

ASSESSING FACTORS INFLUENCING MALAYSIAN GRADUATES' MARKETABILITY IN THE WORKFORCE

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Abstract: Graduate employability remains a critical issue in Malaysia, with many graduates struggling to secure jobs that match their qualifications. This study aims to assess the factors influencing Malaysian graduates' marketability in the workforce, focusing on soft skills, English language proficiency, internship experience, and the alignment of university curricula with industry requirements. A quantitative research approach was employed, utilizing a structured survey to collect data from recent graduates and employers. The findings reveal that internship experience has the strongest positive impact on graduates' marketability, highlighting the importance of practical work exposure in improving job readiness. Soft skills, such as communication, teamwork, and adaptability, also significantly enhance employability, as employers increasingly prioritize these competencies. Additionally, the alignment of university curricula with industry needs was found to be crucial in bridging the gap between education and employment, ensuring that graduates possess relevant knowledge and skills. However, English language proficiency showed a weaker influence on marketability, suggesting that while language skills remain valuable, other factors like practical experience and soft skills play a more dominant role in securing employment. This study provides important insights for universities, employers, and policymakers in improving graduate employability. The findings emphasize the need for enhanced industry collaborations, curriculum improvements, and greater emphasis on experiential learning opportunities. By addressing these areas, higher education institutions and employers can work together to equip graduates with the necessary skills and experiences to thrive in an evolving job market.

Keywords: *Graduate Employability, Marketability, Soft Skills, Internship Experience, University Curriculum, English Proficiency*

Introduction

Graduate unemployment in Malaysia represents a critical socioeconomic challenge, driven by a growing disparity between the rapid expansion of higher education and the labor market's capacity to absorb new degree holders. Despite possessing advanced academic qualifications, many young Malaysians face prolonged joblessness or underemployment due to a persistent mismatch between traditional university curricula and rapidly evolving industry demands. This structural imbalance not only stifles individual economic mobility but also highlights the pressing need to align the nation's human capital development with the practical, skill-based requirements of a high-income economy. This statistic highlights the urgency of resolving the employability crisis exacerbated by COVID-19 and increased competition for a finite pool of jobs. Graduate unemployment has remained a problem, with a 3.1% - 4.0% unemployment rate among graduates from 2001 to 2019, indicating a steady, if troubling, trend (Nesaratnam et al., 2018). This persistent unemployment reflects systemic issues in the education-to-employment pipeline that require immediate attention from all stakeholders.

Marketability is vital to graduate employability. Marketability is the set of relevant skills, knowledge, and personal qualities that candidates possess that employers find attractive. Besides academic qualifications, employers in Malaysia seek critical thinking, problem-solving, and good communication skills (Wickramasinghe & Perera, 2010). Rising digital literacy and Technological Change have also highlighted the need for graduates to have digital literacy and adapt to new technologies increasingly required in the modern workplace (Alrifia & Raju, 2019). Changing industries require a flexible workforce that can keep up with technological advances - this requires a shift in educational focus to match these market needs. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased skill-related underemployment among graduates. Graduates experiencing underemployment reached 33.9% in 2021 from 31.2% in 2020 (Baharin & Abdullah, 2022). This underemployment not only points to a mismatch between graduates' qualifications and career prospects but also points to the need for educational institutions to equip students with the technical and soft skills needed by the industry. This discrepancy between the skills acquired in education and those needed in the workforce has been a theme repeated in discussions about graduate employability (Shivoro et al., 2017). Employers are consistently unhappy with graduates' abilities to enter the workforce, particularly in interpersonal skills, teamwork, and adaptability (Soundararajan et al., 2020). Marketability must relate to employability. Graduating with the right skills will find suitable employment. Conversely, individuals with inadequate skills may have trouble finding work or settle for jobs that do not fully develop their skills. It is especially pronounced in technical fields where employers cite a shortage in graduates' employability skills (Zakaria et al., 2014). A holistic understanding of the skills landscape is required to address these challenges effectively. Educators must actively promote employability skills in their curricula so that graduates are knowledgeable and have the soft skills needed for the job market (Yong & Ling, 2023).

Understanding factors that affect Malaysian graduates' marketability is important to address employability challenges. This research examines these factors to inform strategies to improve graduate readiness for work and national economic growth. Asserting educational outcomes with industry expectations can help fill the skills gap and improve the employability prospects

of graduates in Malaysia. Having this alignment is critical for the graduates and the nation's economic health as a driver of productivity and innovation (Ahmed et al., 2021).

Problem Statement

The employability of Malaysian graduates is a matter of concern in an ever-changing job market. Large investments in higher education mean that many graduates find jobs that match their qualifications, largely because the skills they acquire do not match those employers want. According to research, employers frequently express dissatisfaction with graduates' soft skills, such as communication, problem-solving, and critical thinking, which are required for success in the modern workplace (Seetha, 2014). Also, the current university curriculum is criticized for not adequately preparing students for real-world problems and often puts technical knowledge before interpersonal skills. This gap is particularly significant in light of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which demands adaptability and continuous learning. Growing digital literacy requirements further complicate the situation, as graduates often lack the competencies to thrive in a technology-driven environment (Zainuddin et al., 2019;). (Ting et al., 2017). These challenges to the employability of Malaysian graduates' stem from inadequate skill development, curriculum deficiencies, and changing market demands. Addressing these issues will improve graduates' marketability and help them transition into the workforce (Rahmat et al., 2018).

Research Questions

The employability of Malaysian graduates has become a growing concern due to the evolving demands of the labour market, with challenges stemming from factors such as inadequate soft skills, limited practical experience, misalignment between academic curricular and industry needs, and varying levels of English language proficiency. This research aims to explore these critical factors.

