Academicians' Perception of the Employability Skills Performance of the New Business' Graduates in Malaysia

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Submitted: 25-01-2022 Revised: 05-02-2022 Accepted: 08-02-2022

ABSTRACT

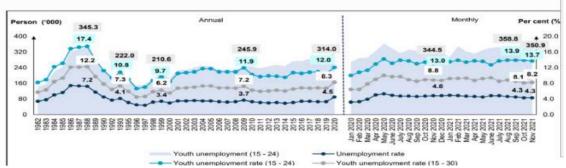
Employability skills have become a serious issue among the new graduates. The academicians play crucial roles to ensure the graduates are ready to employ by industry. However, the link between employability skills and employment is still questionable. Hence, the study aims to identify the academician's perception of the importance, urgency, and performance of employability skills (basic, applied, interpersonal and 21st-century skills) among the new graduates in Malaysia. Besides, to determine which skill contribute more to employment opportunity. 607 academic staff from various universities in Malaysia participated in this descriptive study. Meanwhile, statistics, correlation, and multiple regressions are used to analyze the data. The result revealed that the academicians rated the skills highly on the importance of the other aspects. Furthermore, the academicians had moderate opinions regarding the students' performance on the basic, applied, interpersonal and 21st-century skills. Accordingly, recommendations and limitations are highlighted in this study.

Keywords: Higher education, Academicians, Business graduates, Employability skills, Employment opportunity, Malaysia

Employability has become a critical issue in Malaysia and globally. ILO (2021) reported that unemployment increased steadily, and it was estimated that in 2020, the unemployment was 190.3 million and increased to 193.7 in 2021. Malaysia is not exceptional; the situation worsens among young people aged between 15 and 24 years old. The statistic department (2022 January 10) indicated that in 1982 – 2020 unemployment among the youth (11.9%) increased more than triple compared to the national unemployment rate (3.7%). Furthermore, in January 2020 – November 2021, the youth unemployment rate rose to 13%, and the national unemployment rate was 4.8%. The details are shown in chart 1.

Volume 4, Issue 2 Feb 2022, pp: 439-447 www.ijaem.net ISSN: 2395-5252

Chart 1: Unemployment rate by selected age groups, 1982 – 2020 and January 2020 – November 2021

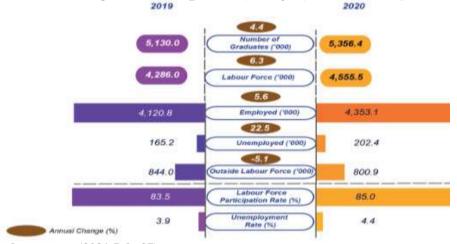


Source: Statistics department, 2022)

It is a similar scenario with unemployment among the new graduate. Chart 2 shows that the unemployment rate increased by 4.4% in 2020 compared to 3.9% in 2019. Even though the employment rate improved by 6.6% or a total of

66.8% in 2020, however, nearly half of them (31.2%) only employed in semi-skilled and low-skilled occupation categories. It shows a mismatch as they do not fully utilize their education skills (Department of Statistics Department, 2021).

Chart 2: Principal statistics of graduates, Malaysia, 2019-2020 ('000)



Source: statistics department (2021 July 27).

The government took intervention to help the new graduate secure jobs such as "Penjana KPT-CAP." It aims to reskill and upskill the graduates by boosting their existing abilities and knowledge. It consists of three sub-programs — Place and Train, Entrepreneurship, and Gig Economy. In 2020 government allocated to the ministry of higher learning for the program that lasts between four and six weeks (Datuk Dr. Noraini Ahmad, 2020 September 25). The budget will increase to RM 1.1 billion in 2022 (MOF, 2021 October 29). However, comprehensive action needs to take urgently by the stakeholder, especially the university, to ensure the students are ready for the industry. Hence, the academician needs to identify what the industry is looking for from the graduates.

The literature indicated that many factors

contribute to the unemployment rate among new graduates in Malaysia. Mohd Abdul Kadir J. et al. (2020) said the main factors contributing to unemployment among graduates are employability skills, job mismatch, and unrealistic salaries. Meanwhile, Roepen (2017) said the combination of technical and non-technical skills. Furthermore, Obeid, Salleh, & Mohd Nor (2017) claimed that the candidates' personality plays an essential role in employability. Bergner (2020) supported that employers often want to get a sense of fundamental candidate character. It is candidates' interactions with the environment and social groups (Holzman, 2020).

