

## The Importance of Employability Skills for Hospitality Graduates toward Employment Status

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**Abstract:** Every individual strives to achieve their dream profession to lead a comfortable life. Currently, individuals are engaged in intense competition to secure employment, particularly those that offer superior perks and remuneration. In today's competitive job market, hospitality graduates need more than just technical knowledge to secure employment. The purpose of this research is to examine the elements that influence the identification of employable abilities as perceived by hospitality graduates. The research study investigates the importance of employability skills among hospitality graduates and their impact on employment status. The primary research problem addresses how soft and hard skills contribute to graduates' job market readiness. The research is quantitative, gathering data from participants through questionnaires. The total number of hospitality graduates involved in answering the questionnaire is 155 respondents. The data demonstrates that employability skills, both soft and hard, are crucial for securing job offers. Major findings indicate that graduates possessing a balanced combination of soft and hard skills have higher employment rates and better job performance. The outcome of this study is to show that employability skills, like hard and soft skills, are important for future careers after graduating from university. This study can raise awareness among current students, particularly those in the hospitality field, about the importance of enhancing their skills beyond their university education.

**Keywords:** *Employability Skills, Employment Status, Hospitality Graduates, Soft Skills, Hard Skills*

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### 1. Introduction

The hospitality sector is vital to the economy of many nations (Modi, 2024). Both commercial and non-commercial settings can provide hospitality services, with a focus on food, beverages, and housing (Oren et al., 2024; Naumov, 2019). These sectors, as key players in the economy, provide a wide range of employment opportunities. In Malaysia, the hospitality industry has traditionally offered a variety of employment opportunities, such as positions in hotels, resorts, restaurants, event management, tourism agencies, and more (Yusnita et al. 2018). It is important for hospitality graduates to actively seek job opportunities, network with industry professionals, and showcase their skills and qualifications to enhance their employability. In the twenty-first century, graduates of hospitality management must equip themselves with skills to maximize their full potential in an increasingly competitive and unstable job market (Simplicio et al., 2019).

The research problem pertains to the persistent issue of unemployment among Malaysian graduates—a situation that has persisted for many years. According to the Unemployment Crisis among Fresh Graduates (2021), the fresh graduates' unemployment rate jumped to 25% in 2020, up from 13.8% the previous year. Some of the factors contributing to this increase include the COVID-19 pandemic, which has prevented people from working outside. According to the Macro Trends website, the unemployment rate in Malaysia decreased by 0.32% in 2022 compared to 2021. The estimate for the number of graduates facing unemployment in Malaysia in 2023 is close to 90,000—approximately 90,000. The number is quite substantial. The smaller the number, the better for the nation. Malaysia's Ministry of Education (MOE) conducted a survey and found that perspectives on attitudes, lack of skills, and lack of knowledge are the main factors preventing employees from finding jobs and becoming unemployed. The total number of unemployed individuals as of May 2024 stands at 566,100, a significant and concerning figure (OpenDOSM, 2024).

The research aims to examine the importance of employability skills among the hospitality graduate students

of UiTM Dungun, Terengganu, for job offers. The industry requires these skills. A person's acceptance in the industry increases with the number of skills they possess. Therefore, possessing employability skills is crucial for individuals, particularly hospitality graduates, to secure job opportunities. The purpose of this study is to find out how important employability skills are to the employment status of hospitality graduates. The following are the research study's objectives:

**RO1:** To determine the importance of employability skills to the employment status of hospitality graduates.

**RO2:** To identify the relationship between hard skills and the employment status of hospitality graduates.

**RO3:** To identify the relationship between soft skills and the employment status of hospitality graduates.

## 2. Literature Review

**Employability skills:** Employability skills play a crucial role in preparing students for a diverse range of employment opportunities post-graduation (Azmi et al., 2018). Employability skills refer to a set of transferable skills that go beyond technical knowledge and qualifications. These skills include communication, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability, leadership, customer service, and cultural awareness, among others (Tushar & Sooraksa, 2023). Hospitality graduates who possess these skills are more likely to stand out to potential employers and increase their chances of receiving job offers. In the context of the hospitality industry in Malaysia, employability skills play a significant role in determining the success of graduates in securing job offers (Shariff, & Abd Razak, 2022). Employers in this industry seek candidates who can effectively communicate with guests and colleagues, work well in teams, and handle various challenges that may arise in a fast-paced environment.

