

# An Employability Assessment of Fresh Business Graduates in Kuala Lumpur from the Perspective of Employers

Subaashnii Suppramaniam, Patrick Han Kok Siew, Gainedenova Ainara

**Abstract:** *This research paper attempts to investigate the graduate labor market from an employer-oriented perspective. This is analyzed in line with the perceptions from various Business Enterprises in Malaysia who are the possible employers of these graduates. A survey is attempted via the distribution of a questionnaire to the Small, Large and Medium Business Enterprises in Kuala Lumpur. The analysis is bound to show the relationship between the Employability Skills of Fresh Business Graduates and satisfaction of employers with said skills. The objectives of this paper were: (i) To identify the Employability skills gap present among Fresh Business Graduates and Employer Perspectives in Kuala Lumpur; (ii) To identify the current employers' satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the skills of the existing graduate employees. This would possibly give chances for academicians to judge the existing degree curriculum and recognize the identifiable needs of the Malaysian employers and to be able to respond and cater to the market needs.*

**Keywords:** *Employability, Skills*

## I. INTRODUCTION

A significant number of scholars and researchers concerned with graduate employability in Malaysia share a same perspective. According to this perspective, employability skills of graduates and skills required by hiring managers should be comprised of the same characteristics. Buntat et al. (2013) argues that graduate employability mismatch is widening every year due to unpredictable changes in the labor market and Higher Education Providers' inability to introduce those changes into academic curricula in time. For many decades higher education certificate has been the primary requirement for employment hence young adults aim to obtain jobs upon graduation. However, given the nature of market dynamics of today, graduates can hardly find relevant jobs based on their basic higher education qualifications. Employers tend to favor skills, capabilities, personal attributes, and abilities that go above and beyond academic qualifications and match current demands of the labor market (Ismail, Yusoff and Sieng, 2011). Collectively termed as employability skills, these skills call for continuous modifications and sharpening as per the context and needs of the employment sector, which is troublesome for higher education providers, as

they seem to fall back in mapping required skills variation into academic curricula of graduates (Yoke and Ngang, 2015). The difference between the skills needed on the job and those possessed by fresh graduates, called the Employability Skills Gap is of real concern in countries around the globe. Malaysian labor market is not an exception to employability mismatch even though unemployment rate in Malaysia as per 2016 was relatively lower at 3.45 % in comparison to previous year's 3.15 % (see figure 1.0). Meanwhile, youth unemployment accounted to devastating 3 % of this overall unemployment rate (Mohd Ibrahim and Mahyuddin, 2017). Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh has confirmed that unemployment rate is especially high among fresh business graduates that is 54,103 young people still unemployed six months after the completion of their studies (Graduan.mohe.gov.my, 2018). These alarming statistics emphasize the importance of communicating the gaps present in employment of fresh business graduates in Malaysian context. Previous studies carried out on employability mismatch have discussed graduates' inability to meet employer expectations and requirements, which has circulated reasonable interest among researchers and academics in the country (Salina et al., 2011; Tina et al., 2011; Latifah et al., 2015; Hani Sakina et al., 2017). They have expressed the need for more flexible workforce with advanced technical skills coupled with well-developed generic skills such as creative thinking, problem-solving and analytical ability that are greatly needed in order to meet the challenges faced in the business sector. The gap between employers' expectations and graduates' actual performance will remain to be the concern as long as market requirements change and consequently it will change the perspective of employers on employability requirements. Hence, provision of updated and accurate information on graduate employability skills is important to be communicated to business graduates' and higher education providers' attention for further improvements. Recent years have witnessed a rapid growth in the number of Higher Education Providers (HEP) in Malaysia, which contributes to government's attempt to prepare a skilled and qualified workforce. In a challenging economy, the role of HEP is not only to produce graduates with specific areas of specialization, but more importantly, to develop graduate employability skills that are most demanded by employers (Saad et al., 2013). In response to enhancing graduates' employability skills, an integrated assessment criteria that considers both academic assessment and work place performance appraisal practices were being developed into curricula of HEPs in the country since 2007 (MOHE, 2012).

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\*Correspondence Author(s)

**Subaashnii Suppramaniam**, Asia Pacific University of Technology and Innovation, Malaysia.

**Patrick Han Kok Siew**, Asia Pacific University of Technology and Innovation, Malaysia.

**Gainedenova Ainara**, Asia Pacific University of Technology and Innovation, Malaysia.

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Nonetheless, despite government's acknowledgement of the issue and actions towards its solution, an increasing number of graduates and uncertain employer needs makes it very challenging to overcome. Meanwhile, this is largely contributing to already noticeable graduate unemployment rate in the country. According to graduates' statistics in Malaysia, over 200,000 students graduate from institutions of higher learning every year and one out of four graduates remain unemployed after the completion of their undergraduate program (Mohd Ibrahim and Mahyuddin, 2017). These statistics also indicate that most of the graduates who are still in the search of sustainable employment account to graduates of social sciences and degree holders. Many researchers in respect to alarming unemployment rate among youth have investigated the correlation of graduates' unemployment and skills shortage. It was found that employers complain about the lack of various employability skills and low performance in the work place (Zabeda, 2009; Rahmah, Ishak and Wei Sieng, 2011; Salina et al., 2011).

