

Personal Attributes and Emotional Intelligence on Employability among Graduate Employees in SMEs: An Empirical Study in Selangor, Malaysia

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Abstract

The study aims to identify the influence of personal attributes and emotional intelligence on graduate employees' employability in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Selangor, Malaysia. A questionnaire survey was conducted, and the study's respondents comprised graduate employees employed by SMEs in the service sector. The data from the 403 questionnaires were analyzed for descriptive, correlation, and regression statistics. The regression analysis results showed a significant positive relationship between personal attributes, emotional intelligence, and graduate employees' employability. The findings from the hypothesis tested showed that personal attributes influence graduate employees' employability, and that emotional intelligence too significantly influences graduate employees' employability. However, the moderators of gender and experience that were expected to have an influence on personal attributes and emotional intelligence were found not to have any influence on the independent variables towards the dependent variable of graduate employees' employability. Further, based on the boots-trapping tests that were performed on the data, it has been shown that the results could be generalized. Thus, personal attributes and emotional intelligence influence graduate employees' employability in service sector SMEs.

Keywords: Personal Attributes, Emotional Intelligence, Graduate Employees' Employability, Gender, Experience.

Introduction

The changing organizational structures, career patterns, and job security have led to an increasing emphasis on employability. An effective employment force is essential for any country to progress nationally and globally. Every government aims to ensure that employees meet the job market requirements. It is also the firm belief of governments worldwide that employees are a significant force in contributing to economic development. The assurance for attaining this challenge is a high level of competency as a 'passport' for employment (Yorke, 2004). Yorke (2004) highlighted that governments worldwide linked qualified graduate employees to a country's national economy. They contend that a working

population that is highly talented, competent, qualified, and experienced would serve as an engine of the national economy to satisfy the employers' expectations and sustain a culture of continuous improvement. Employees, in general, are expected to determine their career success (Baruch, 2004; Coetzee & Roythorne-Jacobs, 2007; Fugate et al., 2004). Individuals must be adaptive to the changing opportunities in career progression (Fugate, 2006; Karaevli & Hall, 2006). Studies by the Confederation of British Industry (2010); Wilton (2011) showed that employers and governments across developed economies expect graduate employees to be ever-ready for the evolving workplace. Further, the increasing costs of providing higher education have forced every government today to ensure graduates are gainfully employed.

The general complaint has been that graduate employees need to meet the requirements expected by employers (Pillai, 2009). The Labour Force Survey Report (2013) revealed that there is an increase of 3.3% (from 27.3% to 30.6%) in the number of unemployed graduate employees in SMEs. The grouses arising from the employers are not confined to Malaysia (Sirat et al., 2008). Hamid (2009) reported that due to the fiercely competitive market, Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs) have been pressured to ensure that graduates are employable. Pillai (2009) suggested that one of the ways to address this issue is to ensure that the graduates possess the required attributes to seek employment successfully.

Studies have been pursued on the impact of personal attributes on employability (Gallopini, 2013; Agus et al., 2011; Van der Heijden & Bakker, 2008). Similarly, there have been studies on the impact of personal emotional intelligence on employability (Rathi & Rastogi, 2009; Coetzee & Harry, 2014). Likewise, the length of service with an organization has been reported to be significantly related to employability (Van der Heijden et al., 2009). Blau and Kahn (2006) have highlighted discrimination based on gender. Researchers have suggested the need for further empirical investigation on the predictors of employability (Wittekind, Raeder, & Grote, 2010). Others (Pool & Sewell, 2007; Talavera & Pérez-González, 2007; Vandervoort, 2006) suggested that the element of emotional competence/intelligence be incorporated, as well, as there is a possibility of a direct impact of it on graduate employees' employability. There have been few studies on the combined effect of personal attributes and emotional intelligence on employability, nor the moderating effect of the demographic factors of gender and experience on employability. Thus, the current study investigates the influence of personal attributes and emotional intelligence on graduate employees' employability, incorporating the moderating factors of gender and experience.

Specifically, the research objectives of the study were to determine: (i) the relationship between personal attributes and employability, (ii) the relationship between emotional intelligence and employability, and (iii) the moderating effect of the demographic factors of experience and gender on the influence of personal attributes and emotional intelligence on graduate employees' employability. SMEs were explicitly chosen for this study, as they are the backbone of the Malaysian economy. The chief executive officer of SME then, Datuk Hafsa Hashim, reported that Malaysian SMEs are expected to contribute 62% to the country's employment and 25% to the country's exports by 2020 (Borneo Post, 2012). The SME's contribution to the Malaysian economy has been about 19 percent of the total export value and 32.5 percent of the GDP in 2012 (SME Annual Report, 2011). Since 62% of the employment opportunities are expected to be provided by SMEs, a substantial percentage of these are expected to comprise graduate employees, with the increasing emphasis placed on education.

Among the factors contributing to the successful performance of SMEs is employees' contribution in terms of their involvement and commitment (Hashim & Zakaria, 2010). This study would not only enhance the graduate employees' employment opportunities but also provide invaluable information to management as to where to focus when it comes to training to enhance the productivity of the graduate employees. It is also anticipated to improve the knowledge available in the literature on graduate employees' employability.

Though there have been several studies conducted and other attempts taken to contribute to the issue of employability from different aspects Gallopeni (2013); Agus et al (2011); Van der Heijden & Bakker (2008); Rathi & Rastogi (2009); Coetzee & Harry (2014), there are limited empirical studies on the influence of the combined influence of personal attributes and emotional intelligence on graduate employees' employability. The findings of these components impact the assessment of one's capability and capacity to gainfully get employed and remain employed, which would complement the findings on employability. Further, the findings of the demographic factors of experience and gender's moderating effect on the independent variables would be a new theoretical contribution to the literature. The findings of this study are anticipated to navigate and enhance the literature on an individual's future scope for employability, especially after graduation and when they are laid off for inevitable reasons, such as restructuring and retrenchment. This study is also expected to provide empirical evidence of the dire need for employees seeking employment or career advancement to equip themselves with the right personal attributes and emotional intelligence.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Employability

The concept of employability has been in the limelight since the 1990s Forrier & Sels (2003), but the historical studies can be traced back almost a century (Gazier, 1998; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). Employability has been reviewed and researched from several perspectives. Harvey (2001) investigated the definition and measurement of the concept of employability. They examined the operationalization of employability and the implicit 'magic bullet' notion of employability-development opportunities. They devised an alternative approach based on an audit of employability development within institutions. Their conclusion suggested that any employability evaluation should indicate areas for internal improvement rather than simply ranking institutions.

