

## Factors Affecting Graduate Employability in Malaysian Public University

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the factors that influence the employability of graduates from public universities in Malaysia. The most important factors that influence the employability of graduates include interpersonal skills, critical thinking skills and academic qualifications. The research was conducted using online surveys among graduates from Malaysian public universities. A total of 116 graduates from Malaysian public universities responded to the questionnaire. SPSS version 29 was used to analyze the data, and a multiple regression analysis was conducted. Therefore, universities can provide quality services and comprehensive curriculum to enhance the employability of graduates in Malaysian public universities.

**Keywords:** Graduates, Employability Interpersonal Skills, Critical Thinking Skills, Academic Qualifications, Public University

### Introduction

In today's world, graduate employability is a critical issue for universities, companies and graduates. The importance of graduate employability and industry performance has become a major concern (Abbas & Sagsan, 2020). Unfortunately, high unemployment continues to affect young people around the world (Pouratashi & Zamani, 2019). As a result, graduates face barriers to employment that could be due to their inadequate job skills, low job prospects or lack of proper career counseling and guidance (Okolie, Nwajiuba, Binuomote, Ehiobuche, Igu & Ajoke, 2020). To understand the concept of career satisfaction amidst the unpredictable conditions in the labor market, it is important to examine the employability of graduates. In

this scenario, higher education has a crucial role to play as it is responsible for providing a workforce that meets the demands of the labor market (Agnihotri, Shiva & Khan, 2022). The link between higher education and the labor market can be understood by assessing the extent to which higher education equips graduates with intelligence and expertise that meets the demand in the labor market (Belwal, Priyadarshi, & Al Fazari, 2017). The relationship between education and employment potential has gained importance as many graduates fail to find a suitable job after graduation (Donald, Ashleigh, & Baruch, 2018).

The main objective of this study is to investigate the factors that influence the employability of graduates from public universities in Malaysia. To achieve this, a survey is conducted among graduates from various public universities in Malaysia to collect relevant data. Examining the factors that affect the employability of graduates from public universities in Malaysia will highlight the gaps and challenges in the current education system that prevent graduates from finding a job. Through this research, policy makers and education providers can gain a better understanding of the needs of the labor market and adapt their curricula and programs to better prepare graduates for employment. In addition, the research findings can help graduates make informed decisions about their career choices and give them a better understanding of the skills and competencies that employers are looking for. Ultimately, this study can help reduce unemployment and underemployment of graduates in Malaysia.

This article is organized as follows. The literature review is presented in the factors influencing graduate employability, while the proposed conceptual framework is described in the methodology. Finally, the conclusion is drawn based on this study.

## **Literature Review**

### *Overview of Graduate's Employability*

A broad definition of employability is the performance, skills, knowledge and certain individual characteristics that enable an individual to secure employment. The term employability is usually divided into two different forms: external employability, which refers to an individual's aptitude and openness to change jobs in another organization, and internal employability, which represents an employee's competence and willingness to stay with their current employer (Al-Shehab, Al-Hashimi, Madbouly, Reyad & Hamdan, 2020). A major challenge in the field of graduate employability is the development of a more comprehensive understanding of career readiness that encompasses both the immediate and long-term employment outcomes of graduates (Tomlinson et al., 2021). For example, the growing unemployment rate among graduates is largely due to a lack of basic employability skills.

The labor markets facing graduates today are characterized by uncertainty and unpredictability as industries are constantly reshaping. Traditional models of career advancement are declining in the face of international development, digitalization and the ongoing dynamics of the labor market (English, de Villiers Scheepers, Fleischman, Burgess, & Crimmins, 2021). There are many factors that can be used to determine the employability of university graduates. According to Hossain, Alam, Alamgir, and Salat (2020), the level of employability of prospective graduates is defined by the possession of certain skills consisting of technical and soft skills. These skills are considered as personal competencies that employers look for in order to fulfill the requirements of the workplace. The basic concept of

graduate employability involves the acquisition of a set of skills and abilities that will enable a graduate to find desirable employment and be successful in their chosen career. Possessing these skills and abilities enables graduates to meet the desired requirements of employers and to deal skillfully with changes in the labor market (Hosain, Mustafi, & Parvin, 2021). According to Abbas and Sagsan (2020), a person's skills refer to their ability and competence to perform the assigned task or job effectively.

### **Factors Affecting Graduates' Employability**

#### *Interpersonal Skills*

A growing number of studies show that soft skills are important when it comes to securing a job for university graduates. Verbal skills, interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence are part of soft skills, which translate into teamwork and leadership skills (Hossain et al., 2020). Communication skills refer to the ability to effectively convey and understand the intended messages when interacting with others. This can occur in face-to-face conversations, online exchanges or written correspondence. Effective communication minimizes tending, optimizes time use, and increases overall efficiency (Hosain et al., 2021). Communication skills include the ability to communicate with coworkers, top managers, customers, and joint venture partners in an effective manner (Sehgal & Nasim, 2018). In this technology-dominated era, it is important for everyone to develop a growth mindset. It is believed that cultivating excellent social interaction skills not only contributes to a competitive world but also creates an effective and collaborative world (Ahmad Tajuddin, Bahari, Al Majdhouh, Baboo, & Samson, 2022). Companies and governments consider the level of competencies and skills acquired by students during their studies as essential employability factors. Employers place great importance on the presence of strong communication, motivational, interpersonal, decision-making and management skills in graduates (Abbas & Sagsan, 2020). This is because they believe that effective soft skills in employees are associated with an increased propensity to make practical decisions and propose workable solutions.

