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(IJEPC)**www.ijepec.com**SOCIAL SCIENCE GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY AND
ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY: FINDINGS FROM A
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DOI: 10.35631/IJEPC.747064**This work is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)****Abstract:**

Recent literature suggested that the English language proficiency appears to influence graduates' employability in the job market especially in the South-East Asia context. This study investigated the Social Science graduates' employability in relation to the English Language proficiency in a Malaysian public university. A quantitative research design was utilised and involved 7025 graduates from the 2015, 2016 and 2017 graduating years. Three variables were examined consisting of the graduates' employment status, the English Language course results, and Malaysian University English Test (MUET) results. These data were analysed using descriptive statistics and Chi Square test. Findings showed inconsistent trends of unemployed graduates in this three-year period albeit a notable increase in 2016. The chi-square analysis suggested that there was an association between the English language proficiency and social science graduates' employability. Although the English language proficiency is highlighted as the contributing factor to graduates' employability, this study concluded that the mismatch between the students' perceptions and the employers' expectations should be addressed. It is further recommended that an ecosystem of key players in the industry and universities should be developed to constantly address the issues related to graduates' employability upon graduation.

Keywords:

Graduate Employability, English Language Proficiency, Social Science

Introduction

Globalisation, Industrial Revolution 4.0 (IR4.0) and the beginning of another decade may change the profession and employment requirements. The jobs that exist in yester years and decades may seem irrelevant in the new decade and era. However, an important question here points to how do we define employability? What are the skills required to guarantee for employability upon graduation in the wake of the new decade and IR4.0?

The working definition of employability as provided by Pool and Sewell (2007) refers to the “set of skills, knowledge, understanding and individual attributes that makes an individual more likely to choose and secure occupations in which they are satisfied and successful”. In another study by Nilsson (2010) stated a new definition for employability stating that “it is the ability of individuals to find and remain employed” which is exactly required to face the complexities and insecurities of modern work life. In addition, employability is defined as a term that is often used as a measurement by employers on graduates’ marketability (Rahmat, Ahmad, Idris & Zainal, 2011). While Yorke and Knight (2006) define the term employability skills to refer to skills, knowledge, attitudes, and other abilities that are necessary for a graduate to secure and keep the first entry job in the labour force. Further, and more broadly, employability is the capability of individuals in effectively utilizing their knowledge, skills, and attitudes within a particular context to self-sufficiently realize their full potential by sustaining their own employment (Hillage & Pollard 1998). This study, however, conceptualizes employability as the ability of the university students to be employed or to be self-employed. However, this paper looks at the graduates’ English language proficiency in relation to their rate of employability. In addition, the graduates’ rate of employability upon graduation are further divided into these categories as follow: (1) employed; and (2) unemployed. We further defined the employed categories into these criteria, (1) further studies; (2) waiting for job placement; and (3) joining skills improvement/ enhancement programme (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012-2017).

Statement of Problems

The past and the present decades have always associated the higher education with graduates’ employability. Research has identified several factors related to unemployability in Malaysia. The findings of a study conducted by Sumanasiri, Ab Yazid and Khatibi (2015) agrees with those of Clarke (2008) who suggests that employability does not depend only on individual characteristics, while the work environment, context and other relations are important in determining one’s employability. The employability factors identified by Finch et al. (2013) was positioned in descending order of priority and includes; listening skills, interpersonal skills, verbal communication skills, critical thinking skills, professionalism, written communication skills, creative thinking skills, adaptability, professional confidence, job specific competencies, leadership skills, work experience, job specific technical skills, academic performance, program reputation, knowledge of software, and institutional reputation. These employability factors identified by Finch et al (2013) appear to parallel to earlier findings of employability skills frameworks (Cotton, 1993). Clearly the employable graduates are distinguishable and show distinct attributes such as according to the empirical study of Smith et al. (2014). The employability dimensions highlighted in the study are: (1) lifelong learning; (2) professional practices and standards; (3) integration of knowledge/ theory/ and practices.

