

# Moderating Effect of and Emotional Intelligence on the Relationship between Skills and Employability

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of the study is to examine moderating role of emotional intelligence on the relationship of perceived soft skills and employability in the business graduates of Malaysia. Study is descriptive and quantitative in nature. The data were collected from 380 students of four different universities (USM, UITM, UUM, UM) of Malaysia. CFA and SEM techniques have been applied to check the validity and hypotheses testing. The results divulged that different types of skills are significantly and positively associated with employability. Moreover, findings also proved that students level of emotional intelligence significantly moderate on the relationship of perceived soft skills and employability. This study gives insight understanding regarding the crucial role of skills and emotional intelligence to positively shape the employability.

**Key Words:** Perceived soft skills, Emotional Intelligence, Employability

## **Introduction**

Previous studies are paying great attention to employability as it is essential for progress and sustainability of economy (Hock Lim, 2007). Organizations prefer to hire employees through job-appropriate knowledge and understanding of skills and the communicative into employability (Earley, Bryant, Pianta, Clifford & Burchinal, 2006; Ledwith & Seymour, 2001). The past employability literature is existing skills in the form of generic skills, employability skills, core competencies and another kind of competencies. These studies determined skills be the important factor in employability literature. Additionally, management researcher claiming that Unemployment of graduates and youth has been increasing and the primary reason is; lack of skills which is ultimately effect on employability. The past researcher is using the employability and skills as the uniform construct, but in the modern era, these constructs are not conclusively. McQuaed and Lindsay (2007) clearly mentioned that employability is vast constructs and 52 factors influencing on employability and; skills is one major factor in employability construct. The past researcher considers that skill is important factors influencing

on the employability, but the whole construct is not deepened only on skills. In the studies, Lawrence and Pool (2008), Hoggard and Pollard (2008) and Finch et al (2009) and other authors have been following the current theme to examine the employability of individuals. The innovative work has done by the Rothwell et al (2008) developed employability model of the graduate student to clarify the complexity of construct. However, indicator and predictors of employability are at primary research. At the note, this study has to utilize the separate construct to examine between the perceived skill set and employability. Moreover, Hoggard and Pollard (2009) argued that skills be the important aspect of employability. Interestingly there has been little consideration has given between interaction skills and employability. The skills literature highlights that primary attention has given to basic organizational employability which is described into (Social Medico, Manpower, and Dichromatic employability). At the individual level, Quani and Qualiter (2014) proposed more comprehensive inquiry on employability to explore individual factors to work independently in the future organization.

Thus, the aim of the study to examine the moderating effect of emotional intelligence on the relationship of skills and employability in the business graduates of public universities in Malaysia. This study will make several contributions to the previous literature. First, its response to seeing the skills factors has been utilized to explore the variability of employability. Following emotional intelligence factors is using as individual variables and its effect on employability. On the contrary, emotional intelligence may serve as the moderator variable in the framework. To best of the author, this may be first attempt to examine the moderating effect of emotional intelligence relationship between the skills and employability. Therefore the focus of the study examines different individual factors (skills, emotional intelligence) examining that may influence employability of business graduates of Malaysia.

## **Literature Review**

### **Employability**

Employability is influenced by the abilities of an individual, qualities and expertise to understand and fully cater their future opportunities (Fugate, Kinicki & Ashforth, 2004). Reviewing of Past literature, most of the work has focused extensively on the external employability of the individual. Contrarily, internal employability is suggested by researchers as a line of future research. In the relation, Rothwell and Arnold's (2008) was developed the model to examine unique in the sense that it caters to internal employability as an additional indicator of employability (Wille, Fruyt & Feys, 2013). Rothwell (2007) and Khalid, Pahi and Ahmed (2016), developed and tested model of employability (self-perceived) provide uniqueness because the self-reporting measure is gaining popularity in management research but the due unavailability of empirical research, model yet in the preliminary stage in the research world. Later, enhanced this model to (self-perceived) employability model for the undergraduate-specific in the (2008). In the developing of the model, authors suggested this model may help the institution and government to examine graduate unemployment and student 'perception regarding their employability and will add the body of knowledge regarding the complexity of employability construct. In the lieu, it would make rational that past study has ignored the aspect of employability (self-perceived) and scarce literature has to endorse that fact. There is a

