

## The Influence of Employability Skills toward Career Adaptability

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### Abstract

Career adaptability is becoming increasingly critical in the rapidly changing business world as it assures organizations to sustain their competitiveness. Career adaptability is described as an individual's willingness and ability to cope and adapt to work environment changes. Employability skills have become one of the factors that affect career adaptability as soft skills will contribute to the growth and success of an organization. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to investigate the relationship between communication skills, problem-solving skills, and teamwork skills towards career adaptability and to identify the most influential factors toward career adaptability in a Malaysian public university. This research is quantitative research which used a self-administered questionnaire as the instrument to collect data. A total of 136 respondents from two faculties responded to a set of electronic questionnaires. The data collected were then evaluated using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) Version 23. The Pearson Correlation analysis revealed that there were positive significant relationships between problem solving and teamwork toward career adaptability. While communication skills revealed no significant relationship toward career adaptability. Regression analysis showed that problem-solving skills have become the most influential factor toward career adaptability.

**Keywords:** Career Adaptability, Communication Skills, Problem-Solving Skills, Teamwork Skills, Undergraduates.

**Introduction**

In today's dynamic and complex business environment, organizations must be ready to compete against increasingly fierce rivalries both at home and abroad. The globe was hit by the extraordinary COVID-19 occurrence in 2020, which led to Malaysia experiencing its worst economic crisis since the last one in 1998. One way to anticipate the increasingly competitive competition, organizations should possess quality talents that can survive and move forward in the present challenging work. With the execution of numerous Movement Control Orders (MCO) to stop COVID-19's spread, the number of job losses has risen which has caused the country's unemployment rate to grow by 200 thousand to a record high of 718.1 thousand in 2020 (DOSM, 2021). New workers, particularly recent grads, are hardly an exception. With more jobless people who lost their jobs due to the epidemic, it is becoming increasingly difficult for graduates to find employment. This phenomenon has made many world citizens, especially educational institutions, rethink their output qualities, namely their resources in pursuing a career. In the context of human resource development, especially those that gain a lot of attention from various countries in the world, graduate output from educational institutions is one of the main concerns that need to be highlighted.

Recently, career adaptability has become an increasing concern and awareness in most organizations as it enables individuals to be successful in their career development (Bocciardi et al., 2017). Career adaptability can be described as an individual's willingness and ability to cope and adapt to changes in the work environment (Johnson, 2016). This element is considered critical in the rapid-changing business world as it may lead to many consequences for employers and employees. Career adaptability will lead to increased productivity as the adaptable workforce is more productive and efficient, thus will increase the company's return on investment in human capital (Rendell & Brown, 2015). In the challenging business world, being adaptable is one of the skills that many companies as well as employees need. There is no point for the employees to have all the work-related skills if they fail to adapt them to the real working environment. Consequently, there are many talented and hardworking individuals who become unsuccessful at the end such as being laid off, never moving up (promoted), resigning from their job, or becoming miserable in their life as they are not adaptable (Gannon, 2015). Henceforth, adaptability is a needed skill for employers to survive in business as well as for employees to survive in their work.

As career adaptability has become critical among employers and employees, it cannot be denied that this quality is also considered important among fresh graduates as they will enter the labour market after their graduation. It is better for students to enhance their career adaptability while studying at the university to be employable in the future as well as to prevent difficulties in finding suitable jobs later (Ćehić, 2016). There are several factors that contribute to career adaptability and one of them is employability skills (De Guzman & Choi, 2013). It cannot be denied that employability skills predict the career adaptability of fresh graduates. Besides having technical knowledge and skills, fresh graduates must also possess soft skills, also known as employability skills in order, to contribute to the growth and success of the organization (Dania et al., 2014). By having a combination of employability skills such as communication, language, teamwork, information technology, communication technology, and problem-solving skills, individuals will be able to cope and adapt to the changing workplace (Brewer, 2013).

Employability skills are crucial in Malaysia as many recent graduates struggle to obtain employment due to a lack of these abilities. According to a study, there will be 22.5 percent more unemployed Malaysian fresh graduates in 2020. The Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) recently conducted research that showed that the number of jobless graduates increased by 22.5 percent from 165,200 in 2019 to 202,400 in 2018 (DOSM, 2021). Additionally, according to the Graduate Tracer Study conducted by the Malaysian Ministry of Education, over 60% of these graduates are still without a job a year after graduating and 55 percent of these unemployed grads have degrees, making up the majority (Roy, 2020). In addition, feedback from employers and business leaders shows there is a gap between the syllabus in the local institutions of higher learning and what the market or industry expects is growing, which makes Malaysian graduates less employable. Public university graduates lack the necessary technical and soft skills to succeed in the employment market (Leo, 2019; Roy, 2020). Hence, it has become a worrisome issue as a majority of unemployed graduates are from public universities and there is a need for further studies on career adaptability as there are only a few studies that have investigated the factors that can influence career adaptability (Bocciardi et al., 2017).

