

EMPLOYMENT OF HOSPITALITY GRADUATES: THE CHALLENGES

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Article history

Received date : 12-8-2022

Revised date : 13-8-2022

Accepted date : 31-8-2022

Published date : 30-9-2022

To cite this document:

Mohd Fuza, Z. I., Wan Kamarudin, W. N. B., Mat Ghani, A., & Wan Nawawi, W. N. (2022). Employment of Hospitality Graduates: The Challenges. *Journal of Islamic, Social, Economics and Development (JISED)*, 7(47), 262 - 274.

Abstract: *Although Malaysia's Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have recently produced a significant number of graduates, there are now marginally fewer that get employed, particularly hospitality graduates. Therefore, this study investigated the employability challenges of hospitality graduates found in the literature. Secondary data was obtained from multiple platforms using key search terms, namely "employability", "hospitality graduate", and "graduate employability". Content analysis was used for the literature review. The finding reveals that the challenges revolve around skill, curriculum, attitude, qualification, interest, and the hospitality industry environment. Of the six themes, challenge, skill, and curriculum were the most prominent ones in the literature. This review emphasized the challenges of employability, not only regarding the graduate attributes, but also the curriculum program and the nature of the hospitality industry. Also, a significant information gap emerged that must be addressed. This study could serve as a reference for managing the employability of hospitality graduates in the future.*

Keywords: *Employability, Hospitality Graduate, Graduate Employability*

Introduction

Every year, more and more students enroll in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Malaysia. In general, the HEIs in Malaysia consist of 33 General Skills Training Institutions (ILKAs) under the Ministry of Human Resources, 11 ILKAs under the Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-based Industry, 146 ILKAs under the Ministry of Rural Development, 19 ILKAs under the Ministry of Youth and Sports, 105 community colleges, 36 polytechnics, 84 vocational colleges, 434 private universities, and 20 public universities. According to the Statistics of Higher Education (MOHE, 2021), in 2021, Malaysia's HEIs produced a total of 326,291

graduates with the majority having a Bachelor's Degree (45.2%), followed by a Diploma (34.7%), and a Master's (7%) (MOHE, 2021). Most of the graduates (34.9%) had studied Social Sciences, Business and Law, while those who took Engineering, Manufacturing, and Construction (21.5%) came in second, followed by Science, Mathematics, and Computing (11.7%) (MOHE, 2021). This statistic shows the importance of higher education for graduate career development (Hanapi & Nordin, 2014).

Although Malaysia's HEIs have recently produced substantial graduate numbers, the number of employed graduates has gone down slightly (Hossain *et al.*, 2018). Based on a tracer study in 2018 by the Ministry of Education Malaysia, 19.8% of graduates still fail to secure employment after one year of graduating (New Strait Times, 2020). Meanwhile, 58.6% succeed in the job market or become entrepreneurs, some (15.7%) embark on further study, a very few (1.3%) improve their skills via training, and the rest (4.6%) wait to hear from job application agencies. All in all, there was only a 1.1% increase in the graduate employability rate between 2017 and 2018, a bit lower compared to the figures in the United States and Europe (Hanapi & Nordin, 2014). Bayah *et al.*, (2016) study reiterate the statistic by reporting on graduates' employability in 2015 by the Ministry of Higher Education reveals Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management in public institution contributed the third highest unemployed graduates in social sciences. Hence, the harsh reality is that getting a job is no longer guaranteed even if one has the title of "university graduate" (Leo, 2019), and good grades alone will not ensure employment (Hossain *et al.*, 2018), at least not for entry-level jobs. Unfortunately, the growing number of educational institutions in Malaysia has increased the competition among institutions and lowered graduate employability (Hanapi & Nordin, 2014). Students are now facing tough competition in the job market, as the number of graduates continues to grow each year coupled with an unstable economy (Leo, 2019). Given these facts, the Ministry of Education, the HEIs, and the industry have now set graduate employability as a priority agenda to ensure that the graduate supply meets job demands (New Strait Times, 2020).

Moreover, based on the field of study, social science graduates do not seem to get employed, so this could be a cause of concern for hospitality graduates. Moreover, although HEIs are offering more Hospitality Management Degree programs, the hospitality industry is still seeing a shortage of skilled workers. Additionally, the current Industrial Revolution (IR4.0) has led to a lower number of employed hospitality graduates, as technology has become more sophisticated, therefore reducing the shortage of human capital. Besides, some jobs are now being replaced with new technology (Nankervis, Connell, & Burgess, 2020). Thus, this urgent situation calls for all university stakeholders to take action. To address the above gap, this study reviews the challenges of hospitality graduate employability in the literature by summarizing major related articles. The statistics of previous studies investigating graduate employment from 2015 to 2020 are presented in Figure 1 below.

