comprehensive understanding of the perceptions of the employers.

3.5. Ethical Considerations.

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the design and implementation of the study. Before data collection began, ethical approval was obtained from the relevant university research ethics committee as part of an internally funded research project. All research procedures were carried out in line with institutional guidelines for studies involving human participants. All participants were provided with an information sheet explaining clearly the purpose of the study, voluntary or not, and their rights to anonymity and confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained from all the participants, ensuring them that they could withdraw themselves from the study at any time without any consequences. The data collected from the focus group discussions and interviews were securely stored and made available to access by the researcher alone to ensure confidentiality of the participants.

4. Results and Findings.

4.1. Thematic Analysis.

4.1.1. Coding Table.

Table 1: Coding Table.

Theme	Code	Description
Skills Mismatch Between Education and Industry Needs	Mismatch in skills and industry requirements	Graduates lack technical expertise in logistics systems, leading to a reliance on expatriates.
Gender Disparity and Cultural Barriers	Underrepresentation of women in technical roles	Cultural expectations discourage women from pursuing technical/logistics roles, and there is a lack of gender inclusivity.
Employment Preferences and Career Perception	Preference for high-prestige jobs like government or oil and gas	Omani youth perceive logistics as a low-prestige field and prefer jobs in government, oil, or gas sectors.
Graduate Attitude and Expectations	Unrealistic job expectations (prefer managerial roles)	Graduates expect high-level positions without the necessary experience or skills, leading to gaps in employability.
Soft Skill Deficiency	Deficiencies in communication, teamwork, leadership, and adaptability	Soft skills like communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and leadership are lacking among graduates.
Industry-Specific Technical Training Needs	Lack of technical expertise in software, systems, and certifications	Graduates are unprepared for technical roles due to a lack of practical training in relevant software and certifications.

Source: Authors.

4.1.2. Skill Match and Training Gaps.

The theme has been built upon the basis of repetitive answers which refer to the absence of technical training among the Omani graduates, especially logistics and supply chain systems. The results of the interviews, carried out with the professionals in the industry, showed that, although the graduates

of the employers had academic degrees, they did not know how to work with the main tools of the industry, and the companies had to hire expatriates for the technical positions.

“Employing Omani nations in accusation within the logistics sector is a challenge due to the lack of specialised experience and skills required in key technical roles. The majority of Omani job seekers, whole possessing degrees, lack of hands-on-experience with logistics systems or supply chain technologies. This has forced companies like ours to employ expatriates for technically demanding jobs” (R1)

Response 2:

“In our experience, the shortage of suitable candidates for logistics and supply chain management roles in Oman is mainly because of the lack of specialised certifications and the inability to deal with new technology developments such as AI and automation. These are the skill sets that are not yet present among a lot of Omani job seekers, and it’s a serious hindrance to filling technical positions. Although we have advocated Omanisation, we must implement more focused training programs that can equip the local labour force to meet industry needs” (R4)

Response 3:

“The only significant challenge that is likely to affect the deployment of Omanis in the logistics and maritime-related fields is the mismatch between the skills that the locals possess and those required in the industry. This is because the industry is becoming more tech-dependent, where high-tech software is being utilised in the management of the supply chain, but the locals are not exposed to this technology. This is the reason why Omanis are not skilled enough to be employed in the fields that are crucial to the ports and the supply chain management efforts”. (R8)

The skills gap in the answers reinforces the conclusions drawn by Al Harrasi et al. (2023), which indicated that Omani graduates lack technical skills and industry-specific qualifications in the logistics industry. In addition, studies such as Chauhan et al. (2022) have emphasised the changing dynamics of the logistics industry, in which emerging technologies such as AI, automation, and data analytics are the focal point. Iqbal et al. (2021) also corroborate this observation, noting that there are critical deficits in soft skills such as problem-solving and leadership, in addition to technical skills, that aggravate Omani job seekers’ performance to the demands of employers. Theme 2: Gender Disparity and Cultural Barriers

4.1.3. Gender Disparity and Cultural Barriers.

This theme was provided by the prevalence of feedback on the low employment of women in logistics, especially those in technical and field occupations. Cultural norms and physical requirements of the job in logistics were discussed as both interviews and the focus group highlighted female exclusionist variables. The theme was established based on the responses that

highlighted increased gender-inclusive policies, mentorship, and flexibility at workplaces in a bid to accommodate women in such industries with the support of the literature of cultural limitations.