Employability has also been viewed from the perspective of globalization, as today's trend is that of organizations attempting to cross economic and geographic boundaries to expand their operations (Bhagwati, 2004). This has resulted from the recent developments that have been brought about by accelerated progress and the awareness of globalization. The global workplace puts forward immediate challenges to the demand for new skills, knowledge, and abilities. This is consequently a challenge and an opportunity to support the needs of these global companies (Prestwich & Ho-Kim, 2007). The advancement in technology has forced activities and interactions with international society. Martinelli et al (2010) reported that the governments and economic markets have fuelled the need for interconnectivity and globalization. Milhauser and Rahschulte (2010), in their study on 'Meeting the Needs of Global Companies through improved international business relations....', stressed that with

these developments, the workers are expected to cope with the global functions by possessing the required employability characteristics.

While the provision and development of graduate employees' employability could be held to be the educational institutions' responsibility, the graduate employees' engagement to acquire the other attributes is equally essential, as advocated by the learning theory. Branine (2008), based on a survey of 700 UK-based employers, reported that 60% of them said that the graduate employees had weak employability skills. Tymon (2013) reported that employers continue to report that graduate employees need more time to prepare for work. What could be the problem here is that the graduates do not take the initiative to acquire the right attributes.

Kreber (2006) identified employability as a critical outcome for graduate employees across many countries. Pillai (2009) reported that tertiary institutions are increasingly under pressure to ensure graduates are employable upon graduation. Jackson (2010) commented that industries and governments worldwide looked forward to bridging the graduate employees' skills gap. The challenge here is ensuring that the knowledge, attributes, and skills align with the industries' requirements. There are complaints that graduate employees need more time to prepare for the work environment. This is a global complaint. In Malaysia, the push towards university-industry collaboration has been emphasized in the blueprint. Different forms of co-operation were formulated to enhance the employability of the graduates. This includes the Industrial Training program and supervises practical training for a specified duration—the program aimed to produce graduates with both practical and theoretical attributes, skills, and knowledge. The program provided a golden opportunity for potential graduate employees to meet multiple employers, gain the confidence to handle real-life challenges, and be aware of the expectations of the practical world.

The constructs of Fugate et al (2004) can be seen in the studies on strategies related to building employability by (Smith, 2010). The activities of those seeking job opportunities to make themselves look more employable have been discussed in that study. In traditional job markets, and particularly in times of economic downturn, this serves to positively "cultivate human, cultural and social capital, which becomes essential for employment and mobility" (Smith, 2010). Looking at the pattern in the US, Smith proposed three strategies that employees (or aspiring employees) could resort to improve their chances of gaining employment or continuing to be in employment. The first is to develop a personal identity more aligned with employers' needs. The second is to engage in networking to build the connections required in needy times, and the third is to undertake unpaid volunteering/internships in marginally paid work to acquire the right skills/intelligence/attributes.

Smith (2010) recognized that those in information technology, advertising, management, and media must constantly update themselves for sustained employability. Those in occupations that require less skill ought to seek variations in their presentation and interaction skills in their delivery, as expected by their employers. While it may be an uphill task to meet the costs for those who are underprivileged and where employers do not provide such facilities, networking is a more available resource. Although it differs from the type of networking done in more skilled occupations, one could use them as "avenues to seek jobs for members of

their own community" (Smith, 2010). As for taking up unpaid employment, this necessitates individuals to use alternative means of support (for example, parents prepared to cover the living expenses for the duration of the internship). Smith (2010), however, questions whether, by accepting such employability discourses, one agrees with the terms and conditions imposed for flexible employment.

The strategies proposed by Smith (2010) suggest ways individuals could seek to become employable. This is more oriented toward the person-centered theories of employability, though it does not make the relationship explicit. The concepts of personal adaptability, career identity, and human & social relationships are found in Smith's (2010) arguments. While the study by Fugate et al. (2004) is theoretically based, Smith's (2010) study is based on available literature. The contribution of Smith's paper can be viewed as a set of propositions for employability.

Cavanagh, Burston, and Southcombe (2015) explored the student's perception of employability to identify the reasons for the increasing unemployment among graduate employees. The authors believed that the explicit graduate capability is a recent articulation of knowledge required to transform oneself into employable. Their findings emphasized the significance of the graduates being work-ready at the point of graduation itself. This aligns with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) emphasis that the national economies need more talented graduate employees to address the environmental, industrial, social, economic, and technological challenges (Foskett & Maringe, 2010).

Personal Attributes

According to Cantor et al (1987), qualities are essential for understanding how personal attributes and coping could contribute to adaptation. Studies have examined how personal behavior dimensions, such as neuroticism or introversion-extroversion, influence coping with work processes (Cooper & Payne, 1991). Personal attributes allow graduate employees to adapt to the work culture, develop ideas, and take responsibility and initiative to help an organization deal with people in need (Harvey et al., 1997).

However, whether these are embedded in a work context needs to be clarified since how the different dimensions influence individuals cope with career changes is limited (Judge et al., 1999; Seibert et al., 1999). Crant (2000) described proactive behavior as an initiative to improve the current circumstances or formulate another. Thus, proactive individuals look for opportunities to act by showing initiative to implement a change successfully (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Crant, 2000). Given the dynamic nature of work, the effort taken to measure the personal dimensions of such people is more critical now than before (Parker, 1998).

Gow and Mc Donald (2000) explored the attributes required for employability and identified four factors. This included adaptability to changing work environments, cross-cultural competence, accountability and business management skills. The debate on the quality of education and its relationship to employability commenced in the 1990s, as Harvey (2001) reported. Sufficient evidence is there to support the view that if there are consistent personal characteristics (and the behavior across different situations over time is also consistent), it is possible to predict the choice of following a strategy based on a person's attributes (Carver, Scheier & Weintraub, 1993; Taylor, 1983; Armstrong-Stassen, 2004). These and other studies

have shown that personal attributes have been established to be powerful predictors of behavior (Ashton, 1998; Paunonen & Ashton, 2001). The studies by Barrick and Ryan (2003) showed that personal attributes and characteristics are reliable and valid predictors of career success.

