

The Impact of Soft Skills Development Strategies on the Employability of Graduates of Higher Education Institutions: Analysis of Past Studies

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Abstract

Higher education institutions (HEI) have a task that not only produces graduates who are successful in academic and technical expertise, but HEIs also need to ensure that HEIs graduates have high abilities and soft skills to compete in the workplace in the future. In this regard, this study was conducted to examine the impact of soft skills development strategies on the employability of graduates based on previous studies. Soft skills studied are such as communication skills, problem-solving skills, working skills in groups, leadership skills, and decision-making skills. Qualitative research design with library research methods to obtain resources in analyzing the objectives of the study was used in this study. The results of the study found that there are elements of soft skills in further improve the employability of IPT graduates. The overall results of the study have a positive impact on lecturers in HEIs in improving the soft skills of their students. This study can guide lecturers to apply soft skills that are appropriate and effective in improving the employability of IPT graduates in the future. The findings of this study are a reference for lecturers and policymakers in shaping students at the level of quality and competent higher education in the future.

Keywords: Employability of Graduates, Soft Skills Students, Higher Education, Policymakers

Introduction

Graduate employability or employability in Malaysia has received public attention since the issue of unemployment occurred among graduates. It has raised concerns from parents, the community, educational institutions, and the government. Therefore, the Ministry of Education (Moe) has taken steps to overcome the issue of employability by introducing the Graduate Employability Blueprint 2012-2017 (GEB) at the national level. It is published to serve as a guide for institutions of higher learning (HEIs) to formulate strategies to produce

human capital that can meet economic demand with the changing landscape of the country (Abd Rahman et al., 2017).

The issue of unemployment has been a hot topic in Malaysia for the past two centuries. The global economic situation is a factor in the influence of the labor market and unemployment. In addition to this, internal factors are also related to the influence of Labor because it is related to the individual self. The phenomenon of unemployment will occur in developing countries due to the consequences of the economy in the country involving the government, policies, industrial sector, employers, and the community in the country (Othman et al., 2020). To be on par with developed countries, the Malaysian economy needs to plan and implement strategic development plans in the face of today's challenges. The rapid development of technology has impacted Malaysia in responding to international challenges to strengthen the economy. Therefore, Malaysia needs to have balanced human resources intellectually, physically, emotionally, and spiritually (Afliza & Maizatul, 2021). Higher education institutions have a key function in producing graduates who are proactive in possessing the various skills required. It is important to further enhance the employability of local graduates who are on par with overseas graduates.

Problem Statement

The issue of poor academic performance among IPT students produces individuals who fail to address current challenges. In the world of employment in the 21st century, this is not a high CGPA factor alone but is prioritized in the level of mastery of soft skills of graduates taken into account by employers in the selection of suitable employees (Zakaria et al., 2017). The soft skills of students are very important to provide benefits to the institution of study as well as other institutions. The competition for graduates in getting a job is very fierce. This allows the employment industry to choose employees according to the wishes of the employer. Employers are now more wise to choose trainees who have a variety of skills such as leadership qualities and knowledge in the discipline. To produce graduates who meet the needs of the market, the curriculum as a whole, and current technological developments so that employees are educated capable, and skilled to compete in the workplace to the future (Sabil et al., 2021).

The employability of graduates does not depend on the number of degrees obtained but includes aspects such as communication skills, critical and creative thinking, leadership qualities, and so on. Marketability also correlates with generic skills and general skills. The aim is to ensure that graduates are capable of teamwork, communication skills, and problem-solving (Mohamad & Muhammad, 2015).

In the Era of Industrial Revolution 4.0, the competition of graduates to get a job after graduation is becoming increasingly intense due to the need to master the skills needed by the industry such competition requires graduates to act more sensitively to current needs in meeting the needs of the job market (Ong et al., 2020). According to Ong et.al (2020), this is because the ability of graduates to get a job immediately after graduating is one of the measures of employability and the issue of graduate employability is not something new and is hotly discussed by academic researchers. Citing statistics from the Tracer Study report from the Ministry of Education, a total of 290,282 graduates graduated in 2018, but a total of 57,411, or 19.8% have yet to get a job (Ong et.al., 2020). Graduates in Malaysia experience unemployment due to several factors, namely their weakness in soft skills such as leadership skills, communication skills, team skills, and responsibility as well as critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Hanafi et al., 2019). Therefore, balanced academic and personal

aspects need to be emphasized in line with current educational and economic changes that require students to prepare themselves to face challenges as future leaders in the future.