### **Research Objectives**

1. To identify the relationship between employability skills (i.e., communication skills, problem-solving skills, teamwork skills) and career adaptability among undergraduates.
2. To identify the most influential variable that contributes to career adaptability among undergraduates.

#### **literature review**

### ***Career Adaptability***

As career adaptability has become a crucial aspect in an organization in order to survive in today's globalized and challenging world of business environment. The concept of career adaptability plays a vital part in helping individuals to achieve diverse career goals such as employability skills development, employment opportunities and career success (Yang et al., 2015, Othman et al., 2018). Career adaptability is originally defined as individual's psychosocial capacity to deal with occupational development, transitions and traumas that change individual's social integration (Savickas, 1997). Furthermore, career adaptability can also be defined as psychological strengths that make individuals to be able to manage the challenges either predictable or unpredictable in their career growth (Savickas, 2013).

Career adaptability consists of four elements which are career concern, control, curiosity and confidence (Hirschi et al., 2014). Hence, career adaptability and its elements (concern, control, curiosity and confidence) are considered as resources or the abilities that help individuals to manage transition in career (De Guzman & Choi, 2013). Additionally, career adaptability is related to a few personal characteristics such as personality traits, positive expectations, arrangement for the future, self-confidence, optimistic evaluation of the situation, emotional disposition and emotional intelligence (Santili et al., 2016). Thus, employer predicts that high adaptability is more equivalent toward business success (Tan, 2017).

The studies on the factors affecting career adaptability are still limited (Bocciardi et al., 2017). There are some factors that have been identified influencing career adaptability. Employability skills have been proven as the crucial factor that helps people adapt with job changes and improve job opportunities (Rasul et al., 2010). Moreover, Big Five personality traits are being said as the predictor of career adaptability (Sarah & Taylor, 2015). These five traits have been shown to anticipate human activities from financial decision to healthy lifestyles to political behaviour (Dennison, 2015).

Besides that, core self-evaluation is also considered as a factor to enhance career adaptability as it may direct individuals to gain more knowledge related to work (Chiang et al., 2013). In addition, emotional intelligence has been confirmed as the predictor to career adaptability which helps the most in enhancing career adaptability with its four elements of concern, control, confidence and curiosity (Coetzee & Harry, 2014). Furthermore, self-efficacy is also said as the predictor of career adaptability as previous studies proved that individuals with high self-efficacy will be able to adapt in changing career situations (Shaibu et al., 2016). Additionally, previous studies also found that employee engagement is significantly correlated with career adaptability and the studies concluded that individuals that experienced higher employee engagement had developed and enhanced skills in career adaptability (Tladinyane & Merwe, 2016).

### ***Employability Skills***

In the era of global challenges, employability skills appear to be important in all industries. According to Ju et al (2012), employability skills can be referred to general and nontechnical competencies needed in performing all jobs, regardless of types or levels of jobs. The characteristics of employability skills include problem solving, taking decisions, functioning in teams, managing time and stress, and learning new knowledge (Singh et al., 2013). Additionally, employability skills in the form of fundamental knowledge, skills and attitudes are vital in any organization as employers consider them as required skills to achieve career success (Wang & Tsai, 2014). Furthermore, communication, problem solving, and team work skills have been suggested as being the most essential employability skill elements when recruiting new graduates to enable them meet the demands of the workplace (Archer & Davison, 2008).

Communication skills are important to human beings in everyday interaction and considered as a main aspect in any human activities. Communication skills can be defined as the ability to deliver and receive information, feedback, ideas and feeling effectively and efficiently to other people (Kumar et al., 2013). In addition, communication is also considered as a skill that involves the process of speaking, listening and understanding systematically and continuously (Ahmad, 2016). Past studies confirmed that the development of other graduate qualities such as teamwork, critical thinking, creative thinking, problem solving, quantitative literacy as well as information literacy depends on their communication skills (Barrett-Lennard et al., 2011; Finley & Rhodes, 2013). Moreover, previous studies found that effective communication significantly reduces employee resistance to change. Effective communication during change stages (unfreezing stage, move stage and refreezing stage) is very important in order to ensure employees change readiness and to guarantee organization change is successful (Akan et al., 2016). Hence, communication will enhance the level of career adaptability in an organization.