Ting, Marzuki, Chuah, Misieng and Jerome (2017) attributed the lack of employment upon graduation to salary expectation. They further stated that graduates declined job offers due to low salary and benefits that were below their expectations (Ting et al, 2017). From another vantage point, Kermode (2017) opined that the high rate of unemployability is often linked to the lack of English proficiency and communication skills. In addition, one of the main concerns highlighted in the literature and raised by the industry is the relationship between globalisation and the influence of English language proficiency on employability. According to Dustmann and Fabbri (2003) a competitive employment market requires good communication skills in workplaces. In view of this, English proficiency plays a crucial role in the job markets. It is with this interest that this paper aims to investigate the Social Science graduates' employability in relation to their English language proficiency.

Literature Review

The current literature suggests that most jobs sectors are seeking for individuals who possess good communication and interpersonal skills. Various studies suggest that employers in all occupational fields put a greater emphasis on employee's communication skills more than academic achievement (Maes, Weldy & Icenogle 1977; McPherson 1998; Winterbotham, Adams & Kuechel 2001). The employability factors identified by Finch et al. (2013) was positioned in descending order of priority and includes; listening skills, interpersonal skills, verbal communication skills, critical thinking skills, professionalism, written communication skills, creative thinking skills, adaptability, professional confidence, job specific competencies, leadership skills, work experience, job specific technical skills, academic performance, program reputation, knowledge of software, and institutional reputation. These employability factors identified by Finch et al (2013) appear to parallel to earlier findings of employability skills frameworks (Cotton, 1993). The employability dimensions highlighted in the study are lifelong learning, professional practices and standards, integration of knowledge/ theory/ and practices. In addition, Aida, Norailis and Rozaini (2015) postulated that graduates employability program should emphasise on the contextual approach as academics alone is not the main factor of one to be employed. This is due to the lack of soft skills and durability besides the attitudinal selective jobs tend to turndown employers of taking the graduates into their workplace (ibid).

Employability Skills

From another vantage point, Md Saad and Ab. Majid (2014) discovered from their study, the most important employability skills as perceived by GLCs, MNCs and SMEs are problem identification, problem-solving, formulations and solutions, ability to use techniques, skills and modern engineering/ICT tools. On the other hand, Mohamed Noor and Noor Suhailie (2013) further disclosed that personal organization and time management top the list among the employers of the private sectors. However, the graduates are lacking these. On the other hand, Selvadurai, Er and Maros (2013) found that information and social interaction, work initiative and ability to work independently are skills that the public sector employers seek from the graduates. While the NGOs seek for humanitarian values (honesty, caring, patience) and socially desirable attitudes (open, curious and confident) as the key characteristics of employability (Morshidi, Chan, Munir, Shukran, Seri Rahayu & Jasvir Kaur, 2012). Furthermore, there is significant association between graduates' skills and gender such as organization skills, problem solving, teamwork and good time management. Female university students reported to be higher either on hard or soft skills (Azmi, Che Hashim & Md Yusoff, 2018). Other than teamwork, generally public university reported higher on the rest of the soft

skills such as communication, organization, problem solving, decision making, creative and innovative thinking and leadership while more of the students from private institutions reported English proficiency, third language and analytical skills as important job skills that students should possess when looking for work (ibid).

English Language Proficiency and Employability

According to Dustmann and Fabbri (2003), a competitive employment market necessitates good workplace communication abilities. As a result, English is an important medium of communication in the workplace. There is clearly a need to conduct a detailed investigation of this topic in the academic arena. Unfortunately, it appears that most graduates lack these qualities. There is a need to acknowledge that since the official language of Malaysia is *Bahasa Melayu* and the teaching of subjects from primary to secondary schools as well as in tertiary levels are not fully implemented in English, some of the local graduates find it very difficult to communicate in English when they embark into the job markets (Noor Azlina, 2011). Although much attention is given between academic and employability, it has been argued that most research studies are focusing more into employability from the theoretical and perspective basis (Wickramasinghe & Perera, 2010). In their study, Kamlun, Jawing, and Gansau (2020) found that English language competency has a substantial, albeit minor, impact in influencing graduate employability. The explanation for this could be that, in addition to their English language skills, there are other criteria that influence graduate employment. The analysis concluded that there must be a misalignment between what the sector wants and the curriculum. As a result, extra precautions should be taken to make graduates more employable.

