

The Role of Emotional Intelligence and Perceived Employability in Undergraduate Students

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Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to investigate the relationship between the four dimensions of emotional intelligence and perceived employability of undergraduate business students from Malaysian public universities. **Design:** The close end questionnaire self-reporting measures of perceived employability were adapted to examine emotional intelligence and perceived employability. **Findings:** All dimensions of emotional intelligence were correlated with perceived employability. The results of the findings concluded that all dimensions of emotional intelligence had a direct impact on employability. **Research Implication:** The main strength of the study is to examine the influence of emotional intelligence dimensions on perceived employability. Previously, studies did not highlight multi-dimensional emotional intelligence with employability and the current findings will help intellectuals and policy makers to understand the employability issues and challenges facing Malaysian students. **Practical implications:** The findings of the study are exploratory in nature. Study findings argued that better emotional intelligence helps individuals to overcome barriers to career related outcomes. The researcher can use it to improve employability by focusing on improving the student's emotional intelligence. Researchers can use this research to launch an emotional intelligence program to improve the employability of students. **Originality:** This is the first study to demonstrate the relevant of evidence between the four dimensions of emotional intelligence and employability and results are consistent with each other.

Key words: *Employability, emotional intelligence, graduates and universities.*

Introduction

Nowadays, institutions have the responsibility to provide extensive knowledge, skills and abilities for employment in the production of employable graduates. The basic criteria is that universities should produce graduates who are able to get job within six month of graduation (Abas-mastura, 2013; Little, 2010). The Paradigm shift away from the business environment and less collaboration between the business world and the institutes has put immense pressure and responsibility on human resource managers; strategists who emphasise policy and process to increase employability. Past literature review have claimed that student employability issues have been observed since 1990s, due to the expansion of the industrial economy to the knowledge economy; as a result, rapid changes in the business world could not allow institutions to excel in the pace of changes. The employability dimensions are enormous in the nature and authors use different techniques to empirically examine the employability model. Robinson (2000) for instance indicated that there are a range of skills to get a job; or the ability to get a job. Employability, however, was not viewed as the standard concept in one note at the international level ((McQuaid, Green, & Danson, 2005).

Researchers and strategists have given importance to the subject of “employability”, which is a necessary element in a sustainable economy in any part of the world. Employability has used several uniform definitions and variation i.e., ability, (Sanders & De Grip ,2004; Van der Heijden, 2005 ; Gazier ,1999; Vos, Hauw& Heijden,2011), capability (Semadar, Robins & Ferris, 2006) construct (Hillage& Pollard,1998; Outin,1990), probability (Brown &Hesketh, 2004; Berntson, 2008), skills (Tseng, 1972; Robinson, 2000), adaptability (Fugate,2001). At the individual level, employability stress studies may include the two streams of studies, first array of the studies focusing on the workers (Charbonneau &Dornhaus, 2015; Dagan & Isaac, 2015) and second stream focusing on the students (Hairi, Nazuir, Ahmad, &Razzaly, 2011; Omar, Ghazali, Daud, Hamizam, &Abg,2010; Rodzalan&Saat, 2015). The concept of employability now focuses on graduate level and reflects “the ability of graduate to gain employment” (Harvey, 2009). Past literature has claimed that although there is huge amount of research on the current subject, scarce literature has given rise to a self-perceived view of student employability. Nevertheless, employability has not been taken as a standard term on a single note at the international level (Mc Quaid & Lindsay, 2005).

In many of the researchers writing on employability, it is claimed that employability of students is influenced by several factors such as skill factors (Aro, Eklund, Nurmi, & Poikkeus, 2015; Palmer, 2014; van der Fels et al., 2015) and individual difference (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2011; Dacre Pool & Qualter, 2012; Potgieter & Coetzee, 2013). From driven of extensive international literature search 1990 to 2015, employability has defined diverse and pragmatic aspects i.e., individuals, personal and external factors (Mc-Quaid & Lindsay,



2005), various skill components (Hilage&Polard, 1998), personal agency or attributes self-directedness (Bazuidenhout, 2001; Coetze, 2001) and attribute (Outin, 1990) etc.