Study Questions

Based on the stated objectives of the study, the following study questions are constructed:

- i) What is the concept of soft skills?
- ii) What is the concept of graduate employability?
- iii) How is the application of concepts and soft skills to the marketability of IPT?

Study Objectives

Specifically, the objectives of this study are as follows:

- i) To explain the concept of skill
- ii) Explain the concept of graduate employability
- iii) To identify the application of concepts and soft skills to the marketability of IPT

Significance of The Study

This study can provide feedback to graduates of Public Higher Education Institutions (IPTA) on communication skills, problem-solving skills, teamwork skills, continuous learning and information management, entrepreneurial skills, professional ethics and morals, and leadership skills in soft skills emphasized by the Ministry of Higher Education. The results of this study are expected to benefit certain parties such as institutions of Higher Learning (HEIs) and students. Therefore, the researcher hopes that students and lecturers can see the extent of student's knowledge and understanding of these soft skills. It is hoped that this will raise awareness in students of the importance of soft skills to them before they move on to the world of work.

I) To Explain the Concept of Skill

The Concept of Soft Skills

According to Osman & Hamzah (2020), soft skills are skills that include generic skills. According to them, the various terms used to describe generic skills between them in theory and practice have elements and theories that are more or less the same, namely skills, key skills, core skills, and employable skills all these terms have been used in Australia. In New Zealand, they use the term essential skills, and terms such as necessary skills, employability skills, and workplace know-how are also used in the United States. The same goals and aspects which these soft skills will describe the attitude, personality, habits, and behavior, how to communicate, and how they deal with a problem that is a skill that is not academic.

According to Syamaizar (2017), soft skills include aspects of generic skills involving cognitive elements related to non-academic skills such as positive values, leadership, teamwork, communication, and continuous learning. Soft skills are general skills other than technical skills, these skills are added value and are needed when someone is working more efficiently in problem-solving, effective communication, thinking creatively and critically, able to work in a team, competitive, and so on. According to him, soft skills are needed by every individual not only in the academic field but also in the career field. Mustapa et al (2018) stated that soft skills are non-technical skills, namely interpersonal skills, humanitarian skills, and behavioral skills needed to apply technical skills and knowledge in the workplace. According to him, soft skills are categorized as matters relating to issues of humanitarian skills such as communication, teamwork, leadership, conflict management, negotiation, professionalism, and ethics. These skills can be acquired through in-service training and

training of certain skills through assigned tasks and soft skills and technical skills are two other skills that are opposite but complement each other.

According to Aishah et al (2022), soft skills are skills that a person needs to have and they can develop through several processes such as growth, maturity, and aging. They also stated that soft skills involve positive skills related to an individual's ability to contribute effectively to others and their environment. As well as general skills that can improve work effectiveness, solve problems well, and work together in a team. To form elements of soft skills in themselves, students need to know the elements that are the basis of soft skills first so that students can prepare themselves to improve their skills and competencies. In addition, according to Zakaria and Daud (2020), skills mean competence or intelligence, and soft skills also known as generic skills are qualities, abilities, and characteristics that a person needs to master to be successful in their studies and career. among other institutes are core skills, essential skills, employability skills, transferable skills, trans-disciplinary goals, and others (Zakaria & Daud, 2020). He added that there are seven constituent skills, namely communication skills, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, teamwork, continuous learning and information management, entrepreneurial skills, moral and professional ethics, and leadership skills that have been outlined by KPT (2006) as attributes that must be mastered by a student.

According to Musa et al (2020), the government in PM 2013-2025 has the desire to produce excellent human capital where every student needs to have soft skills and competent students to help them into the workforce. The ability to master skills and attributes is the meaning of soft skills that can meet the job market to get a job according to the field of study. Soft skills are also an individual's need for technical skills to get a job in a chosen career. Soft skills are not only in improving skills, techniques, and experience to get a job but the individual's ability to perform tasks received while working will be related to the attitude of a student (Musa et al., 2020). Musa et al (2020) also stated that there is no fixed list of soft skills and assessment sets because these skills and assessments are constantly reviewed and reinterpreted according to changes in the environment of a country but it is realistic and important to be developed and assessed in the formation of student attitudes.