need to research concerning Rothwell (2008) employability model which is still unexplored, and no empirical evidence has identified specifically with skill factors as predictors and indicators. In many of writing on Employability, pragmatic and diverse aspect i.e. individual, external and personal factors (Mc Quaid & Lindsay, 2005), different component of skills (Hillage & Pollard, 1998), attributes (Outin, 1990) and attribute self-directedness or personal agency (Bezuidenhout, 2001; Coetzee, 2001) can be improved or enhanced like age (Heijden & Heijde, 2009), pre-graduate experience (Gault, Leach & Duey, 2010), and academic reputation of Institute (Tas & Ergin, 2012) Alternatively, Robinson (2000) suggested as set of skills to gaining job; or capability to acquire the job. However, on the single note, at the international setting, employability has not been treated as the uniform definition (Mc Quaid & Lindsay, 2005). Today, employability consider as the ability of the graduate to gain the employment (Harvey, 2009). As the employability researched has gained momentum, the scholar has paid more attention to employability factors. Skills are considering importance during the job search and interviews (Finch et. al., 2012; Lievens & Sackett, 2012; Nickson, Warhurst, Hurrell & Cullen, 2012).

### **Perceived Soft Skills**

Most of the studies considering skills concept are part of employability at the individual level. However, competencies of individuals create opportunities and help them in continuous career development (Heidjen & Heidjen, 1996). Additionally, Employability skills are important predictors of individual employability (Finch et. al., 2012; Lievens & Sackett, 2012; Nickson, Warhurst, Hurrell & Cullen, 2012) i.e. Communication skills (Ariana, 2010; Graham et. al., 2010; Andrews & Higson, 2008; Gray, 2010; Gardner, Milne, Stringer & Whiting, 2005; Cooper, 1997; Goby and Lewis, 2000), interpersonal skills (Wellman, 2010; Borghans, Weel, & Weinberg, 2008) and etc. Therefore, the phenomenon of employability is not only dependent upon the labor market forces ( Mcquid and Lindsay,2007), but also on other factors i.e. skills Knowledge and abilities.

Same assumptions have derived from the Malaysian perspective, and this might be Causing unemployment amongst graduates of Malaysia (Razak, Yusof, Syazana, Jaafar, & Talib, 2014; Hanapi & Nordin, 2014). In the sum, past studies has identified the 6 employability skills such as numeracy, communication (Nurita & Ainon 2004) teamwork (Rasul, Ismail, Ismail, Rajuddin & Rauf, 2009),problem-solving ,critical thinking (Omar, Manaf, Mohd, , Kassim, & Aziz, 2012 )literacy, information management (Suresh, 2006). These same results have been identified predictors for student employability in the Australia, United Kingdom and Canada, detailed discussion about the comparison has witnessed in the literature section. However, limited empirical research has been done particularly in relation these skills and employability of students, and as a result, there is a scarcity of data regarding its nature, predictors, and outcomes (Pool and Qualter, 2013; Pahi, Ab Hamid, & Khalid, 2016). Likewise, another gap has identified in the form of predictors of employability that essential skill required to be a better fit in the organization is the political skill (Jawahar, Meurs, Ferris, & Hochwarter, in press; Semadar, Robbins, & Ferris, 2006). As the past studies have concluded that political skills have several ways to enhance ability and capability to achieve the maximum in the business world

(Semadar, Robins, and Ferris, 2006). This skills can be adapt as an additional determinant predicting employability of the student. It may be interesting to inquire in depth; how political skills affect achievement of employability (Hannia, Rodri & Guez, 2009).

***H1; There is significant and positive relationship between perceive Soft Skills and on employability.***

### **Emotional Intelligence**

The researcher from the field of human resource management has considered Employability by a person's values, philosophy, emotions, sense of calling or mission, unconscious motives and traits (Boyatzis & Sala, 2004; Boyatzis, 2006). Some of the author's supports employability improves a person's suitability for appropriate and sustainable employment (Bezuidenhout, 2010; Coetzee, 2011; Fugate et al., 2004; Yorke & Knight, 2007).