1. How do soft skills, such as communication and teamwork, influence the marketability of Malaysian graduates in the workforce?
2. What role does internship experience play in enhancing the employability of Malaysian graduates?
3. How does the alignment of university curricular with industry requirements affect graduates' readiness for employment?
4. To what extent does English language proficiency impact the employability of Malaysian graduates in various sectors?

Research Objectives

This research seeks to achieve specific objectives that address the key factors influencing the employability of Malaysian graduates.

1. To examine the influence of soft skills, including communication and teamwork, on the marketability of Malaysian graduates in the workforce.
2. To evaluate the role of internship experience in enhancing the employability of Malaysian graduates.
3. To analyze the impact of university curricular alignment with industry requirements on graduates' readiness for employment.
4. To assess the extent to which English language proficiency affects the employability of Malaysian graduates in various sectors.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study contributes to the graduate employability challenges in Malaysia by identifying factors that influence marketability. Findings will benefit graduates by revealing what employers seek regarding skills and competencies - helping them prepare for the job market. Educational institutions can use findings to refine curricula to include industry-relevant skills, so graduates are prepared with the technical and soft skills needed for the workforce. Employers will also gain insight into skill gaps among graduates so they can work with universities on targeted training to fill the skills gap between education and industry needs. Furthermore, researchers can help policymakers design internship programs, industry partnerships, and upskilling to increase graduate employment rates. Finally, this study aims to smooth the transition from education to employment, thus creating a more skilled and competitive workforce for Malaysian economic growth.

Scope and Limitations

It examines factors that affect marketability of Malaysian graduates and how these factors affect employability. Key findings will include academic qualifications, technical skills, soft skills, industry expectations and how higher education prepares graduates for the labour market. Data from university students, recent graduates and employers will be collected for the study to give an overview of the employability landscape. But this research has limitations. For one thing, it is confined to Malaysian graduates; the findings may not be fully applicable to graduates in other countries with different economic and educational structures. Second, the study uses self-reported data that may be biased or personal perception. The research also does not consider all external factors influencing employability such as economic downturns, government policies and global market trends. Despite these limitations the study hopes to contribute to graduate employability insights and efforts to improve workforce readiness in Malaysia.

Literature Review

The employability of Malaysian graduates is affected by various aspects, such as soft skills, internship experiences, curriculum relevance to industry demands, and competency in the English language. This literature review consolidates current research to examine the collective influence of these determinants on graduate marketability, referencing studies conducted both globally and within Malaysia.

Graduate Employability In Malaysia

Graduating employability, finding and keeping decent work, has remained a problem in Malaysia. Research shows that despite a growing number of university graduates, many struggle to find work or remain underemployed. A Ministry of Higher Education survey found that only 75% of graduates found employment within six months post-graduation, with wide discrepancies between disciplines. This statistic suggests that more fully understood factors enhancing graduate marketability are needed. Research indicates employability is not determined solely by academic degrees but by a complex interaction of circumstances. According to Hanapi and Nordin (2014), Malaysian employers weigh technical competence alongside interpersonal competence and practical experience when screening applicants for jobs. Using this general approach to employability forms the basis of analysis of our independent variables.

Soft Skills

Soft skills like communication, teamwork and problem solving are increasingly seen as essential to employability. Basir et al. (2022) point out that employers in Malaysia value soft skills more than technical knowledge, and that graduates with no such competencies face

significant difficulties finding work. Similar to Seetha (2014), employers are often unhappy with graduates' soft skills, which are essential for success in the modern workplace. Additionally, Fadhil and Ismail (2021) note that the low level of soft skills in local graduates causes high unemployment and call on educational institutions to develop such skills. The lack of soft skills directly impacts the marketability of graduates, as employers are looking for candidates who can communicate and collaborate in multiple work environments.

Internship Experience

The other major employer factor is internship experience. Nesaratnam (2018) argue that practical experience gained through internships prepares graduates for the job market by providing them with the skills and exposure to real-world problems. The Malaysian Ministry of Education recognizes the need for internships and has launched programmes for industry collaboration to enhance graduates' employability (Othman et al., 2018). Research by Mohamed (2021) supports this view, internship experience positively related to employability outcomes for graduates of public universities in Malaysia. The experience gained during internships improves the graduates' resumes, and also gives them more confidence and adaptability which makes them more marketable to potential employers.

Alignment of University Curricular with Industry Requirements

For the purpose of increasing graduates' employability, it is essential that university courses be aligned with the requirements of the business. Saleh (2024) examines the ways in which employers evaluate the quality of education that is offered by higher education institutions (HEIs) and the influence that this perception has on the characteristics of graduates. According to the findings of the study, graduates' marketability can be considerably improved by a curriculum that incorporates skills and knowledge that are relevant to the appropriate industry. Both Joyner and Smith In addition, Joyner and Smith (2015) note that educational programs ought to place an emphasis on the development of abilities such as critical thinking and interpersonal communication, both of which are highly desired by employers in a variety of industries. As a result of this alignment, graduates will have a greater chance of finding employment since they will be equipped with the skills necessary to flourish in a competitive labour market.

English Language Proficiency

ELP is a major factor determining employability in Malaysia. Ting et al. (2017) highlight that employers consistently rank communication skills, particularly in English, as a top priority when hiring. Zainuddin (2019) also support this view, graduates with better English proficiency are more likely to secure their placements in the workforce. A study by Hiew et al. (2021) found that the employability of science graduates is positively related to ELP, highlighting the importance of language in job prospects. MUET results are also a critical measure of graduates' language proficiency that influences employability outcomes (Ting et al., 2017). Strong language graduates are considered more marketable because they can communicate in a globalized workforce. Soft skills, internship experience, alignment of university curricula with industry requirements, and English language fluency are all elements that have been shown to have a significant impact on the employability of Malaysian graduates, according to the research that has been conducted. In order to improve graduates' marketability in the workforce, it is vital to address these areas through the implementation of focused educational programs and collaboration with the industry.