The term is derived from several terms that have been used throughout the world in various pronunciations. National Council for Vocational Education Research (NCVER, 2003) the term soft skills in Singapore is referred to as Critical Skills skills, while in the United Kingdom, it is referred to as Basic Skills, Key Skills, General Skills, and Transferrable Skills. The term soft skills has been used in New Zealand with the term Essential Skills while in Australia the terms used are Key Competency, Employability Skills, and Generic Skills. In Canada, soft skills use the same terms as in Australia, namely Employability Skills while in the United States using the terms Basic Skills and Skills in the workplace. In France, the term used is Transferrable Skills, while in Switzerland the term cross-disciplinary is used. In Malaysia, these skills are better known as generic skills and soft skills (Musa et al., 2020)

In Australia, soft skills assessment is administered by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). The instruments identified to be related to soft skills assessment for university students conducted by ACER (2000, 2001a, 2001b) are Graduate Skills Assessment (GSA), Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing (CRESST) model problem-solving assessment (Herl et al., 1999). Special Tertiary Admissions Test (STAT), Mature Students Admissions Pathway (MSAP), and UNIselect. The instruments used by Educational Testing Services are ETS Proficiency Profile (EPP), Graduate Record Examinations (GRE), Examen de Admisión an Estudios de Posgrado (EXADEP) critical Thinking (iCT), Major Field Tests (MFT), and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL).

Soft Skills Element

Seven soft skills must be mastered by every graduate in Malaysia, namely communication skills, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, teamwork skills, continuous learning and information management, entrepreneurial skills, professional ethics and morals, and leadership skills (Sabil et.al., 2021). According To Patrick S. O'Brien in his book *Marking College Count*, soft skills can be categorized into 7 areas called winning Characteristics, namely, (1) communication skills, (2) organizational skills, (3) leadership, (4) logic, (5) effort, (6) group skills, and (7) ethics. Nontechnical abilities that are invisible in form (intangible) but very necessary are called soft skills (Abidin, 2020). Soft skills are the development of EQ intelligence that is owned by every human being and also needs to be cultivated in each of us so that we can motivate ourselves and others, be responsible, build relationships, communicate, negotiate, adapt to the environment, be creative, innovate and entrepreneurship, lead, build cooperation, manage resources and so on (Abidin, 2020).

The Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia has introduced a comprehensive soft skills mastery approach which includes aspects of generic skills involving cognitive elements, leadership, team, communication, and continuous learning. There are seven soft skills, namely communication skills, critical and problem-solving skills, team skills, continuous learning and information management, entrepreneurial skills, professional ethics and morals, and leadership skills. This soft skills mastery approach also aims to equip students to face significant changes in the career environment so that they can compete in the real world (Ling et al., 2020). Soft skills or generic skills are skills that are difficult to train and teach but are very necessary in the workplace. Soft skills sometimes referred to as generic skills are skills that are difficult to train or teach but are very necessary in the workplace (Sahil & Hassan, 2018).

MOE takes seriously the soft skills after the implementation of the Malaysian Qualification Framework (MQF) which has outlined eight areas of learning outcomes as knowledge, practical skills, social skills and responsibility, ethics, morality and professionalism, communication skills, leadership and teamwork, critical thinking skills, problem solving and scientific skills, information management and lifelong learning skills and management and entrepreneurship skills (Sahil & Hassan, 2018).

According to the soft skills development module for Malaysian HEIs, KIM's characteristics are as follows in Table 1

Table 1
Soft Skills Must (KIM)

Soft Skills	Characteristic Features
Communication Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to communicate ideas, effectively, and with confidence orally and in writing • Ability to actively practice listening skills and provide feedback • Ability to make clear presentations with confidence and by the level of the listener
Critical thinking and problem-solving skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to identify and analyze problems in complex and

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ambiguous situations and to make justified judgments • Ability to develop and improve thinking skills such as explaining, analyzing, and evaluating discussions • Ability to brainstorm ideas and find alternative solutions
Team Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to build good relationships, interact with others, and work effectively with them to achieve common objectives • Ability to understand and take on the role of alternating between group leader and group members • Ability to recognize and respect the attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs of others
Continuous learning and Information Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to find and manage relevant information from a variety of source • Ability to accept new ideas and ability for autonomous learning
Entrepreneurial Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to identify business opportunities
Professional ethics and morals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to understand economic, environmental, and sociocultural impacts with professional practice
Leadership Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of basic leadership theory and ability to lead projects