Leggat, Farrell, and Couper (2013) suggested that emotional intelligence is critical because as an individual differences best between stimulus and behavior. Furthermore, it's linkage to the differences of coping mechanism to incorporate emotional intelligence in the behavior, especially in the rapid changing environment it would be right to say that emotion intelligence has a direct influence on integral copying process (Salovey, Bedell, Detweiler, & Mayer, 1999; Petrides, Perez-Gonzalez, & Furnham, 2007). In the sum, the word of for use this coping process is employability.

Moreover there is apt evidence proven that emotional intelligence considering important predicator of employability related outcomes (Darce, Pool, and Lorraine, 2013: Coetzee, 2013) however, several aspects of emotional intelligence has ignored or are yet not reported, including self-management, social management, social awareness, and relationship management which are suggested to be examined by Atta, Ather, and Bano (2013). Ottino, (2010) recommended further studies should be conducted to explore the relationship between employability and other variables, such as emotional intelligence (see Beukes, 2009). An exploration of how both cognition and emotion, for example, affect employability competence would be of value. Poon (2014) suggested that emotional intelligence should not observe directly. Although the importance of emotional intelligence has observed as moderator in the several setting such as i.e., the moderating variability of emotional intelligence between the several variables, i.e., Ciarrochi, Deane & Anderson (2002) suggested that emotional intelligence has significant and positive role in the stress and mental health. Secondly, Jordan, Ashkanasy & Hartel (2002) claim that moderating effect emotional intelligence has found between the emotional and behavior reactions to job security. The Same moderating effect obtained by Karimi, Leggat, Farrell & Couper (2013) exploring moderating effect of emotional intelligence between the wellbeing and perceived job stress. Moreover, several researchers have proposed theories and attempted to clear this controversy how the predictors of behaviors have moderated by the individual differences. However, there is no consistently reliable conclusion drawn as yet how emotional intelligence moderate the role of the employability skills and employability( self-perceived) (Bastian et. al., 2005; Potgietez and Coetzee, 2013) specifically on the undergraduate level.

***H2; Emotional intelligence significantly moderates on the relationship of perceived soft skills and employability.***

The relationship between skills and (self-perceived) employability has reported in the several sense but how personality difference of emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between skills and employability is limited in nature. In conclusion, his perception about the employability (self-perceived) increase or employability may be enhanced. Although the importance of emotional intelligence has observed in the past studies however at student level little attention has been paid. To summarize, available literature with a focus on skill factor, consider the viewpoint of the faculty, employee or student. Additionally, some of the studies concentrated on the faculty or industry basis (Ramlee, 2002). However, review of the literature suggests that there is no attempt has yet been made to structurally map out all the antecedents together in management research i.e. skills factors, personality factors, emotional intelligence factors, and employability from a student's perspective.

Therefore, understanding and examination of employability construct at the individual level, specifically with the moderating effect of emotional intelligence and personality is critical especially in huge contextual, and the theoretical gap exists in the body of knowledge. This study attempts to fill the gap by analyzing the relationship between emotional intelligence, Skills and its ultimate effect on Employability.

**Methodology**

The study confine employability issues of business students and current facts endorsing that business graduates are top most in the youth unemployment in Malaysia. That provides a reason behind This research focusing on the four universities of Malaysia (USM, UUM, UM AND UITM,).These universities were producing the 35% percent business graduates out of total (According to the Department of Statics Malaysia, 2013). The selected universities represent the exact mix of diversity of Malaysian students. Moreover, these universities located in the different location of Peninsular Malaysia.