An employee's employability is shown to depend not only on technical knowledge but also on generic skills (De Lange et al., 2006). The study by Ortega (2006) confirms that personal attributes can be correlated to the employee's approach to coping in the work context. The choice to adopt specific strategies to manage others is reported to be caused by individual differences (Welbourne et al., 2007). It is reported that employees with a higher presence of attributes related to proactive behavior responded to workplace changes and challenges better. This could be due to intrinsic motivation, which correlates with openness to change (Baek-Kyoo & Lim, 2009). Gallopeni (2013) used personal attributes in his studies to investigate the moderation of personal attributes towards employability, including loyalty, commitment, honesty/integrity, enthusiasm, reliability, work-life balance, motivation, self-presentation, common sense, self-esteem, sense of humor, working under pressure and adaptability.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence, encompassing dimensions such as emotional expression, self-awareness, reasoning, awareness of others, management, self-management, and self-control, is crucial in the workplace. It enables individuals to monitor their feelings and those of their colleagues, fostering a more harmonious and productive environment (Day, 2001; Wong & Law, 2002). This study incorporates these dimensions under the emotional intelligence variable of the questionnaire for data collection. Salovey and Mayer (1990) define emotional intelligence as harnessing energy and guiding thoughts and actions, emphasizing its practical implications. According to Nelis et al (2009), emotional intelligence influences an individual's processing, perception, utilization, regulation, and utilization of emotional information, significantly impacting mental and physical health, work performance, and social relationships. Mayer, Dipaolo, and Salovey (1990) view emotional intelligence as a critical attribute for accurately appraising emotions in oneself and others, thereby enhancing emotional regulation. Menhart (1999) found significant links between career behaviors and emotional intelligence, further highlighting its practical relevance.

Emotional intelligence is recognized as affecting influencing employees' employability (Coetzee & Beukes, 2010; Coetzee & Schreuder, 2011; Emmerling & Cherniss, 2003). According to Moyo and Theron (2011), an individual's emotional intelligence is found to be related to their job performance. Brown et al (2003) found that employees with high emotional intelligence are more likely to achieve success and perform well in their tasks. (which includes the enhancement of employability skills). Kanfer and Kantrowitz (2002) and Goleman (1995) reported that an individual's career attainment is influenced by emotional intelligence. Similarly, Yorke and Knight (2004); Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) identified emotional intelligence as an essential employability attribute. Several South African studies also confirmed that job performance is influenced by the emotional intelligence of an employee Hayward et al (2008); Murphy & Janeke (2009); Nel & De Villiers (2004), which is related to an individual's employability (Beukes, 2010; Coetzee & Schreuder, 2011).

In the study conducted by Slaski and Cartwright (2002) among a group of retail managers to find if there was any relationship between stress, quality of working life, and performance, they found that there was indeed a significant relationship between the level of emotional intelligence and the level of performance. Individuals with high emotional intelligence encountered less stress and enjoyed a better quality of life, leading to better job performance. Sojka and Deeter-Schmelz (2002) showed that emotional intelligence is essential to those in the sales line, as they are expected to face a whole range of customers with varying demands.

The study by Rajagopal and Rekha (2004) on 70 selected managerial employees of BILT in India highlighted a relationship between emotional intelligence and effectiveness. The findings showed that there is indeed a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and an individual's effectiveness. The study showed that it is essential for a potential employer to test an individual's level of emotional intelligence before they are employed. Bhalla and Nauriyal (2004), who also conducted a study in India, found that emotional intelligence significantly enhanced an individual's performance at work. They found that employees' emotional intelligence is essential to increase their productivity and effectiveness.

In the study by Thiruchelvi and Supriya (2009) on the petroleum industry in Tamilnadu, India, emotional intelligence significantly enhanced employability and job satisfaction. The respondents, white-collar employees, demonstrated that emotional intelligence is a crucial factor in their work satisfaction and effectiveness. Goleman (1995) suggests that emotional intelligence can be developed at any age, offering a hopeful perspective. They propose that companies implement training strategies to foster emotional intelligence among employees. By incorporating emotional intelligence in the training schedule, companies can motivate their employees to work together, thereby enhancing the productivity and profitability of the organization (Thiruchelvi & Supriya, 2009).

Abdul et al (2008) studied emotional intelligence, emotional labor, and work effectiveness in service organizations, which revealed the importance of emotional intelligence in this sector. Service industry employees who often interact with customers, colleagues, and managers need emotional intelligence to enhance their performance. This finding underscores the value and recognition of emotional intelligence in service providers. Coetzee and Harry (2014) studied the association between emotional intelligence and career adaptability among African call center employees. This study further emphasizes the significance of developing emotional intelligence to strengthen career adaptability, acknowledging the role of emotional intelligence in individual growth and development.

Hypotheses of the Study

Personal Attributes and Graduate Employees' Employability

Several studies have shown that personal attributes influence employability (Galopeni, 2013; Agus et al., 2011; Van der Heijden & Bakker, 2008). Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006) proposed and studied the five measurable components of employability. There are also studies on transferable attributes and skills to increase employees' job mobility within the same industry (Feldman & Ng, 2007; Fugate et al., 2004). Thus, employability is likely positively associated with career success and enhancement (Lips-Wiersma & Mcomorland, 2006; Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). Harvey (2006) advocated that elements such as work

experience and personal attributes should be added to prepare employees for employability. This leads to the first hypothesis:

(H₁) Personal attributes significantly influence graduate employees' employability.

Emotional Intelligence and Graduate Employees' Employability

In a study conducted by Jordan et al (2002), as cited by Rathi and Rastogi (2009), it was found that when individuals display high levels of emotional intelligence, they can maintain affective commitment in the workplace. Coetzee and Harry (2014) pursued a study to determine the association between emotional intelligence and career adaptability in Africa. Their findings revealed the significance of developing an individual's emotional intelligence to strengthen career adaptability. Further, in the study pursued by Portgieter and Coetzee (2013) to explore the influence of an individual's emotional intelligence on psychosocial employability, it was found that emotional intelligence was a significant predictor of graduate employees' employability. This leads to the second hypothesis:

(H₂): Emotional intelligence significantly influences graduate employees' employability

The combined effect of personal attributes and emotional intelligence to influence graduate employees' employability