Findings of Zabeda (2009) revealed that availability of vacancies in the labor market is not the main contributor to unemployment but skills deficiency is as employers often voice about graduates' inability to meet their expectations. This was supported by Salina et al., (2011) and her survey findings that have indicated that 30,000 business graduates only managed to get casual or temporary work that was below their academic qualifications due to lack of soft, namely lack of communication, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills. Findings of Azian & Mun, (2011) have also stressed the importance of communication skills in graduates' competency.

Despite the gravity of the situation, little research has been conducted to identify the kinds of skills demanded by employers and measure in which skills graduates meet employers' expectation in recent years, especially among business graduates in Kuala Lumpur. There is an increasing demand for such information from higher education providers, academicians, management and policy makers. For this initiative, it is critical to identify specific bottlenecks in skills demanded by employers, and provide detailed information and practical suggestions to overcome the skill shortages. Therefore, this study attempts to identify a list of employability skills adopted from previously researched employability skills dimensions namely, generic skills, communication skills, and professional skills. It also attempts to examine the importance of these employability skills to an employer, their satisfaction with these skills, and the gap between employers' importance and satisfaction with graduates' employability skills with focus on Fresh Business Graduates and employers from SMEs in Kuala Lumpur.

## Graduate Employability

Many researchers have defined employability from various aspects and literature is plentiful on what it means to all who are concerned with this term: employers, HEI (Higher Education Institutions) and graduates themselves (Natalia et al., 2015; Osmani et al., 2015; Sung et al., 2013; Tomlinson, 2012; Salina et al., 2011). The employability is a multidimensional concept and used in contexts of

transferable, generic, intellectual, interpersonal, industry-specific and cognitive skills. Despite the lack of a commonly recognized definition, broadly defined, employability is referred to a specific set of skills and personal attributes that will assist an individual in securing a job, retaining employment whilst staying relevant within the labor market (Yorke, 2006). According to Buck and Barrick (1987), employability skills are in correlation with attributes that make employees an asset to an employer. Many other research papers agree with this statement as findings of Hillage and Pollard (1999), Harvey (2000), De Los Ríos-Carmenado (2015) have emphasized the importance of getting hired as an outcome in determining what employability means to employers and job seekers. In this context, employability can refer to ability to gain first employment, transfer between positions under the same organization, and obtain employment in another organization (Finch et al. 2013, p. 3).

This paper is interested in securing a position for the first time after the completion of undergraduate program that is termed as graduate employability. The term came into researchers' interest in 1960s as concern over the correlation of education and employment rose (Berntson et al., 2006). However, only by 1990s employability was used as an index of measuring the responsiveness of higher education providers to employers' needs and changes in the labor market Zhang et al., (2013) Mason et al. (2009, p.1) suggests that work readiness of graduates are dependent on their possession of the skills, knowledge, attitudes and understanding of the current market needs. This is also supported by Bridgstock (2009) who emphasized the importance of market-based skills in making the graduate attractive to potential employer. However, market needs are often unclear due to uncertainties in the global business environment in which organizations operate in.

Employers tend to have changing perceptions of graduates with similar academic qualifications, and their views differ according to their different organizational traditions, political bias and other factors that arise from internal and external environment (Taajamaa et al., 2014). These refer to specific circumstances that contribute to graduates' employment. From internal environment, it can be affected by individual's self-motivation towards attaining a job position, possession of generic skills, access to industry specific information and changes, personal barriers. Whereas external environment is more concerned with employers' behavior towards the applicants, quality of education and industrial training, country specific economic growth, employer and tax benefits, global labor trends and many more.

Therefore, it is hard to establish a specific definition for this term as employability has different meanings depending on the context job researchers refer to and it will continue to be the ever-changing concept (Yorke, 2003). However, several generic similarities make up the common set of skills for employability skills framework that are relevant across industries.

Based on this discussion, the definition of employability can be summarized as "graduates' ability and willingness to secure a sustainable job in assistance with specific qualifications and knowledge whilst remaining relevant in the labor market".