According to a study, "The focus on employability skills lies in the graduates' ability to adapt and apply their academic and personal skills, leading to concrete educational outcomes that directly link graduate employability with successful employment" (Sarfraz et al., 2018). Moreover, the study shows that employers actively seek these employability skills in college graduates, recognising them as fundamental qualities that underpin career advancement and facilitate lifelong learning (Calvo & Garcia, 2020). Building on this perspective, Wathy (2020) further defines employability skills as the ability to navigate the labour market effectively, enabling individuals to realise their potential through sustainable work. In essence, the collective understanding of employability skills, as articulated by these scholars, underscores their significance in shaping successful career trajectories and facilitating a seamless transition from academic preparation to the dynamic demands of the professional landscape. Balangan et al. (2021) found that employability encompasses not only the ability to secure and maintain a fulfilling job but also, in a broader sense, the ability to move independently within the labour market to realise one's potential through sustainable employment. The following is the extent to which employers discuss their perspectives on soft skills and hard skills:

**Soft Skills:** Azmi et al. (2018) conducted a research study that found interconnected skills such as leadership and communication abilities. According to Al Asefer et al. (2021), soft skills such as communication, problem-solving, collaboration, decision-making, leadership, critical thinking, time management, and creativity are essential in business. Kovács & Keresztes (2022) and García-Álvarez (2022) highlight the importance of soft skills, including teamwork, stress resilience, and self-management, for e-commerce and university graduates, respectively. Kumar (2022) underscores the significance of soft skills for students, highlighting their direct correlation to academic success and future professional employment. The need for continuous improvement further underscores the significance of these skills, as they are essential for effective communication, collaboration, and adaptability in the workplace.

Effective communication skills are particularly important in the hospitality industry, as employees interact with guests from diverse backgrounds. Being able to communicate clearly and professionally enhances customer satisfaction and contributes to the overall success of the business. Teamwork is another crucial skill in the hospitality industry, as employees often work in a collaborative environment. Employers highly value the ability to work well with others, contribute to a positive team dynamic, and support colleagues. Problem-solving and adaptability skills are also essential in the hospitality industry, as employees must be able to handle unexpected situations and find solutions quickly. Employers highly value the ability to think critically, make decisions under pressure, and adapt to changing circumstances.

Furthermore, leadership skills are valuable for hospitality graduates who aspire to advance in their careers. Demonstrating leadership qualities, such as taking initiative, motivating others, and effectively managing teams, can open up opportunities for higher-level positions. Lastly, customer service and cultural awareness skills are vital in a multicultural country like Malaysia, where hospitality professionals interact with guests from various cultural backgrounds. Understanding and respecting different cultures, customs, and preferences can greatly enhance the guest's experience and contribute to the success of the business. In conclusion, employability skills are of utmost importance for hospitality graduates seeking job offers in Malaysia. Possessing a strong set of transferable skills, including communication, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability, leadership, customer service, and cultural awareness, significantly increases the chances of securing employment and thriving in the competitive hospitality industry.

**Hard Skills:** Several studies have investigated the effect of hard skills on the job status of hospitality graduates. HR managers in Malaysia particularly valued problem-solving skills, according to Hasri et al. (2021), while Varra et al. (2021) emphasized the significance of specialized skills for specific job positions in the accommodation sector. Ngoepe and Wakelin-Theron (2023) further emphasized the need for a wide range of competencies, including hard skills, as identified by hotel managers in South Africa. However, Mohamad et al. (2019) revealed a gap between the supply and demand of hard skills, with employers perceiving a lack of certain competencies in fresh graduates. These findings underscore the importance of hard skills in the employment status of hospitality graduates, as well as the necessity for further collaboration between the industry and universities to bridge the skills gap.