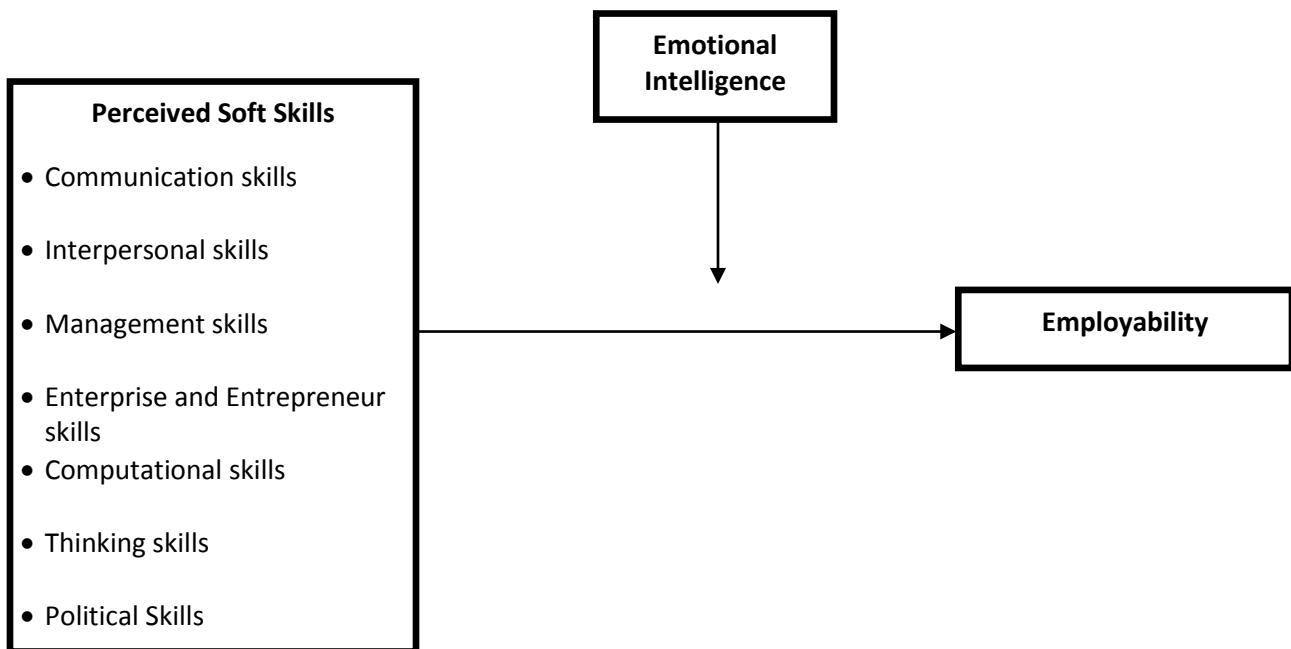
Study is descriptive and quantitative in nature. Questionnaire survey method was used to collect the data from respondents. Non-probability sampling technique has been used for data collection. Krejice and Morgan (1970) Sampling size formula have adapted to calculate the sample size which is near to be around 400.

**Measures:**

The employability is broad term but for the self-perceived employability is "perceived ability to attain sustainable employment appropriate to one's qualification level.' The Employability of students will examine by four further items had been generated by the authors of the undergraduate study (Rothwell, Herbert & Rothwell, 2008). While the scale had not performed particularly well previously ( $\alpha = .70$ ), Emotional intelligence server has adapted from the Bradberry & Greaves (2004) and is based on the Goleman's et el. (2002) model. This instrument has the four dimensions to measure the emotional intelligence. This research instrument contains the 28 items. The personality trait used as the 44 big five inventory BFI adopted from the (Jhon, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991; Bent, Martinez, & Jhon, 1998; Jhon & Srivasta, 1999). The

students of the universities will be the respondents. The reason behind choosing these respondents is that they continue to attract criticism from industry stakeholders with regard to their current expertise and personal attributes (Atfield and Purcell, 2010; Lowden et al., 2011). The employability skills of the students used the employability skills model from the Willis Taylor, 1999 widely utilized in the in the several types of research in the, i.e., (Wikramasinghey & Perera 2010; Shukran et el 2006; Rasul et el, 2010).

**Theoretical Model:**



**Confirmatory factor Analysis:**

<b>Constructs</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>loadings</b>	<b>AVE</b>	<b>CR</b>
<b>CS</b>	CS3	0.64	<b>0.55</b>	<b>0.82</b>
	CS6	0.66		
	CS7	0.85		
	CS8	0.78		
<b>EM</b>	EP12	0.60	<b>0.52</b>	<b>0.88</b>
	EP14	0.81		
	EP15	0.80		
	EP16	0.77		
	EP3	0.68		
	EP6	0.76		
	EP8	0.58		
<b>ES</b>	ES1	0.84	<b>0.73</b>	<b>0.93</b>
	ES2	0.91		
	ES3	0.84		
	ES4	0.88		
	ES5	0.79		
<b>IS</b>	IS1	0.70	<b>0.51</b>	<b>0.87</b>
	IS2	0.69		
	IS5	0.74		
	IS6	0.68		
	IS7	0.57		
	IS8	0.79		
	IS9	0.78		
	<b>MS</b>			
<b>OS</b>	MS1	0.78	<b>0.54</b>	<b>0.82</b>
	MS2	0.82		
	MS3	0.60		
	MS4	0.62		
	MS5	0.81		
	MS6	0.81		
	MS7	0.79		
<b>PS</b>	OS1	0.64	<b>0.52</b>	<b>0.81</b>
	OS4	0.78		
	OS5	0.76		
	OS6	0.74		
<b>TS</b>	PS5	0.68	<b>0.52</b>	<b>0.89</b>
	PS6	0.74		
	PS7	0.63		
	PS8	0.82		
	TS1	0.71		