### Malaysian Employers' Perspective: The Employability Gap

From the perspective of employers, 'employability' often seems to refer to 'work readiness', that is, possession of the skills, knowledge, attitudes and commercial understanding that will enable fresh graduates to make productive contributions to organizational objectives soon after commencing employment. Given the nature of today's market-based business environment, employers are seeking for more flexible, adaptable graduates as they themselves move towards transforming their companies into being more flexible and adaptable in response to changing market needs. Hence, employability skills framework is being shaped on a continuous basis which is resulting in employability mismatch between employer needs and graduates' actual competency, this is especially of concern to fresh business graduates as staying relevant with emerging business trends in global markets is crucial for their career. Previous studies carried out on employability mismatch in Malaysia have discussed graduates' inability to meet employer expectations and requirements (Zabeda, 2009; Rahmah et al., 2011; Salina et al., 2011; Azian & Mun, 2011; Latifah Abdol Latif, 2014; Hani Sakina et al., 2017). The employability mismatch was of construct in the Importance-Performance Analysis developed by Salina et al., (2011) where it was revealed that lack of development in acquisition of "soft skills" and "personality" traits contribute to the gap in graduate employability. Consequently, findings suggest the need for future development of current skills' framework with regard to "core skills" of business graduates. The analysis identified "weakness in English language proficiency", "poor social etiquette", "unrealistic salary expectations", and "irrelevant degree/academic background" as primary factors for graduate unemployment. This is consistent with the findings of Gurvinder Kaur et al., (2008) and Latifah Abdol Latif, (2014).

Tina et al (2011) confirmed that skills set comprised of "ability to present ideas", "problem solving", "understanding and "communication skills" were of importance to employers. Additionally findings suggest that these skills are in relevance to employability of business graduates. Finch et al. (2013) study further emphasize the importance of problem solving skills across industries (e.g. engineering, marketing). Despite its importance, structured and systems thinking, and problem solving skill is one of the most difficult attributes to find amongst the Malaysian talent pool (MOHE, 2012). Meanwhile, good written communication skill with good command of English has been identified as one of the generic skills integral to what employers expect graduates to develop (Pool and Sewell, 2007; Andrews and Higgs, 2008; Graham et al., 2009), and the importance of this skill applies to the Malaysian context as well (MOHE, 2012).

Agus, Awang, Yussof and Mohamed Makhbul, (2011) developed another gap analysis literature where graduate

performance and employer expectations were investigated across 534 organizations from various sectors namely, manufacturing, banking, and services industries. On the basis of this analysis it was clear that the level of satisfaction with graduates' actual performance was relatively low. Gaps appeared to be present in "decision making and problem solving skills", "Critical Thinking", "Communication Skills", and "Ethical and Values".

Based on discussion of literature it is clear that in the Malaysian context "core skills", "soft skills" are of concern of employers. Hani Sakina et al., (2017), supported with his findings that graduates' employability assessment is no longer based on their academic qualifications. He also suggested that "right" combination of certain personal traits, "soft skills", and "technical skills" plays an important part in determining the employment opportunity. For the foundation of this study employability dimensions were adopted from Blom and Sacki's findings, (2011) that was based on engineering graduates in the Indian context and was adjusted to investigate the business graduates competency in the eyes of Malaysian employers. Adjustments were made from the above literature review on Malaysian employers' perspective of graduates' competency.

### Generic Skills

Despite the terminology referred to generic skills being elusive, it can refer to attributes that complement "hard" skills that have transferrable nature, as these skills are relevant to any job position at any stage of applicant's career. However, it is important to note that depending on contextual application generic skills are also called the "key competencies", "core skills", and "basic attributes" (Natalia et al., 2015; Tarvid, 2015; Abou-Setta, 2014; Sung et al., 2013; Clarke, 2008; Holmes, 2008; Wilton, 2008). Hence, dimensions of these skills vary from one industry to another. For example, in early works of Margison (1999), the study has identified problem-solving skills and self-motivation to be in relevance to generic skills in the graduate competency. Stasz (2001) likewise recognized problem solving, teamwork, and personal qualities, as generic skills, but suggested that the workplace context determines their relative importance. More comprehensive attributes and skills under generic skills were suggested by McQuaid & Lindsay (2005) where emphasis were made on honesty and integrity, reliability, readiness to work, understanding one's actions and the consequences, displaying a positive attitude towards work and a sense of responsibility and self-discipline. Additionally, such features as productivity, diligence, confidence, motivation, reasoning, initiative, self-confidence, and the ability to be independent are also mentioned. Similar study of recent literature on generic skills was carried out by Andreas Blom and Saki (2011) in the Indian context where generic skills were with respect to skills' set comprised of "Integrity", "Self-discipline", "Reliability", "Self-motivation", "Entrepreneurship Skills", "Teamwork", "Willingness to Learn, Flexibility and Empathy.

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This was adapted in Saket Jeswani's research analysis (2016) where he added "Ability to translate theory into practice" to proposed skills set.