Now, theorist and research scholars have identified personality factors and important factors of emotional intelligence as predictive power of the outcomes of work and the behavioural process (Bastien et. al., 2005; Potgiatez and Coetze, 2013).

Previous research has been done on emotional intelligence as skills (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2008) and trait (Petrides, Furnham, & Frederickson, 2004) in the life and career of individuals. Most past studies have led to the conceptualisation of emotional intelligence in relation to employability, which still needs clarification of empirical evidence in the self-perceived model of employability. The predictors of employability (emotional intelligence) variation and the impact of student behaviour are therefore required to be examined. This examination showed a low hand comparison high in emotional intelligence. In conclusion, the main objective of the analysis is to examine the association between emotional intelligence and employability.

Conceptualisation of Employability

The first concept of employability in the modern world was “dichotomic employability”. The dichotomic employability is described as dichotomous because it focused on the different poles between employable and unemployable persons without any gradation or employees who are capable or unwilling to work or not. The concept has evolved into a gap between the work requirements of employment and present work expertise of mentally, physically or socially disadvantaged persons as the socio-medical employability in 1950 in US, UK and other European countries (Gazier, 2001). In 1960, this concept took on new changes, focusing on manpower and extending the debate again on the distance between abilities; the disadvantage and the work requirement of employment that was later referred to as the employability policy of manpower. At this time, the main focus of employability was the individual’s rehabilitation so that the barriers to employment could be overcome (Forrier&Sels, 2003b).

First, individual factors that comprised of educational attainment and qualification, transferable skills set (e.g., team working skills set, adaptability, communication, problem-solving, numeracy, and literacy), competencies (e.g., confidence, motivation) and attributes (e.g., fundamental social skills set). Second, personal circumstances associated with individual’s household and social circumstances (e.g., access to resources, caring responsibilities, family responsibilities). Finally, external factors address the conditions of demand for employment (e.g., recruitment factors, vacancy characteristics, macroeconomic

factors) and facilitating support factors (e.g., job-matching technologies and public service accessibility). In this line of action, individual employability is given less privilege.

Researchers have identified different predictors of individual employability. At the individual level, employability is influenced by specific factors such as pre-graduate experience (Gault, Leach & Duay, 2010), age (Heijden & Heijde, 2009), and academic reputation of the institutes (Tas & Ergen, 2012). Prior literature was more concerned with external employability. In addition, several scholars have proposed internal employability as a basis for future study. In that sense, the Rothwell and Arnold (2007) model has begun to analyse it as an additional measure of employability, which is unique in that it requires internal employability (Wile, Fruyt & Fays, 2013).

The self-perceived model was developed by Rothwell and colleagues (2007), as self-reporting has also gained popularity, but extensive empirical research is not yet available in the literature. The research model is at its preliminary stage. Subsequently, an improved model as a self-perception model for undergraduate students was introduced in 2008. When designing a model, he added that it could improve awareness on employee difficulties, but that past research has overlooked the dimension of self-perceived employability that scarce literature endorses. This model could help the government and institutions to analyse the student's sense of joblessness. In Malaysia, more research is needed into the employability model with reference to Rothwell (2008), and has not yet been explored, and there is a lack of empirical studies to identify skill factors as indicators and predictors.

Student's Perspective

Studies have identified that especially Malaysian students are inclined to focus particularly on work enthusiasm as a focal point for estimating the employability of individuals. However, these studies have been conducted to a very limited extent. Due to limited scope, studies failed to understand and considered the intricacy of employability (Raftopoulos, 2006). Testing a range of alternative predictors, such as emotional intelligence and personality traits, would allow researchers to further explore the antecedents of employability (Ai-Hwa, Quak, 2009).