Another study by Nair and Fahimirad (2019) found that the educational framework has to be changed. In their study, Taylor's University implemented a New Curriculum Framework (NCF) in terms of design, delivery, evaluation, and outcomes to address developing difficulties in higher education and better engage and teach the millennial and post-millennial generations of learners. The curriculum is being revised to meet growing demands for a more job-relevant curriculum and a work-ready, resilient, and intentional graduate through the balanced and wholesome "integration of science and arts" into the curriculum to help students succeed in the emerging global landscape (incorporated via nurturing both hemispheres of the brain). Thus, learners will be prepared for future work skills and abilities that will be required in a variety of jobs and work situations, allowing them to acquire and demonstrate the most important 21st-century competencies.

Past research studies have also pointed out the value of good command of English to employees. English is the tool of communication in the globalization and IR4.0 era. English is usually used to conduct interview sessions where the interviewees are judged based on their ability to speak in English (Pandey & Pandey, 2014). Furthermore, Pandey and Pandey (ibid) stated that an employee with brilliant ideas but has a poor command of English will generally stay at the bottom of the management ladder. In addition, several studies have also shown the importance of communication skills for career advancement in Malaysia (Lie, Pang, & Mansur, 2009). Thus, an understanding of factors influencing undergraduate university students' successful transition into the labour market is needed. This is to reduce the proportion of fresh graduates who are overqualified as well as to ensure that employers would be able to recruit graduates who have the required skills for the organizations in the wake of IR 4.0. In a survey conducted by McKinsey, 40 percent of the employers claimed that there was a significant skills gap between graduates and entry-level requirements. This study concluded that "there is an

issue with education systems that fail to produce future workers with the kinds of skills required by today's organizations – let alone those of tomorrow” (McKinsey & Company, 2012, p. 23). It can be deduced that the review of the literature suggests that English proficiency and communication skills are the most important factors in fresh graduates' employability. In relation to this, Zainuddin, Siti Zaidah and Pillai, Dumanig, and Phillip (2019) also stated that employers and learners accept that English plays a significant role in employability. Although all parties agreed in general that good grammar and a wide range of vocabulary are significant, the results suggested many mismatches in terms of the perceptions of students and the expectations of employers. Therefore, the challenge of generating a highly skilled workforce in Malaysia will rely primarily on the different stakeholders in both the education system and the sectors involved. Using highly qualified employees would contribute to a more robust economic growth of the country.

In relation to this, Zainuddin, Siti Zaidah and Pillai, Dumanig, and Phillip (2019) also stated that employers and learners accept that English plays a significant role in employability. Although all sides agreed that good grammar and a diverse vocabulary are important, the findings revealed several discrepancies between students' beliefs and employers' requirements. As a result, the task of producing a highly trained workforce in Malaysia would be mostly dependent on the various stakeholders in the education system as well as the various industries involved. Using highly qualified people would help the country's economy grow more steadily.

One of the fundamental goals of education, according to Eldeen, Abumalloh, George, and Aldossary (2018), is to train and provide graduates with the skills required to meet labour market needs and requirements. According to Anas and Hamzah (2017), the labour market is shifting over time as a result of quick adoption of new technology, economic crises, and sectors. Employers seek out many graduates on the basis of academic credentials, experience, various skills in various fields, expertise, competence, competence, strength, attitude, and aptitude in order to be employable. As a result, we must improve our understanding of the elements that influence undergraduate university students' successful transition to the labour market. This is to limit the number of overqualified new graduates and to assure that, in the 21st century, companies will only hire graduates with the skills they demand. According to a McKinsey poll from 2012, 40% of employers believe there is a significant skills gap between graduates and entry-level needs. He also stated that "there is a problem with education systems that do not produce potential employees with the kinds of abilities necessary by today's organisations, let alone those required by tomorrow's organisations" (McKinsey and Company, 2012, p. 23).

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design employing analysis of available secondary data. The samples consisted of 7025 social science graduates from 2015, 2016 and 2017 of four social science faculties in a Malaysian public university. These faculties consisted of the Faculty of Psychology and Education, Faculty of Humanity, Arts and Heritage, Faculty of International Finance and Faculty of Business, Economy and Accounting. Three variables were examined such as the graduates' employment status, their English language courses results in university and Malaysian University English Test (MUET).