In the Malaysian context, generic skills were acknowledged by the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education and communicated to academic curriculums of students since 2007. Based on this, ministry announced "critical thinking and problem solving; teamwork; lifelong learning and information management" as generic skills in graduate competency (Zubaidah, & Rugayah, 2008). Researchers such as Tina et. Al (2011), Latifah Abdul Latif (2014), agreed with above mentioned skills and have given recognition to additional skills such as Initiative, Responsibility, Adaptability, and Empathy. These components are often used not only because they are the most feasible to assess, but also because of their significance in portraying an individual's employability. An effective communication and application of these skills contributes indirectly to the creation of positive working environments, which would in consequence result in improved production and reductions of costs for the employer. The rationale behind this is the generic skills transition from early skills' set to current framework that can be explained as an outcome of knowledge-based new economy demands and uncertainty of global markets as well as the growing need for fostering enterprise skills (Shyamal, 2009). Based on above discussion it is clear that there are no definitive definitions that may be applied to generic skills. Neither is there a single, universally accepted terminology (Prinsley & Baranyi, 2015). It is important to recognize the multidimensionality of the terminology and basis used for generic skills. On the basis of discussed literature this paper views skills and attributes stated in Part three: Methodology as generic skills.

## Communication Skills

Communication skills are favored alongside other important employability skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, or technical knowledge (NACE, 2013). Communication skills with regard to employment and graduate competency are referred to graduates' first or second language literacy in written, oral, electronic business communications aspect. Alshare et al., (2011) and DeKay, (2012) have highlighted the involvement of communication skills in employment that covered abilities such as producing a clear and structured written report, effective listening and public speaking skills, negotiation, persuasion, and presentation skills. Similar views were presented by Reinsch & Gardner, (2014), who also emphasized the application of above mentioned communication skills across a range of technologies within the work environment. This is due to growing need for computer literacy in the workplace as traditional writing skills are becoming less relevant in the modern age of technology and communication tools development. However, oral communications still remain the most important as it comprises attributes such as public speaking, leading meetings, or negotiating a contract that are crucial for graduate employability as perceived by employers (Keyton et al., 2013).

Another aspect of communication skills is knowledge of additional languages that are advantageous to certain job requirements. In Malaysian context, it primarily refers to English language proficiency. Salina et al. on the basis of her findings revealed that literacy of graduates in English language is preferred than Bahasa Melayu (Salina et al., 2011). This can be supported by a survey conducted by Azian and Mun (2011) that revealed that 68% of employers named communication skills as being the most needed skill in a job application in both local and foreign companies. Whereas, Bahasa Melayu was only found to be important within local companies. For the purpose of this research, skills and attributes stated in Part three: Methodology are recognized as communications skills.

## Professional Skills

In this construct, professional skills will be referring to graduates ability to demonstrate adequate accountability, effective work habits in combination with understanding of basic sense of corporate procedures e.g., punctuality, working productively with others, and time and workload management. Findings of Victoria University have grouped professional skills in relevance to graduates' willingness to work hard, attitude towards work, time management with regard to given task, and commitment to the organization (VUOF, 2015). Generally, professional skills of business graduates refer to the provision of factual or procedural information that is necessary for the successful performance of a task in corporate matter. As it was mentioned in the earlier interpretation of generic skills, Malaysian ministry have included attributes of professional skills in the employability frame for Malaysian graduates where emphasis were given to "Positive attitude towards Professional ethics", "Entrepreneurship"; and "Leadership skill". Also findings of Saket Jeswani (2016) also have supported this by incorporating overall Professional Moral and Habits of graduates into their competency skills' set. For the purpose of this research, skills and attributes stated in Part three: Methodology are recognized as communications skills.

## The Relationship between Generic Skills' Importance and satisfaction level of the employers with Fresh Business Graduates in Kuala Lumpur

Various authors have proposed a number of generic skills required or expected of graduates by employers. Joseph and Joseph (1997), in a survey of 280 New Zealand graduate employers, found the top ranked competencies in descending order were: willingness to learn; having a positive attitude; being motivated; and, possessing the ability to work independently. Hence, the literature suggest that employers of graduates now place major emphasis on generic, behavioral competencies, both in the recruitment of graduates for employment, as well as their performance on the job (Raymond, McNabb & Matthaehi, 1993; Weisz, 1999). Zubaidah and Rugayah (2008) examined the attributes of non-technical skills required by foreign and local companies in

Malaysia and they have found that attributes such as problem solving, group effectiveness and teamwork, and self-management were given much importance in the recruitment process. This can be supported by study on unemployment where Quek (2005) revealed that graduates who lack generic skills are at a disadvantages compared to those who possess them in the eyes of employers.

Consequently, undergraduate courses must seek to develop these competencies in order to meet the needs of business (Haber, 1993). Weisz (1999) found evidence of a link between degree programs that included work-based cooperative education and graduate employment, and found that employers expect generic competencies to be developed prior to employment.