#### *Critical Thinking Skills*

The importance of critical thinking and problem solving is widely recognized in academic literature. Several research studies have emphasized the importance of critical thinking skills, while several authors have also acknowledged the importance of problem-solving skills (Sehgal & Nasim, 2018). Problem-solving skills involve a sequence of steps that include recognizing the problem, gathering information about the problem, recognizing potential obstacles to finding a solution, and developing a proactive approach to solving the problem. The presence of problem-solving skills helps people or teams to successfully adapt to the work environment and overcome life challenges with ease (Ng et al., 2021). Therefore, companies prefer employees who have problem-solving skills and strong critical thinking.

#### *Academic Qualification*

The evolving dynamic between education and employability could be significantly impacted by these emerging trends, raising significant concerns among countries and international organizations (Ahmad Tajuddin et al., 2022). Given the highly competitive labor market and the far-reaching changes in businesses worldwide, companies are focusing primarily on retaining competent, well-educated and skilled employees. Knowledge is a valuable and unique resource that cannot be physically possessed, and organizations that can use it effectively as a strategic tool gain a competitive advantage (Abbas & Sagsan, 2020). Indicators

of academic performance typically include Grade Point Average (GPA) or Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA), which are calculated based on various academic measures, including classroom performance, assignments, presentation skills, and exam scores.

### Research Methodology

In this study, the researcher chose a quantitative approach and used online questionnaires distributed via Google Forms to collect data. This study specifically targeted students from different academic backgrounds enrolled in public universities in Malaysia. Cohen's (1992) simple random sampling table was used for the sample size. The data collection yielded a total of 116 complete questionnaires for this research study. The questionnaire was designed and distributed. It consists of three parts: Part A (General Information), Part B (Factors Affecting Graduates' Employability) and Part C (Graduates' Employability).

### A Proposed Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 outlines the conceptual framework of this study. The independent variables of this study are interpersonal skills, critical thinking skills, and academic qualifications. Graduate employability is the dependent variable.

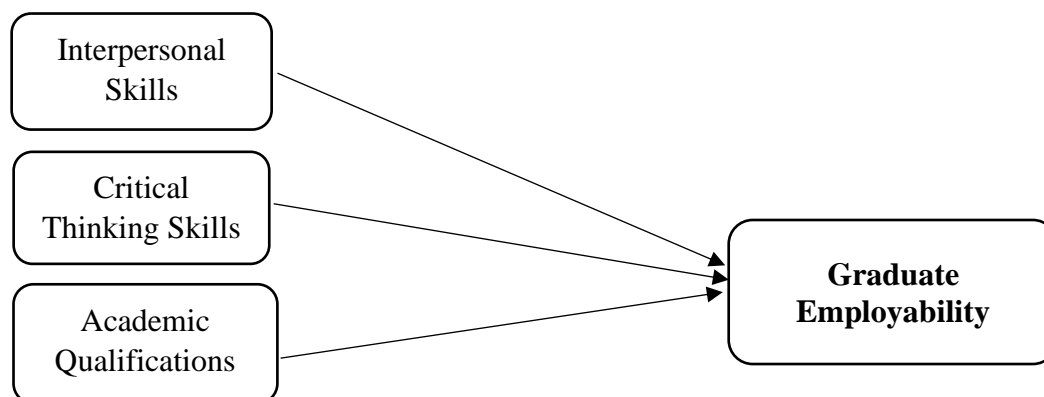


Figure 1. The Proposed Conceptual Framework

Research hypotheses of the study:

- H1 Interpersonal skills have a significant impact on graduate employability.
- H2 Critical thinking skills have a significant impact on graduate employability.
- H3 Academic qualifications have a significant impact on graduate employability.

### Conclusion

This study has identified several key factors that influence the employability of graduates in Malaysian public universities. The acquisition of interpersonal skills and academic qualifications were found to be important determinants of graduates' employment prospects. Malaysian public universities should prioritize these factors in their efforts to improve the employability of graduates. By addressing these areas, universities can better prepare graduates for the competitive job market, improve their transition from university to the workplace and contribute to Malaysia's overall economic development.

The findings of this study have implications for the management of Malaysian public universities to improve the quality of teaching and enhance the employability of graduates. Thus, the improvement of interpersonal skills and academic qualifications as factors that have

a better impact on the employability of graduates have a significant effect on these two variables. This study can help Malaysian public institutions by identifying strategies to enhance the employability of graduates and improve the learning experience of graduates.

The researcher suggested that the management of Malaysian public universities could evaluate the courses or curricula offered to better align them with labor market preferences based on the findings of this study. Therefore, universities can provide quality services and comprehensive curricula to enhance the employability of graduates from Malaysian public universities.

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