

Graduate Attributes, Outcomes of Volunteering and Graduate Employability: The Case of MICE Event Volunteers

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Abstract

Malaysia has produced thousands of university graduates since the introduction of various institutions of higher education providers. Realizing the importance of equipping graduates with specific skills required by the industry, this study aims to examine the relationship between graduate attributes, the outcome of volunteering and graduate employability among university students who have volunteer experience in Meeting, Incentive, Conference and Exhibition (MICE) events. MICE event has emerged as a key sector of the Malaysian Tourism industry, and this has given some impetus to the need for tertiary educated event managers and an evaluation of the educational curriculum. The relationships are measured based on skills possessed by graduates during their volunteering participation in MICE events. The data used in this study is obtained from 1Malaysia Youth Volunteers (iM4U), and 350 questionnaires were returned. The methodology used in the study was questionnaires that were uploaded online and distributed manually. Descriptive and multiple regression analyses were used to analyze the data. This analysis seeks to find the relationships between graduate attributes, the outcome of volunteering and graduate employability. The findings showed that graduate characteristics significantly influenced the graduate employability and there is a significant relationship between the outcome of volunteering and employability among MICE events' volunteers. The results contributed to practical implications to MICE event industry that the volunteer programs are essential to the event success. The study is crucial as it helps to identify the level of skills developed by graduates during the volunteering experience, the enhancement of the educational experience and graduate's performance in the job market.

Keywords: Graduate Attributes; Outcomes of Volunteering; Graduate Employability; MICE Event Volunteers

Introduction

Employability is likely to continue as a major issue for several stakeholders in higher education (Holmes, 2013). In Malaysia, graduate employability is one of the issues that impact many policy implications in higher education (Noriah & Zakiah, 2015). It is also stated that graduate employability depends on individual factors, market labor, and practices in the organization. Individual factors refer to the positive attitude and behavior with regards to the requirement in career opportunities. However, the problems of unemployed graduates and the difficulty of obtaining employment are among the issues that increase the negative perception of the country's policy in higher education. Malaysia now shares the dilemma of other developing countries with increasing numbers of graduates not able to meet the requirements of the existing job market (Noriah & Zakiah, 2015). Besides, in most countries, university graduate holds the highest position and are deemed as social elites and usually accorded entry to high-income occupations in the category of the knowledge worker.

Graduate employability is not determined by the outcome and discipline in specific study programs alone but also the capability of graduates to endorse wider skills such as communications, problem-solving, interactive skills, initiative, and efficiency. Additionally, employability also includes the aspect of attitude and personal attributes of loyalty, commitment, honesty, punctuality, and integrity. It follows that the graduate employability encompasses aspects of proactive actions, personal management attitude and career management aptitude of the individuals towards efforts in obtaining the desired career (Clarke, 2008). Employers seek independent leaders with managerial skills rather than mere followers. These include soft skills such as communication competence, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, ethics and professional moral skills, leadership skills, lifelong learning, and information management skills and teamwork. Graduates are advised to equip themselves in meeting the market requirements together with the increasing importance of both soft and technical skills for better opportunities in getting a job.

The role of education not only focuses on academic achievement but also creates and transforms students from various aspects of life by providing various activities and social opportunities (Widjaja, 2010). Higher Education Institution (HEI) in Malaysia or abroad has embarked on volunteering elements in their education policies due to the importance of volunteering towards student development (Clary and Snyder, 1999). The Malaysian government had taken the initiative by embedded volunteerism element in Malaysian national education policies (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Due to the importance of volunteering activities, the Malaysian government had also established 1M4U with a provision of specific grants for youth including university and college students to organize volunteering programs (Ministry of Youth & Sports Malaysia, 2013). Particularly in the event industry, volunteers become one of the significant factors contributing to the success of an event. MICE industry is the special event sector in Malaysia that contributes to tourism economic growth. Due to the business tourism market competitiveness, Malaysia has secured 958 international business events or MICE events amounting to MYR6.11 billion of economic impact over the past eight years (MyCEB, 2017). Due to the growth and demand of the industry, there are a lot of opportunities for the event planners in Malaysia to do their business. This event has established itself as a reliable source of income generation for a country via event attractions and the increase of visitors to the country generally for business.