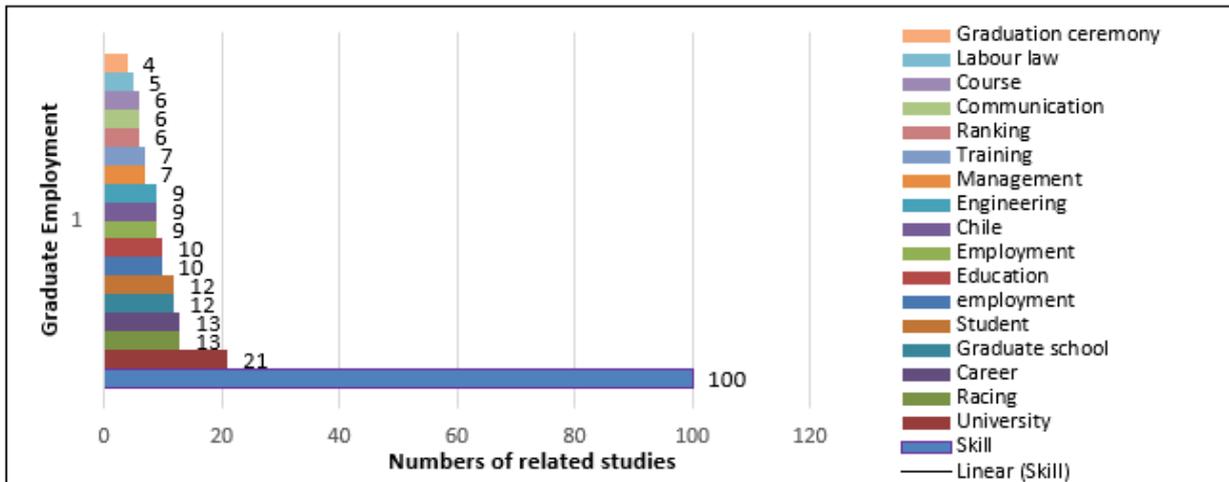


Figure 1. Number of related studies on Graduate Employment.

(Employability: 2015-2020, Worldwide, Source: Google Trends)

Figure 1 shows “skill” as the most popular topic on graduate employment among scholars in the 5-year duration. Most scholars concentrated on graduate employability as a whole by focusing on graduate attributes (e.g. Maxwell, & Armellini, 2019; Herbert et al., 2020; Holdsworth et al., 2020), employability skills (e.g. Fraser et al, 2019; Jewell et al., 2020; Sarkar et al., 2020; de Schepper, Sotiriadou, & Hill, 2020), graduate readiness (e.g. Teng, Ma, Pahlevansharif, & Turner, 2019; Winterton & Turner, 2019), and graduate entrepreneurship (e.g. Ghazali, Ibrahim, & Zainol, 2012; Grecu & Denes, 2017; Birch, Lichy, Mulholland, & Kachour, 2017; Otache, 2019; Dong, Pang, & Fu, 2019). Meanwhile, on the topic of hospitality graduates’ employability, recent studies largely investigated graduate attributes (e.g. Baum, 2019; Schreck, Weilbach, & Reitsma, 2019; Poria & Reichel, 2020), employability skills (e.g. Bathla et al., 2019; Kenayathulla, Ahmad, & Idris, 2019; Singh & Jaykumar, 2019) and the curriculum program (e.g. Mohd Yusof et al., 2020; Hussain et al., 2020; Kusumawardhana, 2020).

