

FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENTS' EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS IN PAHANG

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Abstract: Business management programmes are critical in developing highly competent workers to meet the demands of today's business environment. An empirical analysis of a business management programme is required to determine the effectiveness of programme courses in providing students with soft skills that will enable them to meet contemporary employment needs and professional expectations. This paper aims to assess factors that influence employability skills. A total of 91 students participated in this research. The result of PLS-SEM indicates reliability and personal presentation are significant determinants of employability skills, but honesty and enthusiasm were not significant factors. Thus, this study is essential to spur more significant improvement to produce high-quality graduates, and the findings could be used as a strategy to improve curriculum design.

Keyword: Employability skills, personal quality, honesty, reliability, enthusiasm, personal presentation.

Introduction

Malaysia needs a highly qualified workforce to sustain the industry's expansion. Employees are expected to stay up with global economics in the face of a rapidly changing employment environment and rapid technological change (Singh et al., 2013). Therefore, Malaysia has to restructure its workforce to ensure that middle-level workers are highly skilled to achieve the status of a developed nation by 2020. Malaysia's future workforce must be able to adapt to changing work environments and demands. Therefore, the future workforce must acquire the employability skills necessary for all industries. According to the Eleventh Malaysian Plan (2016–2020), today's field employs only 25% of the workers. The Eleventh Malaysia Plan seeks to increase this workforce to 35%, comparable to academic and professional graduates. In addition, Malaysia's Education Blueprint 2015–2025 (Higher Education) emphasizes the need for graduates who can successfully traverse complex challenges, including global warming and economic crises (Ganapathy, 2016). As a result, graduates must possess the necessary knowledge and technical expertise and make ethical decisions and adapt to rapid change. According to the McKinsey Study, Education to Employment (Mourshed et al., 2013), over 70% of universities believe they have sufficiently equipped students for the workplace. On the other hand, employers believe that only 40% of students are effectively equipped for the profession. The word "employability skills" refers to the ability to find and keep a job, as well as a more contemporary use of the term to denote the training or foundation skills that a person must gain in order to develop job-specific abilities. Employability abilities are required to obtain, maintain, and perform well in work (Shafie & Nayan, 2010). Examples are managing resources, communication and interpersonal skills, teamwork and problem solving and obtaining and maintaining a job. This paper examines the influence of personal qualities (honesty, reliability, enthusiasm, and personal presentation) on employability skills among higher institutions in Pahang state.

Review of Literature

In today's world that current labour markets are continuously updated with the need for current job content, the ability of organizations to find qualified employees and the large sizes of graduates to find relevant jobs have become real challenges. This current scenario requires graduates to look for available jobs considered the supply side while the organizations will look for workers as the demand side. Hence it leads to the concept of employability (Harms & Brummel, 2013). According to Yorke and Knight (2007), employability was known as a set of achievements that consists of skills, understandings and

personal attributes that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, then benefits themselves, the organizations, community and the economy as a whole. This definition suggests that students viewed the most important motivation for pursuing a university degree to improve their job prospects (Cheng et al., 2021). However, it is essential to note that employability is not just about getting a job. Tholen (2014) recognized personal qualities as the outcome of individual ability, and it is a collection of competitive skills and abilities that help graduates obtain employment. On the other hand, Hosain et al. (2021) indicate personal qualities as a distinctive manner of thinking, feeling, and behaving that embraces moods, attitudes, and opinions during interaction with other people. This covers behavioral uniqueness that distinguishes between individuals, and it can be observed based on the person's relationship with the surrounding and social groups. Besides, personal qualities were excellent or positive attitude, discipline, hospitality, integrity, analytical, compliance of regulations, directives, responsibility, independence, and trust (Nik Hairi et al., 2012). Thus, in this study, the researcher examines personal qualities (honesty, reliability, enthusiasm and personal presentation) towards employability skills. Firstly, according to Rasul et al. (2013), honesty is crucial, and businesses require personnel who can be trusted and have high ethical standards. Employers rate honesty high on their list of desirable employability attributes of a graduate. Therefore, it is an integral part of improving students' employability (Archer & Davison, 2008). Secondly, Rasul et al. (2013) highlighted that the industry requires people dedicated to the profession, have a strong desire to work, are sincere and honest, and are reliable, timely, and physically fit. The practice of positive attitudes that are personal qualities needed, such as reliability, honesty, enthusiasm, commitment, motivation, adaptability and others (Noor et al., 2021). Thirdly, Saunders and Zuzel (2015) identified enthusiasm as the willingness to work, attitudes, and behaviours among employability skills. The highest level of competency among undergraduates in achieving employers' expectations is demonstrated by attributes like dedication and enthusiasm (Wye & Lim, 2009). Finally, according to a study by Poole and Zahn (1993), employers look for candidates who have a good personal appearance, such as being neat and clean, for a position in their company. As part of personal branding, appearance is a visual signal that contributes to forming the first impression.