Data Source and Collection

This study utilised secondary data which was extracted from graduates' English Language courses results in university and MUET results obtained from the Academic Service Division. The Graduate Tracer Study sourced from the university's Career and Alumni Centre. For this study, respondents from the 2015, 2016 and 2017 graduating years were involved. The variables for this study were the graduates' employability status, English results, and soft skills. However, information access was limited to numbers and percentages related to graduate employability according to faculty and programme of study. More specific information such as employment by gender, job type, work location and salary were not made available due to the purview of Act 709 of the Malaysian Personal Data Protection Act 2010.

Data Analysis

The obtained data were tabulated, and descriptive analysis were utilised to analyse the total number of employed and unemployed graduates. Normality test was run to determine the normal distribution for the graduates' university English Language course results and the MUET results. The normality test results showed that the data were not normally distributed. Thus, independent Chi-square (a non-parametric test) were employed to determine the relationship between the social science graduates' employability, undergraduate English Language course results and MUET results.

Findings

Number of Graduates based on Faculties: 2015, 2016 and 2017

Most graduates according to faculty were from the Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Heritage (FKSW) with 718 of the overall totals in 2015, 725 in 2016, and 769 in 2017 (see Table 1). There was a gradual increase in FKSW graduates in 2016 and 2017. A similar increase was also observed in the Faculty of Psychology and Education (FPP) with 500 in 2015, 552 in 2016 and 598 in 2017. Likewise, the Faculty of Business, Economy and Accounting (FPEP) recorded a progressive number of graduates with 468 in 2015, 530 in 2016 and 609 in 2017. A decrease was observed in the Faculty of International Finance (FKAL) from 525 in 2015 to 506 in 2016 and maintained similar frequency of 525 in 2017.

Table 1: Number of Graduates based on Faculties

Faculty	2015	2016	2017
	Frequency	Frequency	Frequency
FPP	500	552	598
FKSW	718	725	769
FKAL	525	506	525
FPEP	468	530	609
Total	2211	2313	2501

Social Science Graduate Employment Status

The employment status was classified under these categories such as employed and unemployed. However, the employment status was further divided into different categories consisted of: (1) further study; (2) skills improvement; and (3) waiting for job placements.

The Overall Employment Status: 2015, 2016 and 2017

Table 2 shows that the frequency for Social Science graduates' employability demonstrated inconsistent trends.

Table 2: Employment Status of Social Science Graduates in 2015, 2016 and 2017

Graduate Employability	2015	2016	2017
	Frequency	Frequency	Frequency
Employed	605	788	661
Unemployed	1336	1180	1378
Further Study	40	61	151
Skills improvement	19	19	31
Waiting for job placement	123	205	207
No information	88	60	73

The employment frequency increased from 787 in 2015 to 1073 in 2016 but decreased again in 2017 to 1050. The graduates classified under 'further study', 'skills improvement' and 'waiting for job placement' were included in the employed category because they were expected to secure jobs once they completed their studies, training and obtained work placements.

The unemployed Social Science graduates (including no information category) further demonstrated a similar trend to that of employed graduates. The unemployability frequency decreased to 1240 in 2016 as opposed to 1424 in 2015. However, it was reversed and recorded an increase of unemployment frequency (1451) in 2017. It was deduced that there was an inconsistent frequency of the social science graduates' employability in this three-year period albeit the notable increase in 2016. It can be concluded here that the number of unemployed graduates were greater than employed graduates.

Employment Status and University English Language Course Results

This section presents the findings for the Social Science graduates' employment status in relation to their English Language course results. These graduates were required to complete the English language courses in their first and second year of study. These courses were divided into four semesters and consisted of: (1) English language skills fluency and improvement among low proficiency learners; and (2) enhancing academic English skills usage for advanced level students. These courses are assigned based on the MUET results whether they are enrolled into proficiency level or advanced level classes. Students with MUET Band 1 to Band 3 would be required to register for the proficiency level. Those with Band 4 onwards are register into advanced English courses. In this study, most of the graduates obtained Grade B for their English language courses. Likewise, this group showed a higher frequency of employability compared to the other grades.

Employability and University English Language results in 2015

Table 3 shows that most employed graduates with B grade results (B, B+, B-) accounted for 547 followed by 160 for C range grades (C+, C, C-) and A range grades (71). While graduates who failed their university English language course had 0% employment rate. The majority of employed graduates in 2015 were those with B grade. However, the highest number of unemployed graduates were also from the B grade range with B+ (189), B (339) and B- (403).