Besides, about 8,000 job opportunities for this sector will be available in the next ten years (Department of Statistic, 2013). However, in Malaysia, the employability issue of graduates in the MICE industry still not up to the expectation of skills required by the industry. This related issue also was addressed during the Malaysia Business Event Week 2014 organized by Malaysian Convention & Exposition Bureau (MyCEB, 2014). Thus, this study investigates the relationship between graduate attributes, the outcome of volunteering and employability among the volunteers participate in the MICE event.

Literature Review

The conceptual model of the study comprises five major constructs, which are graduate attributes (problem-solving, communication skills and teamwork) as independent variable followed by outcomes of volunteering as a mediating variable and graduate employability as the independent variable. The model indicates that the three graduate attributes items as perceived by the MICE event volunteers have significant effects on their employability. The model also examines the mediating effect of outcomes of volunteering as essential variables to graduate's employability. There are four hypotheses elaborated in the following.

The relationship between graduate attributes and graduate employability

Graduate employability has become an increasingly controversial issue (Ferns, 2012) as the tertiary education sector grapples with rapid change and a range of other difficult issues. These include the balancing of research and teaching, maintenance and assessment of academic standards among competing pressures of reduced government funding and massification of undergraduate cohorts, and optimizing ICT for effective learning and teaching delivery (Christensen & Eyring, 2012). As a result of the changes that are comprehensive across the higher education landscape, the traditional model of a university degree, the inculcation of discipline for specific knowledge, and associated relevant skills and attributes have been called into question (Boden & Nedeva, 2010).

Over the past decade, employers have progressively called for institutions to produce better-skilled graduates with the wish list of desired graduate attributes seeming ever extended (Tomlinson, 2008). Generic skills, communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving appear to be most highly valued by employers (Clegg, 2013; Hodge, Nadler, Shore, & Taylor, 2011; Prinsley & Baranyi, 2015). Indeed, there may be connections between these attributes, as proficiency in writing is thought to enhance the student's critical thinking skills (Quitadamo & Kurtz, 2007). Therefore, this hypothesis was developed.

H1: There is a significant relationship between graduate attributes and graduate employability among university students who have experience as volunteers in MICE event.

The relationship between the graduates' attributes and outcome of volunteering

Volunteering work personally gives rewards and offers the graduates a valuable opportunity to develop skills, knowledge, and experience besides their studies in university. Aside from the feel-good factor of giving time to a worthy cause, volunteering has some key benefits to the career which makes it well worth considering (Cheary, 2018). Since university and college students are prone for self-exploration and the formulation or reformulation of

values, ideals, and goals, the reflection that accompanies volunteer service experiences is an exciting and effective method of developing personal virtues (Trainor, Muscott, & Smith, 1996). Furthermore, a range of personal and social skills that young people acquire through volunteering were identified as outcomes of volunteering activities (National Youth Agency, 2007). In particular, these focus upon increased self-confidence and self-esteem, improved communication skills, and ability to work with other people more effectively, which essential in preparing for employment after graduating. Many young people also develop a range of practical skills related to their specific areas of volunteering. Volunteering is not only a great way to gain practical experience, but it also can help participants to stand out from the crowd and learn practical skills which make volunteers more desirable for prospective employers. Therefore, the following hypothesis was developed:

H2: There is a significant relationship between graduate attributes and outcome of volunteering among university students who have experience as volunteers in MICE event.

The relationship between the outcome of volunteering and employability

The higher levels of unemployment in the UK or another country have contributed to the interest in volunteering as a way to employment (Paine, 2013). In volunteering, volunteers can have a change in developing new skills, extend networks, build CVs, trying to learn new things and gaining more experience. The benefits that the volunteers gain from volunteering give them the opportunity to be promoted as part of the current pursuit of employability (Smith, 2010). Nowadays, employers are actively looking at the evidence of volunteering by candidates before they conduct interviews. Employers are in search of graduates who have something extra on their CVs, and they want to know whether graduates have challenged and extended themselves beyond getting a degree. The interests in volunteering among youth give them the opportunity to enhance employability (National Youth Agency, 2007). The new labor was productive in its development of volunteering initiatives, with the goals to improve employability. Volunteer work offers networking opportunities for both employment in an organization or acquaintances that lead to successful job hunting. Therefore, the hypothesis was developed.