TS2	0.65
TS3	0.80
TS4	0.76
TS5	0.62
TS6	0.73
TS7	0.68
TS8	0.77

**Discriminate Validity**

**Table2**

The above mention tables are representing the discriminant and convergent validity of the model as the values of AVE and composite reliability are greater than 0.5 and 0.8 respectively that’s why this model has convergent validity. As far as discriminant validity is concerned, it depends upon the values of square root of AVE which must be greater than the correlation values. As in table, the values of correlation are less than the values of square root of AVE so discriminant validity is also present in the model.

Items	CS	EM	ES	IS	MS	OS	PS	TS
<b>CS</b>	<b>0.7421</b>							
<b>EM</b>	0.4219	<b>0.724</b>						
<b>ES</b>	0.1460	0.378	<b>0.858</b>					
<b>IS</b>	0.5376	0.631	0.417	<b>0.716</b>				
<b>MS</b>	0.5439	0.633	0.404	0.635	<b>0.757</b>			
<b>OS</b>	0.3132	0.442	0.300	0.378	0.442	<b>0.739</b>		
<b>PS</b>	0.6082	0.624	0.219	0.729	0.588	0.353	<b>0.724</b>	
<b>TS</b>	0.5352	0.574	0.223	0.561	0.546	0.454	0.640	<b>0.721</b>



**SEM**

<b>Relationships</b>	<b>Beta</b>	<b>S.E</b>	<b>t-Value</b>
<b>CS -&gt; EM</b>	0.345	0.195	1.76393
<b>CS * EI -&gt; EM</b>	0.636	0.29	2.13736
<b>EI -&gt; EM</b>	1.253	0.21	5.95989
<b>ES -&gt; EM</b>	0.285	0.240	1.18738
<b>ES * EI -&gt; EM</b>	0.478	0.370	1.29184
<b>IS -&gt; EM</b>	1.401	0.284	4.92547
<b>IS * EI -&gt; EM</b>	1.727	0.470	3.66733
<b>MS -&gt; EM</b>	0.88	0.319	2.78472
<b>MS * EI -&gt; EM</b>	1.327	0.539	2.46104
<b>OS -&gt; EM</b>	0.322	0.167	1.93131
<b>OS * EI -&gt; EM</b>	0.328	0.324	1.01173
<b>PS -&gt; EM</b>	0.239	0.254	0.94181
<b>PS * EI -&gt; EM</b>	0.565	0.462	1.22363
<b>TS -&gt; EM</b>	0.395	0.226	1.75174
<b>TS * EI -&gt; EM</b>	0.901	0.390	2.30995

**Regression Weights:**

In the meanwhile from the point view of direct relationship emotional intelligence has the positive and significant effect (5.959894) Interpersonal skills have consistent relationship between employability IS -> EM (4.925471). Management skills have consistent relationship between employability MS > EM (2.784721). Communications skill has the consistent relationship between employability OS > EM (1.93131). Thinking skills has the consistent relationship between employability TS > EM (1.75174). Political skills have not the consistent relationship between employability EPS > EM (0.941812). ). Enterprise skills have not a consistent relationship between employability ES > EM (1.18738).

The moderating effect of emotional intelligence and employability is observed in the currents statistics as mentioned above. The emotional intelligence moderates between computations skills and employability CS \* EI > EM (2.137366). The emotional intelligence moderates between Interpersonal skills and employability IS \* EI > EM (3.667336). The emotional intelligence moderates between management skills and employability MS \* EI > EM (2.461042). The emotional intelligence moderates between computations skills and employability TS \* EI > EM (2.309953). The emotional intelligence does not moderate between enterprise skills and employability ES \* EI > EM (1.291842). The emotional intelligence does not moderate between communication skills and employability OS \* EI -> EM (1.011736). The emotional intelligence does not moderate between political skills and employability PS \* EI > EM (1.223634).