Meanwhile, Paljug (2020) said that employers prefer employees with the same traits and characteristics. The literature also indicated



that employers and graduates have different opinions on skills needed for employment (Erni, 2018). Furthermore, (Paterson 2017) found that students and lecturers share similar perspectives on the importance of employability.

Yong, B. P. P., & Ling, Y.-L. (2022) revealed the skill gap between employers and students on soft skills in terms of ranking order. Finally, (Tanius E., Johari, H. Yulia A., Siong, H. C. & Pazim K. H. (2018) claimed that the stakeholder, employer, academician, and student agreed that interpersonal skill is the most important skill by the employer. However, they have a different opinion on which skills are more important than the others.

Based on the above discussion, this study will determine the academician's perception of the importance, urgency, and performance of employability skills (basic, applied, interpersonal and 21st-century skills) among the new graduates. Therefore, the study focuses on the basic skills, applied skills, interpersonal and 21st-century skills as the employability skills required by the industry.

The study is quantitative, and 706 academic staff participated in this study. 607 academic staff from ten public and private universities in Malaysia joined this study. There are five variables related to employment opportunities in this study: basic skills, applied skills, interpersonal skills, and 21st-century skills. Meanwhile, the dependent variable is employment opportunity. The academic staff was asked their perception on the importance, performance, and urgency of the skills toward the employment opportunity among the university graduates. This study used the 5-point Likert scale; meanwhile, SPSS adopted to analyze the data.

THE RESULT Academic Staff Demographic Profile

There was 607 academic staff participating in our research from 10 universities and colleges in Malaysia (from the Peninsular, Sarawak, and Sabah). A comparatively similar number of male (51.2%) and female (48.8%) lecturers participated in this study. The majority of the lecturers were with a Bachelor's degree qualification (52.9%), followed by lecturers with a master's degree (29%). The dominant age range was 26-35 with 6-10 years of teaching experience.

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive Statistics for Lecturers' Ratings of the Measured Skills

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of the Academic Variables

	N	Minimum	- Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
BS_Importance	607	3.00	5.00	4.4969	.56376
BS_Urgency	607	2.00	5.00	3.8969	.77558
BS_Performance	607	2.00	5.00	3.8135	.74354
AS_Importance	607	3.90	5.00	4.5824	.46643
AS_Urgency	607	3.00	5.00	4.1453	.68533
AS_Performance	607	3.00	5.00	3.9392	.66597
IS_Importance	607	3.73	5.00	4.5729	.47206
IS_Urgency	607	3.00	5.00	4.0675	.68018
IS_Performance	607	2.00	5.00	4.0637	.88283
CS_Importance	607	3.00	5.00	4.5440	.56708
CS_Urgency	607	3.00	5.00	4.1364	.59835
CS_Performance	607	2.80	5.00	3.8379	.73719
EPO	607	1.60	4.00	2.9189	.60593
Valid N (listwise)	607				

The table above presents the mean values of lecturers' ratings on the four skills in three aspects:

DOI: 10.35629/5252-0402439447 Impact Factor value 7.429 | ISO 9001: 2008 Certified Journal Page 441

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importance, urgency, and performance. On average, the lecturers rated the kills highly on the importance compared to the other aspects. The lecturers had moderate opinions regarding the students' performance on the skills, comparatively lower than the students' self-perceived performance.

Correlation Analysis

Table 3. Basic Skill Correlations

		BS_Importance	BS_Urgency	BS_Performance
BS_Importance	Pearson Correlation	1	.141**	297**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	607	607	607
BS_Urgency	Pearson Correlation	.141**	1	.586**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	607	607	607
BS_Performance	Pearson Correlation	297**	.586**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	607	607	607

^{**.} Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From the table above, the correlation results show a statistically significant relationship between all three pairs (p < .01). However, the only noted and sufficiently strong correlation was seen between urgency and performance (r = .586, p < .01). The result suggests that the more urgently the skills needed for employment, the more lecturers think their students performed better on these skills.