Literature Review

Employability

In the competitive and uncertain global economy of today, employability has now become one of the major concerns among policymakers, stakeholders, and scholars (Römgens, Scoupe, & Beausaert, 2019). Employability has been defined variously. According to Hillage and Pollard (1998), employability can be defined as the capability to independently within the labor market to attain opportunities through employment. Interestingly, Winterton and Turner (2019) found that from the supply-side, employability highlights individual characteristics, successfully shifting responsibility from unemployment to the unemployed, changing the individual, and eliminating structural explanations. Another definition notes that employability is a set of graduate accomplishments gained from developing attributes to gain employment to perform in the chosen job (Scott, Connell, Thomson, & Willison, 2019). Numerous authors from varied disciplinary fields have emphasized the need to form more cohesive definitions that integrate theoretical employability frameworks (Forrier, Verbruggen, and De Cuyper, 2015; Helyer and Lee 2014; Knight and Yorke 2004; Scott et al., 2019; Small, Shacklock, and Marchant 2018; Smith, Ferns, and Russell 2016; Peeters et al. 2019). Scholars have used ten (10) common theoretical models to study employability, namely, the Employability Skills Model, the Model Employability, the USEM Model, the Heuristic Model, Career EDGE, the Employability

Development Model, the Integrated Competence Model of Employability, the Integrated topology, Journey of Employment (JET) model, the RAW model, and the Model of Sustainable Employability. A summary review of these theoretical models is presented in Table 1. Based on the ten theoretical models of employability, USEM is one of the most interesting, even though it was introduced a decade ago. The most widely accepted model of employability is the Career EDGE model as it is more comprehensive than the others. The skill model is one of the earliest models of employability (Sumanasiri, Yajid, & Khatibi, 2015). Interestingly, all of these models are constantly being improved, as new scholars adopt previous models and then improve them and make them more inclusive. According to Pool and Sewell (2007), as cited by Sumanasiri et al. (2015), Career EDGE is widely accepted because it can readily be tested quantitatively, so it enables the findings to be generalized, contrary to other qualitative or case-study-based models. One of the latest models, i.e., the model of sustainable employability, places more emphasis on the capability approaches related to employability.

Table 1: A Summary Review of Theoretical Employability Models

Author	Year	Element	Theory/Model
Cotton	1993	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic skills • Higher-order thinking skills • Affective skills • Traits 	Employability Skills Model
Hillage & Pollard	1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assets • Deployment • Presentation • Contexts 	Model Employability
Knight & Yorke	2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding • Skills (subject-specific and generic) • Efficacy beliefs (and self-theories generally) • Metacognition (including reflection). 	USEM model
Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth.	2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employability • Personal Adaptability • Career Identity • Social and Human Capital 	A heuristic model of employability
Pool & Sewell	(2007)	<p><i>A. Five lower-order factors;</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career development learning • Experience • Degree subject knowledge understanding and skills • Generic Skills • Emotional intelligence (reflect and evaluate the experience) <p><i>B. Social concepts</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-esteem • Self-efficacy • Self-confidence 	Career EDGE

Author	Year	Element	Theory/Model
Harvey	2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roles of graduates • Higher education institutes, Employers • Employment 	Employability Development Model
Wellman	2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge • Skills • Personal attributes 	Integrated Competence Model of Employability
		Personal & Occupational attributes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vary micro • Macro • Meta competencies. 	Integrated topology
Copps & Plimmer	2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal circumstances • Emotional Capabilities • Attitudes • Employability Skills • Qualifications, education, and training • Experience and involvement • Career management skills 	Journey of Employment (JET)
Hogan et. al.	2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rewarding • Ability • Willingness 	RAW model
Van. Der et al.	2016	<p>A. <i>Macro-level (Societal)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labor market • Globalization • Market condition <p>B. <i>Meso-level (work)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational culture • Leadership <p>C. <i>Micro-level (personal)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family • Personal • Social • environment 	Model of Sustainable Employability.

Employment challenges among hospitality graduates

According to Wang and Tsai (2014), hospitality graduates are graduates of hospitality management programs or related programs that focus on supplying professionally trained employees and potential managers to hotels, restaurants, and related businesses. Hence, the hospitality industry provides a combination of low-skill and high-skill jobs (Baum, 2002; Griffin, 2020). Moreover, workers in the hospitality industry are not necessarily highly skilled. So, a hospitality degree graduate could be disadvantaged when applying for a job, as he will compete with other candidates with more industry experience but lower academic qualification (Harkison, Poulston, & Kim, 2011). If hospitality graduates join the industry without an in-depth understanding of how the industry works, they would probably leave the industry

altogether. Besides, there are also situations where hospitality graduates do not enter the hospitality industry and instead work in other industries (Brown, Arendt, & Bosselman, 2014).

