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GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY IN SABAH'S AGRICULTURE SECTOR: PERCEPTION AND EXPECTATION OF EMPLOYERS AND GRADUATES

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Abstract

Graduate Employability and unemployment is a common problem in most developing countries, including Malaysia. Among the factors that contribute to unemployability are lack of experience, communication skills, soft skills and industry-academia gap of mismatching graduates' skills with industrial demands. In view of this, it is discovered that very few studies show graduate employability skills among agricultural graduates in Malaysia, especially in Sabah. Therefore, this study aims to identify the expectations and the important criteria in terms of skills, knowledge, or personal qualities of agricultural graduates from the Faculty of Sustainable Agriculture according to employers' views and to compare with graduates' perspective in Sabah. Besides, this research intended to identify the graduates level of awareness regarding the employers' expectation. This study employs a mixed approach in which interview sessions and open-ended surveys were conducted with seven government and private employers in agriculture-based companies in Sabah. A total of 77 FSSA graduates in 2019 represent new agricultural employees. Data were collected from two different sets of questionnaires. A direct comparison was made by applying the same scoring method to both employers and graduates. Overall this study shows an inverse relationship between the expectation of employers and graduates perceptions. Therefore, cooperation between institutions and industry is crucial to reduce this gap. This effort can be done by holding a roundtable discussion, industrial talk at the university and sabbatical training of lecturers to agricultural-related companies. The industry can also be involved in the process of establishing new programs and curriculum revisions. It is hoped that this effort will produce graduates that are matched with the needs of the industry. Hence will increase graduate employability.

Keyword: Employability, Employers' Expectation, Graduates' Perception,

1.0 Introduction

Quintessentially, obtaining a job is vital for a person to survive in this world in order to have a source of fixed income, improve one's economic level, contribute provision to his / her family, own a comfortable accommodation, and the basic essentials besides also hold a position in the society. Usually, career planning for the youths starts during the academic period which should be the educators' primary focus. Relatedly, they would be well prepared and ready to venture out in the working world after graduation. According to Hall (2002), the early career years are utmost crucial for young people as there are the starting point in their working lives. As to keep up with the expected standard, talented graduates with positive attitude and vibe have higher chances in capturing the employers' interests to be developed into employees' capacities within the employers' organizations (Gunkel, Schlägel, Langella, Peluchette, and Reshetnyak, 2013) as employability is related to oneself-concept, emotional value, well-being and personality.

Graduates nowadays are struggling to find jobs after they have completed their studies in higher institutions especially suitable ones that are paralleled with their academic qualifications. In Sabah, in terms of employment across all industries, agriculture sector is the second largest contributor after services as reported in The Sabah Development Corridor blueprint (2008-2025). For Agricultural students in Sabah, this is a vast opportunity for them to get involve in Sabah agricultural sector. At the same time, they can obtain some exposure regarding the industry, gain essential knowledge, and have a bit of concrete ideas about what to expect and the skills needed for a job related to agriculture.

Eldeen, Abumalloh, George, and Aldossary (2018) points out that, preparing and providing graduates with the required skills to meet the needs and requirements of the labour market is one of the basic tasks of education. However, due to the rapid emergence of advance technologies, economic crises and industries' demands; the labour market is changing over time (Anas and Hamzah, 2017). Hence to be employable, several

graduates' factors are sought after by the employers which are the academic qualifications, knowledge, multiple skills in various fields, expertise, competency, proficiency, ability, attitude, and aptitude. On the other hand, not all students fulfilled these necessary qualities as a study done by Seng (2019) reveals that only 20% of local graduates have the technical skills required by employers. According to Hamid, Islam, and Hazilah (2014), the employers have complained about graduates who are lacking the skills to carry out assigned work effectively and they also display low performances in the work place.

Thus, this particular study aims to analyse and examine the employers' expectations towards the graduates in relation to skills, knowledge and personal qualities including their awareness on the employers' expectations by using a CareerEDGE model developed by Pool and Sewell (2007).

1.1 Objectives

In general, this study intends to explore the employers' expectations towards the agriculture graduates and also the graduates' awareness in relation to their skills, knowledge and personal qualities which could assist them to be employable in the future.