Potgieter (2012) incorporated emotional intelligence as an additional construct to self-esteem constructs to explore the relationship between self-esteem and employability of postgraduate business management students who were employed and pursuing management studies part-time. The findings report that there is indeed a significant relationship between self-esteem and employability. However, the samples selected for the study were conveniently selected. This study is pursued to ascertain the influence of the combined independent variables of personal attributes and emotional intelligence on the dependent variable of graduate employees' employability. Thus, the need for the third hypothesis:

(H₃): Personal attributes and emotional intelligence significantly influence graduate employees' employability

The moderating effect of work experience on the relationship between personal attributes, emotional intelligence, and graduate employees' employability

Decisions on career mobility depend heavily on career experience considerations (Feldman & Ng, 2007). Employee experience would moderate the personal attributes of employees toward employability and career enhancement. Some career researchers have studied differences in relationships between variables for work experience and employability (De Lange et al., 2005; Van der Heijden, 2000). Van der Heijen et al (2009) have also ascertained differences between experienced employees in their research. Thus, the need for the fourth hypothesis

(H₄): Work experience moderates the relationship between personal attributes, emotional intelligence, and graduate employees' employability.

The moderating effect of gender on personal attributes and emotional intelligence on employability

In the studies on 'the effect of age on the employability–career success relationship,' Van der Heijden et al (2009) found some significant gender effects to the disadvantage of women, which urges further studies considering ethical implications and increasing efforts in understanding how these could be overcome. This might not be attributable to differences in workers' capabilities or career potential but solely to discrimination based on gender (Blau & Kahn, 2006). This leads to the fifth hypothesis:

(H₅): Gender moderates the relationship between personal attributes, emotional intelligence, and graduate employees' employability.

Research Methodology

A quantitative empirical research approach has been used in this study. There were 403 respondents who took part in this study. The respondents were selected from small and medium-sized enterprises in the service sector located in Selangor, Malaysia using random and purposive sampling. The data collection process involved the distribution of a questionnaire, which incorporated components from several past research to the human resource contact person of randomly selected enterprises. The contact personnel purposively selected the graduate employees, ensuring the data collected was specific to this group. The correlation study, conducted during the normal work process of the organization, aimed to explore the relationship between graduate employees' employability, personal attributes, and emotional intelligence.

The study's independent variables (i.e. personal attributes, and emotional intelligence) are highly relevant in the context of graduate employees' employability. The personal attribute construct, measured using the ACCI / BCA Framework, includes items such as Loyalty, Commitment, Honesty/Integrity, Reliability, Adaptability, Working under pressure, Motivation, Enthusiasm, Common sense, and Work-life balance. These attributes are crucial for the employability of graduate employees. The other independent variable, emotional intelligence, was measured using the Genos EI instrument specifically designed for workplace contexts. The dependent variable, graduate employees' employability, was determined using an instrument developed and validated by Heijde and Van der Heidjen (2006). In addition to these variables, two moderators, gender and working experience, were used to investigate their impact on employability. The questionnaire was designed based on a 7-point Likert scale measure, ensuring the responses were nuanced and reflected the participants' views.

Findings and Discussion

Respondents' Profile

The survey, conducted through random and purposive sampling, were from 403 respondents. The data reveals a balanced gender distribution, with 45.4% males and 54.6% females. The majority of respondents, 47.6%, were aged between 21 and 30, followed by 36.0% in the 31-40 age group. In terms of marital status, 50.1% were single, and 49.9% were married. These key demographic insights set the stage for a deeper analysis of our survey results.

The respondents were a diverse group, representing various levels of management and professionals. The majority, 50.6%, were in middle or lower management, followed by 37.0% in professional or technical roles and 12.4% in senior management positions. In terms of

academic qualifications, 44.9% held Bachelor's Degrees, 30.0% had Diplomas, 23.3% had masters, and a small percentage, 1.8%, were in the 'above master' group.

In terms of experience, the most significant percentage of respondents, 39.2%, had been with their company for 3 to 5 years. This was followed by 22.1% with 1 to 2 years of experience, 20.3% over five years, and 18.4% with less than a year. In terms of company size, the majority, 54.3%, were in companies with over 150 employees, followed by 16.9% in companies with 100-150 employees, 16.4% in companies with 50 -100 employees, and 12.4% in companies with less than 50 employees.

Table 4.1

Profile of respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	183	45.4
Female	220	54.6
Age		
21-30	192	47.6
31-40	145	36.0
41-50	66	16.4
Marital status		
Single	202	50.1
Married	201	49.9
Academic Qualification		
Diploma	121	30.0
Bachelor	181	44.9
Master	94	23.3
Above Masters	7	1.8
Position, P		
Senior management	50	12.4
Middle/lower management	204	50.6
Professional/Technical	149	37.0
Years of experience, YC		
<1	74	18.4
1-2	89	22.1
3-5	158	39.2
>5	82	20.3
Number of employees, NOE		
<50	50	12.4
50-100	66	16.4
100-150	68	16.9
>150	219	54.3

Factor Analysis and Reliability Tests

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) has been used in this research to determine the items of the dimensions. Factor Analysis with Principal Axis Factoring (PAF) was used to detect suitable and accurate factors within the dimensions. In the current research, the individual results of factor analyses have been presented for different independent and dependent variable structures. In the context of factor analysis, the items for each dimension were selected because the factor loadings were greater than 0.5, and items with cross-loadings were ignored due to the overlapping effects between the items.

10 items were identified for personal attributes to get the job and 12 for personal attributes to maintain the job. A factor analysis using principal axis factoring analysis with varimax rotation was done to validate the two constructs of personal attributes for getting and maintaining the job. The results showed a two-factor solution with eigenvalues greater than 1.0. All items had a high factor loading of more than 0.50, and the total variance explained was 46.02% of the total variance. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.88, indicating sufficient inter-correlation, while Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant (Chi square=7017.595, $p < 0.05$). These results confirm that each construct is uni-dimensional and factor-wise distinct. 1 to 3 items were omitted from the context of personal attributes for getting and maintaining the job.

Graduate employees' employability was divided into five dimensions: Occupational Expertise, Anticipation and Expertise, Personal Flexibility, Corporate Sense, and Balance in Responsibility. There were 7 items for occupational expertise, 2 for Anticipation and Optimisation, 4 for Personal Flexibility, 5 for Corporate Sense, and 8 for Balance in Responsibility. A factor analysis using principal axis factoring analysis with varimax rotation was done to validate the five different dimensions of graduate employees' employability skills. The results showed a five-factor solution with eigenvalues greater than 1.0. All items had a high factor loading of more than 0.50, and the total variance explained 48.16% of the total variance. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.94, indicating effective inter-correlation, while Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant (Chi square=8697.45, $p < 0.05$).