Low range English language course results (C+, C, C-, D+ and E) contributed a combination of 423 unemployed graduates. Graduates with A grade (22) and A- (57) were among those unemployed.

Table 3: Cross Classification Table for the English Language Results and Graduate Employability 2015

English Language Results	Graduate Employability		Total
	Unemployed	Employed	
A	22	9	31
A-	57	62	119
B+	189	165	354
B	339	195	534
B-	403	187	590
C+	289	118	407
C	111	33	144
C-	17	9	26
D+	3	0	3
E	3	0	3
Total	1433	778	2211

Employability and University English Language results in 2016

For 2016, employability was the highest among graduates with English language results of B+ (280), B (360) and B- (241) while 13 graduates had obtained A and A- (37). The employed graduates with low range grades C (C+, C, C-) and D (D+, D) accounted for a total of 138. The pattern was repeated in 2015 where a bulk of unemployed graduates were those with grade B, for example B+ (270), B (425) and B- (305) followed by 150 for grade C+, 45 for C and 9 for C-. A total of 40 graduates who obtained Grade A and A- were jobless. However, there was not a significant difference between the employed and unemployed frequency in 2016 (see Table 4) compared to 2015.

Table 4: Cross Classification Table for the English Language Course Results and Graduate Employability 2016

English Language Results	Graduate Employability		Total
	Unemployed	Employed	
A	9	13	22
A-	31	37	68
B+	270	280	550
B	425	360	785
B-	305	241	546
C+	150	98	248
C	45	32	77
C-	9	5	14
D+	0	2	2
D	0	1	1
Total	1244	1069	2313

Employability and University English Language results in 2017

The average grade obtained by the Social Science employed graduates was B, consisted of B+ (266), B (246) and B- (190) in 2017. This was followed by graduates who had obtained grade A (96) and A- (162). Low proficiency graduates (Grade C+, C and C-) contributed to the rest of employed graduates with a total of 90 (see Table 5). In 2017, a similar pattern in 2015 and 2016 was repeated in which the bulk of both employed and unemployed graduates obtained grade B (B+, B and B-) for their English language course. Graduates who obtained English language course marks in the B+, B and B- categories were among those unemployed (986) followed by grade A and A- (262) and grade C+, C and C- (203). Similar to the previous graduating year in 2015 and 2016, both the employed and unemployed graduates were from the average proficiency range.

Table 5: Cross Classification Table for English Language Course Results and Graduate Employability 2017

English Language Results	Graduate Employability		Total
	Unemployed	Employed	
A	84	96	180
A-	178	162	340
B+	357	266	623
B	360	246	606
B-	269	190	459
C+	130	51	181
C	55	32	87
C-	18	7	25
Total	1451	1050	2501

The findings showed that university English language course results improved every year, especially in 2017 due to many graduates obtained grade A compared to 2015 and 2016. The frequency trends further pointed to inconsistent number unemployed graduates from 2015 to 2017. However, the average grade (Grade B) obtained by both the employed and unemployed social science graduates spanning three years showed a consistent trend.

Association Between Social Science Graduates' Employability and University English Course Results

The hypotheses testing using independence Chi-square test was performed to further investigate the association between social-science graduates' employability and English language proficiency. The hypotheses were tested to ascertain if there was a significant relationship between graduates' employability towards English language courses grades among social science graduates in 2015, 2016 and 2017.

H_0 : Graduates' Employability is not dependent with average English course results

H_1 : Graduates' Employability is dependent with average English course results

Table 6 shows the p-value of the Chi-Square Results for English language course results and the graduate employability. Based on the results, it showed that there was an association between the English language course results and graduates' employability in 2015, 2016 and 2017 graduating years. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected and concluded that there was an association between the English language course results and graduate employability.

Table 6: Chi-Square Results for the English Language Results and Graduate Employability

Year	p-value	Decision
2015	0.000	p-value less than 5% significance level. Therefore, we rejected null hypothesis. It was concluded that there was an association between the English language course results and graduate employability.
2016	0.031	p-value less than 5% significance level. Therefore, we rejected null hypothesis. It was concluded that there was an association between the English language course and graduate employability.
2017	0.000	p-value less than 5% significance level. Therefore, we rejected null hypothesis. It was concluded that there was an association between the English language course results and graduate employability.