Past studies claiming employability studies in Malaysian students specifically focus on employer sampling (Nurita, Shahardin & Aion, 2004; Tneh, 2009, Asmaand & Lim, 2000; Lee, 2000, Quek, 2000; Kanapathy, 2000; Khalid, 2009) lectures (Hussain, 2002; Fauzi & Nita, 2009; Rasul, Ismail, Rajuddin, & Rauf, 2009) and few on the students (Norshima, 2005; Lim, 2011) and employability levels have not been explored yet in the Malaysian undergraduate business students employability (self-perceived). Although similar studies related to employability with a focus on technical (Omar, Bakar & Rashid, 2012), science (Shafie,

&Nayan, 2010) and vocational studies (Norshima ,2005). However, the sampling setting for business studies (i.e., Islam, Hamid, Shukri, &AbdManaf, 2013) has limited literature.

Emotional Intelligence

The employability is influenced by the philosophy, values, sense of mission or calling, emotions, traits and unconscious motives of a person (Boyatzis & Sala, 2004; Boyatzis, 2006). It also increases an individual's health for a good and stable employability (Bezuidenhout, 2010; Coetze, 2011; Fugate *et al.*, 2004; Yorki& Knight, 2007). Leggat, Farrel and Couper (2013) indicated that emotions are as important as the relationship between behaviour and stimulus and is better mitigated by individual differences. It is also a reference to the differences in the coping mechanism, particularly for rapidly changing situations, in which emotional intelligence directly affects key coping processes. Salovey and Mayer (1997) developed emotional intelligence, as a theory of psychology, in following words: "Emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth".

Emotional intelligence was seen as a key component that influences cogitation (Shadahat, Sajjad, Farooq & Rehman, 2011). Persons with higher level of emotional intelligence are enabling themselves and others to succeed and to build stronger personal ties (Cooper, 1997). Coetzee (2013) found emotional intelligence as the significant predictor of employability. There are still no studies on various aspects of emotional intelligence such as social management, self-management, relationship management and social awareness which needs to be investigated empirically by future studies are suggested by Atta, Athar, and Bano (2013). It is yet unclear how emotional intelligence affects the life goal.

Goleman (1998, p.4) provides a strong justification for integrating emotional intelligence into any model of employability as he argues "in a time with no guarantees of job security, when the very concept of a job is rapidly being replaced by portable skills, these are prime qualities that make and keep us employable". A more descriptive and newer name can be assigned to them: emotional intelligence, from "personality" and "character" to "competence" to "soft skills". Moynegh and Worsley (2005) justified that, in future, emotional intelligence in a knowledge-based economy will become more important by preparing to expand the workforce in which human interaction plays a vital role. Mayer et al. (2004, p197) described emotional intelligence as: "the capability to reason about emotions, and of emotions to enhance thinking. It includes the abilities to accurately perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth". Goleman (1998, p. 317), who has done a lot of work, describes emotional intelligence in

simpler words: “the capability for recognising our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships”. As with all the frameworks in a model, a graduate would need well defined emotional intelligence skills to achieve his true employability potential.

Within Yorke and Knight's (2002) personal qualities study, emotional intelligence is considered to be one of the attributes of employability, but also some of the process skills and numerous other personal qualities are also included. Past studies have shown that people with a high level of emotional intelligence often stimulate themselves and others in order to achieve more. These individuals have better career and health achievements in their professions and have better personal ties than those with low emotional intelligence (Cooper, 1997). In Jaeger (2003, p. 634), emotional intelligence and academic performance are associated positively, while in the higher education fields, the former could be improved by teaching and learning. Additionally, it has been argued that employees, students and employers can have attractive and desirable outcomes by rising emotional intelligence.