Emotional intelligence is divided into seven dimensions: Emotional Self Awareness, Emotional Expression, Emotional Awareness of Others, Emotional Reasoning, Emotional Self Management, Emotional Management of Others, and Emotional Self Control. There were 6 items for emotional self-awareness, 5 for emotional self-management, 4 for emotional management, 5 for emotional self-control, 3 for emotional expression, 5 for emotional awareness of others, and 4 for emotional reasoning. A factor analysis using principal axis factoring analysis with varimax rotation was done to validate the factors for emotional intelligence. The results showed seven factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0; all items had a high factor loading of more than 0.50, and the total variance explained was 48.21%. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.93, indicating effective inter-correlations, while Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant (Chi square=13466.97, $p < 0.05$). The factor loading for items ranged from 0.50 to 0.68. In general, Cronbach's alpha values have been reduced after eliminating some items through factor analysis within the scope of emotional intelligence. It shows that all the items after the elimination can serve the purpose of producing non-biased results.

Table 4.2

Reliability of items before and after the utilization of factor analysis

Variable	Cronbach Alpha's value (before the item was deleted)	Number of items (before the process of deletion)	Cronbach Alpha's value (after the item is deleted)	Number of items (after the process of deletion)
Personal Attributes				
Personal attributes for getting the job	0.76	13	0.92	10
Personal attributes for maintaining the job	0.91	13	0.92	12
Graduate employees employability				
Occupational Expertise	0.62	9	0.87	7
Anticipation and Optimization	0.88	8	0.83	2
Personal flexibility	0.86	8	0.85	4
Corporate sense	0.85	7	0.81	5
Balance in responsibility	0.87	9	0.89	8
Emotional intelligence				
Emotional self-awareness	0.80	10	0.67	6
Emotional self-management	0.74	10	0.56	5
Emotional management of others	0.78	10	0.54	4
Emotional self-control	0.74	10	0.64	5
Emotional expression	0.74	10	0.33	3
Emotional awareness of others	0.78	9	0.69	5
Emotional reasoning	0.76	10	0.63	4

Regression Analysis

Relationship between personal attributes and graduate employees' employability

A standard bi-variate linear regression analysis was conducted to investigate the Influence of personal attributes on graduate employees' employability. Personal attributes were analyzed by combining the dimensions of personal attributes for obtaining and maintaining jobs. Personal attributes and values were obtained by summing up the personal attributes for obtaining and maintaining jobs. Graduate employees' employability was analyzed by combining the constructs of occupational expertise, anticipation and optimization, personal flexibility, corporate sense and balance in responsibility. The values were obtained by summing up the items of occupational expertise, anticipation and optimization, personal flexibility, corporate sense and balance in responsibility. Table 4.7 summarises the regression results between personal attributes and graduate employees' employability.

Table 4.3

Summary of Regression Results between personal attributes and graduate employees' employability

Variable	Coefficient	T-statistic	P-value	Bootstrap (p-value)
Constant	64.46	10.20	0.00**	0.00**
Personal attributes	0.59	12.35	0.00**	0.00**

R²=0.28,
F=152.41,p-value(F-test)=0.00

Table 4.3 shows that personal attributes are positively and significantly related to graduate employees' employability. This indicates that personal attributes can explain 28 percent of the variance in graduate employees' employability. This supports the first hypothesis that personal attributes significantly influence graduate employees' employability. With reference to Table 4.3, the bootstrapping method used in 1000 samples generalized that personal attributes influence graduate employees' employability significantly, and the results are reliable. The effectiveness of significance is in the lower mode due to the lower level of R-square. In general, it shows that the model has achieved a higher level of group significance. This can be observed from the higher F-test (152.41) and lower p-value of F-test (0.00). It is necessary to check for some crucial assumptions of linear regressions, such as the normality and homoscedasticity assumptions. The residuals must be normally distributed to reduce the violation of linear regressions. The residuals are generally distributed as there is no divergence gap between the residuals and the fitness line. Since all the values of residuals are aligned to the fitness line, it follows that the patterns of homogeneity favour the linear model. This model does not suffer from heteroscedasticity (unequal spread of error variances) due to the closeness and consistency of the residual values with the fitness line.

Relationship between Emotional intelligence and graduate employees' employability

A standard bi-variate linear regression analysis was conducted to investigate the Influence of emotional intelligence on graduate employees' employability. Emotional intelligence was

analyzed using combinations of emotional self-awareness, emotional self-control, emotional self-management, emotional management of others, emotional reasoning, emotional expression, and emotional awareness of other constructs. The combination was obtained by summing up the emotional self-awareness, emotional self-control, emotional self-management, emotional management of others, emotional reasoning, emotional expression, and emotional awareness of others items. Graduate employees' employability was analyzed using combinations of occupational expertise, anticipation and optimization, personal flexibility, corporate sense, and balance in responsibility. The combined values were obtained by summing up the occupational expertise, anticipation and optimization, personal flexibility, corporate sense and balance in responsibility items. Table 4.8 summarises regression results between emotional intelligence and graduate employees' employability.

Table 4.4

Summary of Regression Results between emotional intelligence and graduate employees' employability

Variable	Coefficient	T-statistic	P-value	Bootstrap (p-value)
Constant	40.68	6.62	0.00**	0.00**
Emotional Intelligence	0.57	16.57	0.00**	0.00**

R²=0.41,
F=274.42,p-
value(F-
test)=0.00

Table 4.4 indicates that emotional intelligence is positively and significantly related to graduate employees' employability. This shows that 41 percent of the variance in graduate employees' employability can be explained by emotional intelligence. This supports the second hypothesis that emotional intelligence significantly influences graduate employees' employability. With reference to Table 4.8, the bootstrapping method used in 1000 samples has generalized that emotional intelligence influences graduate employees' employability significantly, and the results are reliable. The effectiveness of significance is moderate due to the moderate level of R-square of 0.41. The residuals must be normally distributed to reduce the violation of linear regressions.

