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A Systematic Literature Review on Graduates' Social Intelligence

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Abstract: Social intelligence is becoming more important in the workplace as it helps people to be aware of their interactions which creates a harmonious working environment. As such, human resource officers are starting to prioritise this element as one of the criteria that they seek in a candidate during an interview. This paper is a systematic literature review on the current criteria that human resource officers look for during job interviews and their perceptions of graduates' values in relation to social intelligence. This systematic literature review employed the four procedures by Gessler & Siemmer (2020) to clearly review previous literature. The review has highlighted that human resource officers have shifted their emphasis from academic performance to social intelligence when interviewing candidates during a job interview. However, graduates seem to have difficulties in showcasing social intelligence. Thus, further investigation is required in relation to how graduates perceive social intelligence and how they demonstrate social intelligence, either in oral or written communication. Apart from that, the review has also highlighted the inconsistencies in requirements between private and public sectors, as well as the size of the company. Thus, further investigation is needed to investigate these inconsistencies.

Keywords: Social intelligence, graduates' employability, workplace communication

1. Introduction

Qualification is no longer the main criterion that employers look for in the future workforce. Employers' emphasis has shifted from academic qualification to soft skills (Succi & Canovi, 2019). Graduates need to prepare themselves in developing their soft skills, interpersonal skills, and people skills, as human resource officers have prioritised soft skills over technical skills when hiring candidates (Loures et al., 2021). Currently, it was found that graduates entering the workplace lacked social competencies and employers preferred graduates who have high level of social intelligence (Jameson et al., 2016). As such, graduates who are not able to demonstrate having social intelligence in their communication have a low chance of being employed.

Social intelligence involves understanding other people's feelings, thoughts, emotions, and social cues to control their actions in the social environment (Goswami, 2018). It is closely related to communication and interactions that supports the enhancement of interpersonal connections (Subramaniam et al., 2019). Social intelligence helps develop individuals' capability in understanding the intentions of others, using appropriate social strategies, taking control on complicated social settings, interacting with others, and adapting to social situations (Kong, 2015). In relation to that, social skills that individuals possess are associated with the ability to speak in a clear and convincing way that involves saying the appropriate message properly at the right time. It involves building and maintaining positive relationships, acting properly in between each other, to deal with problems without degrading those who work under the said person, and to negotiate and manage conflict swiftly (Mohamed, 2020).

Social intelligence is also an item that suggests the availability and ability to produce opinions and to understand

the opinion of others, the ability to recognise both verbal and nonverbal cues in the communication process, the capability to interact with colleague, their expertise to work in a team, their level of empathy towards others, the skills to find a way out of difficult situations, while considering individual's demographic aspects of communication (Onufriieva et al., 2020). A person who is highly socially capable and has more social experience can understand other people better, which allows them to act appropriately to cater to specific social situations (Koraus et al., 2017). Human resource officers believed that candidates with sociable personality traits are deemed as potential and talented employees (Kabalina & Osipova, 2021). When employees have a high degree of social intelligence, they then have the competence to understand and analyse other people's feelings, emotions, intentions, and behaviour (Goswami, 2022). Therefore, graduates with social intelligence are closely related as having good communication and interpersonal skills when working for the company.

Good communication is necessary for graduates as it happens in almost every workplace daily. Maintaining suitable communication is necessary in the workplace environment as it helps nurture trust within the employers and affects employees' performance at work (Bencsik, 2020). During the entry level in most jobs, companies are hiring potential candidates that fit the company's objective to be shortlisted for an interview. From the very moment a graduate applies for a job, their written and spoken communication is already being assessed by human resource officers (Azmi et al., 2018). According to Piopiunik et al. (2020), college graduates that portray good social and cognitive ability are more likely to be called for an interview. However, the current preparedness of graduates in terms of their skills to enter the industry are unmatched with the requirements needed from human resource officers (Meeks; 2017, Suleman & Laranjeiro; 2018). The importance of having good social intelligence surpasses the current capability of graduates on their entry level in the workplace (Hirudayaraj et al., 2021). Graduates need to develop and acquire a combination of technical and soft skills which include communication, teamwork, problem solving, critical and innovative thinking, creativity, self-confidence, ethical understanding, as well as the willingness to take responsibility for their actions (Clarke, 2017; Moore and Morton, 2017).

