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## Enhancing Individual Employability: The Perception of Sports Graduates in Malaysia

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### Abstract

Employability enables graduates to grab the organization's opportunities and benefits, making them highly employable. Despite that, poor graduates' employability is seen as an attractive issue in the organization as they are the asset to determine success. As a consequence of this problem, this study aims to assess the level of employability perceived by Malaysian sports graduates. The quantitative approach using a survey design was used to conduct this study. Questionnaires were distributed to 370 sports graduates employed in public and private organizations. A total of 20 items for employability were assessed using descriptive analysis. Based on the findings, it was reported that the level of employability perceived by the graduates was at a high level. This shows that sports graduates believe they can deliver their knowledge and experience to the working environment. Thus, future researchers recommended conducting the study by looking at the perspective of employers and employees to gain high constructive findings.

**Keywords:** Employability, Sports Graduates, Graduates' Perception

### Introduction

Generally, every organization selects employees from graduates with the necessary employability skills. This is due to the high employability of employees who can provide quality work. According to Tanius (2018), employability is a long-term practice that helps individuals develop various abilities, manners, characteristics and attitudes to succeed. The employability of employees enables the organization to accomplish goals and support the industry's growth. Previous researchers indicated employability as a word that can be perceived in various contexts and meanings. The employability of graduates can be influenced by the development of programs conducted by Higher Education Institutions (HEI) and at the workplace when they have been recruited. This indicates that employability is essential for individuals because it helps them secure and sustain work in the organization. The proper development of employability could make graduates possess skills that can enable them to become valuable.

Nowadays, hiring graduates with employability is essential for the organization to gain good productivity and profitability. The desirable employability skills lead graduates to develop

their career growth in the organization. However, Fletcher et al. (2017) reported that employers are often dissatisfied with the skills invested by the graduates when performing their duties in the organization. This is supported by Aliu and Aigbavboa (2020), graduates need to improve their skills related to the industry as they are only impressive and energized in academic subjects. From this, it asserts that graduates need to acquire readiness in theoretical and soft skills that can enable them to do their work in the long term. In regards to this situation, the involuntary turnover rate among employees will be raised due to the poor performance shown towards the organization. Consequently, this indicates that most graduates needed help exhibiting their employability following the requirements of employers. As a result, further research must be conducted to answer the research objective. Thus, this study aims to determine the employability level perceived by Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) sports graduates.

### Literature Review

According to Tanius (2018), the researcher indicates that employability is a long-term practice that helps individuals develop various abilities, manners, characteristics and attitudes to succeed. Previous researchers define employability as a collection of attributes, expertise and knowledge that all labor force entrants should possess to provide benefits in achieving effectiveness at work (Misra & Khurana, 2017). Employability is also seen as the willingness to work paired with work ethics, business skills, creative and inventive interpersonal and thinking skills and learning abilities of an individual (Kamaruddin et al., 2020). Meanwhile, according to Holmes (2016) cited in Seng (2018), employability can be described as a set of an individual's skills, knowledge and personal characteristics.

Besides, employability also can be perceived in two contexts referring to students in HEI or graduates employed by public or private organizations. The employability of individuals is not dependent on them only, but it is also the responsibility of other parties, such as universities and organizations (Clarke, 2018). Abd Majid et al (2020) also stated that HEI is responsible for preparing the students' employability to ensure they will secure a job after graduation. This aligns with previous researchers' statements that the university is responsible for generating graduates with relevant capabilities that can make them employable (Tanius, 2018). A study conducted by previous researchers shows that the employability skills received at the workplace enabled them to exhibit ideal attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, which helped them to encounter problems in the working environment (Abas Mastura et al., 2018). The researcher also stated that employees who possess various employability skills, such as teamwork, may influence their development and competency in their job. This shows that employees' skills can be improved to a high level when the development applied in the organization meets the requirements.

Previous research done by Ybema et al (2020) among employees in the Netherlands found that the average mean employability score was reported at a high level. Hian et al (2014) conducted a study among sports science graduates and also revealed the same result of the average level of the mean score. The opportunities given by the organization for employees have given them high benefits to deliver and execute the task with good skills. They also gain new knowledge and experience in handling their working environment. Drange et al (2018) support highly employable individuals with solid career identity encourage them to realize and create chances. However, Kaur and Kaur (2020) conducted a study on employee

competency among manufacturing industries showing a contradiction from previous researchers mentioned above. The researcher stated that the average mean score was at a moderate level. Employees' inadequate employability makes them less efficient in performing work not in line with their capabilities. In response, they could feel less motivated and confident in executing the responsibilities given. Consequently, employability is the thing that is most needed for graduates to secure, maintain and succeed in their job.