Relationship between Gender, personal attributes and graduate employees' employability

Though the original intention was to study the effects of the demographic factors of gender and work experience on both personal attributes and emotional intelligence on graduate employees' employability, the idea was dropped as it was found that there were overlapping effects of personal attributes on emotional intelligence and vice versa. Thus, the linear regression analysis of the demographic factors on the combined independent variables regarding graduate employees' employability was pursued in isolation rather than in combination.

A standard multivariate linear regression analysis was conducted to investigate the Influence of gender on the association between personal attributes and employability skills. Table 4.9 summarizes the regression results between gender, personal attributes, and employability skills.

Table 4.5

Summary of Regression Results between gender, personal attributes and Graduate employees' employability (Model 1)

Variable	Coefficient	T-statistic	P-value	Bootstrap (p-value)
Constant	62.70	9.47	0.00**	0.00**
Personal attributes	0.59	12.34	0.00**	0.00**
Gender	1.14	0.90	0.37	0.39

R²=0.277,
F=76.58,p-value(F-test)=0.00

Table 4.6

Summary of Regression Results between gender, personal attributes and Graduate employees employability (Model 2)

Variable	Coefficient	T-statistic	P-value	Bootstrap (p-value)
Constant	39.39	1.88	0.06	0.10
Personal attributes	0.76	4.84	0.00**	0.00**
Gender	16.01	1.26	0.21	0.27
Personal attributes * Gender	-0.11	-1.17	0.24	0.30

R²=0.279,
F=51.56,p-value(F-test)=0.00

Table 4.7

Comparison between model 1 and model 2 in terms of R-square and change in R-square

Variable	R-square	Change in R-square
Model 1	0.277	0.277
Model 2	0.279	0.002

Table 4.4 indicates that gender does not directly affect graduate employees' employability. The moderating variable of gender was insignificant in explaining the variations in employability skills. It can be seen that gender did not influence the personal attributes due to a lower level of overlapping effects. With reference to Table 4.6, it can be seen that the interaction term between personal attributes and gender was insignificant in explaining the variations in graduate employees' employability. This shows that gender cannot be a moderating variable influencing the association between personal attributes and graduate employees' employability. The importance of interaction terms can also be seen through the change within the R-square. This confirms no moderating effect since Table 4.7 only showed a minimal change of 0.002. With reference to Tables 4.5 and 4.6, the bootstrapping method

has generalized the fact that there was no moderating effect, and the results are reliable. There is no multicollinearity issue as the value of VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) is less than 5, and the tolerance value is not close to 0. It is necessary to check for some crucial assumptions of linear regressions, such as the normality and homoscedasticity assumptions. The residuals must be normally distributed to reduce the violation of linear regressions.

Relationship between gender, emotional intelligence and graduate employees' employability

A standard multivariate linear regression analysis was conducted to investigate the Influence of gender on illustrating the association between emotional intelligence and graduate employees' employability.

Table 4.8

Summary of Regression Results between gender and the interaction of Emotional Intelligence on graduate employees' employability (Model 1)

Variable	Coefficient	T-statistic	P-value	Bootstrap (p-value)
Constant	40.01	6.30	0.00**	0.00**
Emotional Intelligence	0.56	16.53	0.00**	0.00**
Gender	0.49	0.43	0.67	0.69

R²=0.41,
F=137.03,p-value(F-test)=0.00

Table 4.9

Summary of Regression Results between gender and the interaction of emotional intelligence on graduate employees' employability (Model 2)

Variable	Coefficient	T-statistic	P-value	Bootstrap (p-value)
Constant	31.61	1.54	0.12	0.18
Emotional intelligence	0.61	5.36	0.00**	0.00**
Gender	5.84	0.47	0.64	0.67
Emotional intelligence * Gender	-0.03	-0.43	0.67	0.69

R²=0.41,
F=91.23,p-value(F-test)=0.00

Table 4.10

Comparison between model 1 and model 2 in terms of R-square and change in R-square

Variable	R-square	Change in R-square
Model 1	0.41	0.41
Model 2	0.41	0.00

Table 4.8 indicates that gender has no direct effect on employability skills. In a way, gender is insignificant in explaining the variations of employability skills. Besides that, gender does not influence emotional intelligence due to the lower level of overlapping effects. Table 4.9 shows that the interaction term between emotional intelligence and gender was not significant in explaining the variations in employability skills. This indicates that gender cannot be considered a moderating variable that could influence the association between emotional intelligence and graduate employees' employability. The importance of interaction can also be seen from the change within R-square. This confirms the fact that there have been no moderating effects since Table 4.10 shows that there is no change. With reference to Tables 4.8 and 4.9, the bootstrapping method has generalized the fact that there was no moderating effect, and the results are reliable. There is no multicollinearity as the value of VIF is less than 5, and the tolerance value is not close to 0. It is necessary to check for the assumptions of linear regressions, such as the normality and homoscedasticity assumptions. The residuals must be normally distributed to reduce the violation of linear regressions.

Relationship between work experience, personal attributes and graduate employees' employability

A standard multivariate linear regression analysis was conducted to investigate the Influence of work experience on personal attributes and graduate employees' employability. Table 4.15 summarises regression results between work experience, personal attributes and graduate employees' employability.

Table 4.11

Summary of Regression Results between work experience, personal attributes and graduate employees' employability (Model 1)

Variable	Coefficient	T-statistic	P-value	Bootstrap (p-value)
Constant	63.17	9.63	0.00**	0.00**
Personal attributes	0.59	12.35	0.00**	0.00**
Work experience	0.45	0.74	0.46	0.52

$R^2=0.276$,
 $F=76.39$,
 p-value(F-test)=0.00

Table 4.12

Summary of Regression Results between work experience, personal attributes, and interaction term and graduate employees' employability (Model 2)

Variable	Coefficient	T-statistic	P-value	Bootstrap (p-value)
Constant	49.48	2.86	0.00**	0.00**
Personal attributes	0.69	5.32	0.00**	0.00**
Work experience	5.66	0.92	0.36	0.38
Personal attributes * Work experience	-0.04	-0.86	0.39	0.42

$R^2=0.278$,
 $F=51.14$,
 $p\text{-value}(F\text{-test})=0.00$

Table 4.13

Comparison between model 1 and model 2 in terms of R-square and change in R-square