This paper is a systematic review of the importance of social intelligence in the workplace and perceptions of graduates' social intelligence as perceived by human resource officers, which poses an issue that needs further research.

2. Methodology

To identify the appropriate criteria of the literature reviewed, this systematic literature review adapted the methodology offered by Gessler and Siemer (2020) which consists of the four specific procedures (refer Figure 1) for a systematic literature review. According to Hart (2018), this approach allows other researchers to replicate and update the literature by providing a transparent account of the reviewers' procedure.
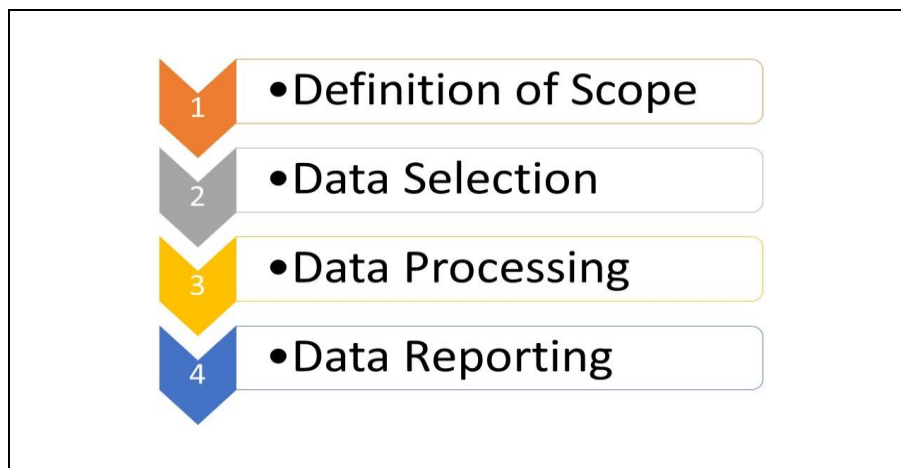

Fig.1 - Procedures for a systematic literature review by Gessler and Siemer (2020)

2.1 Definition of Scope

This systematic literature review selected relevant literature on the perception of human resource officers on graduates' social intelligence. The aim of this systematic literature review is to provide additional insight about the issue globally as well as applying and testing the methodology implemented in a diverse area. Specifically, the research questions to be addressed are as following:

- What literature can be identified when applying systematic literature review on graduates' social intelligence from the perspective of human resource officers?
- What are the limitations of the literature from previous study?