The above situation arises because hospitality graduates from the younger generation are more interested to reach a higher position than the position offered to fresh graduates (Harkison et al. 2011). Harkison et al. (2011) also claimed that the students did not really choose to take the hospitality course; they just enrolled because of the less rigid entry criteria for new intakes, and since they failed to qualify for their selected course. Thus, the previous literature has debated whether hospitality graduates are less interested in small and medium enterprise (SME) employment or large organizations. Several scholars have found that these graduates seek employment in other industries due to the higher salary, better work conditions, and opportunity, compared to jobs in the hospitality industry. Besides, they also did not get a job offer in the hospitality industry or were simply disinterested to pursue any (Nachmias & Walmsley, 2015). Graduates who managed to secure management positions brought up the issue of low salary. The hospitality industry must offer attractive and competitive compensation to attract graduates. The industry's inferior compensation has been a debated issue in the literature for a long time (Ahmad et al., 2014).

Furthermore, Pearlman and Schaffer (2013) found that the skill limitation of hospitality graduates also contributed to the low employment rate in the hospitality industry. Hence, hospitality graduates tend to leave the industry after graduation (Chang & Tanford, 2018). Graduates are required to attain and develop certain skills and qualities during their period of study at HEIs. These skills form attributes that will improve their employability. As per Hanapi and Nordin, (2014), the graduates must have adequate employability skills and technical skills. Graduates should master technical skills, as these are the most sought-after skill among employers. Meanwhile, the graduate quality or personal attributes make up their employability skill. In the current technological era, each graduate is required to completely master both technical and employability skills (Hanapi & Nordin, 2014) to be more competitive in the labor market. Hossain et al. (2018) claimed that the mismatch between employer demand and graduate skills is the main reason for the high unemployment. Entry-level graduates must have soft skills but Malaysian university graduates seem to lack them. Moreover, these graduates have poor employability skills and do not perform well at work (Hossain et al., 2018).

Hence, from the perspective of hospitality, employment causes a lot of pressure and exhaustion among employees. According to Patiar, Kensbock, Benckendorff, Robinson, Richardson, Wang, and Lee (2020), the product of hospitality and services consisting of production, delivery, and consumption is intangible and must be delivered in real-time or in a short time. In fact, the hospitality industry has several inter-dependent departments and sub-departments that further contribute to the high-pressure work environment (Wang, 2013; Patiar et al. 2020). Besides, employers expect hospitality graduates to have a wide range of employability skills revolving around management, calculation, human relations, communication, leadership, as well as interpersonal skills and soft skills (Harkison et al., 2011). Similar to Lin et al. (2018), the hospitality industry is now increasingly demanding qualified employees. Surprisingly, Nachmias and Walmsley (2015) found that employers are also concerned about the graduates' ability to transition from student to employee.

On the other hand, several HEIs are unable to spend on the resources required to offer practical training facilities or work-integrated learning to increase graduate employability (Patiar et al. 2020). Alexander (2007) claimed that higher institutions tend to favor management

concepts compared to practical elements. This style of teaching produces students with limited skills that do not meet the requirements of the hospitality industry. Besides, learning institutions prioritize academic and professional qualifications more than anything else (Lim, Mansor, Rahim, Sazali, & Izhar, 2018). However, in comparison to hard skills (27%) employers place more value on soft skills (50%) and experience (31%) (Lim et al., 2018). Besides, the literature on hospitality in HEIs heavily recognizes graduate recruiters from large companies and undervalues those from SME companies (Nachmias & Walmsley, 2015). Chang and Tse (2015) argued that the hospitality curriculum does not meet the requirements of the hospitality industry. In line with this, Hanapi and Nordin (2014) reiterated that the university curriculum is not aligned with the skills required at the workplace. Therefore, graduates will be hard-pressed to find jobs that match their skills and qualifications. Moreover, the graduates find that the skills that they have are not needed or are irrelevant to perform at their jobs. Nevertheless, it was noted that the most skilled and knowledgeable hospitality graduates tend to get hired ahead of their peers (Hossain et al, 2018). Therefore, Griffin (2020) suggested that the faculty play the main role in developing and sustaining a rapport between all stakeholders involved to improve the relevant curriculum

Methodology

This study used multiple sources of secondary data. The searching duration covered December 2020 to Jan 2021. Various online search engines were used including open access journals from institutions, Wiley Online, Emerald, Google Scholar, Taylors, and Francis Online, Elsevier, and Springer Link. Plus, other related online articles were retrieved via the Google search engine. Moreover, to determine the articles that meet the study requirements, a list of significant articles was reviewed. The main keywords used were employability, graduate employability, hospitality graduate, and employment rate. Supportive keyword was also applied to enhance the accuracy of article information, such as graduate unemployment, hospitality industry, and fresh hospitality graduate. The search resulted in 250 articles, of which 80 articles were found appropriate for the review. Qualitative techniques, namely content analysis, were used to analyze the collected articles. Topics, abstracts, keywords, introductions, results, and discussion were analyzed to find more information on the search terms.