Methodology

This study aims to assess the factors affecting the marketability of Malaysian recent graduates and employers currently in the workforce through a quantitative approach. The principal objective of the quantitative design is to gather numerical data using structured surveys. The data will undergo statistical analysis to ascertain the relationships between the independent variables (IVs) and the dependent variable (DV) of employability.

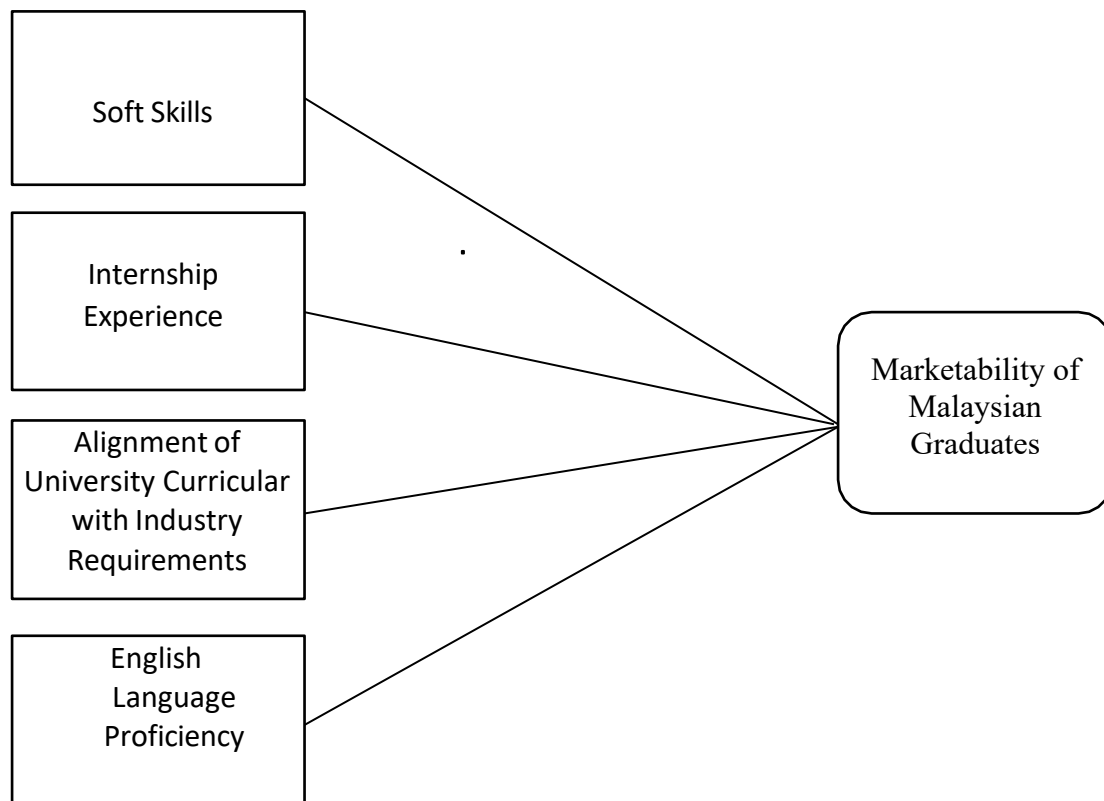


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

Research Design

The survey will be designed to collect data on four independent variables: soft skills, internship experience, compatibility of university curricula with industry requirements, and English language competency, along with the dependent variable of employability.

Data Analysis

This research uses several statistical tests like multiple regression and Pearson correlation. It is preferred as the principal statistical test because it can handle studies with many independent variables and one dependent variable. The independent variables include soft skills, internship experience, alignment of university curricular with industry standards, and English language proficiency, whereas the dependent variable is the employability and marketability of Malaysian graduates in the labour market. Multiple regression permits researchers to test for the strength and direction of each independent variable with respect to the dependent variable simultaneously, while adjusting for the effects of other independent variables in the model. Furthermore, the linear association between two quantitative variables is assessed by Pearson correlation. This Pearson correlation examines the interaction between each independent variable and the employability of Malaysian graduates. This preliminary assessment of the

strength of correlations among variables helps validate strong associations before performing more complex statistical analyses such as multiple regression.

Demographic Analysis

Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the demographic profile of this study participants. The majority of respondents were female (52.9%) compared to male respondents (47.1%). In terms of age distribution, the largest group fell within the 25-27 years old category (36.0%), followed closely by those aged 22-24 years (26.2%). Regarding racial diversity, Chinese respondents constituted nearly half of the sample (49.4%), followed by Malay (27.3%) and Indian (23.3%) respondents. Educationally, a significant portion held a Diploma (32.0%) or Bachelor's Degree (23.3%), while Master's Degree and Doctorate holders each accounted for about a fifth of the respondents. Employment status varied, with a notable proportion being self-employed or freelancers (33.7%) and part-time employees (31.4%). The largest represented industries among employed respondents were Education (27.3%), followed by Retail and Hospitality (21.5%) and Healthcare (16.9%). For those employed, securing a job post-graduation varied, with a significant number finding employment within 3-6 months (33.1%) or more than 6 months (33.7%), while some respondents remained unemployed (16.3%). Overall, these demographic insights provide a clear picture of the diverse background and employment characteristics of the study's participants.