Student’s Perspective

In addition, sufficient evidence has been provided to support that emotional intelligence considering substantial results relevant to employability (Darce, Pool & Lorraine, 2013; Coetze, 2013). Nonetheless, many factors, including social management, relationship management and social awareness, which are proposed for review by Atta, Athar, and Bano (2013) have been overlooked or have not yet been reported.

Though the significance of emotional intelligence as moderator was noted in some settings. The variance of emotional intelligence across different variables such as Ciarochi, Deane and Anderson (2002) indicated an important and positive role for emotional intelligence between stress and mental health. Second, emotional intelligence effect has been seen between emotional and behavioural reactions to work safety by Jordan, Ashkanesy and Hartel (2002). Same impact that was moderating by Karimi, Leggat, Farrell and Couper (2013) discusses a moderating influence between emotional awareness and work stress. Furthermore, some scholars proposed theories and tried to clarify this issue, which demonstrates how the behaviour predictors have moderated the discrepancies. Nevertheless, there is still no reliably of clear inference as to what the position of employability (self-perceived) in emotional intelligence is specifically on the undergraduate level (Bastian et. al., 2005; Potgietaz and Coetze, 2013).

Tucker et al. (2000, p. 336) said: “As educators, we want our students to graduate with a solid foundation in the knowledge and skills they will need to be productive managers and effective leaders. By implementing emotional intelligence theory and exercises, faculty will

help students become well-rounded graduates.” They also provide useful advice on the application of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence can be developed in an early student hood nor it is genetically fixed (Goleman, 1998, p. 7), rather it looks like something people can learn easily, which automatically implies that it can be taught in Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs). A number of secondary or primary schools have discussed the subject of emotional literacy or emotional intelligence on board, as they are eager to advance the skills of their educators. Fabio and Kenny (2014) studied among 254 Italian high school students and discussed the relationship between support and emotional intelligence of teachers and friends with adaptive career development indices. Results revealed a positive association between the dimensions of emotional intelligence and self-perceived employability. This suggests that teacher support and emotional intelligence call for further investigation of factors that contribute to the advancement of adaptive careers among youth.

Coetzee & Beukes (2010) conducted research on South African students to conclude that emotional intelligence has a significantly effect on employability and career self-efficacy behaviour. Moreover, they suggested that this research should support the fact that emotion plays an important role in acquired employability and behaviour and that those practitioners who really want to increase the employability of students should focus on emotional intelligence. Fabio and Kenny (2014) conducted research on Italian youth and find the positive and significant role of emotional intelligence and self-perceived employability and suggested that individual and social variables need to examine the variation of the following construct. Potgieter & Coetzee (2013) conducted research on South-African students and concluded that emotional intelligence had a positive affect on employability attributes special to career self-management, which is considered to be an important predictor of employability. Moreover, they advised that emotional intelligence would be developed to enhance the carrier proactive behaviour. Coetzee & Harry (2014) conducted research on emotional intelligence with career adaptability and found a consistent relationship, as adaptability is the construct of employability and therefore this indirect relation in the proposed framework. D’Silva, & Hamid (2014) focused on Malaysian students and found a positive relationship between emotional intelligent and employability but focused on the orientation of employability.

Similarly, Fruyt&Mervielde (2010) explore that RIASEC personality model has the capability to predict the employability of students and reached this conclusion by examining the personality of 974 Finish students. Some of the aspects and antecedent have not yet been explored, which is recommend by a number of authors. Jordanian researcher Malek (2009) researched the emotional intelligence of first year Jordanian students using ability emotional intelligence antecedents such as the social awareness, social management, self-management and self-awareness and using a longitudinal study. This dimension of emotional intelligence has proven to have a direct and indirect impact on student behaviour. Emotional intelligence has a cognitive ability to presume the emotion, behavior and attitude in the light of



environment. The self-management dimension is based on the Goleman (1990) theory, which proposes the relationship between the variables.