#### **The Relationship between Communication Skills' Importance and satisfaction level of the employers with Fresh Business Graduates in Kuala Lumpur**

Most studies found in literature, showed that the highest ranking of employability skills from an employer's perspective was communication skills (Azian & Mun, 2011; Rahmah et al., 2011; Rasul, Ismail, Rajuddin & Rauf, 2010; Zubaidah & Rugayah, 2008). This was supported by Billing (2003), who revealed that the importance of communication skills amongst business graduates also existed in the United Kingdom, the United States, New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa. According to Azian and Mun (2011) Malaysian employers also expect the possession of communication skills from graduates as survey results showed that 68% of employers named communication skills as being the most needed skill in a job application. One of the criteria needed by companies from their employees is the ability to communicate well especially in English. Based on a research done by Wan Irham, Shafinah & Azhari (2007) on the current needs of the R&D department in the Kedah industrial sectors, they find that the R&D department administrators stated that they look for candidates who have the abilities to generate and express ideas verbally in English (90%), to give presentations using English (90%), to write report in English (60%), to speak English fluently (60%), to have a good command of English language grammar (30%) and to have persuasive skills in English language (30%). The findings show us that there is a need for graduates to master the language as it is used worldwide.

#### **The Relationship between Professional Skills' Importance and satisfaction level of the employers with Fresh Business Graduates in Kuala Lumpur**

Survey findings of Jackson, (2016) stressed that professionalism of graduates was highlighted as the most important contributor to graduates' employability. Many respondents have agreed that the emphasis on professionalism occurs before the individual is hired. Hence, graduates' competency evaluation is dependent on how they express themselves as responsible professionals in their endeavors. Other findings have supported this on the basis that good academic performance does not necessarily make a good employee (GCA, 2015). It was concluded that possession of work ethic skills made the difference in graduates' hiring process. During The Conference Board's Business and Education Council many members of Fortune 500 companies have pointed the need for graduates to have

clear expectations of the business world and basic sense of corporate procedures (Marais & Perkins, 2012). This can be seen in the Australian context from the "Student and Graduate Employability Skills Survey" implemented at Victoria University of Wellington where it was found work ethics of graduates was of employers' concern when considering graduate cohort (VUOW, 2015). Often employees value graduates' willingness to exceed given requirements in a sense of deadlines, assignments, and projects. Agreed that understanding of professionalism is indeed of deficiency in graduates' competency in today's workforce. From Malaysian employers view the importance of work ethics was emphasized by the findings of Salina et al., (2011) who revealed that graduates lack the professional attitude towards and readiness to comply with corporate rules. Therefore, one of the primary reasons for employers' dissatisfaction with fresh graduates especially business graduates found to be the professionalism of graduates. This was supported by Juhdi, Yunus & Abu Samah, (2006) who also suggested that graduates were not aware of work ethics before getting hired and through trainings only it was developed. However, he also emphasized that employers preferred graduates who already possessed such skills as trainings are costly and time consuming for employers.

#### **Theoretical Grounding**

The underpinning theory that governs the theoretical framework of this paper is job matching theory. According to the job matching theory, a mismatch between the required skills and the skills a graduate actually possesses has important consequences for productivity, wages and probability to get a job (Tachibanaki, 1994). Therefore, the competency level (qualification) required by employers must be equivalent with competency level of the graduates. The match between graduates' field of specialization and the field of specialization which is required for the job is also relevant. Job match also can be identified by the degree to which graduates are able to utilize the knowledge, skills and attitudes to the work context (Barnard et al. 2001).

In matching theory, unemployment or underutilization of graduate-level skills in employment – reflects mismatches between graduates and employers that may emerge for a number of reasons. Mason et al. (2009) highlighted that matching theory, together with the literature on over-education and underutilization of skills, pointed to several reasons why the teaching, learning and assessment of employability skills might be expected (all else being equal) to contribute to superior labor market outcomes for graduates in possession of those skills. Work or employability skills are conceptualized as those transferable skills that one might expect to be developed in an undergraduate program but which have broad applicability in the workplace (Wilton 2008). This refers to the work skills transferable from higher education into employment in a wide variety of contexts. The employability skills highlighted by Wilton (2008) refer to problem-solving skills, written and spoken communication, foreign language skills, numeracy, basic computer literacy, advanced IT or software skills, research skills, creativity and ability to work in teams.

## II. METHODS & MATERIALS

This study employed self-administered questionnaire due to its convenience, inexpensiveness, reduction of biases and greater anonymity (Saunders et al., 2009). The purpose of the questionnaire is to generalize from a sample to a population to make inferences about the characteristics of the population (Saunders et al., 2009). This questionnaire is comprised of three sections. First part of the questionnaire is concerned with respondents' demographic information, which includes the following: gender, age groups, qualification, sector of occupation, working experience, and position at the organization. The questions were developed through MCQ format (Multiple Choice Questions). The responses were needed to build a profile of respondents as well as to identify the types of SMEs and sectors who are more likely to hire Fresh Business Graduates.