A student who has additional Soft Skills (KIT), on the other hand, will be considered competent and excellent because they have various skills and can be competitive in the current era of globalization (Osman & Hamzah, 2020). The features of the KIT that have been outlined by IPT, can be referred to in the soft skills development module for IPT Malaysia. The characteristics are as follows in Table 2

Table 2

Additional Soft Skills (KIT)

Additional Soft Skills	Characteristic Features
Communication Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to use technology in presentations • Ability to negotiate and reach an agreement • Ability to communicate with people of different cultures
Critical thinking and problem-solving skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability to think beyond limits • Ability to make decisions based on strong evidence • Ability to maintain and give full attention to assigned responsibilities • Ability to understand and adapt to new cultures and work environments
Team Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to contribute to the planning and coordination of Group outcomes • Responsible for the group's decisions
Continuous learning and Information Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to develop an inquisitive mind and thirst for knowledge
Entrepreneurial Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to draw up business planning • Ability to build, explore, and seize business and employment opportunities • Ability to work alone
Professional ethics and morals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to analyze and make decisions in solving ethical problems • Ability to maintain an ethical attitude, as well as a sense of responsibility to society
Leadership Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to understand and take on alternate roles between team leader and team members • Ability to supervise team members

Communication Skills

Mastery of good communication skills is needed by every individual and these skills are measured based on the selection of good language style, polite, civilized, showing noble

personality, using words that describe respect for the listener, and using sentences that are easy to understand (Osman & Wahab, 2018). Communication is closely related to intonation in conversation which can affect a person's emotions based on the tone of voice used while speaking and aspects of intonation can also determine a person's interpersonal message (Osman & Wahab, 2018).

This communication skill is a way for a person to convey an idea orally or in writing that the idea conveyed must be clear and easy to understand by all (Osman & Hamzah, 2020). Language skills are important and represent the characteristics of a civilized nation. A person who has good communication skills, they have the skills to listen, and can provide feedback in any situation and discussion. Additional features of these communication skills are being able to make presentations with confidence and being able to explain clearly to other listening partners. For someone who uses technology during the presentation will be more prominent their presentation is an additional feature of these communication skills in turn maintains good relations with others and foster cultural values based on the customs of each nation consisting of various races.

Communication skills involve effective communication which has several levels, namely mastery the first level is the ability to convey ideas clearly and effectively, the second level is the ability to practice active listening skills and give feedback and the third level is the ability to make presentations clearly according to the level of the listener (Zakaria & Daud 2020).

Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills

These elements of critical thinking and problem-solving skills are essential elements for acquiring knowledge about the information emphasized in the learning sessions (Osman & Hamzah, 2020). IPT has outlined the skills of critical thinking and problem-solving skills including critical thinking and analytical skills in which a person who thinks critically will think and find solutions to problems with more maturity and make rational decisions based on strong evidence. Everyday life will have problems and we can solve these problems without following emotions and rational decisions (Osman & Hamzah, 2020).

According to Osman and Hamzah (2020), among the skills emphasized by IPT, is the skill to think critically and skillfully in solving problems to produce a society that is skilled in providing views, criticisms, and opinions before making a decision and this element is related to making a decision. Zakaria and Daud (2020) stated that this skill involves three skill levels, namely the first level is the ability to identify and analyze problems in complex and ambiguous situations and make justification assessments, the second level is the ability and repair thinking skills such as explaining, analyzing and evaluating discussions and the last level is the ability to find ideas and find alternative solutions.

Teamwork Skills

According to Osman & Hamzah (2020) teamwork skills are those who can work together to achieve a set goal. They will express their opinions among themselves to succeed and encourage them to think without shame about their opinions. Individuals who are accustomed to group work will train themselves to respect each other and accept the views of others. Therefore, the elements that need to be emphasized by the IPT can build good relationships during the group, understand and be able to compromise with others, together to obtain consensus in decision-making.

Zakaria & Daud (2020) stated that teamwork skills involve three levels, namely the ability to build good relationships, interact, and work effectively to achieve the same objectives, the second level is to understand and take on the role between group leaders and group members

and the last is the ability to recognize and respect the attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs of others. Hanafi et al (2019) stated that in an association or club, member cooperation is important to ensure that activities in the association run well and can provide a spirit of teamwork to other members to provide their ideas and views. Teamwork is work done with the same goal in a group or individual in a group that has different ways of working to complete the task and is a combination of several capable individuals from a combination of abilities, skills, and knowledge. therefore, each member of the group has a commitment and challenge in achieving team goals.