**Employment Status:** Numerous studies highlight the significant influence of a myriad of factors on the employment status of hospitality graduates. Ojha et al.'s (2023) insights underscore the challenges faced by persons with disabilities in securing employment, prompting us to consider how employability skills can enhance inclusivity in the hospitality sector. Fleuren et al.'s (2020) comprehensive framework for sustainable employability becomes particularly relevant when examining how specific skills contribute to the long-term success and adaptability of hospitality graduates in a dynamic industry. Bohórquez Arévalo & Sierra Contreras (2020) call for a context-specific definition of employability that resonates with the unique demands of the hospitality field, prompting us to explore tailored indicators for success. Together, these insights emphasize the crucial link between employability skills and the employment status of hospitality graduates, urging a focused and holistic approach to preparing them for challenges and opportunities in their field.

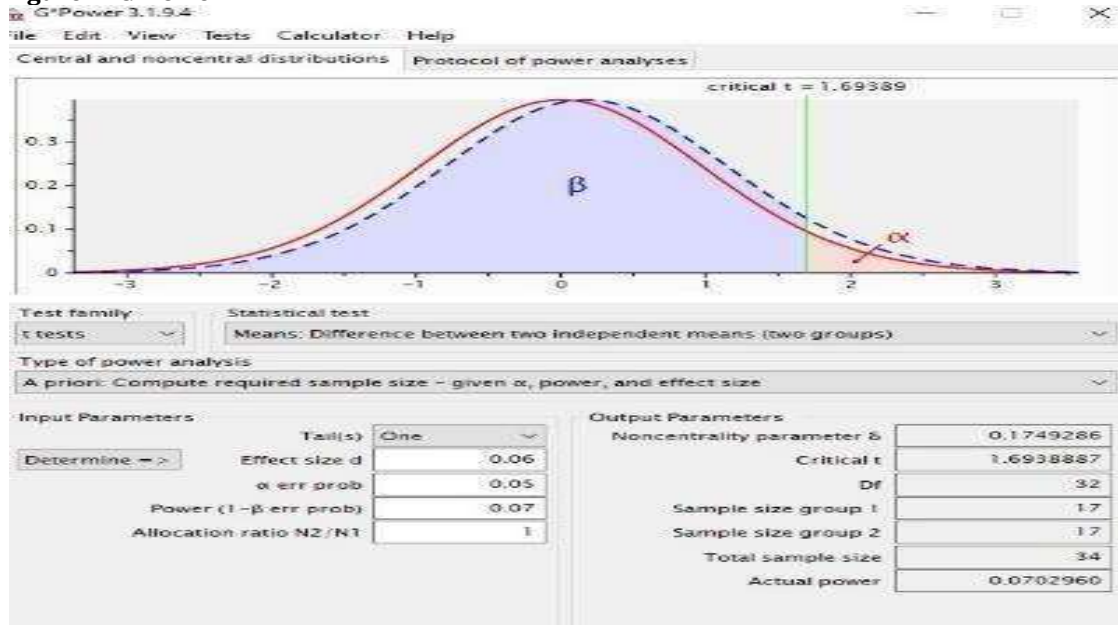
**Employed:** Employment, a basic feature of the socioeconomic landscape, refers to the dynamic interaction between individuals and organizations in which individuals offer their labor or services in exchange for recompense, usually in the form of pay or salaries. According to the most recent data available from the US Department of Labor, employment trends remain a significant priority, along with continued efforts to monitor and solve issues such as job creation, workforce development, and labor market dynamics. A complex network of laws, regulations, and contractual agreements controls this connection, establishing the terms and circumstances of employment. The form of work has shifted dramatically over time, determined by the interaction of economic, technical, and sociological influences. A complete review of labor laws from various countries is highlighted in "Comparative Labor Law" as stated by Williams (2004), which highlights the variance in legal frameworks governing employment interactions. These frameworks reflect the shifting requirements and expectations of both companies and employees in a fast-changing environment.