The second and third section of the research detailed the independent and dependent variables that would be tested for acceptance or rejection in further chapters. 34-item instrument was designed for three dimensions of employability skills, namely Generic Skills, Communication Skills, and Professional Skills. The section two consists of 17-items of employability skills. The objective of this section is to identify the Employability Skills (grouped into dimensions: generic, communication, and professional skills) that Fresh Business Graduates should possess as perceived by employers in Kuala Lumpur. The third section consists of 17-items of employability skills as well. This section aims to assess the employers' level of satisfaction with the three indicators of fresh business graduates' employability skills. The questions and statements used for this questionnaire was adopted from Employability Skill Dimensions developed by Blom and Sacki (2011). Adopted questions and statements were adjusted to match the demographics of the research, thereby; Employability Dimensions are specific to Malaysian Employers' perspective.

The population in this study is the number of Malaysian employers from various mix of industries who in the past have employed fresh business graduates. The respondents were from following sectors: Education, Service, ICT, Healthcare, Hospitality, Construction, Manufacturing, Business and Agriculture from both public sector and private sector. The respondents were from industries located in Kuala Lumpur. Specifically the focus was on SMEs based in Kuala Lumpur who have employed fresh business graduates prior. A total of 176 samples were taken for this study. For the primary data collection, the sampling procedure was through distributing the questionnaire to the respondents. For the secondary data collection, data was collected through the literature review of the past researches on Employability Assessment of Fresh Business Graduates. Information was obtained from the numerous academic sources such as Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), Emerald Insights, EBSCO, ProQuest and Science Direct. After editing, which ensures that the information on the schedule is accurate and categorized in a suitable form, the data are put together in tables using the Excel spreadsheet so

that it may also undergo some other forms of statistical analysis. The data was later downloaded using the SPSS 21 program. A total of 176 respondents' information was keyed into the system. Graphical presentation such as histogram, bar charts and pie charts were used to emphasize the interpretation analysis. Analyzing frequencies of these variables will help to better understand the relevancy and validity of the sample group within this research. This research paper will include descriptive and inferential statistics. For descriptive analysis mean, frequency, and percentage will be employed. As for inferential analysis, this study used Reliability Test to ensure the reliability of each 37-items. Pearson Moment Correlation Test was of use to this study as it assisted in examining the relationship between variables.

## III. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

A total of 176 respondents that have participated in completing the questionnaires. In the demographic profile, there are 82 male (46, 6 percent) and 94 female (53, 4 percent) respondents. Majority of the respondents are female, however somewhat depicts an almost equal distribution among gender groups. Meanwhile, about the age groups of respondents, it was found that respondents age groups there are 110 respondents (62.5 percent) within the age group of "30 years or below" whereas age groups of "31 – 40" and "41 – 50" years account to 59 and 7 responses respectively. Besides that, regarding the qualification of respondents, 64 are bachelor degree holders, 57 are masters graduates, 55 are diploma graduates. Majority of respondents are bachelor degree holders accounting to 36.4 percent of responses. Moreover, regarding the sector of occupation, there are 89 respondents are from private sector (11.9 percent), 66 respondents are from multinational sectors accounting to 37.5 percent, whereas, the small number of 21 respondents were from public sector. Furthermore, regarding the working experience of respondents, the working experience group showing "5 years or less" has 99 responses (56.3 percent), "6 – 10 years" has 66 responses (37.6 percent), "11 – 15 years" has 8 responses (4.5), and lastly "16 years and more" has only 3 responses (1.7 percent). The majority of the respondents belong to "5 years or less" category. Lastly is about the position of respondents in the given organization. Total of 41 responses from top management accounting to 23.3 percent of overall responses.

Respondents from middle management accounted to 76 responses at 43.2 percent, whereas respondents from lower management at 33.5 percent covered 59 responses. The majority of respondents for this questionnaire survey are from middle management positions at the organization.

The main purpose of this research was to examine the relationship between the importance of Employability dimensions that are generic skills, communication skills and professional skills toward satisfaction level of employers with these employability dimensions. Table below showed a summary of the hypothesis testing's result.

**Pearson Correlation**

Hyphothesis	Significant Value	Supported/ Rejected
H <sub>1</sub> : Generic skills have significant impact on the satisfaction level of the employers with the employability skills of Fresh Business Graduates in Kuala Lumpur.	.292	Supported
H <sub>2</sub> : Communication skills have significant impact on the satisfaction level of the employers with the employability skills of Fresh Business Graduates in Kuala Lumpur.	.202	Supported
H <sub>3</sub> : Professional skills have significant impact on the satisfaction level of the employers with the employability skills of Fresh Business Graduates in Kuala Lumpur.	.519	Supported

**Employability Skills as Perceived by Employers**

The level of importance attached to each skill reveals employers’ valuation of, and demand for, that skill. Table summarizes the importance of each skill under the three independent variables as perceived by the employers. All skills are rated from 1 (least important) to 5 (very much important) and the mean values for all the skills scored above 4.5 for both communication and professional skills are somewhat important to be possessed by Fresh Business Graduates, wherein “Ability to value company policies and display "right" attitude towards work ethics” (IPS1) and “Ability to translate theoretical knowledge into professional business practices” (IPS2) scored maximum in professional skills with mean of 4.79.