2.2 Data Selection

The data extraction for this systematic literature review search was conducted between July 2022 to January 2023. It involved searching databases for relevant studies in peer-reviewed literature. The following databases were selected for data extraction: Scopus, Emerald, Web of Science (WoS), ERIC, and Google Scholar. To search titles, abstracts, and keywords, this study utilised a search query by breaking the main topic down into search terms as showed in Table 1. The terms that were searched for are (("human resource officer*" OR "hr manager*" OR "recruiter*" OR "human resource management*" OR "HR officer*" OR "talent scout" OR "talent recruiter") AND ("graduate*" OR "fresh graduate*" OR "degree holder" OR "grad*" OR "student*") AND ("social intelligence*" OR "social skill*" OR "relational skill" OR "people skill*" OR "street smart*")). This study limited search to English peer-reviewed academic articles published from 2016 to 2022. Other than that, the type of documents was restricted so that only full text "journal articles" were available as the source. Figure 2 represents the stages of selecting sources from literature.
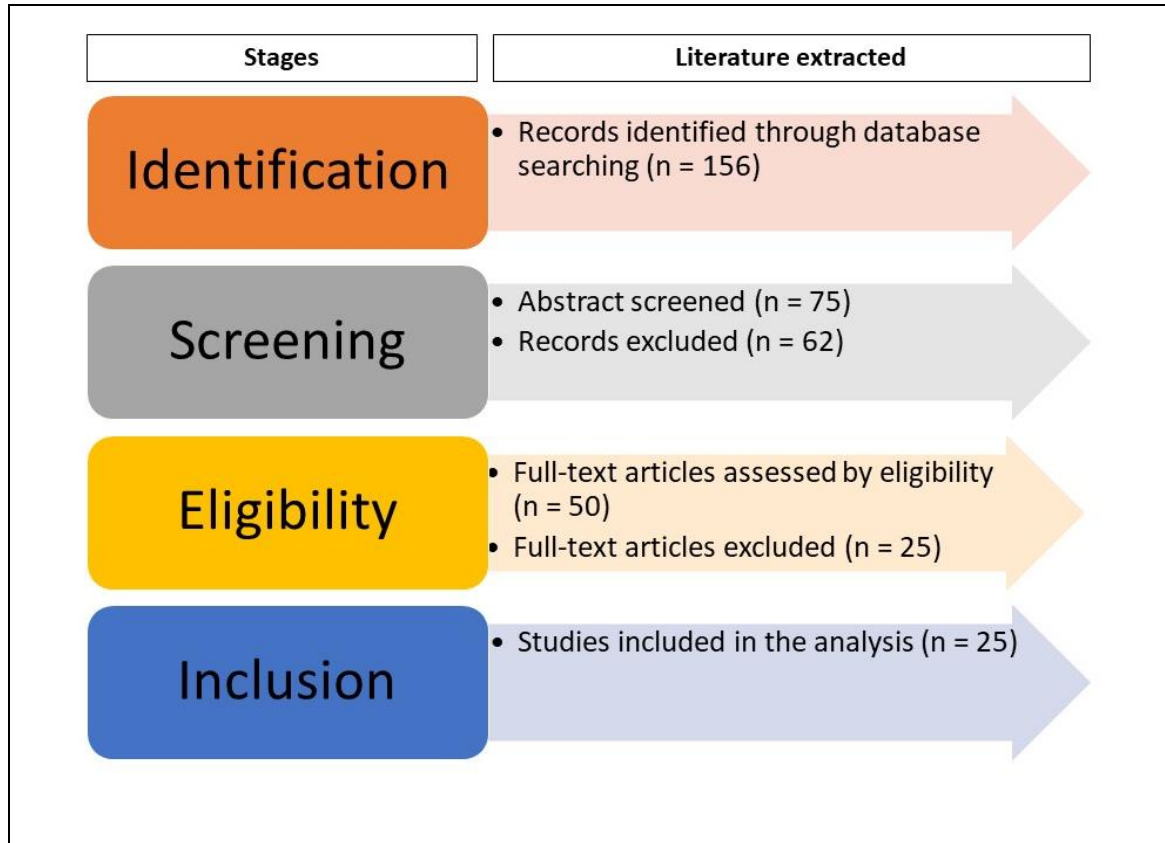

Fig. 2 - Stages of selecting sources from literature.

Table 1 - Search string

Database	Search String
Scopus, Emerald, Web of Science (WoS), ERIC, and Google Scholar	(("human resource officer*" OR "hr manager*" OR "recruiter*" OR "human resource management*" OR "HR officer*" OR "talent scout" OR "talent recruiter") AND ("graduate*" OR "fresh graduate*" OR "degree holder" OR "grad*" OR "student*") AND ("social intelligence*" OR "social skill*" OR "relational skill" OR "people skill*" OR "street smart*")).