Continuous Learning And Information Management

Skills in continuous learning and information management skills include two levels of mastery, namely the first level is the ability to find and manage relevant information from various resources and the second level is the ability to accept new ideas and be capable of autonomous learning (Zakaria & Daud, 2020).

Learning that was previously learned is very important and is used for the future and lifelong learning is a learning that has no end and is constantly changing and requires more effort the transfer of learning does not only occur on one learning source, it may be more than one to improve individual knowledge (Hanafi et al., 2019).

Entrepreneurial Skills

This entrepreneurial skill involves three levels of mastery, namely the first level is the inability to identify business opportunities, the second level is the ability to formulate business planning and the last is the ability to build, explore, and seize business and employment opportunities (Zakaria & Daud, 2020)

Professional Ethics and Morals

According to Osman and Hamzah (2020) stated that the National Education Philosophy was formulated based on religious, political, economic, social, individual, and universal factors. Religious factors consider Islam as the official religion of Malaysia in addition to other religious practices freely professed by national law. However, ethical and moral elements are emphasized as basic considerations in developing the potential of the individual as a whole and integrated. Osman and Hamzah (2020), ethics and morals in education are important in balancing one's knowledge and emotions. However, the elements that have been outlined by IPT for the elements of professional ethics and morals include producing people who understand the surrounding conditions including culture, environment, human behavior, and so on. The country needs a society that can tolerate each other for the well-being of people of different religions and cultures. According to Zakaria and Daud 2020, this skill includes two levels of mastery, the first level is the ability to understand the economic, environmental, and sociocultural impact in professional practice and the last level is the ability to analyze and make decisions in solving ethical problems.

Leadership Skills

Leadership skills involve three levels of expulsion, namely the first level is knowledge of the basic theory of leadership, the second level is the ability to lead projects and the third level is the ability to understand and take on the role of the team leader and other members (Zakaria & Daud, 2020).

II) Explain the concept of graduate employability**Graduate Employability Concept**

According to Ahmat & Adenan (2021), employability skills exist, namely employability is the ability to get new jobs in the free labor market. Three important aspects must be possessed by graduates to achieve employability skills, namely skills, understanding, and personal qualities. Thus, graduates will have more potential to secure employment of their choice that will benefit themselves, the workforce, society, and the economy. There are three skills the first skill is the basic academic consists of reading, writing, mathematical sciences, communication, and listening. The second skill is high-level thinking including learning, creative thinking, decision-making, and problem solving. The third skill is a personal quality that is responsibility, self-confidence, social skills, honesty, integrity, team spirit, and so on. Soft skills should not be underestimated because soft skills are personal cross-sectional competencies that are attitudes towards social, language, and communication abilities, friendliness ability to work in a team, and other qualities that characterize relationships with others. He also noted that soft skills are a complement to technical skills. Technical skills are generally skills related to professional knowledge of equipment or techniques. In other words, technical skills are like the technical and administrative procedures related to the core functions of an organization.

Ahmat & Adenan (2021), graduate employability needs to include compatibility elements, namely being able to develop solutions that are compatible with work culture and goals. In addition, the element of flexibility is the ability to provide appropriate work services for the project or task in progress. The next element of marketability is reliability, which is responsive to the needs of employers and customers, timely and targeted work required by employers such as informative briefs, and so on. All of these skills are available to students if higher education institutions provide a platform to shape these students to achieve all the skills required by the industry. All of these skills are available to students if higher education institutions provide a platform to shape these students to achieve all the skills required by the industry. According to Ahmat & Adenan (2021), the Ministry of Higher Education has outlined seven effective approaches to improving the employability of graduates, namely formal training, informal training, entrepreneurship programs, smart partnerships with industry, practical training at the international level, inculcating positive values and student mobility programs. Industry and employers will look at all of these criteria to ensure graduates can compete in an increasingly challenging market.

Improvements to absorb these criteria must be made continuously to ensure that an institution of higher learning can produce balanced graduates, knowledgeable, have strong personalities, and are skilled in various fields, and the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) recommends that university management shorten the process of study, review, and implementation of new study program offerings to six months compared to taking several years before. This shows that the industry seems to express its dissatisfaction with the management of higher education institutions, both public universities (UA) and private universities (US) (Ahmat & Adenan, 2021). That is why there is an interest in establishing cooperation with the industry to reach a consensus in producing balanced graduates and to satisfy all parties, both academic experts and industry experts.