“In supply chain and logistics industries, the paucity of women, especially in technical and field-based roles like maritime navigation and port operations, is apparent. The Omani cultural expectations dissuade women from pursuing physically demanding work or long working hour jobs, which are common in the logistics industry. Despite some organisations trying to alter this through more inclusive policies and support for women’s involvement, the changes are incremental and the obstacles are entrenched.” (R6)

“The imbalance of genders within logistics is stark, especially in leadership and technical roles. While we do have female employees in administrative roles, women are underrepresented in operational roles, and this is in part a product of cultural expectations. The nature of logistics work, including late hours and travel, is seen as being inappropriate for women. Organisations need to take conscious steps to turn around such perceptions and provide an environment that will facilitate more women joining the industry, for example, through flexible working hours and mentoring groups for female employees.” (R3)

“Cultural barriers and gender expectations still hamper women from being complete participants in logistics and maritime sectors. While some progress has been achieved, the path towards total gender inclusiveness is still long. For instance, women would find it difficult to get field-based jobs in the logistics sector because the work culture is largely perceived as male-dominated. This comes with family duties, making it even harder for women to commit to shift-based or physically demanding jobs. As it is, more focus on gender-sensitive policies, mentorship, and flexibility in work structures is called for.” (R17)

As per the above responses, it shows that, gender inequality in supply chain and logistics careers is a common occurrence. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has identified the underrepresentation of women in non-traditional fields, such as in logistics, due to cultural expectations and the physical demands of the job. Despite the increasing pressure for gender inclusivity, women still face significant challenges in the Omani labour market, particularly in male-dominated professions like logistics. Additionally, Pitychoutis & Spathopoulou (2024) argue that societal expectations regarding gender roles in Oman are significant elements in limiting women’s work in logistics employment. Encouragingly, studies such as Iqbal et al. (2022) show that women’s involvement can increase when organisations adopt policies to assist with work-life balance, career guidance, and mentoring. Nevertheless, gender-sensitive policies can still have a primary role in surmounting these ingrained cultural barriers.

4.1.4. Employment Preferences and Career Perception.

This theme was based on the recurring statement about the ambitions of Omani youth to work within the higher-ranking industries, including oil, gas, and government, rather than within logistics. Focus groups and interviews used to underline the myth that logistics present few career development opportunities and poor wages. It was developed based on the responses reflecting a lack of awareness of the opportunity presented by the logistics industry and a need to promote the career advantages of the industry better.

"One of the greatest difficulties in persuading Omani nationals to take up careers in logistics and supply chain is that they prefer to work in sectors perceived to be more prestigious, like oil and gas or in the government sector. It is a wrong perception by the majority of Omani youth that logistics careers lack long-term career growth or high salary pay. We need to change this perception by promoting the growth opportunities in the logistics and supply chain sectors and making the youth aware of the opportunities available." (R2)

"The perception that it is not as prestigious to have a career in logistics as it is in IT, banking, or in the oil and gas industry is still affecting the demand for Omani nationals. Many young Omanis are simply unaware that there are well-paid and stable careers in the logistics and shipping industries. More work is needed to change these perceptions and get the word out about the benefits associated with having a career in logistics." (R5)

"The logistics sector is still viewed as a second-class sector compared to other sectors like oil, gas, and finance. This affects the willingness of Omani job candidates to pursue careers in logistics and supply chain management. The majority of young people are not aware of the rapid development in logistics or the career development opportunities available. To alter this, there is a requirement not just to promote the economic role of the sector but also to develop the career development frameworks within companies to make it more attractive to local nationals." (R19)