### Methodology

The descriptive design was employed in measuring the level of employability perceived by UiTM sports graduates. In this study, 370 sports graduates who worked in public and private organizations participated in answering the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 20 items adapted from Baker et al (2017) and was used to evaluate the employability level of sports graduates. All the items used were based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

A pilot study was conducted to ensure the questionnaire was valid and reliable. A total of 30 UiTM sports graduates were selected as the respondents. The Cronbach Alpha value from Konting et al (2009) was used in interpreting the reliability of the questionnaire. Based on the result, the Cronbach Alpha value shows that the questionnaire is excellent and valid. Table 1 and 2 shows the interpretation and result of the Cronbach alpha value.

Table 1

#### *The Interpretation of Cronbach Alpha Value*

<b>Cronbach Alpha Value</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
0.91-1.00	Excellent
0.81-0.90	Good
0.71-0.80	Good and acceptable
0.61-0.70	Acceptable
0.01-0.60	Non Acceptable

Table 2

#### *Cronbach Alpha Values for HRM Practices*

<b>Construct</b>	<b>N of Items</b>	<b>Cronbach Alpha</b>
Employability	20	0.930

### Findings

Based on the descriptive statistics, the result shows the mean score for employability. The level of employability was interpreted through the mean score from Nunnally (1978). Table 3 shows the interpretation mean score for the level of employability.

Table 3

#### *Interpretation of Mean Score*

<b>Level</b>	<b>Mean score</b>
Low	1.00-2.33
Moderate	2.34-3.66
High	3.67-5.00

Table 4 reported the descriptive statistics of employability among UiTM sports graduates. The level of employability among UiTM sports graduates was reported at a high level as the value of the mean score is in the range of 3.67 to 5.00 (Nunnally, 1978).

Table 4

*Level of Employability*

Construct	Mean	Std. Deviation (SD)	Level of Interpretation
Employability	4.23	0.616	High

**Discussions**

Based on the study's findings, the employability level perceived by UiTM sports graduates at the workplace was high. This shows that sports graduates strongly agree that the skills gained from implementing various programs organized by higher education institutions have equipped their employability. At the same time, the employability of sports graduates also improves when employers provide an excellent chance to demonstrate their abilities of what they have learned and trained. This is supported by Yusop and Umar (2018); Ahmad et al (2021); institutional efforts in organizing various programs such as career opportunities and entrepreneurship have become a medium to convey information and awareness that can add the students' value to secure jobs. The result of this study was in line with previous studies conducted by Ybema et al (2020), Liu (2018); Hahn and Kim (2018) which found the average mean score of employability also yielded at the high level. This means that good skills gained by graduates have assisted them in having the opportunity to secure a better career and adapt to the change of working environment. Employers are more interested in graduates who fulfil the aspect of personality, self-confidence and self-appearance to fill vacancies in the organization since their added value can distinguish them from others affecting an organization's performance (Zamira & Farah, 2019).

Nevertheless, the result of a study by Kaur and Kaur (2020) shows a contradiction when the average mean score was reported at a moderate level. This finding indicates that the organizations probably need less employability possessed by graduates during the study until it causes their employability cannot be maintained and improved. The graduates who do not have high employability will have little chance to stay longer in the organization if the graduates and employers do not take the initiative to build it up. This is supported by Salman et al (2020), employees' disengagement and management's inability to provide enough assistance will influence the development of staff and organizations' capability. Therefore, the employability of graduates can be enhanced if the graduates, institutions, and employers carry out their responsibilities to plan necessary strategies that can contribute to developing and enhancing the employees to sustain their job.

**Implications of Study**

The implication of this study was addressed to the employers in public and private organizations in evaluating the employees' employability to ensure they can execute tasks and responsibilities. It also can help employers create opportunities among employees to enhance their employability to the specific measurements needed by the organization. The

implication can also be highlighted to the HEI in preparing students before entering the labour market. The HEI may produce integrated modules for students to make them able to demonstrate their knowledge to the relevant industries. For that, employability is essential for an individual to get a chance to deliver what they have to the working life.

### Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Researchers

The findings of this study revealed that UiTM sports graduates believed they had a high level of employability. The result indicates that graduates' skills are helpful for the organization's demand. The advancement of technology and graduates' knowledge enable them to excel in their job. This shows that continuous learning and a relevant field approach can equip graduates to be more employable. As a result of this study, future researchers are recommended to enlarge this study to the other field of graduates in Malaysia as this study only covered UiTM sports graduates' perception of employability. Future researchers may also conduct a study on the perspective of employers and employees so that high constructive findings can be gained. Overall, graduates' ability to execute compatible skills empowers the organization to accomplish goals.

### Theoretical and Contributions of Research

This study's theoretical implication is to contribute to expanding the literature review regarding employability. The development of employability theory enables researchers to have a greater understanding of the skills development of graduates. From this, it can help employers to prepare relevant practices that can enable graduates to secure a high level of knowledge and experience in performing their job. As a result, the graduates' employability can be enhanced, making them a high potential to adapt to the changes in job requirements. Therefore, the graduates' employability is important in every organization to sustain their achievement for the long term.

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