COVID-19 which hit the world in early 2020 has had a significant impact on social and economic life around the world. Many socio-economic activities are disrupted globally, such as the postponement and cancellation of cultural, religious, tourism, sports, and other events that involve economic chain tightening, leading to the closure of companies and suspension

of work activities due to the pandemic, which causes the unemployment rate to increase drastically and job opportunities to narrow.

Most scholars define employability by focusing on personal skills and aspects, attitudes, habits and behaviors, ways of communicating, problem-solving skills, decision-making skills as well as the process of managing organizations and graduate employability is also seen as the ability of individuals to get a job and stay in that job without looking for another job, as well as being able to adapt to the requirements of the industry and employers (Ayob et. al., 2020). In addition, marketability is the ability of an individual to get a job, stay in a job, and adapt to the job and it is a skill that is needed to meet job needs such as interpersonal skills and good behavior in line with the initial idea of human resources or human capital that emphasizes the need for education and training.

The employability of graduates in HEIs is an issue close to students and the field of Education. The main subject of discussion is the employability of graduates to reduce the problem of unemployment resulting from the challenges of the world entering the Industrial Revolution 4.0. Puad & Nawe (2021) stated that academic qualifications and certificates do not guarantee graduates employability because employers take into account the added value of graduates including skills, privileges, and personal advantages to seize job opportunities. Furthermore, the low quality of graduates in the workplace presents a challenge to employers in the face of the Industrial Revolution 4.0.

Graduate employability refers to the skills required by graduates to obtain employment through learning new skills required by employers or industry and is also understood as having the ability to get the first job, and retain and acquire new jobs. Defined employability as the ability of graduates to demonstrate the characteristics required by employers for the future needs of the organization as well as the ability of graduates to possess, demonstrate, and define all the skills to get a job (Azri et al., 2019).

Higher Education Skills has set out seven approaches to improving the employability of graduates such as formal training, informal training, entrepreneurship programs, smart partnerships with industry, practical training at the international level, inculcating positive values and student mobility programs as well as industry and employers will look at all these criteria to ensure graduates can compete in an increasingly challenging market (Ahmat & Adenan, 2021).

Ahmat & Adenan (2021) stated that the employability of graduates must include the following elements, namely compatibility/agreement/suitability means the ability to develop solutions that are compatible with the culture and work goals. Next is flexibility, which is the ability to provide appropriate work services for the project or task being carried out. Then reliability, which is to be responsive to the needs of employers and customers, timely and targeted work. Last is sensitivity, which can carry out a work approach that meets the actual value of the work required by the employer, such as an informed approach, cost-effectiveness, and so on.

Soft Skills and Employability of Graduates

Soft skills and marketability are relevant elements and are a requirement by graduates who need to master to adapt them at the job level (Majid & Hussin, 2015). With the changing economy, graduates have faced a high challenge in finding employment and the industry is now not only looking at academic qualifications but also giving priority to candidates with high employability.

Many factors affect the success of graduates today. Previous studies have stated that several important components can predict the level of employability of graduates including

the mastery of candidates in the aspect of soft skills, academic achievement, and specific industry training experience (Omar & Helma, 2020). According to Omar and Helma (2020), these three components of marketability are complementary. The disadvantage of one of the components can adversely affect the potential of a potential graduate in the process of recruitment, interviewing, and hiring.

Soft skills are non-technical, intangible, and personality-specific skills that determine an individual's strengths as a leader, listener, negotiator, and conflict solver. Some of the important components of soft skills are foreign language proficiency (second language), communication ability, willingness to learn, leadership ability, planning and organizing activities, entrepreneurship, critical and innovative thinking, decision making, self and time management, problem-solving and teamwork all graduates must have skilled soft skills besides being supported by the achievement of excellent academic certificates and experience in quality industries (Omar & Helma, 2020).

III) To identify the application of concepts and soft skills to the marketability of IPT

Application of Marketability and Human Capital

Knowledgeable and highly skilled human capital is the most important factor for the country to transform the economy towards achieving the status of a developed and high-income country by 2020. Therefore, it is clear that marketability is an important element in stimulating and generating economic growth for the country. Quality human capital refers to the success of individuals with strong marketability. Hence, it is not surprising that the government has made human capital as the most important investment indicator for the development of a country and at the core of innovation and a productive high-income economy. In addition, the impact of marketability on graduates is also seen through the application of human capital value. The generation that has a strong human capital, should generate sovereignty and prosperity to the country. Therefore, the strengthening of quality human capital and development generated should be towards adhering to the values of a strong identity.