Table 4. Applied Skill Correlation

		AS_Importance	AS_Urgency	AS_Performance
AS_Importance	Pearson Correlation	1	.423**	.348**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	607	607	607
AS_Urgency	Pearson Correlation	.423**	1	.758**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	607	607	607
AS_Performance	Pearson Correlation	.348**	.758**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	607	607	607

^{**.} Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The table above shows the correlation results among the applied skill ratings: importance, urgency, and performance, rated by the lecturers. All pairwise correlations were statistically significant (p < .05). Urgency and performance had the strongest correlation (r = .758, p < .01) followed by importance and urgency (r = .423, p < .05), and urgency and performance (r = .348, p < .01).

Table 5. Interpersonal Skill Correlations

		IS_Imiportance	IS_Urgency	IS_Performance
IS_Imiportance	Pearson Correlation	1	.223**	.045
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.270
	N	607	607	607
IS_Urgency	Pearson Correlation	.223**	1	.355**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	607	607	607

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IS_Performance	Pearson Correlation	.045	.355**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.270	.000	
	N	607	607	607

^{**.} Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results of correlation analysis on interpersonal skill variables similarly show the same pattern in which performance was related with urgency (r = .355, p < .01). This finding indicates that the more the lecturers think that the skill is urgent, the higher they rated the students' performance on the skill. The correlation of urgency and importance was also significant, but lesser in magnitude (r = .223, p < .01), while importance has no relation with performance (r = .045, p = .270).

Table 6. The 21st Century Skill Correlations

		CS_Importance	CS_Urgency	CS_Performance
CS_Importance	Pearson Correlation	1	.236**	083*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.042
	N	607	607	607
CS_Urgency	Pearson Correlation	.236**	1	.310**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	607	607	607
CS_Performance	Pearson Correlation	083*	.310***	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.042	.000	
	N	607	607	607

^{**.} Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 6 is the results of the correlation analysis among the 21^{st} -century skill ratings (i.e., importance, urgency, and performance). Similarly, urgency and performance were significantly correlated (r = .310, p < .01). The correlation of urgency and importance was also significant, but lesser in magnitude (r = .236, p < .01).

Predicting Employment Opportunity

In order to investigate the influence of the four measured skills (i.e., basic skills, applied skills, interpersonal skills, and 21st-century skills), we examined the role of the lecturers' responses on

the ratings of importance, urgency, and performance in predicting their employment opportunity. Meanwhile, multiple regression analysis was used to test the effects.

First, we looked at the influence of the importance of skills on employment opportunities. The result showed that the important aspects explained the 11.5% variance in employment opportunities. Of course, the variance accounted by the predictor variables was not significant, but considering the research is about behavior, 10% of the variance is enough to explain what factors account for the effects.

Table 7. Multiple Regression Table for Importance

Model Summary Adjusted RStd. Error of the Model R Square Square Estimate .234^a .055 .049 .59101 Predictors: (Constant), CS_Importance, BS_Importance, AS Importance, IS Imiportance

ANOVA

^{*.} Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).



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Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	12.215	4	3.054	8.742	.000 ^b
	Residual	210.277	602	.349		
	Total	222.492	606			

a. Dependent Variable: EPO

Coefficients

		Unstandard	lized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients		-
Model		В	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	3.696	.357		10.352	.000
	BS_Importance	102	.045	094	-2.248	.025
	AS_Importance	145	.058	112	-2.507	.012
	IS_Imiportance	218	.074	170	-2.940	.003
	CS_Importance	.295	.064	.276	4.633	.000

a. Dependent Variable: EPO

The predictive value of the importance rating on the skills toward the employment opportunity rated by the lecturers was small ($R^2 = 5.5\%$). It indicates that the roles of the four skills measured were minimal. Therefore, further

discussions to explain the relationships between the variables are deemed unnecessary due to the insufficient variance accounted for in the dependent variable.

Table 8. Multiple Regression for Urgency

Model Summary

			Adjusted	R
Model	R	R Square	Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.404 ^a	.163	.158	.55612

a. Predictors: (Constant), CS_Urgency, BS_Urgency, IS_Urgency, AS_Urgency

ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	36.310	4	9.077	29.351	.000 ^b
	Residual	186.182	602	.309		
	Total	222.492	606			

a. Dependent Variable: EPO

Coefficients

		Unstandardize	d Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients		
Model		В	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	3.618	.172		21.057	.000
	BS_Urgency	362	.037	463	-9.657	.000
	AS_Urgency	.227	.049	.257	4.617	.000
	IS_Urgency	085	.041	096	-2.083	.038
	CS_Urgency	.029	.059	.028	.481	.631