Variable	R-square	Change in R-square
Model 1	0.276	0.276
Model 2	0.278	0.002

The results in Table 4.11 show that work experience does not directly affect employability skills. Work experience could have been more significant in explaining the variations in graduate employees' employability. Besides that, work experience did not influence the personal attributes due to a lower level of overlapping effects. From Table 4.12, the interaction between personal attributes and work experience was insignificant in explaining the variations in graduate employees' employability. This shows that work experience cannot be considered a moderating variable that could influence the association between personal attributes and graduate employees' employability. The significance of interaction could also be seen from the change within the R-square. This confirms the fact that there is no moderating effect since Table 4.13 shows that there is a minimal change of 0.002. With reference to Tables 4.11 and 4.12, the bootstrapping method has generalized the fact that there was no moderating effect, and the results are reliable. There is no issue with multicollinearity as the value of VIF is less than 5, and the tolerance value is not close to 0. It is essential to check for the assumptions of linear regressions, such as the normality assumption and homoscedasticity assumption. The residuals must be normally distributed to reduce the violation of linear regressions. It can be seen that the residuals are normally distributed, as there was no gap of divergence between the residuals and the fitness line. Since all the values of residuals are tied up to the fitness line, it follows the patterns of homogeneity and favours the linear model. It can be seen that this model does not suffer from heteroscedasticity (unequal spread of error variances) due to the closeness and consistency of the residual values with the fitness line.

Relationship between work experience, emotional intelligence and graduate employees' employability

A standard multivariate linear regression analysis was conducted to investigate the Influence of work experience on illustrating the association between emotional intelligence and graduate employees' employability. Table 4.14 shows the summary of regression results between work experience, emotional intelligence, and graduate employees' employability.

Table 4.14

Summary of Regression Results between work experience, emotional intelligence and graduate employees' employability (Model 1)

Variable	Coefficient	T-statistic	P-value	Bootstrap (p-value)
Constant	39.67	6.26	0.00**	0.00**
Emotional intelligence	0.57	16.56	0.00**	0.00**
Work experience	0.37	0.67	0.50	0.56

R²=0.407, F=137.24,p-value(F-test)=0.00

Table 4.15

Summary of Regression Results between work experience, emotional intelligence, and interaction term and Graduate employees' employability (Model 2)

Variable	Coefficient	T-statistic	P-value	Bootstrap (p-value)
Constant	29.53	1.76	0.08	0.13
Emotional intelligence	0.62	6.65	0.00**	0.00**
Work experience	4.15	0.71	0.48	0.55
Emotional intelligence * Work experience	-0.02	-0.65	0.52	0.59

R²=0.408, F=91.51,p-value(F-test)=0.00

Table 4.16

Comparison between model 1 and model 2 in terms of R-square and change in R-square

Variable	R-square	Change in R-square
Model 1	0.407	0.407
Model 2	0.408	0.001

Table 4.14 shows that work experience does not directly affect graduate employees' employability. Work experience could have significantly explained the variations in graduate employees' employability. Besides, work experience did not influence the emotional intelligence variable due to the lower level of overlapping effects. Table 4.19 shows that emotional intelligence and work experience did not explain variations in the employability of graduate employees. This shows that work experience could not be considered a moderating

variable influencing the association between emotional intelligence and graduate employees' employability. The importance of interaction could also be seen from the change within the R-square. A minimal change of 0.001, as seen in Table 4.20, confirms no moderating effect. With reference to Tables 4.14 and 4.15, the bootstrapping method has generalized the fact that there was no moderating effect, and the results are reliable. There is no multicollinearity issue as the value of VIF is less than 5, and the tolerance value is not close to 0. It must be checked for the critical assumptions of linear regressions, such as the normality and homoscedasticity assumptions. The residuals must be normally distributed to reduce the violation of linear regressions. It can be seen that the residuals are normally distributed, as there was no gap of divergence between the residuals and the fitness line. Since all the values of residuals are linked to the fitness line, it follows the patterns of homogeneity and favours the linear model. It can be seen that this model does not suffer from heteroscedasticity (unequal spread of error variances) due to the closeness and consistency of the residual values to the fitness line.

Summary of the Results of Hypotheses Testing for the Influence of personal attributes and emotional intelligence on graduate employees' employability

No.	Research hypothesis	Accepted/ rejected	Significant /non- significant	Remarks
H ₁ :	Personal attributes significantly influence graduate employees' employability	Accepted	Significant	Answers Research Question 1
H ₂	Emotional intelligence significantly influences graduate employees' employability	Accepted	Significant	: Answers Research Question 2.
H ₃	Work experience moderates the Relationship between personal attributes; emotional intelligence, and graduate employees' employability.	Rejected	Significant	Answers Research Question 3
H ₄	Gender moderates the Relationship between personal attributes; emotional intelligence	Rejected	Significant	Answers research question 3

The evidence that a sizeable Dutch telecom company tried to enhance the employability orientation of its employees by creating an 'employability website', where the employees could train themselves by attending mobility workshops, career guidance talks and budget training, is proof that organizations could contribute to their career advancement. This would facilitate a win-win situation where the organization could get their employees to be

committed towards their organization and the employees enhancing their employability (Nauta, 2007; Sjollema, 2007).

Enhancing employability practices and policies could incorporate job rotation opportunities and formal training (Fleishmann, Koster & Schippers, 2015). Waterman (1994) has highlighted the need for testing and counselling opportunities to make workers aware of their "skills, interests, values and temperaments". Employability voucher schemes were suggested to increase awareness, opportunities, willingness, and orientation in training (Gerards, De Grip & Witlox, 2014).

The following is a detailed discussion of the findings based on the study's research questions.

RQ1: Do Personal attributes significantly influence graduate employees' employability

The regression analysis was performed to determine the relationship between personal attributes and graduate employees' employability. It shows that personal attributes positively and significantly influence graduate employability. This indicates that personal attributes can explain 28 percent of graduate employees' employability variance. This supports the hypothesis that personal attributes influence the graduate employee's employability significantly, and the effectiveness of significance is lower due to the lower level of R-square. This is in line with the following findings. Berntson (2008) showed that while gainful employment is the key to a successful life, employability is the key to gainful employment (Berntson, 2008). Berntson (2008) reported that employability is linked to an individual's perception of seeking new, better, or equal employment. Thus, an individual's attitude and ability is determined by employability. The finding that enhancing personal attributes enhances graduate employees' employability aligns with the illustration of Robyn Muldoon of the University of New England, Australia (Muldoon, 2009). Muldoon illustrated this in his case study with students seconded to part-time employment whilst at the university. It was found that not only did the part-time job enhance employability, but it also facilitated the enhancement of other personal qualities.