Also, the appreciation of this value leads to the development of universal insistence. The approach of education and dissemination of knowledge should be developed to produce quality and balanced human capital and quality and balanced human capital should be mobilized productively and the process of education and Knowledge Development should be carried out continuously in an effort towards organizational development. The formation of human capital should focus on producing individuals who are balanced and harmonious in various aspects, including intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical aspects in line with the National Education Philosophy. In addition, balanced here is an individual who does not go beyond the limits and does not prioritize one aspect to ignore other aspects. In short, the importance of marketability through the application of human capital is a necessary element in a society, especially in Malaysia. This is because human capital is a civilizational revolution towards a better society than the transition of the past. The application of this human capital is a continuation of the cultivation of knowledge which is the basis for the progress of a country, and indirectly a stimulant to economic growth.

Employer Perception of Graduate Performance

There are various studies on the level of satisfaction of employers on the performance of graduates have been conducted by HEIs. The IPT needs to know and further improve and find ways to improve the quality of academic and non-academic programs to ensure that the graduates produced can meet the job market and employer requirements. Therefore, many

studies on the perception of employers and their level of satisfaction with graduates have been carried out.

Among the Studies are

A report from the Department of Polytechnic Education on the perception of employers towards polytechnic graduates of the Ministry of Education Malaysia. The study in this report was conducted through quantitative methods to identify the needs and perceptions of employers toward semi-professional employees among polytechnic graduates. A total of 450 employers out of 500 employers across Malaysia have responded. The findings show that the needs and perceptions of employers on the motivation and attributes of graduates are very high. Meanwhile, the gap between the needs and the employer's perception of the job role is minimal. The findings also showed a significant gap between employers 'needs and perceptions of graduates' technical skills. However, employers 'perception of graduates' employability skills is at a high level.

Studies on graduate employability in Malaysia: A survey from an employer's perspective conducted by (Ismail, 2012). This study was conducted to look at some of the key employability characteristics that employers consider important in the process of recruitment and selection of new employees, their perception of the quality of graduates who are currently working with the problem of job mismatch among graduates, and assess the extent to which the education system in Malaysian universities can produce graduates who meet the needs of the job market. A total of 534 questionnaires were returned out of a total of a thousand forms sent by post to employers. The findings show that there is a gap between the actual performance of graduates and the expectations of employers for all marketable characteristics, especially in decision-making and problem-solving characteristics, which recorded the largest gap.

The findings also showed that the graduates produced are still lacking in thinking skills, communication, and interpersonal skills such as being able to convey views that can convince others. The Study Between Reality and Hope-An Empirical Study of Employers' perception of the Performance of local graduates was conducted by Zafir et. al., (2015). This study was conducted to provide suggestions to HEIs and policymakers on the current level of performance of graduates who are currently working and the skills that are needed by the industry. A total of 534 respondents provided feedback from 2000 questionnaires that were posted to human resource managers or top managers of private companies. The findings showed that the biggest gap in graduates ' performance was in communication and interpersonal. Similarly, the performance of graduates in terms of ethics and values, thinking skills, decision-making leadership, and problem-solving is also found to have a relatively large gap by employers.

Employers ' Perception on Graduates in the Malaysian Services Sector by Ismail et al (2011) was implemented to find out the perception of employers on the performance of immigrants in the service sector. The study involved a total of 749 employers in the services sector in the Klang Valley. This study has divided the graduates involved into three (3) groups, namely graduates of the National University of Malaysia (UKM), other local graduates, and overseas graduates. The findings found that other local graduates had obtained the highest mean in communication, interpersonal, and decision-making skills. In terms of leadership skills, UKM graduates and other local graduates are better than overseas graduates. The findings on a graduate's skills for the future show all of the listed criteria are considered important which suggests that employers give preference to holistic graduates. Of the criteria listed, 15 criteria have achieved a mean of 4.0 and above indicating they are more important

than the rest. The criteria are communication skills, fluency in Malay and English, writing skills, thinking skills, decision-making skills, problem-solving, ICT skills, teamwork, work planning, values and ethics, self-confidence, attitude and character, leadership, and personality. This finding also shows that academic level is less important compared to the previously mentioned soft skills Brunei Institute of Technical Education (IBTE) has also conducted the IBTE Employers' Satisfaction Survey.