a. Dependent Variable: EPO

Differently with importance, the lecturers'

ratings on skill urgency were significant predictors

b. Predictors: (Constant), CS_Importance, BS_Importance, AS_Importance, IS_Imiportance

b. Predictors: (Constant), CS_Urgency, BS_Urgency, IS_Urgency, AS_Urgency



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for employment opportunities. The R-square value was 16.3%, indicating a moderate variance explained accounted by the importance of the four skills on the employment opportunity of the students. Among the four skills, Applied Skill was

the strongest predictor to positively affect employment opportunity (β = .257, p < .05). However, the 21st Century skill did not significantly affect employment opportunity (β = .028, p = .631).

Table 8. Multiple Regression for Performance

Model Summary

	J			
			Adjusted	RStd. Error of the
Mode	el R	R Square	Square	Estimate
1	.193°	.037	.031	.59652
a.	Predictors:	(Constant),	CS_Performance,	IS_Performance,

AS Performance, BS Performance

ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	8.281	4	2.070	5.818	.000 ^b
	Residual	214.211	602	.356		
	Total	222.492	606			

a. Dependent Variable: EPO

Coefficients

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		В	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	3.301	.159		20.704	.000
	BS_Performance	218	.063	268	-3.483	.001
	AS_Performance	033	.069	036	479	.632
	IS_Performance	.041	.056	.059	.730	.466
	CS_Performance	.108	.043	.131	2.497	.013

a. Dependent Variable: EPO

The predictive value of the performance rating on the skills toward the employment opportunity rated by the lecturers was very small ($R^2=3.7\%$). This finding indicates that the four skills' roles were not significant (the p-values for all four skills were larger than .05). Therefore, further discussions to explain the relationships between the variables are deemed unnecessary due to the insufficient variance accounted for in the dependent variable.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Across all aspects, the study among academic staff respondents found that the urgency of the skills has a moderate predictive effect on the students' employment opportunities. Among the four skills, only Applied Skill significantly

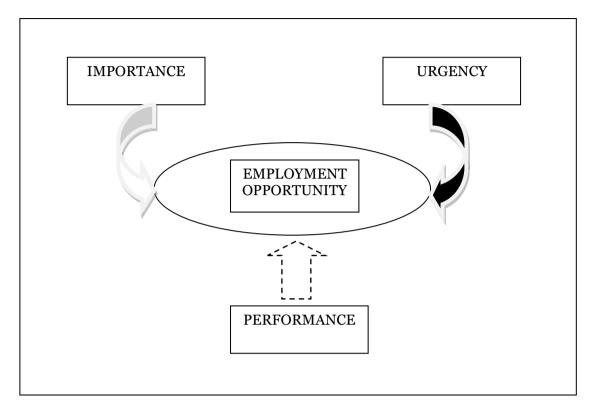
influenced the student employment opportunity. The analysis results on the academic staff data were not in line with the results analyzed on the students' responses. This contradictory finding indicates that the students and the lecturers are not on the same page regarding their perceptions of the importance, urgency, and student's performance on the four skills measured. In addition, there were different views between the students and the lecturers about the factor deemed important and has an important effect on employment opportunity.

The results generated from the academic staff responses concluded the following model. First, the model illustrates that only urgency plays a significant role in explaining employment opportunities.

Figure 1. The Academic Staff Model

b. Predictors: (Constant), CS_Performance, IS_Performance, AS_Performance, BS_Performance





LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Even though this study represents the opinion of the academician responsible for grooming the future of human capital e but there is some limitation found in this study. First, the factors contributing to unemployment among the graduate in this study are employability skills; they are basic, applied, interpersonal, and 21st-century skills. However, in reality, many other factors influence employment opportunities, and they differ among the industry and situation. Hence, the future study may include other factors such as quality health, as literature indicated that employers are looking for healthy candidates. The second limitation is that the respondent is only academic staff; it may differ from other stakeholders such as employers and graduates. So, the future study may include employer and student, so the real reasons for unemployment among graduates in Malaysia is discovered. Finally, this study uses only a questionnaire to collect the data, so the results only depend on respondent honesty and seriousness in answering questions. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies should include other methods such as interviews; hence the result will be more accurate.

Funding: This article is part of the findings of

the Fundamental Research Grants Scheme (FRGS 2015-1) funded by the Malaysia Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia.

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