Results and Discussion

The reducing numbers of employable hospitality graduates show that this issue will be a subject of interest in the coming years, especially given the technological advancements, economic fluctuations, and other factors prevalent in this era. Table 2 lists a summary of the challenges of employability among hospitality graduates. The findings reveal six themes to the challenges of employability found in the literature. These themes include skill, curriculum, attitude, qualification, interest, and the hospitality industry environment. Of the six thematic challenges, the literature highlighted skill and curriculum as the most challenges affecting the employment of hospitality graduates. This finding is not similar to that of Nankervis et al. (2020), who noted that some of these jobs are now being replaced with technology. However, this effect is not such a challenge in the context of employment in the hospitality industry.

Table 2: A Summary of Employability Challenges Among Hospitality Graduates

Author	Theme	Challenges
Bist et al. (2020) Baum (2002) & Griffin (2020)	Skill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students lacked in communication skills, problem solving ability, analytical skills and business understanding • The hospitality industry is a combination of low-skill and high-skill jobs
Alexander (2007)	Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher institutions emphasize more on management skills rather than practical skills.
Harkison et al. (2011)	Qualification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The job requirements do not necessarily need high academic qualifications. • Graduates must compete against candidates with high experience but low qualifications.
Pearlman & Schaffer (2013) Kaushal & Srivastava (2021)	Skill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hospitality graduates have limited skills that contribute to the low employment rate in the hospitality industry. • Need of multiskilling and professional development
McPhail et al. (2015), Kaushal & Srivastava (2021)	Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hospitality is a high-pressure work environment. • Optimism toward revival & Crisis preparedness.
Hanapi & Nordin (2014)	Skill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hospitality graduates are required to completely grasp both technical and employability skills to be more competitive in the labor market.
	Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The university curriculum is not aligned with the skills required at the workplace.
Brown, Arendt, & Bosselman (2014)	Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hospitality graduates are more interested to work and gain a higher position in another industry.
Ahmat et al. (2014)	Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hospitality graduates prefer other industries due to the low salary in the hospitality industry.
Nachmias & Walmsley (2015)	Attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers are concerned with the students' ability to transition from student to employee.
	Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hospitality graduates are more interested to work in large organizations than SME organizations.
	Attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HEIs heavily recognize graduate recruiters from large companies and undervalue graduate recruiters from SME companies.
Chang & Tse (2015)	Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hospitality education does not meet the skill requirements of the hospitality industry.
Hossain et al. (2018)	Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recent hospitality graduates do not have the skills demanded by employers.
	Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduates from Hospitality degree programs have poor employability skills and do not perform well at their jobs.

Author	Theme	Challenges
Lin et al. (2018)	Qualification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The hospitality industry is increasingly demanding qualified employees.
Patiar et al. (2020)	Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HEIs are not prepared to spend on the resources required to offer practical training to students.
Griffin (2020)	Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing and sustaining a rapport with all stakeholders involved will improve the relevant curriculum.

Conclusion

This study reviewed the literature to determine the challenges of employability among hospitality graduates in Malaysia. The study revealed that the challenges of employability not only revolved around the graduates' attributes but also the curriculum program and the nature of the hospitality industry. These findings help enhance understanding of the challenge of employability specifically among hospitality graduates. Students, higher education institutions (HEIs), and the hospitality industry need to understand these challenges to address this employability issue (Harkison et. al. 2011). A good rapport between the hospitality industry and HEIs should be established and continuously improved to sustain the relevant curriculum that will, in turn, improve the job prospects and job satisfaction among hospitality graduates. Exploring this challenge can contribute valuable findings to hospitality literature. Future research could use this finding as a basis for studying hospitality graduate employability from another perspective. In particular, it is recommended that future research focus on comparing the different points of view between HEIs and the hospitality industry.

Acknowledgement

This research was supported in part by Fundamental Research Grant Scheme, Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia (FRGS Phase 1/2019).

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