The preference for working in government or oil and gas sectors over logistics and supply chain is a well-established phenomenon in Oman, and in the Gulf region at large. Al Pitychoutis & Spathopoulou (2024) explain that most young Omanis view the logistics industry as being low in prestige and career development, and hereby most young Omanis are discouraged from pursuing a career in the sector. This is supported by the analysis provided in Sanni's (2025), which indicates that despite the demand for logistics professionals in the Oman logistics industry being high, job seekers are preferring jobs in more traditional sectors such as the oil and gas industry. In the study carried out by Lagger (2023), it was evident that the cultural perceptions of working in the logistics industry, including the stigma that comes with working with one's hands, are major barriers. The implications of the interview results are that in order to overcome these barriers, more emphasis needs to be placed on the career prospects in the logistics industry and the employment packages.

4.2. Triangulation through Focused Groups.

To ensure confidentiality, all focus group participants have been anonymised and are referred to using coded identifiers (FG) throughout the findings.

4.2.1. Employer Perspective on Graduate Expectations.

One of the key issues that were addressed during the focus group discussions was the issue of unrealistic graduate expectations. The members of the group, particularly the management positions such as FG1 (Navy, Maritime industry) and FG2 (Shipping, Port Logistics), indicated that most graduates enter the job market with the assumption that they will be appointed to managerial positions. The assumption is further worsened by the lack of awareness that entry and operating positions are stepping stones for career progression. According to FG3 (Warehousing, Logistics), "Young graduates wish to begin at the top and do not appreciate the fact that acquiring experience at the base is key to career advancement."

This difference between what is expected and what is real was also recognised by some of the group members, both expatriates and locals. Locals, such as FG4 (Manufacturing/Logistics), recognised that Omani graduates graduating from local institutions feel that they deserve to be placed in leadership positions but do not have the skillset or experience that would allow them to achieve that. This difference, as recognised by FG5 (Shipping, Port Operations), is part of the explanation for the high unemployment rate of Omani graduates in the supply chain/logistics field. A frame of mind adjustment is also essential, where graduate students need to have a realistic knowledge of the career cycle, and places of learning need to instil in students the importance of having a career foundation that begins at entry levels.

4.2.2. Soft Skill Deficiency.

The second important theme that was emphasised in the focus group was the lack of soft skills in Omani logistics graduates. The participants emphasised that although the graduate might have the theoretical ability to perform in the logistics and supply chain industry, the soft skills are lacking. FG6, who is in the logistics and manufacturing industry and an expatriate, and FG7, who is in process engineering and an expatriate, emphasised that the graduate is lacking in terms of teamwork, problem-solving skills, and leadership skills. FG7 stated that although the technical skills are available, with regard to communication and teamwork skills, the young graduate needs a lot of guidance. The participants stated that the lack of soft skills was due to the education system. As FG8 (International Shipping, Expat) described, "Our education system is highly focused on academic performance and less on interpersonal skills, which are critical in working in the logistics industry." Similarly, FG4 (Manufacturing/Logistics, Local) mentioned that the graduates would struggle with communicating in English properly, especially when dealing with international customers and suppliers.

4.2.3. Industry-Specific Technical Training Needs.

The third overriding theme to emerge from the focus group sessions was industry-specific technical training needs. Although

most logistics graduates possess a fundamental supply chain theory and management of logistics knowledge, they still lack the technical capabilities and practical skills to apply in today's fast-moving logistics and supply chain businesses. Industry specialists, including FG3 (Warehousing, Logistics, Expat) and FG4 (Shipping, Port Logistics, Local), too observed a huge skills mismatch in supply chain optimisation, inventory management systems, and specialist software (i.e., Lean Six Sigma, SAP, ERP systems).

The attendees agreed that most graduates were not equipped with the technical know-how of the logistics industry. FG3 emphasised, "We wish for graduates to be capable of operating the systems and equipment we use in the industry immediately, but local graduates lack those capabilities." FG9 (industrial engineer) concurred with this opinion, adding, "Industry-specific software such as logistics software and supply chain optimisation software must be added to the curriculum. Graduates must learn how to use them prior to employment."