Table 1: Demographic information

Variables		Frequency	%
Gender	Female	91	52.9
	Male	81	47.1
Age	Below 22 years old	32	18.6
	22 - 24 years old	45	26.2
	25 - 27 years old	62	36.0
	28 years old and above	33	19.2
Race	Chinese	85	49.4
	Indian	40	23.3
	Malay	47	27.3
Highest level of education	Diploma	55	32.0
	Bachelor's Degree	40	23.3
	Master's Degree	39	22.7
	Doctorate (PhD)	19	11.0
Current employment status	Employed (full-time)	20	11.6
	Employed (part-time)	54	31.4
	Self-employed/freelancer	58	33.7
	Unemployed	40	23.3
Industry of current/ most recent job	Business/Finance	14	8.1
	Education	47	27.3
	Engineering/IT	33	19.2
	Government/Public Sector	12	7.0
	Healthcare	29	16.9
	Retail and Hospitality	37	21.5
If employed, how long did it take you to secure a job after graduation?	Still unemployed	28	16.3
	Less than 3 months	29	16.9
	3 - 6 months	57	33.1
	More than 6 months	58	33.7

Reliability Analysis

Table 2 presents the reliability analysis of key variables related to the marketability of Malaysian graduates in the workforce. The results indicate strong internal consistency across all constructs, with Cronbach's alpha (α) values ranging from 0.72 to 0.90. Graduates' marketability exhibited the highest reliability ($\alpha = 0.90$), suggesting that the items measuring this construct were highly consistent in capturing the intended concept. Soft skills also demonstrated strong reliability ($\alpha = 0.86$), emphasizing their stable measurement in the study. Similarly, English Language Proficiency (ELP) and internship and work experience showed good reliability, with α values of 0.80 and 0.81, respectively, reflecting their importance in graduate employability. Meanwhile, the alignment of the university curriculum with industry requirements had the lowest reliability ($\alpha = 0.72$), though still within an acceptable range, indicating moderate consistency in the measurement of this variable. Overall, the high reliability values suggest that the instrument used to assess these factors is robust and suitable for further analysis in understanding their impact on graduate employability.

Table 2: Reliability Of Soft Skills, English Language Proficiency (Elp), Internship and Work Experience, Alignment of University Curriculum and The Marketability of Malaysian Graduates in the Workforce

Variables	Total Item	Reliability (α)
Soft skills	6	0.86
English Language Proficiency (ELP)	6	0.80
Internship and work experience	6	0.81
Alignment of university curriculum with industry requirements	6	0.72
Graduates' marketability	6	0.90

Normality Test

Table 3 presents the normality test results for soft skills, English Language Proficiency (ELP), internship and work experience, alignment of university curriculum with industry requirements, and the marketability of Malaysian graduates in the workforce. The mean score for soft skills is 3.04, with a 5% trimmed mean of 3.05, indicating that extreme values have minimal impact on the central tendency. The variance (0.85) and standard deviation (0.92) suggest a moderate spread in responses. The skewness value of -0.13 indicates a nearly symmetrical distribution, while the kurtosis of -1.01 suggests a relatively flat distribution, implying a lack of extreme values in the dataset. The mean for ELP is 3.04, closely matching the 5% trimmed mean of 3.03, showing that extreme values do not significantly affect the data. With a variance of 0.74 and a standard deviation of 0.86, responses exhibit moderate variation. The skewness value of 0.04 suggests a nearly normal distribution, while the kurtosis of -0.82 indicates a flatter distribution with fewer extreme deviations. Internship and work experience have a mean of 3.06 and a 5% trimmed mean of 3.05, indicating that extreme responses do not have a major effect. The variance (0.80) and standard deviation (0.89) reflect moderate dispersion in responses. A skewness value of 0.13 suggests a slight rightward skew, but still close to symmetry, while the kurtosis of -1.00 indicates a relatively flat distribution. This variable has a mean of 3.07 and an identical 5% trimmed mean, confirming that outliers have a negligible impact on the central value. With the lowest variance (0.62) and standard deviation (0.79) among all variables, responses are relatively consistent. The skewness of -0.14 suggests a minor leftward skew, while the kurtosis of -0.69 indicates a flatter distribution with fewer extreme values.

The mean and 5% trimmed mean for graduates' marketability are both 3.04, signifying minimal influence from extreme responses. The variance (1.01) and standard deviation (1.01) are the highest among all variables, indicating a wider spread in responses. A skewness value of 0.03 suggests near symmetry, while the kurtosis of -1.00 reflects a relatively flat distribution with fewer pronounced peaks. When comparing the 5% trimmed mean with the mean for all variables, no extreme values deviated by more than 1 unit. Additionally, the skewness and kurtosis values, which fall within the -2 to +2 range, indicate a normal univariate distribution (George & Mallery, 2003). Overall, the normality test results suggest that all variables are approximately normally distributed, with minimal skewness and relatively flat kurtosis, supporting the assumption of normality for further statistical analyses.