RQ2: Emotional intelligence significantly influences graduate employees' employability

The regression analysis to determine the relationship between emotional intelligence and graduate employees' employability shows that emotional intelligence positively and significantly influences graduate employees' employability. This is seen from the fact that 41 percent of the variance in graduate employees' employability can be explained by emotional intelligence. This supports the second hypothesis that emotional intelligence significantly influences the graduate employee's employability. The significance's effectiveness was moderate due to the moderate level of R-square of 0.41. The findings align with the findings of Nelis, Quoidbach, Mikolajczak and Hansenne (2009), where emotional intelligence was found to explain the individual differences in the processing, perception, utilization, and regulation of emotional information. These elements were found to influence social relationships and work performance significantly. The findings here also align with Coetzee and Beukes (2010), who found that higher levels of emotional intelligence led to more excellent graduate employees' employability and higher career satisfaction.

RQ3: Work experience moderates the relationship between personal attributes, emotional intelligence, and graduate employees' employability

Work experience has no direct effect on graduate employees' employability. Work experience did not significantly explain the variations in graduate employees' employability. Besides, work experience did not influence the emotional intelligence variable due to the lower level of overlapping effects. The interaction between emotional intelligence and work experience did not explain the variations in graduate employees' employability. This shows that work experience could not be considered a moderating variable influencing the association between emotional intelligence and graduate employees' employability. The importance of interaction could also be seen from the change within the R-square value. The minimal change of 0.001 confirms that there is no moderating effect. With reference to the bootstrapping method, it can be generalized that there was no moderating effect, and the results are reliable. There is no multicollinearity issue as the value of VIF is less than 5, and the tolerance value is not close to 0.

RQ4: Gender moderates the relationship between personal attributes, emotional intelligence

Summary of Regression Results between gender and the interaction of emotional intelligence on graduate employees' employability (Model 2)

Variable	Coefficient	T-statistic	P-value	Bootsrap (p-value)
Constant	31.61	1.54	0.12	0.18
Emotional intelligence	0.61	5.36	0.00**	0.00**
Gender	5.84	0.47	0.64	0.67
Emotional intelligence * Gender	-0.03	-0.43	0.67	0.69

R²=0.41,
F=91.23,p-value(F-test)=0.00

The results from the regression analysis indicate that gender has no direct effect on employability skills. In a way, gender is insignificant in explaining the variations of employability skills. Besides that, gender does not influence emotional intelligence due to the lower level of overlapping effects. The interaction between emotional intelligence and gender was insignificant in explaining the variations of employability skills. This shows that gender cannot be considered a moderating variable that could influence the association between emotional intelligence and graduate employees' employability. The importance of interaction can also be seen from the change within R-square. This confirms the fact that there has been no moderating effect. The bootstrapping method generalized that there was no moderating effect, and the results were reliable. There is no multicollinearity as the value of VIF is less than 5, and the tolerance value is not close to 0.

This is different from the following studies. The studies of Mayer and Geher (1996), Mayer, Caruso and Salovey (1999) and Mandell and Pherwani (2003) showed that women were likely to have a higher level of emotional intelligence both in personal and professional capacities.

The studies by De Lange et al. (2005) and Van der Heijden (2000) found relationships between work experience variables and employability. The studies by Van der Heijden et al. (2009) also showed differences between experienced employees. There have been contradictory findings that demographic factors do influence employability, as in the case of Adeyemo (2008), who found an association between demographic variables and emotional intelligence and conclusions that there were no differences when it came to emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1998a), this study could not ascertain that the demographic factors of gender and experience moderate the independent variables towards the dependent variables.

Conclusion, Implications, Limitations and Recommendations

Conclusion

Knowledge of the factors that could enhance the employability of graduate employees would undoubtedly improve the success of the SMEs directly and the nation indirectly. The hypotheses drawn and the results showed a positive and significant relationship between personal attributes and emotional intelligence on graduate employees' employability. The findings of this study highlight the significance of enhancing personal attributes and, more so, the emotional intelligence of a graduate employee to prepare for successful employability and career advancement. Considering the lack of research on employability, this study contributes valuable insights that could be used by SMEs in general to enhance the employability of graduate employees directly. By doing so, SMEs could also look for increased productivity, as this is associated with employees having the right attributes and emotional intelligence.

Implications of the Study

Several practical implications have resulted from this study. First of all, though there have been quite a few studies on employability, it has to be noted that most of them were focused on graduates, the curriculum, the role of higher educational institutions, and the employment market. More studies are needed on serving graduate employees, a pressing issue today, and their perception of employability. Among the studies pursued to date, they have personally examined their influence on employability. The results show evidence of enhancement in employability by personal attributes and emotional intelligence. First, a significant relationship between personal attributes and the graduate employees' employability has been established. Second, there is an essential link between emotional intelligence and graduate employees' employability. Third, a significant association exists between personal attributes and emotional intelligence and their influence on graduate employees' employability. This is an important finding as there has yet to be a similar finding in other studies related to small and medium enterprises in the service sector in Selangor, Malaysia. This study has attempted to present a new contribution to SMEs in the service sector. This would facilitate a win-win situation for both the employees and employers.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Studies

There are some limitations to the current study. For example, the samples were drawn from small and medium-sized service organization graduate employees. Thus, the issues examined in this study involved only the respondents from the service sector. As such, the results obtained from this study only apply to SMEs in medium-sized enterprises, such as agriculture, manufacturing, and other sectors. The respondents in this study were rated by themselves and not their immediate employers. The inclusion of the employers could have provided a

more complete finding. The generalizations of this result may be questionable because of the limited research. The sample size 403, used in the data analysis, is at the minimum level required for the study. Though the results could be generalized, better results could be obtained should more respondents have participated in the research.

This research was conducted in the small and medium-sized service industries located in and around the Klang Valley in Selangor, Malaysia. Future research could be pursued in other sectors of the SMEs and other states in Malaysia. In the current study, the graduate employees were required to evaluate how prepared they were to be employable and their chances of progression. Future studies could incorporate graduate employees and employers to assess whether there were significant differences in the findings. Coordinated research could enable a win-win situation where the graduate employees could perfectly fit the requirements and expectations of the employers. Such an arrangement would facilitate higher productivity and satisfaction for the organization, which could harmonize the working environment.

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