H3: There is a significant relationship between the outcome of volunteering and employability among university students who have experience as volunteers in MICE event.

The mediating roles of the outcome of volunteering

Volunteering can help young people to develop capacity and skills to become active leaders and citizens. A previous study shows that young people engaged in volunteering develop positive social behaviors that can help reduce negative risk-taking (Hamzah et al., 2016). Volunteering also able in helping young people prepare for employment and their transition to responsible adulthood. Young people can develop skills in becoming active leaders and citizens. Another study indicated that young people engaged in volunteering develop positive social behaviors that can help reduce adverse risk-taking (Mardiyyah et al., 2013). It is evident that volunteering can also help young people prepare for employment and their transition to responsible adulthood.

Studies have shown volunteers' beliefs have an impact on their participation in volunteering activities. Psychologists such as Clary, Synder, Ridge, Copeland, Stukas, Haugen and Miene (1998) found that beliefs are factor mediators on the personality and actions of an individual (cited in Mustaffa et al., 2015). A common and widespread opinion is that while self-interest is the primary motivating element behind many human endeavors, a self-interest is not necessarily inconsistent with altruistic behavior, and indeed volunteering has shown to be related to motives that refer to self-interest as well as other related concerns (Clary & Synder, 1999; Cornelis et al., 2013). Align from that, individual participation in volunteering activities is also determined based on the attitudes of others and an understanding of the needs of the volunteers and the ability to interact socially. According, the following hypothesis was developed.

H4: The outcome of volunteering mediates the relationship between the graduate attributes and graduate employability among volunteers in MICE event.

Methodology

In order to achieve sufficient minimum sample size, the questionnaire was distributed to ensure a high response rate and in case of incomplete and inconsistent responded questionnaires. 390 questionnaires distributed, and 350 questionnaires returned. Eleven excluded because the questionnaires were unsuitable to be included in the analysis due to incomplete data. Therefore, there were 339 usable questionnaires with a response rate of 86%. Having a high response rate is highly recommended, however achieving response rate at least 60% is acceptable.

Furthermore, 50% of the response rate at the individual level is considered adequate for data analysis by Baruch and Holtom (2008). The self-administered questionnaire was structured into four sections. Section A question on the respondent's demographic profile such as age, gender, education level, living area, and occupation. The Sections B comprised of questions related to independent variables focusing on the outcome of volunteering (11 items). Section C assigned seven items to measure the graduate employability for students as a dependent variable. The final section comprised of questions on graduate attributes as mediating variables with seven items. The Five-point Likert scale used in measuring items in all dimensions (graduate attributes, graduate attribute, and graduate employability) ranging from 1, strongly disagree to 5, strongly agree.

Besides, all items were formulated as clearly as possible with simple wording and language to reduce any possible ambiguities. A pilot survey questionnaire distributed to 30 respondents who have experienced volunteering MICE event in Selangor by using Google form and given three days to complete the survey. Moreover, all participants were internet users and can use the internet to seek information on volunteering. Besides, some changes made in order to clarify the instructions and the questions based on comments and additional recommendations by the experts and pilot-study respondents. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) used in data analysis. The pilot test used Cronbach Alpha analysis to test reliability. Besides, the descriptive analysis focusing on the mean score and standard deviation, as well as inferential statistics of multiple regression investigating the relationship

between variables, were used whenever appropriate in order to answer the objectives, research questions, and hypotheses of this study.

Findings

The demographic profile information described the gender, age, education, volunteering experience, volunteering field, and status. Table 1.1 illustrates that females made up the highest percentage with 67% while the male respondent was 33%. The highest percentage with regards to the age of the respondents is among 20-25 years old with 42.8%. Regarding education, the majority of respondents has a bachelor's degree with 53.1%, and only 20.1% has a diploma. Respondents with experience less than one year recorded the highest percentage with 92.3, and only 7.7% respondent had 1-2 years' experience in event volunteering.