Table 3: Normality Test of Soft Skills, English Language Proficiency (Elp), Internship and Work Experience, Alignment of University Curriculum with Industry Requirements and Themarketability of Malaysian Graduates in the Workforce

Variables	Mean	5% Trimmed Mean	Variance	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Soft skills	3.04	3.05	0.85	0.92	-0.13	-1.01
English Language Proficiency (ELP)	3.04	3.03	0.74	0.86	0.04	-0.82
Internship and work experience	3.06	3.05	0.80	0.89	0.13	-1.00
Alignment of university curriculum with industry requirements	3.07	3.07	0.62	0.79	-0.14	-0.69
Graduates' marketability	3.04	3.04	1.01	1.01	0.03	-1.00

Pearson Correlation Analysis

Table 4 presents the Pearson correlation analysis to examine the relationship between soft skills, English Language Proficiency (ELP), internship and work experience, and the alignment of the university curriculum with industry requirements in relation to the marketability of Malaysian graduates in the workforce. The table provides details on the significance level (Sig.), Pearson correlation coefficients, and their interpretation. According to Pallant (2016), correlation coefficients between 0.10 and 0.29 are considered weak, those between 0.30 and 0.49 are considered moderate, and those between 0.50 and 1.0 are considered strong. The correlation coefficient ranges from -1 to +1, where 0 indicates no correlation, +1 signifies a perfect positive correlation, and -1 signifies a perfect negative correlation. Soft skills show a moderate positive correlation with graduates' marketability ($r = 0.43$, $p = 0.00$), suggesting that graduates with stronger soft skills tend to have higher marketability in the workforce. Similarly, the alignment of the university curriculum with industry requirements demonstrates a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.55$, $p = 0.00$), indicating that when university programs align well with industry needs, graduates are more marketable. The strongest correlation is observed with internship and work experience ($r = 0.87$, $p = 0.00$), highlighting that hands-on experience plays a crucial role in enhancing employability. However, ELP shows a weak and non-significant correlation with graduates' marketability (r

= 0.14, $p = 0.07$), suggesting that English proficiency alone may not be a strong determinant of marketability in this context.

Overall, these findings emphasize the importance of practical experience, curriculum relevance, and soft skills in improving graduate employability, while English proficiency appears to have a limited direct impact.

Table 4: Pearson Correlation Analysis To Determine The Relationship Between Soft Skills, English Language Proficiency (Elp), Work Experience And Alignment Of University Curriculum With Industry Requirements With The Marketability Of Malaysian Graduates In The Workforce

Variables	Graduates' Marketability	
	Sig.	Pearson Correlation
Soft skills	0.00	0.43
English Language Proficiency (ELP)	0.07	0.14
Internship and work experience	0.00	0.87
Alignment of university curriculum with industry requirements	0.00	0.55

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 5 presents metrics utilized to evaluate multicollinearity, as outlined by Pallant (2007). Tolerance reflects the degree to which the variance of a specific independent variable remains unexplained by other independent variables within the model (Pallant, 2007). In this investigation, tolerance values between 0.64 to 0.84, surpassing the minimum threshold of 0.20. Consequently, these findings suggest an absence of noteworthy multicollinearity. This assertion is further supported by Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values between 1.19 to 1.57, below the established threshold of 5. As suggested by Hair et al. (2011), concerns regarding multicollinearity typically emerge when VIF surpasses 5 and tolerance drops below 0.20. Thus, based on the study's results, multicollinearity does not appear to be a signifi

Table 5: Multicollinearity Analysis Of Soft Skills, English Language Proficiency (Elp), Internship And Work Experience And Alignment Of University Curriculum With Industry Requirements

Variables	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
Soft skills	0.70	1.43
English Language Proficiency (ELP)	0.84	1.19
Internship and work experience	0.75	1.34
Alignment of university curriculum with industry requirements	0.64	1.57

Table 6 provides an overview of multiple regression analyses involving impact of soft skills, English Language Proficiency (ELP), internship and work experience and alignment of university curriculum with industry requirements on the marketability of Malaysian graduates in the workforce. The findings reveal that these combined factors accounted for 79% of the variance in predicting the marketability of Malaysian graduates in the workforce ($R^2 = 0.79$).

Table 6: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.89	0.79	0.78	0.47

The ANOVA table presented summarizes the outcomes of a multiple linear regression analysis performed to predict the marketability of Malaysian graduates in the workforce. The regression segment highlights that the model significantly accounts for the variability observed in the dependent variable. With an F-statistic of 155.96 and an associated p-value of 0.00, the statistical significance of the entire model is emphasized. Overall, the ANOVA outcomes suggest that the regression model is highly significant in elucidating the factors that predict the marketability of Malaysian graduates in the workforce.

Table 7: Anova

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	136.91	4	34.23	155.96	0.00
	Residual	36.65	167	0.22		
		173.56	171			

Table 8 presents the multiple regression analysis results, examining the impact of soft skills, English Language Proficiency (ELP), internship and work experience, and the alignment of the university curriculum with industry requirements on the marketability of Malaysian graduates in the workforce. The model highlights the varying degrees of influence each predictor has on graduate employability.

Soft skills have an unstandardized B value of $B = 0.15$, indicating that for each unit increase in soft skills, graduates' marketability is expected to increase by 0.15, while holding other variables constant. The standardized beta coefficient of $\beta = 0.14$ suggests a small but meaningful effect, highlighting the role of communication, teamwork, and adaptability in improving graduate employability. The t-value of $t = 3.20$ and p-value of $p = 0.00$ confirm the statistical significance of this relationship, reinforcing the importance of soft skills in enhancing job prospects. Internship and work experience have the highest unstandardized B value at $B = 0.87$, meaning that for each unit increase in internship and work experience, graduates' marketability is expected to increase by 0.87, assuming all other factors remain unchanged. The standardized beta coefficient of $\beta = 0.77$ indicates a strong effect, making this the most influential predictor of marketability. The t-value of $t = 18.74$ and p-value of $p = 0.00$ confirm its significance, emphasizing the crucial role of hands-on experience in making graduates more attractive to employers. The alignment of the university curriculum with industry requirements has an unstandardized B value of $B = 0.16$, meaning that for every unit increase in curriculum alignment, graduates' marketability increases by 0.16, while keeping other factors constant.