First, the titles, abstracts, and keywords of the journal articles were scanned for any connection to our main topic. All articles related to other disciplines were excluded. After going through multiple databases searching, the following stage involved evaluating the abstracts based on predefined criteria. Accordingly, 81 of the 156 articles were excluded. Second, the relevance of the full-text articles was evaluated. Ultimately, 25 articles remained for further examination. This study aimed at providing a comprehensive understanding of the topic, regardless of different disciplinary perspectives. To be included in the review, the articles had to fulfil three criteria as Figure 3.
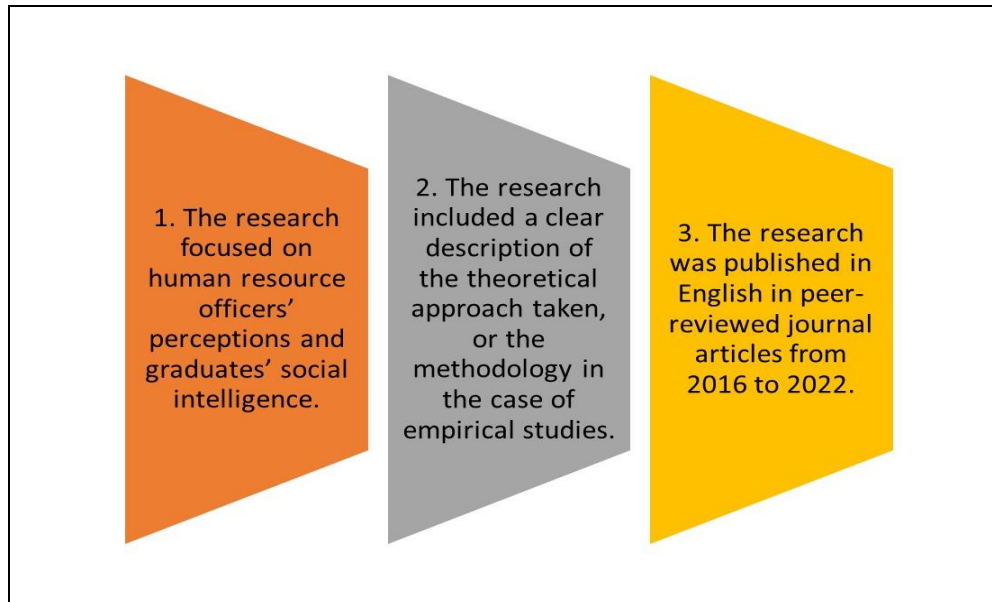
Fig. 3 - Inclusion criteria

2.3 Data Processing

This stage involved assessing the quality of the journal including critical appraisal, extracting relevant data, data analysis, and synthesis. To characterise the literature examined in this study, main characteristics were extracted from each study such as authors, sources, and date of publication. The study was summarised, and research questions were noted. Based on the research questions, this study developed an overview of the themes emerging from the articles. Subsequently, a summary was developed based on the major findings of each article in the last section.

2.4 Data reporting

In this final step, a descriptive analysis of the characteristics of the articles were reported. To characterise the literature included in this study, multiple categories were applied such as date of publication, subject discipline of the journal, types of articles, and emerging topics. Given that the study is on the general observation of the issue, the study focused more on the application of the method and the reporting of the data.

3. Results

Graduates should acquire soft skills upon graduation as these are the basic skills that human resource officers look for in graduates (Meeks, 2017). In Portugal, Suleman and Laranjeiro (2018) reported that human resource officers were unsatisfied with the current graduates' preparedness in terms of their communication skills. Studies in Sudan and Ghana also reported similar findings where the human resource officers were unsatisfied with business graduates' social intelligence as they put the value of soft skills way ahead of technical skills (Kamal, 2020; Kwarteng & Mensah, 2022). For accounting graduates, it was also reported that these graduates had not acquired good speaking skills valued by employers' s (Atanasovski et al., 2019; Bressler & Pence, 2019). Ebaid (2021) reported that the human resource officers in Saudi Arabia sought accounting graduates with personal and interpersonal skills over technical skills. However, it was found that these graduates lacked these soft skills. Hanbazazah (2020) found that Saudi Arabian technical and vocational graduates were not able to work well with others and dispute resolution effectively due to lake of social flexibility.

The demand for soft skills by human resource officers could also be observed in the United States and Australia. In the United States, Lyu and Liu (2021) found that job vacancies on energy sector demanded for applicants to have high levels of social and cognitive skills, people conduct, and customer service skills. Lotzar (2018) reported that human resource officers preferred graduates with good interpersonal skills where they could communicate and influence others. In Australia, the human resource officers identified effective communication, teamwork, collaboration, as well as critical thinking skills as being key graduate insufficiency (Prikshat et al., 2018). They had shifted their emphasis from academic achievement to soft skills such as the ability to communicate, to solve problems efficiently, to have good behaviour and teamwork ability (Mainga et al., 2022). Similar findings could also be found in Canada, United Kingdom, and Italy. In Canada, it was reported that human resource officers favoured graduates who demonstrated good soft skills, particularly communication skills (Chhinzer & Russo, 2017). This is similar to the findings of the study conducted by Dean & East (2019) in United Kingdom, who found that the ability to communicate well with

others was crucial. However, graduates did not seem to prioritise soft skills in preparing themselves for workplace. In Italy, it was found that graduates underestimate the importance of preparing themselves with the necessary soft skills (Dolce et al., 2019).