Furthermore, respondents that have volunteered in exhibitions recorded the highest percentage with 43.4%. Respondents who are working recorded the highest with 55.2% compared to student respondents only at 44.8%. The highest respondents are from IPTA at 53.1%, meanwhile from IPTS 46.9%.

Table 1.1
Respondent's Demographic Profile

<i>Demographic Characteristics</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>
Gender	Male	112	33.0
	Female	227	67.0
Age	20-25 Years Old	145	42.8
	26-30 Years Old	112	33.0
	31-35 Years Old	82	24.2
Education	Diploma	68	20.1
	Bachelor's Degree	180	53.1
	Master's Degree	91	26.8
Experience	Less Than 1Year	313	92.3
	1-2 Years	26	7.7
Field	Meeting / Seminar	75	22.1
	Incentive	50	14.7
	Convention / Conference	67	19.8
	Exhibition	147	43.4
Status	Students	152	44.8
	Working	187	55.2
University	IPTA (Public University)	180	53.1

IPTS (Private University)	159	46.9
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Mean and Standard Deviations of Study Variables

Table 1.2 shows the results mean and standard deviation of the study variables. Responses to all items for the study variables made on a 5-point Likert Scales (1=Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree). Mean scores were used to determine the levels of agreements of the variables.

Table 1.2
Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Study Variables

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Mean (M)</i>	<i>Standard Deviations (SD)</i>
Graduate Attributes	4.42	.29
Outcome of Volunteering	4.42	.29
Graduate Employability	4.42	.31

Note: N= 339

Based on Table 1.2, there were descriptive statistics of graduate attributes, the outcome of volunteering and graduate employability. Based on the mean score the three variables have the highest mean score at 4.42. Besides, standard deviation indicates how close the data is to the mean. In this study, graduate employability has the highest standard deviation of 0.31. However, graduate attributes and outcome of volunteering have the same standard deviations at 0.29.

Table 1.3
Reliability Coefficients for Study Variables

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Number of items</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>
Graduate Attributes	11	0.73
Outcome of Volunteering	11	0.73
Graduate Employability	7	0.62

Note: N=339

From Table 1.3, the Cronbach's Alpha for graduate attributes (communication skills, problem solving and teamwork) was in the range of 0.62 to 0.73. Two variables had a reliability coefficient above 0.7, and the coefficient is considered as acceptable as suggested by Sekaran and Bougie (2013). However, only one variable has coefficient below 0.7 which is graduate employability at 0.62. From the previous research, it is stated that Cronbach's Alpha 0.6 has moderate strength of associations (Plummer & Tanis Ozcelik, 2015).

Hypotheses Testing

Multiple Regressions was used to investigate the relationship between the predictor variables and the criterion variable as posited in the research hypotheses. It involves the linear relationship between the predicted values of the dependent variable based on the value of more than one independent variable. According to Field (2009), multiple regressions are used when the linear combination has more than one predictor variables from the outcome prediction value. Regression analysis is deemed appropriate for this study since both the predictor and criterion variables were measured on a continuous scale.

Graduate Attributes and Graduate Employability

The analysis indicated an overall test of influence between graduate attributes and graduate employability. This test reflects to satisfy hypothesis H1 and response to research objective 1. There is no multicollinearity detected in the results since the tolerance value recorded was greater than 0.10 and VIF values less than 10. Referring to the results, all regression assumption is explained.

Table 1.4
Model Summary for Graduate Attributes on Graduate Employability

<i>Predictors</i>	<i>Model Std. β</i>
Graduate Attributes	0.99
R ²	0.98
Adj. R ²	0.98
R ² Change	0.98
F-Change	16689.026

Based on the results presented in Table 1.4 the regression model explained 98% (R² = 98, F-change = 16689.02, $p < .01$) of the variation in total graduate employability. The remaining 2% is explained by other predictor variables that are not provided in the data set. The p-value in the ANOVA table indicates less than .01. This indicates that all three sub-dimensions (communication skills, problem solving and teamwork), can be used to predict graduate attributes. The Coefficient Table shows that all variables were significant.