Employment Status and Malaysian University English Test (MUET) Results: 2015, 2016 and 2017

The Malaysian University English Test (MUET) is a pre-requisite entry requirement for any student aiming to enrol in first degree programmes in local Malaysian public or private universities. The test is usually for students who are in the matriculation programme, diploma-level and pre-university courses. The results for the old MUET format were classified into six bands with Band 1 being the lowest and Band 6 the highest achievement before the revision were made to MUET format and band classification in 2020.

For the period between 2015 to 2017, students graduating from the four social science faculties in the university had MUET achievement results across all bands except Band 6 (see Table 7, Table 8, and Table 9). The highest number of graduates who had secured job placements were those with MUET Band 2 results (294 in 2015, 416 in 2016, and 543 in 2017). This is followed by Band 3 achievers with 259 in 2015, 302 in 2016 and 280 in 2017.

While those obtained Band 1 consisted of 143 in 2015, 269 in 2016 and 201 in 2017 of employed graduates. Band 4 and 5 achievers recorded the smallest number of employed graduates in three years which could be explained due to a smaller number of graduates with Band 4 above compared to those with Band 3 and below.

**Table 7: Cross Classification Table for MUET Results and Graduate Employability
2015**

MUET Results	Graduate Employability		Total
	Unemployed	Employed	
1	375	143	518
2	557	294	851
3	394	259	653
4	101	80	181
5	6	2	8
Total	1433	778	2211

**Table 8: Cross Classification Table for MUET Results and Graduate Employability
2016**

MUET Results	Graduate Employability		Total
	Unemployed	Employed	
1	369	269	638
2	548	416	964
3	280	302	582
4	46	75	121
5	1	7	8
Total	1244	1069	2313

**Table 9: Cross Classification Table for MUET Results and Graduate Employability
2017**

MUET Results	Graduate Employability		Total
	Unemployed	Employed	
1	323	201	524
2	786	543	1329
3	316	280	596
4	24	25	49
5	1	1	2
TH	1	0	1
Total	1451	1050	2501

Although the highest number of employed graduates were those who obtained Band 2, this trend was further replicated for the unemployed graduates. All the three years recorded Band 2 as the highest number of unemployed graduates with 557 in 2015, 548 in 2016 and 768 in 2017. In 2015, the second highest number of unemployed graduates who obtained Band 3 was 394. This trend changed in 2016 and 2017 whereby Band 1 came second place with 369 (Table 8) and 323 (Table 9) unemployed graduates. In 2015, Band 4 achievers recorded a total of 101 unemployed social science graduates but it was then changed to only 46 in 2016 and 24 in 2017. The lowest unemployed rate occurred in Band 5 with 6 in 2015, 1 in 2016 and 1 in 2017. However, there was an increasing trend of graduate employment in 2016 (1069) and 2017 (1050) compared to only 778 graduates in 2015.

Association between MUET Results and Social Science Graduate Employability

The hypothesis testing using independence Chi-square test was performed to further investigate the association between MUET results and social-science graduate employability in 2015, 2016 and 2017.

H₀: Graduates' Employability is not dependent with MUET score

H₁: Graduates' Employability is dependent with MUET score

Table 10. Chi-Square Results for MUET Results and Graduate Employability

Year	p-value	Decision
2015	0.000	p-value less than 5% significance level. Therefore, null hypothesis was rejected. It was concluded that there was an association between the MUET results and graduate employability.
2016	0.000	p-value less than 5% significance level. Therefore, null hypothesis was rejected. It was concluded that there was an association between the MUET results and graduate employability.
2017	0.034	p-value less than 5% significance level. Therefore, null hypothesis was rejected. It was concluded that there was an association between the MUET results and graduate employability.

Summary of the Relationship between MUET Score and Social Science Graduate Employability

Most of the social science obtained MUET Band 1 to 3 and none of them obtained Band 6. Based on the chi-square results, it showed sufficient evidence to suggest an association between MUET score and graduate employability in three graduating years.

Summary of Findings

This study investigated the graduate employability in 2015, 2016 and 2017 graduating years. The findings of this study pointed to the inconsistent frequency of the social science graduates' employability in this three-year period albeit the notable increase in 2016. The result of this study showed a greater number of unemployed graduates than employed graduates. The graduates' low employability rates were associated with their university English language course results and MUET bands. Both chi-square tests demonstrated similar results and showed sufficient evidence to suggest the associations between the English Language courses results, MUET results and the graduate employability. Thus, the results suggested that the English language proficiency is the main employability criteria among the Social Science graduates in 2015, 2016 and 2017 graduating years.