Generic Skills	Mean	Communication Skills	Mean	Professional Skills	Mean
IGS1	4,59	ICS1	4,79	IPS1	4,79
IGS2	4,57	ICS2	4,73	IPS2	4,79
IGS3	4,79	ICS3	4,73	IPS3	4,61
IGS4	4,77	ICS4	4,25	IPS4	4,67
IGS5	4,05	ICS5	4,47	IPS5	4,67
IGS6	4,10				
IGS7	4,10				

“Ability to communicate formally and informally with people from different backgrounds” (ICS1), “Ability to access and use basic electronic business communication tools” (ICS2), and “Proficiency in English” (ICS3) scored maximum in communication skills with means of 4.79 and 4.73, respectively. Items of generic skills scored a total mean value of below 4.5, i.e., they are not very important to be possessed by Fresh Business Graduates (maximum mean value for “Ability to work with minimum level of supervision and think independently” (IGS3) is 4.79). Hence, all communication and professional skills considered in the study are rated as important. It is also evident from the analysis that total mean score for the importance of employability skills (IGS, ICS and IPS) is 4.55 as perceived by the employers. Professional skills show the highest level of importance. The high importance level of “Ability to value company policies and display "right" attitude towards work ethics” and “Ability to translate theoretical knowledge into professional practice” is consistent with the literature review.

Many employers specifically look for Fresh Business Graduates who are able to interpret theoretical knowledge into practice as well as those who value company ethics. Employers rated communication skills as the second important employability skill among the three dimensions of skills. This may be partly because employers emphasize on emerging need to improve communication skills before the hiring process. As far as technical jobs are concerned, generic skills are not much required and hence rated as least important.

**Satisfaction with Employability Skills of Fresh Business Graduates as Perceived by Employers**

The summary for the mean rating on the satisfaction with employability skills of fresh business graduates as perceived by the employers is illustrated in table below.



# An Employability Assessment of Fresh Business Graduates in Kuala Lumpur from the Perspective of Employers

The total mean score for all the 17 employability skills of three employability dimensions is 3.77, which is less than the importance of the employability skills as perceived by employers. Hence, it is evident from the data of total mean

score of both the importance (4.55) and possession (3.77) that there is an employability skill gap among Fresh Business Graduates.

Generic Skills	Mean	Communication Skills	Mean	Professional Skills	Mean
SGS1	3,84	SCS1	3,34	SPS1	4,00
SGS2	4,01	SCS2	3,48	SPS2	4,06
SGS3	3,25	SCS3	3,51	SPS3	3,97
SGS4	2,76	SCS4	3,89	SPS4	4,01
SGS5	4,01	SCS5	4,10	SPS5	3.89
SGS6	4,01				
SGS7	4,01				

The employers' mean scores for generic skills possessed by the Fresh Business Graduates as perceived by the employers is 3.69 (less than the mean value of importance for IGS 4.42 ), with highest mean value of 4.01 that is same value for following for items: teamwork (SGS2), honesty and integrity (SGS5), reliability (SGS6) and flexibility (SGS7). It scored a lowest value of 2.76 for lifelong learning (SGS4). The employers' mean scores for communication skills possessed by the Fresh Business Graduates as perceived by the employers is 3.66 (less than mean value of importance for ICS=4.59) with highest mean value for "presentation skills" (4.10) and lowest for "verbal and written communication skills" competency (3.34). The employers' mean scores for professional skills possessed by the Fresh Business Graduates as perceived by employers is 3.98 (less than mean value of importance for IPS=4.7), with highest mean value for "theoretical knowledge into practice" (SPS2=4.06) and lowest for "competency in theoretical and research management" (SPS5=3.89).

Graduates, which can also be perceived as one of the major causes for Fresh Business Graduates' low performance and employers' dissatisfaction. Ability to translate theoretical knowledge into practice scored highest among professional skills, which can be interpreted as most jobs require some sort of understanding the process especially in business sectors; therefore it is possible that Fresh Business Graduates might have previously been exposed to professional skills during their mandatory industrial training at the university. Hence they are able to adapt and adjust themselves well in the organizations' working environment. This clearly is an added advantage for Fresh Business Graduates and an essential skill required by most employers.

### Employability Skills Gap

In this section, researcher analyzed the important skills that Fresh Business Graduates are falling short. Initially this paper combines the analysis of the importance ratings and the possession ratings to identify the specific skills that are highly important, but are not possessed by Fresh Business Graduates in Kuala Lumpur, or the employer is not satisfied with the particular skill among Fresh Business Graduates. This difference may be considered as skills gap that needs to be addressed on a priority basis. As it is evident from table below, there is a skill gap in both generic skills and communication skills, whereas it is not in the case of professional skills. As far as generic skills are concerned, there is an overall skill gap of 0.73, when its importance as perceived by the employer is compared with its possession among Fresh Business Graduates.