**Unemployed:** This has become a significant concern, particularly due to the impact of the digital revolution and the COVID-19 pandemic (Avdeeva et al., 2021). This issue is more than just a lack of jobs; it carries social implications. Unemployed individuals often face perceptions of reduced capability, leading to disparities in employment outcomes (Okoroji et al., 2023). Moreover, the consequences of unemployment extend beyond the economic realm, affecting mental health as well (Koenig et al., 2022). It's crucial to recognize that not all unemployed individuals are in the same situation; distinctions exist between those on temporary layoffs or furloughs and those without any work, with the latter group experiencing more severe and enduring repercussions (Hall & Kudlyak, 2020). This complex landscape underscores the need for comprehensive efforts to address unemployment and its multifaceted impact on individuals and society.

### 3. Methodology

This research will focus on a population of 326,291 hospitality graduates holding diplomas and bachelor's, and master's degrees in Malaysia (Fuza et al., 2022). The numbers cover both private and public universities in Malaysia. Through a comprehensive study, we aim to analyze the employability skills and employment status of this diverse group, shedding light on the factors influencing their career trajectories within the Malaysian hospitality sector. By selecting a representative sample from the population of 326,291 hospitality graduates with diplomas, bachelor's, and master's degrees in Malaysia, the research aims to draw meaningful insights into the relationships between employability skills and employment status, contributing to a nuanced understanding of the experiences and outcomes within the hospitality sector for this subset of graduates. On the other hand, G-Power suggested a sample size of 34 for the Pearson correlation coefficient to find a medium effect at a significance level of  $\alpha = 0.05$ . According to G-Power, 34 respondents constitute an adequate sample size for this study. In summary, a minimum of 34 respondents is required to ensure an accurate and valid study. This study successfully gathered 155 respondents through a questionnaire, ensuring a robust study and research.

Figure 1: G-Power



The researchers selected participants from the pool of hospitality graduates using a non-probability sampling technique known as purposive sampling from hospitality graduates of UiTM Dungun, Terengganu. The researchers chose the subjects based on non-predetermined criteria, allowing for a more flexible approach to capture diverse perspectives within the target population. This means that researchers would carefully pick participants based on preset criteria such as academic performance, industry experience, or specific hospitality abilities. This study employs a five-point Likert scale-based survey instrument divided into four sections, encompassing participants' demographic profiles and their perspectives on the importance of employability skills in securing job offers among hospitality graduates. The Likert scale will gauge respondents' perceptions and experiences related to employability skills.

### 4. Findings

The demographic data shows that there are 155 total respondents, of whom 82 are male and the remaining 73 are female. In percentage terms, the proportion of male respondents is 52.9%, while the proportion of female respondents is 47.1%. This indicates that the majority of respondents to the questionnaire are male. Furthermore, the questionnaire identifies three age groups: 18 to 20 years old, 21 to 23 years old, and over 23 years old. Ninety-three respondents, representing 60% of the sample, are over 23 years old, while 48