As a response to such concerns, the respondents have proposed increasing working-in-the-field practical experience in the education system, such as internships, apprenticeships, and industry-certificate courses. As highlighted by FG10 (Shipping, Port Operations), "Certifications like Lean Six Sigma or APICS should be included as part of the graduate training programs to ensure that students are industry ready."

4.3. Comparative Analysis.

Thematic analysis of the focus group discussion shed critical light on the employability of Omani logistics graduates, pinpointing the most critical gaps in mind-set, soft skills, and industry-specific technical preparation. As compared with the findings of the preceding responses in interview-based thematic analysis, there is certainly a convergence but also a noticeable difference in the manner in which these issues are perceived and ranked by industry professionals. For instance, both the focus group discussions and the interview pointed to a mismatch between skills as a major hindrance to graduate employability. The interviews highlighted the degree to which the speeded-up take-up of new technologies, such as AI and automation, has compounded the issue, rendering it clear that graduates are not only lagging behind in terms of technical qualifications but are also ill-equipped to handle the complexities of modern logistics systems (R1, R4, R8). The focus groups reflected the same, highlighting that graduates do not possess industry-grade software and real-world operational expectations, requiring focused, computer-aided, sector-specific training to address these shortages (R6, R19). Curriculum change is required by both sets of responses, but the focus group placed greater stress on the need to shift the attitude of graduates helping them understand the value of starting at the bottom, entry-level jobs rather than expecting managerial positions directly. This reflects the industry's frustration with unrealistic expectations on the part of Omani graduates in terms of their career development, a concern that was less prominent in the interview responses but emerged strongly in the focus group discussion.

The second major comparison is in the area of soft skills, particularly communications, teamwork, leadership, and adapt-

ability, which emerged as a pervasive issue across both interview and focus group responses. In the interviews, expat professionals like R3, R6, and R8 specifically mentioned the gap in communication and problem-solving skills that makes graduates incapable of working effectively in teamwork environments and problematic work situations. This was supported by the focus group feedback that complemented it by stating that the Omani education system is more academically knowledge-based and less focused on developing these essential interpersonal competencies, so crucial in the logistics and supply chain sectors. The focus groups, however, were stronger in condemning the education system due to its inability to prepare graduates with soft skills and suggested that proactive measures should be taken to instil soft skills by way of mock interviews, public speaking, and mentoring. The focus group discussions also tapped into the disjuncture between academic and real-life skills acquisition issues faced by the industry, with the problem being discussed extensively elsewhere in the academic literature by Al Harrasi et al. (2024) as well as in the interviews, although they appear to be more urgent than in the interviews as they would require a significant shift in how students are taught to deal with the reality.

5. Discussion.

The research focused on exploring how employers view the skills shortage and their readiness to work with Omani graduates. The study points out a gap in technical skills of Omani graduates, which has been extensively reported in earlier research. To take an example, recent studies have emphasised the rapid technological improvement in logistics and supply chain management, particularly through AI, automation, and data driven systems (Chauhan et al., 2022; Paužuolienė et al., 2024). However, Omani graduates have been discovered to be unqualified in some of the crucial technologies like ERP systems and Lean Six Sigma. This observation aligns with the position of Al Harrasi et al. (2023) who contend that the local workforce in Oman has critical issues with the acquisition of the technical skills demanded by the contemporary logistics sectors. The focus on the discrepancy between graduate credentials and industry demands in the study is also similar to that of Sanni (2025), who noted that with the increasing demand of specialised knowledge on AI and blockchain technologies, graduates in Oman are not prepared to fulfil these needs. The research has also established that most Omani graduates are having unrealistic expectations of their careers such that they want to be managers, yet they lack the experience or skills to perform effectively in technical jobs. This expectation gap is reflected in the results of Iqbal et al. (2021), who have emphasised that soft skills, including communication and teamwork are not well developed in graduate studies, which restricts their job opportunities in complex logistics and supply chain work.