The standardized beta coefficient of $\beta = 0.12$ suggests a small but significant impact, with a t-value of $t = 2.78$ and a p-value of $p = 0.01$. This indicates that universities that align their programs with industry needs contribute positively to graduate employability. English Language Proficiency (ELP) has an unstandardized B value of $B = -0.07$, indicating that an increase in ELP is associated with a slight decrease in graduates' marketability, though this effect is minimal. The standardized beta coefficient of $\beta = -0.06$ shows a weak relationship, while the t-value of $t = -1.61$ and p-value greater than 0.05 indicate that this variable is not a significant predictor. This suggests that while English proficiency is important, other factors such as practical experience and curriculum relevance play a larger role in determining employability.

Overall, the regression analysis underscores the importance of real-world experience, curriculum relevance, and soft skills in shaping graduates' success in the workforce, while English proficiency alone appears to have a limited direct effect.

Table 8: Summary Of Multiple Regression Analysis Impact Of Soft Skills, English Language Proficiency (Elp), Internship And Work Experience And Alignment Of University Curriculum With Industry Requirements On The Marketability Of Malaysian Graduates In The Workforce

Variable	Unstandardized B	Standardized Beta	t	p
Soft skills	0.15	0.14	3.20	0.00
English Language Proficiency (ELP)	-0.07	-0.06	1.61	0.11
Internship and work experience	0.87	0.77	18.74	0.00
Alignment of university curriculum with industry requirements	0.16	0.12	2.78	0.01

$p < .05$ (significant at the 0.01 level, 2-tailed)

Discussion

This chapter discuss the impact of soft skills, English Language Proficiency (ELP), internship and work experience and alignment of university curriculum with industry requirements on the marketability of Malaysian graduates in the workforce. Additionally, it addresses the limitations of the study, offers suggestions for future research, and discusses this study's implications.

Influence of Soft Skills on Graduates' Marketability

The findings of this study indicate that soft skills significantly influence the marketability of Malaysian graduates in the workforce. The multiple regression analysis showed that soft skills had a positive and significant impact ($B = 0.15$, $\beta = 0.14$, $p = 0.00$), suggesting that graduates with stronger soft skills are more likely to secure employment. These results justify the growing emphasis placed on soft skills as a critical factor in employability and career success.

One possible explanation for this finding is that modern workplaces require graduates who can effectively communicate, collaborate, and adapt to dynamic work environments. Employers increasingly prioritize soft skills such as teamwork, problem-solving, leadership, and emotional intelligence when making hiring decisions. Unlike technical skills, which can be taught on the job, soft skills are often developed over time through experience and personal growth. This explains why graduates who demonstrate strong interpersonal and professional skills have a competitive edge in securing employment.

Furthermore, the rapid digital transformation across industries has heightened the need for soft skills. Automation and artificial intelligence are replacing many routine tasks, shifting the demand towards roles that require human interaction, creativity, and critical thinking. Graduates who possess strong soft skills are better equipped to navigate workplace challenges, manage diverse teams, and contribute meaningfully to organizational goals. This aligns with previous research that emphasizes the role of soft skills in career advancement, job performance, and professional adaptability. Another justification for the significant influence of soft skills on marketability is the increasing globalization of the workforce. Many organizations operate in multicultural environments, requiring employees to communicate effectively across cultural and linguistic barriers. Graduates who can collaborate in diverse teams, resolve conflicts, and demonstrate cultural intelligence are more attractive to employers, particularly in multinational corporations and service-oriented industries.

Despite the strong influence of soft skills on graduate marketability, it is important to recognize that soft skills alone may not be sufficient to secure employment. Employers often seek a balance between technical competencies and interpersonal abilities. While this study highlights the importance of soft skills, it also emphasizes the need for practical work experience and industry-relevant knowledge. Universities should therefore integrate soft skills training into academic programs through group projects, presentations, internships, and leadership activities to better prepare graduates for the workforce. The significant relationship between soft skills and graduates' marketability highlights their crucial role in shaping employment outcomes. As industries continue to evolve, universities, employers, and policymakers must work together to ensure that graduates develop well-rounded competencies that align with market demands.

Influence Of English Language Proficiency (Elp) On Graduates' Marketability

The findings of this study reveal that English Language Proficiency (ELP) had a weak and statistically non-significant impact on graduates' marketability ($B = -0.07$, $\beta = -0.06$, $p = 0.11$). This suggests that, despite its theoretical importance, ELP may not be a primary factor influencing employability in the context of Malaysian graduates. This result warrants further exploration and provides an opportunity to critically assess the role of language proficiency in the job market.

One potential explanation for the weak influence of ELP on marketability could be the nature of the jobs included in the study. While proficiency in English is undoubtedly valuable in many sectors, particularly those requiring international communication, technical roles, or positions within multinational corporations, it may not be as critical in certain local industries. For example, industries such as retail, healthcare, or government sectors may prioritize other skills, such as technical expertise or practical experience, over strong language proficiency. In these sectors, employees may only need basic communication skills, with specific technical knowledge or hands-on experience taking precedence. Additionally, Malaysia is a multilingual country with a diverse range of languages spoken across various regions. As a result, employers in Malaysia may place greater emphasis on proficiency in Bahasa Malaysia or other regional languages, depending on the nature of the job and the target audience. While English remains an important global language, local language skills could be seen as more immediately useful in day-to-day operations for some industries. This might explain why ELP had a lower impact on marketability compared to other factors, such as soft skills or work experience, in this study. Another factor to consider is that the graduates in this study may have had a baseline level of proficiency in English. In today's globalized world, English language education is a key component of the Malaysian education system, and many graduates may possess a sufficient

level of language proficiency to meet employer expectations. Consequently, employers may no longer view English proficiency as a distinguishing factor among candidates, especially if it is expected from all graduates. This could diminish its perceived importance in hiring decisions, with employers instead focusing on more tangible aspects such as work experience, technical skills, or soft skills. Furthermore, the role of ELP in marketability may vary across different industries and job roles. For example, in sectors like business, marketing, and technology, where communication with international clients or partners is crucial, ELP may play a more significant role. However, for positions that primarily interact with local communities or work within a specific technical domain, the need for advanced English proficiency may be less critical. Future research could explore this variation by examining industry-specific demands for language proficiency and how these align with graduates' skills.