respondents, accounting for 29.7%, are between 21 and 23 years old. The lowest number of respondents, aged 18 to 20 years old, accounted for just 16.3%. Other than that, the data also collects the background of the respondents' level of education. Out of 155 records, 75 individuals hold a degree, accounting for 45.4% of the respondents. Those with a diploma, pre-diploma, PhD, and master's degree follow. The number of respondents with a diploma is 58, or 37.4%. Pre-diploma: 13 respondents, 8.4%. The PhD category comprises 7 respondents, accounting for 4.5% of the total, while the master's category includes only 2 respondents, accounting for 1.3%. In addition, the respondents' total monthly income falls into four categories: less than RM1500, from RM1501 to RM3000, from RM3001 to RM4500, and above RM4500. The majority of the respondents, 90 individuals, earn between RM1501 and RM3000, accounting for 63.4% of the total income, while only 3 individuals, or 2.1%, earn less than RM1500. The group of respondents with an income between RM3000 and RM4500 comprises 40 individuals, accounting for 28.2%, while only 9 individuals, accounting for 6.3%, have an income exceeding RM4500. Tables 1, 2, and 3 present the descriptive analysis, which includes the mean, standard deviation, and ranking of each item in a single variable.

**Table 1: Summary of Descriptive Analysis for Soft Skills (A)**

Code	Item	N	Mean	Standard Dev	Rank
A1	I can communicate well with the Customers and the coworkers.	155	4.29	0.581	7
A2	I believe that I have great organizational skills	155	4.37	0.685	4
A3	I can get a solution after a problem appears quickly.	155	4.37	0.645	5
A4	I believe I have good decision-making skills.	155	4.32	0.674	6
A5	I can be a creative and innovative person in the workplace.	155	4.37	0.615	3
A6	I can lead the team so well.	155	4.40	0.641	2
A7	I can be a very cooperative person when it comes to team tasks.	155	4.41	0.601	1

According to Table 1, the seven items of Soft Skills (A) are ranked as follows: A7 has the highest mean (4.41) and standard deviation (0.601), followed by A6 with a mean (4.40) and standard deviation (0.641), and A1 has the lowest mean (4.29) and standard deviation (0.581).

**Table 2: Summary of Descriptive Analysis for Hard Skills (B)**

Code	Item	N	Mean	Standard Dev	Rank
B1	I possess a strong command of various IT skills, including programming languages, data analysis tools, and software development methods.	155	4.23	0.619	4
B2	I am fluent in English; I can speak, write, and explain things clearly in the language.	155	4.32	0.609	3
B3	I can speak another language fluently.	155	3.54	1.112	5
B4	I'm skilled at managing my time well.	155	4.52	0.638	1
B5	I'm good at analyzing complex data, finding patterns, and making smart decisions based on my discoveries.	155	4.45	0.647	2

According to Table 2, for the five items of Hard Skills (B), B4 has the highest mean (4.52) and standard deviation (0.638), and B5 has the second highest mean (4.45) and standard deviation (0.647). Lastly, B3 had the lowest mean (3.54) and standard deviation (1.112).

**Table 3: Summary of Descriptive Analysis for Employability Skills among Hospitality Graduates toward Employment Status (DV)**

Code	Item	N	Mean	Standard Dev	Rank
C1	Do you believe that possessing employability skills significantly impacts hospitality graduates? Ability to secure employment?	155	4.87	0.337	3
C2	Do hospitality graduates who possess strong employability skills have better career prospects within the hospitality industry?	155	4.92	0.271	1
C3	Do you think that employers in the hospitality sector prioritize candidates with a diverse range of Employability skills?	155	4.82	0.404	4
C4	Do you perceive employability skills as crucial for hospitality graduates in achieving and maintaining successful careers in Employment?	155	4.88	0.320	2

According to Table 3, the four items of employability skills among hospitality graduates toward employment status (DV) are as follows: C2 has the highest mean (4.92) and standard deviation (0.271), C4 was the second highest with a mean (4.88) and standard deviation (0.320), and lastly, the lowest was C3 with a mean (4.82) and standard deviation (0.404).

**Pearson's Correlation Analysis**

Pearson's correlation analysis is the most well-known way to measure the linear correlations between two variables. In this study, the dependent variable is employment status, while the independent variables are hard skills and soft skills. The researchers must prove and discover the relationship between hard skills and employment status, as well as the relationship between soft skills and employment status, using SPSS to test their statistical hypotheses.