Methodology

The population of the study among higher institution in Pahang State. The sample size was determined using GPower calculation. A total of 85 samples were suggested based on an effect size of 0.15, an alpha level of 0.05, and four predictors. However, taking the suggestions of Hair et al., (2014), a larger sample size improves the precision and reliability of PLS-SEM results. A total of 91 respondents took part in the survey. The sample was selected based on purposive sampling to ensure the respondents fit with the profile. The item measurement was adopted from past studies: personal quality (Singh & Singh, 2008); (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, 1992) and employability skills (Curtis & McKenzie, 2002). Item modification was made to meet the context of the study and validate by the field experts. The average variance extraction (AVE) is more than the minimal value of 0.500, and all constructs meet the threshold condition of composite reliability (CR) > 0.7. As a result, it is proven that each construct is truly distinct from one another.

Result and Discussion

Table 1 shows the findings of one-tailed path coefficients with a significant value of $p < 0.05$. It was found reliability and personal presentation are significantly related to employability skills ($\beta = 0.288$, $p < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.354$, $p < 0.05$ respectively). The value of the coefficient of determination (R^2) of the main effect model suggests the exogenous constructs explain 76.2% of the variances in employability skills. The effect sizes for H2 and H4 are 0.003 and 0.002. Therefore, the predictive relevance of Q2 is 0.366. Based on the results, there are four findings to be discussed. First, personal attributes are the most critical employability skill (Shafie & Nayan, 2010). In addition, personal attributes include honesty, reliability, enthusiasm, and personal presentation. However, the result of the study shows that only reliability and personal presentation are significant to employability skills. Second, while past studies have indicated the importance of honesty and enthusiasm (Noor et al., 2021), the study results are contradictory. Both honesty and enthusiasm do not determine employability skills. Therefore, injecting

a moderating variable, for instance, emotional intelligence is suggested to examine the interaction effect (Aziz & Pangil, 2017). Thirds, comparing all determinants, the influence of personal presentation on employability skills is the strongest. The finding is consistent with (Khotijah, 2021). Fourth, graduate job candidates must prepare themselves with soft skills such as presentation, appearance, and charisma. Finally, to produce graduates with high personal qualities, higher education institutions should design one curriculum to improve students' personal qualities in line with industry requirements.

Table 1: Path Coefficient Assessment

Hypotheses	Std Beta	Std Error	T Statistics	P Value	f2	Q2	Result
H1: Honesty -> Employability Skills	0.134	0.119	1.123	0.262	0.02	0.366	NS
H2: Reliability -> Employability Skills	0.288	0.097	2.976	0.003	0.125		**
H3: Enthusiasm -> Employability Skills	0.187	0.122	1.528	0.127	0.048		NS
H4: Personal Presentation-> Employability Skills	0.354	0.113	3.122	0.002	0.151		**

Note: R²= 0.762, ** p < .05

Conclusion

This study examines the roles of honesty, reliability, enthusiasm, and personal presentation in explaining employability skills among higher institutions students in Pahang state. Because the findings on the role of honesty and personal presentation are inconsistent, the study recommends that future research include the appropriate moderating variable. Practically, the findings offer some insights into the development of higher employability skills, in which higher education institutions must ensure the curriculum design is more fit with the industrial demand.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors have not declared any conflict of interest. All co-authors have seen and agree with the manuscript's contents, and there is no financial interest to report. The authors certify that the submission is original work and is not under review at any other publication. All sources of financial support for the project should be disclosed.

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