Research with EI Construct focuses more on the developed countries, i.e., the positive relationship between emotional intelligence and self-perceivable employability was noticed among high school students in South Africa (Beukes 2010) and young workers in Britain (Dacre & Pool 2011). In an Italian background, both high school students (Di Fabio & Palazzeschi in press) and university students reported a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and perceived employability (Difabio & Buci, 2013). Developing countries (i.e., Malaysia) have ignored particulate matter in previous studies and this has been proposed in the current study due to different socio-economic settings.

Research Methodology

This study focused on Peninsular Malaysia due to the high rate of youth unemployment persisting in Malaysia and following research on the employability of Malaysian student, which considers the important determinant of youth unemployment. This study focused solely on the employability of the Malaysian students, as suggested in previous literature. Additionally, the study focuses exclusively on the students enrolled in business education / management sciences departments at public universities in Malaysia.

Relation to the previous discussion studies is confine on the business students as current evidence indicates that in Malaysia the highest youth unemployment is for business graduates. The reason behind this, as mentioned in the background of study, most important factors influence on employability is youth unemployment.

The study focused on four universities of Malaysia (UUM, USM, UITM and UM). Such universities are producing 35% of the total business graduates (Statics department Malaysia, 2013). The universities selected represent Malaysia's exact diversity mix. However, they are located elsewhere in Malaysia Peninsular, which could add to the diversity of the area. For this study, the proposed method of sampling is stratified cluster sampling.

The research design that focuses on the student as the most widely accepted tool for research in the modern world is the questionnaire used in the current scheme. The sampling focusing on the Malaysian aspect and the four universities was chosen for the research (i.e., UUM, USM, UITM and UM). The data collected from the above-mentioned universities was used to conclude the research.

Table 1: Target Population and sampling

Sr. No.	University	Total Business Students	Percentage	Sampling size
1	UUM	5748	0.35	133
2	USM	3956	0.24	92
3	UITM	4142	0.25	100
4	UM	2279	0.14	55
	TOTAL	16125	100	380

Table 2: Questionnaire

Note: Questionnaire using in the current study has adapted from the following sources.