Recently, problem solving is becoming one of the employability skills needed in today's workforce (Dishman, 2016). Problem solving can be defined as the ability to recognize and define problems, create and exercise solutions, detect and examine outcomes (Carnevale & Smith, 2013). Moreover, several skills such as cognitive skills, interaction skills and problem-processing skills are crucial to effective problem solving (Carnevale & Smith, 2013). Previous studies found that there is a relationship between problem-solving skills and individual's coping responses (Chinaveh, 2013). Furthermore, problem-solving skills lessen and deter the negative impacts of stressful life situations in term of both psychological and physical well-being (Chinaveh, 2013). In addition, past researchers found that in order to encounter problematic situations, issues or challenges, leaders and policy makers need to have decisive problem solving (Kerns, 2016). Thus, it has been proven that people who have high problem-solving skills are able to adapt and adjust to their difficult and changing work environment.

Teamwork has long been known as an important part of working culture. Therefore, most of employers around the world prefer to recruit new employees with good teamwork skills as it is very costly to develop their teamwork skills later (Lau et al., 2013). Additionally, it cannot be denied the importance in developing undergraduates' teamwork skills as most of the recruiters seek for employees with strong teamwork skills (Loughry et al., 2014). Teamwork skills can be described as the ability to work with others effectively (Riebe et al., 2017). Besides that, teamwork can also be referred as interrelated set of behaviors, actions, cognitions and attitudes that simplify or ease the required tasks that need to be completed (Sevdalis, 2013). Previous studies found that teamwork had a positive impact on employee performance, which then contributed to organizational productivity (Agarwal & Adjirackor, 2016). Besides that, teamwork was also found to play a key role in enhancing organizational commitment (Zincirkiran et al., 2015). Moreover, earlier studies also found that effective teamwork activity could lead to increased employee job satisfaction (Musriha, 2013). Thus, employability skills are suggested to be positively correlated with career adaptability as it is confirmed as important in helping people adapting with changes and improve career opportunities in the workplace (Rasul et al., 2010).

## **Research Methodology**

### *Research Design*

This study is examining the influence of employability skills toward career adaptability among undergraduates. Since this study is a quantitative study, it incorporates a scientific research inquiry designed to study the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The research instruments comprised of self-administered questionnaires (primary source). A set of electronic questionnaires using Likert type scale (1-5) were distributed to the respondents by the researcher. The Cronbach alpha values at the pre-test and actual test were above 0.7 which was reliable. Data collected were analysed using SPSS software (Version 23.0).

### *Measurement*

A set of questionnaires used to measure all the variables involved in this study and were adapted from previous studies. The survey questionnaires consisted of two components: the first component is to describe the demographic profiles; while the second component of the questionnaires comprised of Likert type scale (1-5). To measure career adaptability (De Guzman & Choi, 2013), communication skills, problem-solving skills and

teamwork skills (Orner, 2009), 24-items, 5-items, 4-items and 5-items were adopted respectively.

### *Sampling*

The sample of target population was drawn from all final year undergraduates who were currently in one of the Malaysian public university. This study was conveniently conducted and 136 respondents from two faculties were involved in the survey. This is consistent with Hair et al (2011) who recommended that a good sample size for statistical analysis must be at least 10-20 times more than the variables.

### *Data Analysis*

Data analysis of the study was analysed using SPSS version 23. In order to identify the relationships between variables, multiple regression analysis was performed to test the hypotheses and to identify the most significant predictor that influenced career adaptability among the undergraduates.