Nonetheless, the results in this paper also show a lack of connection to certain literature highlighting the advancement of Omanisation policies. Although more locally based staff are being incorporated into the logistics sector, the study concludes that expatriates still hold vital technical and middle-level roles,

which is a more critical attitude to Omanisation than some past studies have admitted. In particular, according to Al-Mansoori et al. (2021) and D'Achon (2025), Omanisation has been successful in providing working opportunities to the Omani nationals, but the effects on the logistics sector have manifested slowly and less significantly than expected. The existence of expatriate workers is a challenge to the fact that Omanisation itself can resolve the skills gap. The results of this research are consistent with the discussion by Wahab et al. (2024), who believe that despite the Omanisation policies that have made job opportunities available, they are yet to resolve the technical skills gap, especially in well-developed sectors such as logistics technology. To handle this, the research suggests a more focused strategy that includes internships, apprenticeships, and industry certification that would take the graduates to the field and expose them to real-life logistics operations prior to their entry into the job market following the recommendations of Al Harrasi et al. (2024) and Iqbal et al. (2021).

The current research findings fit the Human Capital Theory as it informs about the fact that Omani graduates have the necessary academic knowledge, but they have no practical skills in major logistics technologies and applications, i.e. ERP solutions and Lean-Six Sigma, that are essential in the industry (Al Harrasi et al., 2023; Al Harrasi et al., 2024). This discrepancy highlights disconnect between the formal and the dynamically changing needs of the logistics industry, stating that the investment in skills training and industry-specific certifications is paramount. Besides, the study confirms that Omanisation policies, despite the success in generating job opportunities, should be made more technical training oriented in order to close the skill gap, especially with the new technology such as AI and blockchain (Sanni, 2025). The results highlight the possibility of using a holistic strategy towards the development of human capital in the logistics industry in Oman.

Conclusions.

In conclusion, this study identified important skill gaps in logistics and supply chain sector of Oman, particularly in technical competencies and essential soft skills. The findings show that many Omani graduates still face difficulties in meeting the changing demands of logistics and supply chain industry especially in areas linked to emerging technologies such as AI and blockchain. A key contribution of this study is that it shows the employability gap is not only about technical skills shortages, but also about wider mismatch involving workplace expectations, practical exposure, occupational perceptions, and industry readiness requirements. In this sense, employability is shaped not only by what graduates know, but also by how well they are prepared for the realities of workplace.

Limitations of the Study.

This study also has some limitations. Although the qualitative design allowed for a deeper understanding of the issue, the findings cannot be generalised to the wider population. In addition, the study focused specifically on the logistics and supply

chain sector in Oman, which means the findings may not fully apply to other sectors or countries with different social and economic conditions. The purposive sampling strategy may also have introduced some degree of bias, as the study focused on experienced industry professionals. These limitations should therefore be kept in mind when interpreting the findings.

Practical Implications and Recommendations.

Overall, the findings suggest that schools and universities in Oman need to work more closely with industry in designing curricula that include practical and vocational technical training, particularly in emerging areas such as AI and blockchain. Greater attention is also needed for soft skills development, including teamwork, communication, and problem-solving, so that graduates are better prepared for employment. In addition, Omanisation efforts need to be supported through more targeted technical training, internships, and apprenticeship opportunities that can help Omani graduates gain real workplace exposure before entering the job market. The study also points to the need to improve perceptions of logistics-related careers and to encourage stronger female participation in the sector.

Study contribution and Practical Contributions.

This study contributes by providing industry-based insights into the employability gap affecting Omani graduates in the logistics and supply chain sector. Rather than viewing the issue only as a shortage of technical skills, the findings show that the gap is also shaped by practical exposure, workplace expectations, soft skills, and broader perceptions of logistics-related careers. In this way, the study offers a more grounded understanding of graduate employability within the Omani context.

The study also offers useful practical implications for educators, policymakers, and industry stakeholders. It highlights the need for stronger collaboration between higher education institutions and the logistics industry, particularly in curriculum design, practical training, internships, and technical certification. The findings further suggest that Omanisation efforts are likely to be more effective when they are supported by stronger industry readiness and more targeted workforce development strategies.

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