**Table 4: Correlations Analysis**

		Correlations		
		Employment Status	Soft Skills	Hard Skills
Employment Status	Pearson Correlation	1	0.181*	0.182*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.033	0.032
	N	155	155	155
Soft Skills	Pearson Correlation	0.181*	1	0.705**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.033		0.00
	N	139	155	155
Hard Skills	Pearson Correlation	0.182*	0.705**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.032	0.000	
	N	139	155	155

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

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 indicates that the soft skills among hospitality graduates toward employment status have presented a correlation of  $r = 0.181$  ( $p = 0.033 < 0.05$ ). Moreover, it also shows that hard skills among hospitality graduates toward employment status correlate,  $r = 0.182$  ( $p = 0.032 < 0.05$ ).

**Hypothesis Testing**

The results of the hypothesis test, as presented in Table 5, illustrate both the hypothesis and its outcome.

**Table 5: Summary of Hypothesis Testing**

Items	Hypothesis	Result of Hypothesis
H1	There is a relationship between soft skills among hospitality graduates and their employment status.	Supported $P = 0.033 < 0.05$
H2	There is a relationship between hard skills among hospitality graduates and their employment status.	Supported $P = 0.032 < 0.05$

**H1:** There is a relationship between soft skills among hospitality graduates and employment status.

Table 5 indicates that soft skills have a significant value of 0.033, which is below the threshold of 0.05. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between soft skills and employment status among hospitality graduates. Accordingly, H1 is supported.

**H2:** There is a relationship between hard skills among hospitality graduates and employment status.

According to Table 5, hard skills have obtained a significant value of 0.032, which is lower than 0.05. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between hard skills and employment status among hospitality graduates. Accordingly, H2 is supported.

### Discussion

Employability skills are crucial for hospitality graduates in terms of their employment status. Individuals possessing a high level of employability skills are more likely to secure a job offer. Developing countries require skilled workers (Sukardi et al., 2023). The aforementioned data unequivocally demonstrates that industry professionals assert the significance of employability skills, both hard and soft, in securing job offers from companies or hotels. The hypothesized relationship between soft skills and employment status yields a value of 0.033, which is less than 0.05. This proves the variables have a relationship with each other. The hypothesized relationship between hard skills and employment status yields a result of 0.032. If the results are lower than 0.05, this proves that hard skills influence the employment status of hospitality graduates.

Ojha et al.'s (2023) insights highlight the difficulties faced by individuals with disabilities in securing employment, prompting us to explore how employability skills can enhance inclusivity in the hospitality sector. Hospitality companies require workers with a wide range of skills and expertise to contribute to their growth. Every hotel has its unique mission to achieve a specific level of sales and revenue annually. A highly skilled and competitive associate can assist the company in achieving its goals. Professional employment necessitates not only strong academic grades but also the acquisition of skills and experience. Nowadays, people are competing to get a better job so they can survive. Having good grades and decent employability skills increases the likelihood of receiving a job offer. Those with a wide range of skills, both soft and hard, will benefit greatly. Therefore, employability skills influence the employment status of hospitality graduates.

Hard skills significantly influence the employment status of graduates in the hospitality industry. Companies look for hard skills in candidates. Hasri et al. (2021) discovered that HR managers in Malaysia particularly valued problem-solving skills. HR managers in Malaysia recognize problem-solving skills as a hard skill. These skills are crucial to each staff member in every company. Companies require staff with strong cognitive abilities, the capacity to generate innovative solutions to problems, and the ability to propose improvements for the benefit of the company.