The Standard Coefficient Beta (β) or also known as Beta loading values in the table indicate the relative influence/importance of the entered variables. That can be said that it shows which variables are essential to the model based on the value, regardless of the direction of influence whether it is a positive or negative influence. The results addressed research objective 1, and it is satisfied H1. Hence, hypothesis 1 was fully supported.

Graduate Attributes and Outcome of Volunteering

The graduate attributes and outcome of volunteering analysis indicated an overall test of influence between graduate attributes and outcome of volunteering. This test reflects to satisfy hypothesis H2 and response to research objective 2. There is no multicollinearity detected in the results since the tolerance value recorded was greater than 0.10 and VIF values less than 10. Referring to the results, all regression assumption is explained.

Based on Table 1.5 above indicates that the regression model explains 1.000 (R² = 1.000, F-change = 0, $p < .01$) of the variation in total graduate attributes. Hypothesis 2 suggested that graduate attributes have a significant relationship with the outcome of volunteering. However, this study found that graduate attributes were negatively significant to the outcome of volunteering.

Table 1.5

Model Summary for Graduate Attributes and Outcome of Volunteering

Predictors	Model Std. β
Graduate attributes	1.000
R ²	1.000
Adj. R ²	1.000
R ² Change	1.000
F-Change	.

The Standard Coefficient Beta (β) or also known as Beta loading values in the table indicate the relative influence/importance of the entered variables. That can be stated that it shows which variables are essential to the model based on the values regardless of the direction of influence whether it is a positive or negative influence. The graduate attributes were not significant and negatively predicted graduate employability ($\beta = 1.000$, $p < .01$). The result addresses research objective 2 and has not satisfied H2. Hence, hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Outcome of Volunteering and Graduate Employability

The outcome of volunteering analysis indicated the overall test of influence between the outcome of volunteering and graduate employability. This test is to satisfy hypothesis H3 and response to research objectives 2. There is no multicollinearity detected in the results since the tolerance value recorded was greater than 0.10 and VIF values less than 10. Referring to the results, all regressions assumption is explained.

Table 1.6

Model Summary for Outcome of Volunteering and Graduate Employability

Predictors	Model Std. β
Outcome of Volunteering	0.99
R ²	0.98
Adj. R ²	0.98
R ² Change	0.98
F-Change	16689.026

On the table above, it indicates that the regression model explains 98% (R² = 98, F-change = 16689.02, $p < .01$) of the variation in total graduate employability. The remaining 2% is explained by other predictor variables that are not provided in the data set. The p-value in the ANOVA table indicates that less than .01. This suggests that all of the outcomes of volunteering can be used to predict graduate employability.

The Standard Coefficient Beta (β) or also known as Beta loading values in the table indicate the relative influence/importance of the entered variables. That can be stated that it shows which variables are essential to the model based on the values regardless of the direction of influence whether it is a positive or negative influence. The outcome of volunteering was able to significantly and positively predict graduate employability ($\beta = .98$, $p < .01$). The result addresses research objective 3 and satisfies H3. Hence, hypothesis 3 is fully supported.

The mediating effect of outcome of volunteering between the graduate attributes and graduate employability

The outcome of volunteering analysis indicated the overall test of the mediating effect of the outcome of volunteering between the graduate attributes and graduate employability. This test reflects to satisfy hypothesis H4 and response to research objectives 4. There is no multicollinearity detected in the results since the tolerance value recorded was greater than 0.10 and VIF values less than 10, all regressions assumption is explained.

Table 1.7

Model Summary of the mediating effect of outcome of volunteering between the graduate attributes and graduate employability

<i>Predictors</i>	<i>Model 1 Std. β</i>
Graduate Attributes	.990
R ²	0.98
Adj. R ²	0.98
R ² Change	0.98
F-Change	16689.026

Table 1.7 indicates that the regression model explains 99% ($R^2 = .98$, $F\text{-change} = 16689.02$, $p < .01$) of the variation in total graduate employability. The remaining 1% is explained by other predictor variables that are not provided in the data set. The p-value in the ANOVA table indicates that less than .01. This indicates that the mediating effect of the outcome of volunteering between the graduate attributes and graduate employability.