In conclusion, while English Language Proficiency is often cited as a key employability skill, this study's findings suggest that it may not have as significant an impact on graduate marketability in the Malaysian context as expected. This highlights the need for a nuanced approach to employability, where ELP is considered alongside other factors, such as technical skills, soft skills, and work experience, which might play a more pivotal role in determining a graduate's success in the workforce.

Influence of Work Experience on Graduates' Marketability

The findings of this study underscore the substantial influence of work experience on the marketability of Malaysian graduates, with internship and work experience having the highest positive and significant impact on employability ($B = 0.87$, $\beta = 0.77$, $p = 0.00$). This result is consistent with the widely recognized notion that practical experience in the workforce plays a critical role in preparing graduates for the labour market.

One key justification for this finding is that employers typically seek candidates who have demonstrated the ability to apply their knowledge in real-world settings. Work experience, including internships, co-op programs, or part-time jobs, provides graduates with the opportunity to develop and refine their technical and professional skills. It allows them to gain hands-on experience, build a professional network, and become familiar with the expectations and demands of the workplace. For employers, candidates with relevant work experience are seen as more job-ready and capable of contributing to the organization from day one, which is why work experience is often regarded as one of the most important factors in hiring decisions. Additionally, work experience offers graduates the chance to develop a range of transferable skills that are highly valued in the workforce. These include communication, problem-solving, time management, teamwork, and leadership. Such skills are developed through real-world interactions and the challenges that arise in a work environment, making them essential for long-term career success. Employers understand that graduates with work experience are not only technically proficient but are also likely to be more adaptable, resilient, and capable of navigating the complexities of modern workplaces. Furthermore, the increasing competition in the job market means that graduates without work experience may struggle to stand out. In many industries, especially in the fields of business, engineering, and technology, employers are inundated with applications from graduates. As a result, candidates who lack relevant work experience may be overlooked in favor of those who have demonstrated their skills in professional settings. This explains why work experience has emerged as a key determinant of marketability in this study.

Another important aspect to consider is that work experience helps graduates build a portfolio of accomplishments and references that they can showcase to potential employers. It allows them to develop a track record of achievements, which can be a powerful tool in interviews or when applying for future jobs. This portfolio not only validates their competencies but also provides concrete examples of their ability to handle the responsibilities of a full-time position. The significant influence of work experience on graduates' marketability is well justified by the findings of this study. The results confirm that employers prioritize candidates with hands-on experience as they are perceived as more capable of contributing to the organization's success. To improve the marketability of graduates, universities should focus on providing students with more opportunities for internships, work placements, and other forms of practical experience. These experiences will better equip graduates with the skills and knowledge required to succeed in the competitive job market.

Influence of Alignment of University Curriculum with Industry Requirements on Graduates' Marketability

The findings of this study indicate that the alignment of university curriculum with industry requirements has a significant positive effect on the marketability of Malaysian graduates ($B = 0.16$, $\beta = 0.12$, $p = 0.01$). This finding is highly relevant in today's fast-evolving job market, where the demand for job-ready graduates with the skills necessary to meet industry standards is becoming increasingly important. The positive relationship between curriculum alignment and marketability suggests that educational institutions play a crucial role in preparing graduates for the challenges and expectations they will face in the workforce. One key justification for this finding is that an industry-aligned curriculum ensures that students acquire relevant knowledge and skills that directly translate into job performance. When universities design their programs to meet industry needs, they are more likely to equip graduates with competencies that are immediately applicable to real-world work scenarios. Employers are more likely to hire graduates who possess the specific technical skills, industry knowledge, and problem-solving abilities that align with the evolving demands of the job market. This alignment makes graduates more competitive and better prepared to enter the workforce, contributing to their overall marketability.

Moreover, industry-aligned curriculums typically focus on practical, hands-on learning experiences, which are highly valued by employers. Internships, project-based learning, and industry partnerships provide students with opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings. These experiences not only enhance students' technical skills but also foster essential soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and adaptability. This blend of technical and soft skills is critical in the modern workplace, where employers seek graduates who are both skilled and well-rounded. Furthermore, an industry-responsive curriculum helps bridge the gap between academic learning and the practical skills required by employers. In many cases, graduates who have not been exposed to current industry trends or emerging technologies may struggle to adapt to their roles in the workplace. In contrast, graduates who have been taught using a curriculum that reflects the latest developments in their field are more likely to have a smoother transition into their careers. This alignment ensures that students are not just learning theoretical concepts but are also developing the ability to address the practical challenges they will encounter in their future jobs.

Another important factor to consider is the evolving nature of many industries. As technology, processes, and methodologies change rapidly, educational institutions must constantly update their curricula to stay relevant. A curriculum that evolves with industry trends allows graduates

to stay ahead of the curve and better position themselves in a competitive job market. By incorporating feedback from industry experts, universities can tailor their programs to provide the most relevant and timely education to students.

In conclusion, the positive relationship between the alignment of university curriculum with industry requirements and graduates' marketability reflects the importance of providing an education that meets the demands of the workforce. Graduates who have been equipped with skills that are directly applicable to their chosen industries are better positioned to secure employment and succeed in their careers. The findings highlight the need for universities to continuously collaborate with industry stakeholders to ensure that their curriculums remain relevant, responsive, and capable of preparing graduates for the evolving job market.