Discussion

Existing English Language Proficiency

The graduates mostly obtained lower MUET bands upon their registration as university students. This may be explained by their lack of English mastery skills since they were in schools. These graduates were studying English for one or four semesters in university as compared to the 11 years spent in schools learning the English language. In 2013, the English Language Roadmap was created as a guideline and to enhance the English language education in Malaysia (Malaysia Education Blueprint, 2013). However, the argument here is despite the systematic reform of the English language education in Malaysia, the standard of English language continues to drop among students. In view of this, the results of this study may point to the urgency for schools to provide students with more opportunities to improve their English language proficiency. Such enforcements are important, so these students are equipped with, at least, the basic and appropriate English communication skills. Thus, they may demonstrate the required proficiency to cope with their academic subjects when they enter higher learning institutions.

Low English Proficiency and Graduate Employability

A low rate of employability is more significant when MUET is used a variable because MUET is an examination which testing the academic skills and this examination was sat by the graduates prior to university admission. While the English university courses are divided into Proficiency and Advanced English with more focus on communication skills and less demanding compared to MUET. Therefore, the specific focus which entails each of the university English courses may only focussing on job seeking and communication skills for both the proficiency and advanced levels. The skills learned in these courses were merely preparing these graduates with the skills needed in workplace such as meeting, writing business proposal and communication. However, it is rather uncertain if these graduates especially those with low English proficiency may at least be able to demonstrate the required speaking skills demanded by most employers. The study conducted by Kamlun, Jawing, and Gansau (2020) suggested that the English language competency has a substantial, albeit minor impact in influencing graduate employability due other criteria that might influence graduate employment. While this study shows the association between graduates' employability and low English proficiency, it is equally important for the university and stakeholders to re-assess the alignment between what the sector wants and the curriculum to investigate the other criteria apart from the English proficiency that might be affecting low employability rate among graduates.

STEM and ARTS Courses in University

A rather contradictory finding in this study showed that while those with Band 2 and Grade B students were highly employed, they were also highly unemployed. This could be due to the programmes they studied in the university whether the courses they were taking provided more opportunities for employment in the current job markets. However, most public and private universities in Malaysia have restructured their curriculums. Currently, more new courses and programmes are offered to meet the job demands in the IR4.0 era. This is supported in a study conducted by Nair and Fahimirad (2019) where they opined that the educational framework has to be changed. For example, Taylor's University implemented a New Curriculum Framework (NCF) in terms of design, delivery, evaluation, and outcomes to address developing difficulties in higher education and better engage and teach the millennial and post-millennial

generations of learners. The curriculum is being revised to meet the growing demands for a more job-relevant curriculum and a work-ready, resilient, and intentional graduate through the balanced and wholesome "integration of science and arts" into the curriculum to help students succeed in the emerging global landscape (incorporated via nurturing both hemispheres of the brain). Thus, the changing educational framework and universities curriculum restructuring may prepare and equip the learners with more relevant and current work skills required in a variety of jobs and work situations, allowing them to acquire and demonstrate the most important competencies during the IR4.0 era.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study points to the association between low English proficiency and graduate employability. However, it is also timely for various stakeholders in the higher education and industries to address the mismatch between the students' perceptions and the employers' expectations. It is further recommended that an ecosystem of key players in the industry and universities should be developed to constantly address the issues related to graduates' employability upon graduation. Nevertheless, it is important to note the limitations pertaining to lack of data such as gender, locations, age and specific programs due to data confidentiality. Thus, this study did not explore these factors in relation to graduate employability. In view of this, future studies could endeavour to investigate these factors as it may explain other specific skills which are more current and relevant for employment in the IR4.0 era. Not only are the data devoid of the aforementioned factors, but they are also statistically unrepresentative of the entire graduates' population in Malaysia. Considering the constant needs to conduct more current studies to identify the employability rate among graduates in association with their English language proficiency, the findings of the study may provide more fertile grounds for further research in discerning the current and relevant skills for the graduates in Malaysia.

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