It is evident from the analysis that communication and professional skills are perceived to be more important by the employers, whereas their possession by the Fresh Business Graduates is less. Also it can be noticed that the highest score for satisfaction level was scored by Communication Skills at 4.10 wherein major contribution is posed by computer knowledge, as can be perceived that today's generation is much more converse with computer technologies. Generic skills are not perceived to be important, although they are present among Fresh Business Graduates. The alarming situation is one apparent by less score of possession of generic skills among Fresh Business

No.	Generic Skills		Communication Skills		Professional Skills	
	Imp.	Sat.	Imp.	Sat.	Imp.	Sat.
1	4,59	3,84	4,79	3,34	4,79	4,00



2	4,57	4,01	4,73	3,48	4,79	4,06
3	4,79	3,25	4,73	3,51	4,61	3,97
4	4,77	2,76	4,25	3,89	4,67	4,01
5	4,05	4,01	4,47	4,10	4,67	3.89
6	4,10	4,01				
7	4,10	4,01				
Total	4,42	3.69	4.59	3,66	4,70	3.98

The major contributions posed in this skill gap are by the factors like lifelong learning and independence, which can be interpreted as that the Fresh Business Graduates in Kuala Lumpur are not inclined towards lifelong learning and they are not very much independent to work in different environmental situations. Fresh Business Graduates in Kuala Lumpur are lacking these major generic skills. As far as communication skills are concerned, there is an overall gap of 0.93 (more than Generic Skills' Gap). The major contributions are posed by verbal and written communication as well as use of business communication tool, which indicate that graduates are lacking the communication skills and they do not have competency in use of communication tools which are essential in today's modern business world. As far as professional skills are

concerned, there is a lesser gap between the importance perceived and the possession of skills as perceived by employer/employer satisfaction for skills possessed by graduates. The major contribution for minimizing the gap is work ethics and competency in theoretical and research management. Table below indicates the overall employability skills gap of 2.38 comprising generic, communication and professional skills, wherein the major contribution for increasing the gap is of communication skills due to lack of confidence in verbal and written communication skills of graduates, although the professional skills tried to minimize this gap to a certain extent due to overall work ethics and competency in translating theoretical knowledge into practice

Variable	Importance	Satisfaction	Gap
Generic Skills	4.42	3.69	0.73
Communication Skills	4.59	3.66	0.93
Professional Skills	4.70	3.98	0.72
<b>Total</b>	<b>13.71</b>	<b>11.33</b>	<b>2.38</b>

The results of the study showed that as far as importance of employability skills as perceived by employers is concerned, 3-4 scored maximum in generic skills with mean of 4.79 and 4.77 respectively; acquiring 1 maximum in communication skills with mean of 4.79 which is the same high value scored for 1-2 in professional skills. Hence, all employability dimensions considered in the study are rated as important. As far as employability skills possessed by the graduates as perceived by employers are concerned, the total mean score for all the 17 employability skills of three independent variables is 3.77, which is less than the importance of the employability skills as perceived by employers (4.27). Hence, it is evident from the data of total mean score of both the importance (4.27) and possession (3.77) that there is an employability skill gap among Fresh Business Graduates. The overall employability skills gap of 0.78 comprising of generic, communication and professional skills, wherein the major contribution for increasing the gap is of communication skills due to lack of good communication approaches. The findings of the study reveal that communication skills contribute maximum to employers' satisfaction with 38.4%, followed by generic skills (27.8%) and then professional skills (14.1%). Moreover, the results also depict that the professional skills

have significant impact, whereas, communication and generic skills show little less impact on employers' satisfaction towards employability skills of Fresh Business Graduates in Kuala Lumpur .

#### IV. CONCLUSION

At the present time, many universities have come under intense pressure to equip students with more than just the academic skills. A number of reports issued by employers have urged universities to make more explicit efforts to develop the key employable skills among Fresh Business Graduates, which are required in many types of employment. Therefore, it is important for universities to have a working relationship with industry to meet the requirements and needs of the employers, as industries today are disappointed by and large with the kind of graduates emerging from educational institutes particularly for the want of right kind of employability skills.

# An Employability Assessment of Fresh Business Graduates in Kuala Lumpur from the Perspective of Employers

Though, in Kuala Lumpur where thousands of students complete business degree every year, the employability of the Fresh Business Graduates' is often quoted as one of the biggest challenges the country is facing today. Universities have to tighten their belts in order to minimize the skills gap identified in this study by formulating strategies to equip their students with those skills in which they are lacking with the help of the model validated in this study.

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#### AUTHORS PROFILE

**Subaashnii Suppramaniam** Is working in Asia Pacific University of Technology and Innovation, Malaysia.

**Patrick Han Kok Siew** Is working in Asia Pacific University of Technology and Innovation, Malaysia.

**Gainedenova Ainara** Is working in Asia Pacific University of Technology and Innovation, Malaysia.