Limitation And Suggestion

This study provides valuable insights into the factors influencing the marketability of Malaysian graduates in the workforce. However, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study relies on self-reported data, which may introduce response bias. Participants might overestimate or underestimate their competencies, work experience, or marketability, leading to potential inaccuracies in the findings. Future research should incorporate employer perspectives or objective assessments, such as job placement rates or recruiter evaluations, to validate the reported data.

Second, the study primarily examines graduates' marketability based on four key factors which are soft skills, English Language Proficiency (ELP), internship and work experience, and curriculum alignment with industry requirements. While these variables are important, other potential determinants of employability, such as technological skills, networking opportunities, and industry demand fluctuations, were not considered. Future studies should adopt a more comprehensive approach by including additional factors that influence job readiness and career success.

Third, the use of convenience sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings. The sample may not fully represent the diverse population of Malaysian graduates, as it could be skewed towards certain demographic groups or academic backgrounds. To enhance the applicability of the results, future research should employ probability sampling techniques, ensuring a more representative distribution of graduates across various disciplines and institutions. Additionally, the study does not account for longitudinal changes in employability. Market conditions, industry requirements, and skill demands evolve over time, which may affect the relevance of graduates' skills and qualifications. A longitudinal study tracking graduates' employment trajectories over several years would provide deeper insights into how these factors influence long-term career success.

Another limitation is the weak and non-significant relationship between ELP and marketability, which contradicts some prior research emphasizing the role of language proficiency in employability. This finding may be influenced by contextual factors such as industry-specific language requirements or employer preferences. Future studies should explore whether ELP's impact varies across different sectors, job levels, or geographic regions. To improve the practical implications of this research, universities and policymakers should use these findings to enhance graduate employability programs. Strengthening internship opportunities, aligning curricula with industry needs, and fostering soft skills development should be prioritized. Employers should also be involved in curriculum design and career readiness initiatives to

ensure graduates are better equipped for the job market. By addressing these limitations and incorporating these suggestions, future research can provide a more comprehensive understanding of graduate employability and its contributing factors.

Implications of Research

This study has several important implications for various stakeholders, including higher education institutions, employers, policymakers, and graduates. The findings highlight the significant impact of internship and work experience, soft skills, and curriculum alignment on graduates' marketability, emphasizing the need for strategic improvements in these areas. From an educational perspective, the results suggest that universities must place greater emphasis on practical learning experiences. Internship and work experience were found to be the strongest predictors of graduate marketability, indicating that hands-on exposure to real-world job environments significantly enhances employability. Institutions should therefore strengthen their industry partnerships to offer more structured and meaningful internship programs. Additionally, curriculum alignment with industry requirements was also a significant predictor, suggesting that universities must continuously update their courses to match evolving workforce demands. Incorporating industry-relevant skills, certifications, and applied learning experiences can bridge the gap between academic knowledge and professional expectations. For employers, the study underscores the value of hiring graduates with practical experience and strong soft skills. Employers should actively collaborate with universities to provide internship placements, mentorship programs, and skill development workshops. The significant role of soft skills in employability also suggests that organizations should invest in training new hires in communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability to enhance their workforce's overall efficiency and productivity.

From a policy perspective, the findings highlight the need for government agencies and higher education regulators to refine policies that enhance graduate employability. Policies should encourage universities to implement structured internship programs as a mandatory component of degree requirements. Additionally, funding and incentives can be provided to organizations that offer extensive internship opportunities, industry training, and graduate placement programs. Policymakers should also monitor the alignment between university curricula and industry demands, ensuring that academic institutions remain responsive to changes in the labor market. For graduates, the results emphasize the importance of gaining relevant work experience and developing essential soft skills to enhance their job prospects. Students should take proactive steps in securing internships, participating in leadership roles, and engaging in extracurricular activities that build their teamwork and communication skills. The non-significant impact of English Language Proficiency (ELP) suggests that while language skills remain important, graduates must also focus on other competencies that employers prioritize, such as critical thinking and technical expertise.

By addressing these implications, universities, employers, and policymakers can collectively improve graduate employability, ensuring that the workforce remains competitive in an evolving job market.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the factors influencing the marketability of Malaysian graduates in the workforce. The findings highlight that internship and work experience, soft skills, and the alignment of university curricula with industry requirements significantly contribute to graduates' employability. Among these factors, internship and work

experience emerged as the strongest predictor, indicating that hands-on exposure to real-world job environments is crucial in preparing graduates for the labor market. The results emphasize the need for universities to enhance experiential learning opportunities and industry collaborations to ensure graduates acquire relevant skills before entering the workforce. Soft skills were also found to have a significant impact on graduate marketability, reinforcing the importance of communication, teamwork, adaptability, and problem-solving abilities in securing employment. This suggests that universities should integrate soft skills training into their academic programs and encourage students to participate in leadership roles, group projects, and extracurricular activities that enhance these competencies. Additionally, the positive association between curriculum alignment and marketability highlights the importance of keeping academic programs updated to meet industry demands. Universities must continuously engage with industry stakeholders to design curricula that reflect evolving job market trends. Interestingly, English Language Proficiency (ELP) did not show a significant impact on marketability in this study, suggesting that while language skills are important, employers may prioritize practical experience and soft skills when hiring graduates. Future research could explore whether the role of ELP varies across different industries and job positions. Overall, this study underscores the need for higher education institutions, employers, and policymakers to collaborate in improving graduate employability. By strengthening internship programs, enhancing soft skills development, and ensuring curriculum relevance, stakeholders can better prepare graduates for a competitive job market, ultimately contributing to a more skilled and adaptable workforce.

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