The Standard Coefficient Beta (β) or also known as Beta loading values table indicate the relative influence/importance of the entered variables. That can be stated that it shows which variables are essential to the model based on the values regardless of the direction of influence, whether it is a positive or negative influence. Model 1 of the graduate attributes of beta loading value is ($\beta = .99$, $p < .01$), however after testing for mediating in Model 2, no values appear and indicates that outcome of volunteering does not mediate the relationships between graduate attributes and graduate's employability. Hence, it can be concluded that Hypothesis 4 is not supported.

Modified Conceptual Framework

After conducting the variables for multiple regression analysis, this is the modified conceptual framework for new items and variables. Figure 1 shows the modified conceptual framework of this research.



Figure 1: Modified Conceptual Framework

Based on Figure 1, the new conceptual framework comes out after conducting the test using multiple regressions. After performing the test for mediating in Model 2, no values appear, and this indicates that the outcome of volunteering does not mediate the relationships between graduate attributes and graduates employability. Hence, it can be concluded that the outcome of volunteering does not mediate the graduate attributes. Thus a new conceptual framework is generated from the outcome of the findings.

Discussions and Conclusion

This study has outlined the graduate attributes, the outcome of volunteering and employability in MICE event volunteers. The objective of this study is to examine the relationship between graduate attributes, the outcome of volunteering and employability. From the findings obtained, the proposed framework was modified. Based on Figure 1, the new conceptual framework is created after hypotheses testing were carried out using multiple regressions. After conducting the test for mediating analysis in Model 2, no values appear, and this indicates that the outcome of volunteering does not mediate the relationships between graduate attributes and graduates' employability. Hence, it can be concluded that the outcome of volunteering does not mediate the graduate attributes. So a new conceptual framework was generated. The study has achieved the stated objectives, and all the posited research questions have been answered. The finding also showed that people get involved in volunteering because they want to gain some skills, abilities, and experiences. This finding was consistent with the result where it claimed that volunteering gives a lot of benefits to individuals and provides a chance to acquire skills and experiences that not be offered by other activities. But there was no evidence stated that graduate attributes would affect the outcomes of volunteering. Graduate attributes influence the outcome of volunteering acts as a pathway to employment. Evidence to support the effect of volunteering on graduate attributes remains limited (Smith, 2010). In this case, the institutions should expose their students to participate as volunteers especially in MICE event so that they will have the opportunity to develop skills, knowledge, and experience besides their studies in university. It is easier for the students to be fit into the workplace when they build up the skills outside of the subject they have been studied. The government should organize a related event and make it compulsory participation to the graduate to join the

event. This action can give the wake-up calls for the students to help them recognize the gap in their skills, which are beneficial in their future employment.

In addition, with the findings in this research shows that volunteering is related to the employability, it will give the benefits to the event volunteers to be prepared in the real world job. In volunteering, the volunteers can have the opportunity to develop new skills, extend networks, improve communications, learn new things and gain more experience. The benefits that possessed by volunteers will give them chance to be promoted as part of the current pursuit of employability. Thus, by volunteering the volunteers will have the potential of employability in future. MICE event industry can enhance the importance of the volunteer program so it can encourage more graduates to join as event volunteers that are very significant to the event success. In addition, the event manager should understand how to retain their volunteer so that the volunteers enjoyed their participation in the event. The volunteers definitely will be returning volunteers to join the events in future if they are satisfied with the management. Volunteerism benefits to enhance the educational experience of the graduates and increased the student's portfolio and social capital. The finding of this study is an added value in the literature for the Malaysian context of MICE's industry perspective.

In summary, the findings may offer some opportunity to the MICE event volunteers to better understand the graduate attributes, the outcome of volunteering and employability. The findings showed that volunteering provides opportunities to learn a range of different skills which in return are useful for the students' future employability. Therefore, volunteerism benefits by enhancing the educational experience as well as increasing the student's portfolio increased social capital and the awareness of socio-political. In fact, it will increase the students' sense of responsibility in giving back to society. MICE key players in the industry should provide more volunteering opportunities to university students and graduates, so they have the opportunity to develop the required skills for their future employment. Since the results of this study are limited to MICE event volunteers in Malaysia, so future studies may use these study outcomes as the basis to expand the study scope to other types of event volunteering such as sports event, festivals, and entertainment.

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