## **Findings and Discussions**

*The relationship between problem-solving skills, teamwork skills, communication skills and career adaptability*

Table 1

*Multiple regression results among problem-solving skills, teamwork skills, communication skills, and Career Adaptability*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Problem-solving skills	.322	.073	.360	4.395	.000
Teamwork Skills	.310	.072	.325	4.307	.000
Communication Skills	.104	.090	.095	1.150	.0252

As presented in Table 1, the first variable which is problem-solving skills shows a significant relationship with career adaptability ( $\beta=0.322$ ,  $p=0.000$ ) and this variable becomes the most influential factor toward career adaptability. This finding is consistent with a previous study by (De Guzman & Choi, 2013). Problem-solving skills has been found as an essential skill needed especially among the undergraduates as it enable them to be competitive not only in Malaysia setting but also in the global market. In today's demanding business market, the undergraduates are facing challenges in securing a job as the employer expected that they have competencies to cope with unanticipated problems which become critical for business success. Thus, undergraduates' student who possess higher problem-solving skills are said more adaptable with uncertainty in work environment. Higher learning institution (HEI) should play the important role in order to increase the quality of graduates by formulating a distinctive curriculum by preparing various value added extracurricular activities to the students. Strategic video game play are said as one of the crucial element that can influence the problem-solving skills among undergraduates' student. It can develop and improve their problem-solving skills by playing strategic video game as such activities require a critical thinking on how to solve certain problems or issues. Therefore, it cannot be denied

that problem solving is becoming one of the crucial employability skills needed in today's workforce.

In addition, teamwork skills show a significant relationship with career adaptability ( $\beta=0.310$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). This finding is consistent with a previous study by De Guzman & Choi (2013). Teamwork had long known as an important part of working culture. It refers to the ability of an individual to work with others effectively which required an interrelated set of behaviours and attitudes that contribute to the completion of tasks. An outstanding graduates should able to become a good team player, cooperate and interact to each other as this qualities will benefit their potential future employer as most of them are prefer to recruit new employees with good teamwork skills and avoiding additional cost this skills later.

However, communication skills reveal no significant relationship with career adaptability ( $\beta=0.104$ ,  $p=0.252$ ). Nevertheless, this finding was contrast with previous study by De Guzman & Choi (2013) as they found that communication skills were significantly related to career adaptability. Hence, this study contributes to new findings as none of the previous researchers that had found that communication skills are not significant to career adaptability. Due to different study setting, Malaysian undergraduates' student beliefs communication skills turn into one of the major barriers for them to easily adapt with uncertain situation. English language proficiency are still become the main concern in public higher learning institution, as many of the student are still unable to communicate effectively by using this language. By mastering this skill it will let the graduates more marketable and demanded by the potential employer despite having the other graduates qualities.

Thus, the findings are able to characterize the Malaysian undergraduates as majority of them agreed that problem-solving skills and teamwork skills will assist them to exceptionally adapt with the future work environment that full with uncertainty and challenges. Yet, communication skills are still become the major obstacles for them to acquire the set employability skills demanded by most of employer nowadays. Hence, disappearance of employability skills among undergraduates will be the major reason they are not not willing to adapt and learn new things in the workplace.

Table 2  
*Result for Regression Analysis – Model Summary*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.625 <sup>a</sup>	.391	.377	.34546

According to Table 2, the model summary indicates that the r-square only has 39.1% of variations in dependent variable (career adaptability) which are explained by all three independent variables namely communication skills, problem-solving skills, and teamwork skills. Hence, the other 60.9% of variations are explained by the other independent variables that were not studied in this research.

**Conclusion**

The findings provided new insights into the field of study of career adaptability specifically among undergraduates. Generally, the findings of the study explained the influence of employability skills toward career adaptability among undergraduate student in public higher education institution (HEI). Moreover, problem-solving skills is revealed as the most influential factor toward career adaptability. It can be concluded that problem-solving skills has become the top priority among undergraduates to achieve career adaptability in their future career. Therefore, higher institutions should review and focus more on problem-solving skills through the development of various programs in that may enhance these skills among undergraduates. However, communication skills revealed no significant relationship with career adaptability. This finding showed that higher education institution (HEI) should give much attention in developing this skills among the undergraduates as the development of other graduates qualities such as teamwork, critical thinking, creative thinking, problem solving, quantitative literacy as well as information literacy depends on how good they are in communication. Furthermore, future research can also be extended by conducting comparison studies between private and public universities. In addition, future researchers can also analyse other factors in order to fully understand the relationships among these variables.

The contribution of the study is to examine how communication skills, problem-solving skills, and teamwork skills affects career adaptability among university students in a Malaysian public university. Career adaptability research among students at higher learning institutions, particularly in Malaysia, is mostly unexplored. As a result, by investigating the three key employability skills of communication, problem-solving, and teamwork, we can provide national policy makers (such as the ministry of higher education) and higher learning institutions with insights into how to develop and improve the courses and syllabus for students that ultimately improve these crucial skills to ensure their employability skills are competitive in the job market.

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