Subsequently, having the competencies in social intelligence and soft skill can boost graduates' career and growth in the industry (Meeks, 2017) because well-equipped graduates with soft skills can present themselves better and help them excel in their career (Srivastava & Kuri, 2021). This is also required by human resource officers in Asian countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia. In the Philippines, Plantilla (2017) reported that human resources officers take into account graduates' soft skills when they applied for a position in the company. In Indonesia, it was reported that graduates lacked interpersonal and poor communication skills in English (Prikshat et al., 2018). In India, the majority of graduates did not meet the requirement for hiring, where only a fraction of them possessed the adequate social and technical skills set by employers. In Malaysia, it was reported that graduates seem to have poor attitude, lack of confidence, and shortage of English skills (Noah & Aziz, 2020; Prikshat, et al., 2018). These are the basic skills valued by Malaysian human resource officers on top of information technology, interpersonal and personal skills, and good communication skills (Ismail et al., 2020), Faizahani et al. (2019) found that most fresh graduates lacked negotiation skills and proper communication skills as well as social communication skills such as not being diplomatic towards the interviewer. Written and verbal communication were deemed as the most important professional skills. Lange et al. (2022) indicated that poor communication skills is the main cause for rejecting a graduate during an interview. Thus, it could be concluded that graduates with high level of social intelligence and have good communication skills are preferred by human resource officers. This conclusion is in line with the findings in the study conducted by Chand et al. (2019).

Nonetheless, there are studies that show human resource officers do not consider soft skills as the main important criterion. For example, Mainga et al. (2022) reported that social skills were the least important skills required by employers when recruiting new graduates for entry-level positions. Lyu & Liu (2021) indicated that company's productivity is not positively affected by social skills that graduates possess, even if it is the most frequently required skills. It is believed that on-job training is the best tool to develop these skills (Low et al., 2016). These findings contradict the findings from a study conducted by Bishop (2017), who found that having adequate soft skills is one of the signs that that graduates can perform in the company well. This raises questions about whether human resource officers do look for graduates with high social intelligence, or they recruit any candidates who have the capability to learn and perform well on the job, as job training is indicated as the best tool for gaining job experience in the workplace.

In assessing candidates' social intelligence, the assessment during the interview process differs between companies (Succi, 2019). Findings by Briones et al. (2021) indicated that there are differences in term of skill preference between public and private companies, although both businesses assess similar graduates' interpersonal and technical skills. A larger company with more employees also has a greater requirement for communication across age groups compared to smaller companies (Hirudayaraj et al., 2021). These different preferences raise challenges for higher learning institutions and the graduates alike to develop skills that can match all companies. Hence, more research should investigate multiple variables regarding the different types of company and the organisation capacity to identify the different preferences from various companies.

There are studies that have examined the relationship between social intelligence and gender. Heo et al. (2022) found that social intelligence is purely associated with demographic background, particularly with gender. Malik et al. (2018) found that male students have higher level of social intelligence than female students. Similar finding was reported by Sanwal & Sareen (2022) who found that male employees had more social skills and social awareness compared to female employees. On the contrary, Hashem (2021) indicated that female college students have a high level of self-regulation as well as social intelligence. This suggests that studies are required to examine the relationship between social intelligence and gender.

4. Conclusion

Based on the presented evidence, it can be concluded that most human resource officers prefer graduates with social intelligence and soft skills over technical skills. Nevertheless, there are previous studies that are against this general perception that companies are only looking for candidates with good communication and social intelligence skills. Future studies could address the three main concerns on previous literatures; the different types of companies' preferences, the necessary skills required for candidates to be employed, as well as the demographic differences. As several scholars tried to explain their inconsistent findings, it is confusing for graduates to prepare themselves with the necessary skills; whether they should focus on the academic achievement, social intelligence, or simply their ability to learn and adapt in the company.

Acknowledgements

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