Hospitality graduates have the opportunity to enhance their skills independently, such as through internships. They learn from all the organizations that contribute to the hotel. While interning, they learn as much as possible from the seniors and staff. They can develop and teach themselves all the skills they need to be better individuals in the future. If they portray a positive attitude and commitment during the internship, there are higher chances for them to receive a job offer from the companies. Companies typically hire individuals who possess multitasking skills, which enable them to perform multiple tasks simultaneously, thereby demonstrating their ability to work efficiently and handle the pressures of their assigned tasks. Hard skills are crucial in today's world, as they can provide a distinct advantage to their possessor.

Skills are important for a job offer from any company. Based on all the data above, soft skills are one of the main factors that can influence employment status. What are soft skills? Communication, problem-solving, collaboration, decision-making, leadership, critical thinking, time management, and creativity are examples of soft skills that are essential in business, according to Al Asefer et al. (2021). All these skills are essential for a good worker who can contribute to the growth of the company alongside other staff members. For instance, without soft skills such as leadership, an individual or staff member will struggle to effectively lead and collaborate with their colleagues to complete all assigned tasks. In the 21st-century economy, soft skills have become a crucial factor for graduate employability (Stewart, 2017). These skills are important for future employability, especially for fresh graduates without experience.

Soft skills are not inherited from parents or professional families. Soft skills can be developed and gained through learning and practice. Some companies prioritize individuals with soft skills over those with hard skills, as reported by Al Asefer et al. (2021). Those who develop all their skills will have a greater advantage in securing a job offer compared to those who only possess good grades. In today's world, individuals can access a wealth of information through online platforms like YouTube and Google Chrome. All the information needed to develop soft skills is readily available online. They can access all the information for free and strive to practice as much as they can. Hence, they will be able to develop these soft skills for themselves. In summary, soft skills are crucial for individuals today in pursuing their desired careers.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, employability skills matter to every hospitality graduate's employment status. Every individual must develop employability skills, both soft and hard, to secure a better job in the future. The study was able to prove to all the students or graduates from any field, especially hospitality courses, that employability skills are a must for every person. Students should strive to develop all their skills as their studies are essential for a brighter future. After graduating from colleges or universities, students who possess solid skills are more likely to gain acceptance into companies or hotels. Companies and hotels seek employees who possess a variety of skills, not just academic excellence. Those with both good grades and multiple skills will have a distinct advantage. Both soft and hard skills can play a significant role in securing job offers. You can develop and learn these skills online, through training programs, and through other means. Parents do not inherit this skill or talent, but it takes time, perhaps weeks or months, to develop into a solidly skilled individual. Therefore, students should strive to enhance their employability skills to secure better career opportunities. In summary, research has proven the importance of employability skills for hospitality graduates in securing a good job in the future.

Furthermore, this study is subject to several limitations. Firstly, a significant limitation of this study is the difficulty in locating relevant articles, particularly those that discuss the employment status of hospitality graduates. The articles for this study are not as widely available as others on the internet, and locating them can be a time-consuming task. The latest number of hospitality graduates is also hard to find due to a lack of sources that provide surveys and updates about the graduates, especially hospitality graduates.

For future studies, the researchers will focus on fresh graduates who just finished their internship at the hotel, to determine whether they can get the job offer during and after their internship at the company. The key elements or factors that make the employer interested in hiring a person include great communication skills, which is one example that the employers will consider. This is vital to study so that all the students who will face their internship will do the same things to get job offers after they finish their studies.

In addition, our future study will focus on the characteristics and criteria of employability skills from the perspective of the employer. Human Resources management and company management will be our respondents. The study focuses on collecting and asking questions about the other criteria needed for job recruitment. The employer will share the criteria that they want to find and see in the candidate before joining the company. This research will benefit people who want to face interviews for a new job in the future and not just for the hospitality industry. All the criteria that the company wants will be good lessons and preparation for candidates before they attend the interview. For instance, if the company requires a Halal Certificate Handler, candidates should attend and obtain the certificate beforehand to increase their chances of being hired



by the company. Therefore, candidates should adhere to the company's requirements to streamline the recruitment process.

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