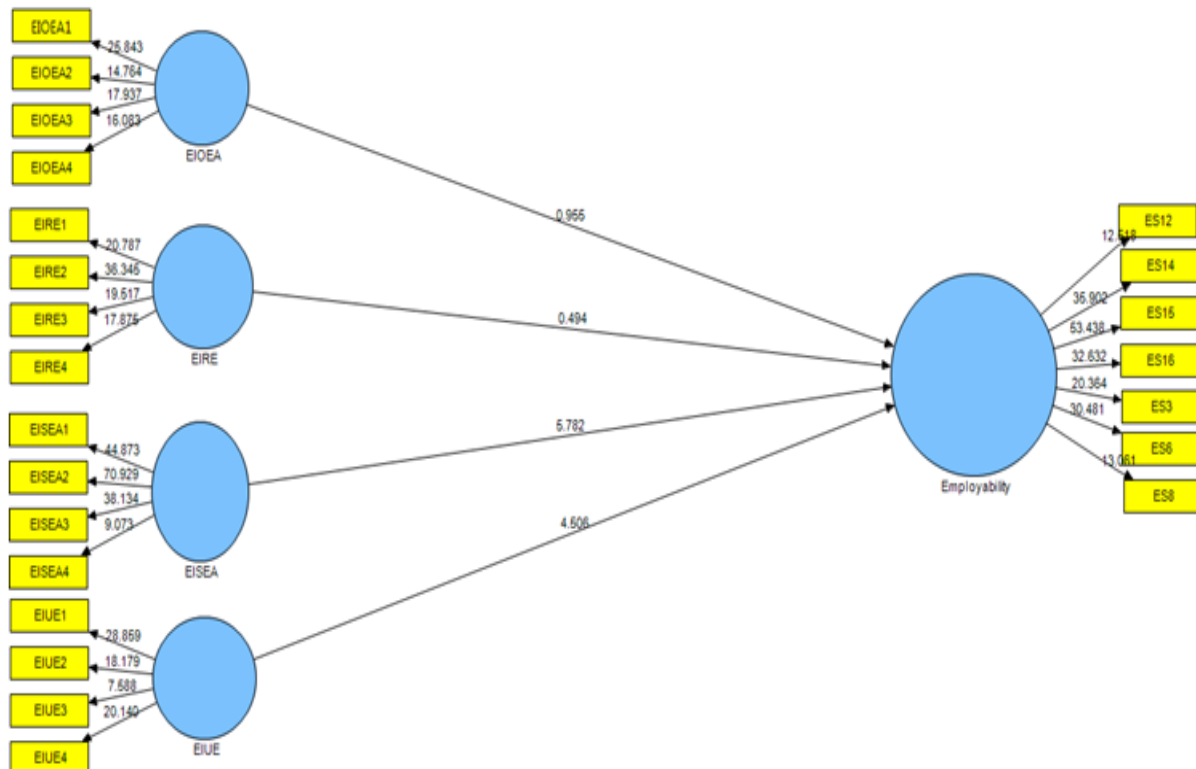
Sr.No.	Variables	No of Items	Adopted
1	Employability	16	Herbert & Rothwell, (2008)
2	Emotional intelligence	15	Bradberry and Greaves (2004)
Summary of Respondents' Demography Item		Frequency	Percentage
Gender			
Male		113	42.32
Female		267	70.26
Age Group			
18-22years		207	54.47
22-24 years		128	33.68
24 and above		45	11.84
University			
UM		55	14.47
USM		91	23.95
UUM		134	35.26
UITM		100	26.32
Race			
Malay		173	45.53
Chinese		129	33.95
Indian		17	4.47
others		61	16.05
Majoring			
Human Resource		60	15.79
Management		160	42.11
Entrepreneurship		8	2.11
Accounting		26	6.84

Finance	19	5.00
Marketing	13	3.42
Economics	94	24.74
Human Resource	60	15.79

Data Collection Strategy

After data collection from the last year's university students, different statistical approaches were used to test the hypotheses of the study. This includes initial steps, such as data screening, which include checking whether the data has been entered correctly, identification of missing data, outliers, normality, linearity, homoscedasticity and multi-collinearity. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and reliability analysis were conducted to test the correctness of the measures, followed by descriptive statistics to describe the characteristics of the respondents. Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis were then performed to test the relationship between the independent and dependent variables and the impact of the moderating variable. These entire tests were conducted using SEM technique. The Partial Least Square model test has been adopted for the data analysis which is considered to be appropriate for the moderating effect.

Figure 1. PLS Model



Data Analysis

The normal distribution of data was assessed after examining the outliers. The normal distribution constitutes the key assumption for a structural equation model and statistical analysis (Hair Jr. et al., 2010).

Multicollinearity refers to the association between two or more exogenous variables, where the independent variable shows little correlation with other independent variables (Hair Jr. et al., 2010).

Table 3: Structural Model

Structural Model				
Relationship	Beta value	STD(Error)	T-Value	Decision
Emotional and employability	0.555089	0.031958	17.369326	supported

Table 4: Measurement Model

Measurement Model					
latent variable	Items	loading	Ave	CR	R square
Emotional intelligence			0.531427	0.883587	
	EISEA1	0.818615			
	EISEA2	0.806225			
	EISEA3	0.787457			
	EIUE1	0.61515			
	EIUE4	0.581814			
Employability			0.523212	0.847565	0.308123
	ES14	0.603944			
	ES15	0.795714			
	ES16	0.813247			
	ES3	0.763815			
	ES6	0.656977			
	ES8	0.766834			
		0.632564			

Table 5: Discriminate validity

Discriminate validity		
	Employability	Emotional intelligence
Employability	0.723333948	
Emotional intelligence	0.555089	0.728990398