## **Discussion**

The emotional intelligence is considered crucial construct when the Mayor Solovey (1995) developed the model by the ability to examine the predictors of work outcome. Now this construct has been conceptualizing at employee level to examine several work outcomes.

The purpose of the study is to examine moderating role of emotional intelligence on the relationship of perceived soft skills and employability in the business graduates of Malaysia. Study is descriptive and quantitative in nature. However the communication, interpersonal, computing, management, enterprise and entrepreneurship skills, thinking in the single framework has gain little attention. Especially at the Malaysian background, only one study has found in the context of examining the skills in the Malaysian students and conclude the variation of skill between the students found in the different public universities. This study shows the communication, interpersonal, computing, management, enterprise and entrepreneurship skills, thinking are positively connected with employability perception about those students. On, the skills side of study, The theoretically it's proven in the different studies that these skills (communication, interpersonal, computing, management, enterprise and entrepreneurship skills, thinking) and has the significant relationship of employability but scarce literature has found in the relationship with political skills, The more specifically the moderating role emotional intelligence and skills (communication, interpersonal, computing, management, enterprise and entrepreneurship skills, thinking) and employability. This study focusing on the employability of Malaysians student for that purpose drive nine hypothesis and out of fourteen, nine were supported, and five have found not supported with the study.

Additionally, emotional intelligence has the great importance in the employability. It has endorsed last fact high emotional intelligence students are more capable of coping the copying situation in the simple words on the other way around students can learn and understand about the skills if they are more. These findings were supporting the theory of cognitive-affective Process theory and empirical evident to support postulate from the findings. The theory postulates that employability perception is influence by the ability, knowledge, and skills as this study focusing on the skill factors. On this regards communication, interpersonal, computing, management, enterprise and entrepreneurship skills, thinking and emotional intelligence as the personal resources effects on the perception about employability.

## **Conclusion**

The Main purpose of the study was to examine the moderating impact of emotional intelligence on the communication, interpersonal, computing, management, enterprise and entrepreneurship skills, and thinking and political skills in the business graduates of public universities in Malaysia. This study was focusing on the two objectives which achieved by flowing summary of conclusions. The second objective achieves by examining moderating impact of emotional intelligence on communication, interpersonal, computing, management, enterprise and entrepreneurship skills, and thinking and employability. The hypothesis has driven by empirical evidence moderating impact of emotional intelligence on communication, interpersonal, computing, management, enterprise and entrepreneurship skills, and thinking and employability. This hypothesis found the significant.

The results show that moderating impact emotional intelligence communication, interpersonal, computing, management, enterprise and entrepreneurship skills, and thinking and employability. Moreover, the study provides theoretical, practical and methodological adding the body of knowledge by the in the term by skill factors effect on the employability. Based on this empirical evidence several new directions of research has proposed. These findings of the study are valuable in search of enhancing the employability of undergraduate's students in the context of Malaysian and international aspect too.

### **Limitations & Future Directions**

Except for those several contributions for the theoretically and practical to the employability of students, some of the limitation has attached with the current study. Firstly, the thing observed in the several behavioral studies that chance for the error or variance could be the possible limitation of the present study. This study was focusing on the single point of data collection procedure that might be influenced by the environmental factors. Secondly, the study concentrating on the 4(USM, UUM, UITM, and UITM) public universities in Malaysia and ignored other private universities, colleges, and institution in the Malaysia. Thirdly, the study adopted the quantitative method to prove the claimed relationship between the variables. The questionnaire is most accepted in the social science research but on the other side this data not always produce the correct result. If the study used triangulation such as the qualitative and quantities study or used interviews from the lecture and employer, who are also the stakeholder in the employability of student or other methodology to carry out detailed results of the study might produce the different result in the Malaysia. Fourthly, the study has used the technique of cross-sectional survey in which the response of respondent has observed in the due period that not permits the findings to conclude in the casual relationship. In observation, that data have collected on the spot questionnaire that will allow one limitation of the consistent behavior of people will consistent. In the light following observation, longitudinal study the proposed for the future study. This study may help more detailed inquiry about the employability phenomena in the Malaysia graduates.

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