The study involved a total of 738 graduates of the 24th National Convocation, 2016. The study found that overall employer satisfaction reached 85.2%. In this study, a total of 18 items under 6 skill clusters (3 items per skill cluster) were used to measure the level of satisfaction of employers on the job performance of IBTE graduates. The clusters are technical skills and knowledge, basic skills, adaptation skills, teamwork skills, entrepreneurial skills, and employability skills.

Graduate Employability Development: Student Perceptions And Obstacles Encountered

The curriculum of study is an important influence in shaping a student's career path. However, it was found that the average respondents involved in the study thought that the program of study they were pursuing was not sufficient to prepare them to compete in the job market. Only 43.4 percent of respondents from UUM and 33 percent from USM agreed that the program of study followed was adequate in preparing them to meet the needs of the job market. No less than 31 percent of respondents from UUM and 36 percent from USM responded that their study programs were not able to prepare them adequately to meet the needs of the job market. In addition, some respondents are not sure whether the program of study followed is sufficient to meet the needs of the market factors lack of exposure to soft skills, especially through the curriculum of study among important factors that can affect the marketability of graduates (Yusof & Jamaluddin, 2017).

Graduate employability development is not limited to the curriculum of study programs only but more importantly, the University's efforts to offer specific programs or courses/training that can expose students to the soft skills needed by employers and the job market. Proactive students certainly have the initiative to obtain career-related information from various sources to equip themselves before entering the labor market upon graduation. Although students admit that many factors cause problems in making decisions and determining career goals, in terms of students' sensitivity to the demands in the labor market is found to be still low. Only 35.6% of the students found admitted that they knew the form and type of employability skills required by employers. While 18.9% of students do not know it at all and the majority of students (45.5%) are unsure of the employability skills required by employers. Although some students are sensitive to the labor market scenario and have initiatives to improve their competitiveness in the graduate labor market, their efforts are also faced with some constraints. A total of 51.9% of students admitted that there were constraints for them to improve their employability skills while they were attending university. The constraint factor can be broken down into four main factors, namely time factor, cost and program factor, information factor, and attitude factor. In terms of time factor, busyness with assignments and classes is the main factor that prevents students from attending programs or courses that can improve employability skills other than.

In conclusion, the sustainability of an institution of Higher Learning is no longer dependent on the quantity of students who graduate but now the quality of the students and the marketability of the graduates themselves will be viewed by most industry players. The preparedness of graduates in the world of work must start from the stage of study where the institution must work with the faculty to identify elements and aspects that need to be

improved to improve the preparation of students. Skills training that is usually applied in the study stage should not only be viewed in terms of training duration but also should be viewed as a whole so that skills training between industry and higher education can achieve its objectives at the maximum level. Technical cooperation such as industrial joint ventures in contributing subsidies to students and staff is believed to help increase continued involvement in improving skills and expertise.

Implications of The Study

The results of this study have positive implications for certain parties such as IPT students, IPT graduates, higher education institutions, the Ministry of Higher Education, and the Ministry of Education Malaysia. The findings from this research can provide a meaningful contribution to the Ministry of Higher Education, especially the education division to assess the extent to which soft skills elements affect the marketability of today's IPT graduates. The need for soft skills must be taken into account by all parties, both themselves, educational institutions and employers are no exception. Mastery of soft skills will help improve the quality of graduates to position themselves in the workplace and then give birth to first-class human capital.

Based on the definition and research that has been submitted, it can be concluded that soft skills are skills that are very necessary to be owned by an employee regardless of the job and the employment sector that is or will be ventured into. The overall results of the study had a positive impact on the lecturers in the IPT in assessing the soft skills of their students. This study guides lecturers to apply soft skills considered appropriate and effective in improving the employability of IPT graduates in the future. The findings of this study are a reference for lecturers in carrying out their duties as quality and competent higher education educators in the future.

Soft skills elements such as communication skills, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, teamwork skills, continuous learning and information management, entrepreneurial skills, professional ethics and morals, and leadership skills are very important in every individual, especially graduates to further improve the employability of graduates in the era of Industrial Revolution 4.0 which they have to compete in getting a place in their work environment in the future.

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