According to Hair Jr. et al. (2013), unlike Cronbach's alpha, CR does not assume an equal indicator loading of the construct. CR varies between 0 and 1; the threshold value should not be lower than 0.60 (Henseler et al., 2009) but value from 0.70 and above is most desirable (Hair, et al., 2012). Accordingly, CR value between 0.6 and 0.7 indicates average internal consistency, while value between 0.70 and 0.90 is considered substantial (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Discussion

The results of emotional intelligence are interesting in nature. The two dimensions of emotional intelligence have not been significantly correlated with the employability of Malaysian business graduate students. Self-emotional appraisal and other self-emotions are not constant with findings. The remaining two emotional intelligence constructs affect the employability of Malaysian business graduate students. Intrepidly, when the PLS technique adopted from the inverse relations with emotional intelligence found a strong relationship of employability. This provides a new line of research that has been shown to be positive in the emotional intelligence construct, applying the entire construct to a single sample population.

Limitation and Area for Future Research

Except that several theoretical and practical contributions to the employability of students, some of the limitations are also attached with this research. The first aspect noticed is the possibility of error or variability in several behavioural studies that can be a possible limitation of the current research. This research focused on a procedure of single point of data collection that could be influenced by environmental factors. For example, there might be a chance that students are busy with a tight schedule in a class filled with urgency. This behavioural limitation is a major current limitation of the study.

Harman's single factor was utilised in the study to provide error free results and now it has been observed that study is problem-free. Data from other respondents may be collected from other discipline students, private universities, and other institutions or students of any other level of postgraduate, PhD level, which may minimise the error of problems.

Second, the research focuses on the 4 public universities of Malaysia (UUM, USM, UITM, and UM), and does not include all of Malaysia's private universities, colleges or institutions. However, using the same characteristics in the study, business graduates, last year students, from the public universities. The results of the study may differ from the current findings when sampling the population from different parts of Malaysia or the region. On that behalf, findings of study can be generalised at the any part of the country. Additionally, this study that focuses on the business graduate of public universities in Malaysia based on different

demographic variables has also been ignored such as gender, race, and subject specialisation. For this reason, future studies must include these factors in view and specialise in the need for more detailed results.

The third point was the adoption of the quantitative approach to show how the variables are related to the statements. The questionnaire is most widely accepted in social studies, but sometimes this evidence does not always yield the right result. The different result in the Malaysian research could be obtained by using triangulation such as qualitative and quantitative studies or by using lecture and employer interviews that also play an important part in employing a student or a technique to achieve detailed results.

Fourth, the study used a cross-sectional survey methodology in which the respondents' response was recorded on time that would not cause the results to be drawn on a casual basis among the variables of study (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). As it was found that data was collected on the spot through the questionnaire that allowed one limitation of the consistent people's behaviour. Longitudinal research for the future study is proposed with the following statement. This may help to further examine the employability of students in Malaysia.

Fifth, the study limitation is the use of a variable used in the analysis; several other emotional intelligence concepts can be used as the potential for future studies, particularly from the perspective of emotional intelligence. There is also potential scope for the future studies to use emotional intelligence as the multi-dimensional construct. For example, emotional intelligence approach has been adopted from Poon, 2014. In his study, the single dimension measure concluded the research. Future studies may use multi-dimensional emotional intelligence. Employability used as a single dimension of construct several other studies use the multi-dimensional employability i.e., skills and knowledge and abilities. This study therefore proposed a multi-dimensional construct.

Conclusion

The study's principal aim is to study the effect of emotional intelligence on business students in Malaysian public universities. The focus of this analysis was on the three objectives achieved through the summary of findings. This research also offers theoretical, practical and methodological contribution to the literature. Based on this empirical evidence, a number of new research directions were suggested. This is also useful in seeking to increase students' employability both in Malaysia and globally.



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