1. To investigate the expectations of employers towards the agriculture graduates concerning the skills, knowledge and personal qualities of fresh graduates.
2. To identify the graduates' level of awareness regarding the employers' expectations.
3. To examine which employees' capabilities that the employers found most valuable among their skills, knowledge and personal qualities.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Employability in Malaysia

The ability for a person to gain initial employment, maintain his / her employment and obtain new employment is known as employability, or in simple words; the capability to get and keep fulfilling work with fixed salary. In year 2006 to 2009, the average employments rates were higher

among graduates from post-graduate degrees. In the science specialization, about 66.9% of the graduates were employed and 33.2% of them were not yet employed (Sirat, Heng, Shuib, Rahman, Kamil and Singh2012).

Issues concerning graduates' unemployment and employability have been raised many times due to the changing of economic fortunes and employment structures. In the meantime, an enormous number of graduates enter the local labour market every year. Subsequently, they face stiff competition in job hunting as there are more supply than demand. The amount of job vacancies offered in the present is much lesser compared to the large number of job seekers. According to an online report in July 2020 by JobStreet.Com, the labour market in the country is heavily affected due to the Covid 19 pandemic since March of this year. Over 800,000 people are unemployed whilst the job vacancies available are 50% lesser.

In 1996, Malaysia faced a financial crisis which caused an uprising among unemployed graduates. Hence, policy makers, educators and industry players have revisited the issue regarding the role of a university as a centre to fulfil the need to supply trained workers for the labour market. The higher education institutions are expected to produce a competent workforce for the various industries, sectors and fields. Nevertheless, this crucial matter cannot be defined solely based on the employers' expectations, but also by the nation's aspirations.

2.2 The Importance of Employability skills

Employability skills are skills preferred by the employers, usually to ensure the skills possessed by an employee are matched with his / her current job. According to Tan and Arnold (2012), there is a general consensus that employability refers to a wide range of attributes and competencies which allow the job seekers to gain and maintain employment such as communication skills, logical, analytical and problem solving skills, positive personality, good values, confidence and integrity, flexibility and adaptability, innovation and creativity, and last but not least is having a team spirit.

Husain, Mokhtar, Ahmad and Mustapha (2010) says that, based on their study, the employers rated the importance of employability skills at a

high level as it is compulsory for graduates to possess employability skills in enabling them to compete in the local and global market.

For comparison, there are different perspectives of employability skills among the graduates, universities and industries. Generally, graduates believe their education and skills are sufficient enough. Meanwhile, the universities consider their students to be well prepared for the transition to the workplace. Unfortunately, the employers concluded that new graduates are still lacked the vital skills for employment, for example; they have unrealistic expectations and demand for higher salaries (Tan and Arnold, 2012). A reliable employee or a professional in a job position is considered to be someone who is knowledgeable and skilled but at the same time, he / she possesses the desirable attributes like book smart, street smart, maturity, independent, reliable, having common sense, high emotional quotient (EQ), and intelligent quotient (IQ).

2.3 The Types of Skills Required by the Industries

There are several types of major industries in Malaysia such as fishery, oil and gas, agriculture, food and beverage sector, transportation and factory productions. Each sector needs specific skills and knowledge based on their specialization in the industry. Academic qualifications that purely focus on work theories and skills are not sufficient. The graduates are required to develop the valuable expertise, positive values, and extensive knowledge which could contribute effectively to the industries and society as a whole.

The types of skills that are required by the industries can be divided into three part; core skills, personality skills and subject knowledge. According to Sirat *et al.* (2012), the employers have perceived the characteristics of a 'good quality graduate'. The characteristics are listed below:

- 1) Good values like honesty, confident yet humble, innovative, and creative.
- 2) Positive attitudes such as proactive, hardworking, high motivation, and curiosity driven.
- 3) Work-related skills, for example; communication, entrepreneurship, and leadership skills.

- 4) Preparedness to work likehaving the ability to perform well in a working environment.

It is a compulsory for the graduates to possess at least some of the abovementioned skills to ensure they can adapt to the rapid development of the job market. Furthermore, a study done by Husain *et al.* (2010) shows that the employers rated the importance of employability skills at a high level, which provesemployability skills must be owned by fresh graduatesin order to competeand succeed in the working world.

2.4 CareerEDGE Development Profile

Proposed by Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007), the CareerEDGE model was built to provide clear and feasible statements that allows this multidimensional concept to be explained easily and used as a framework for working with graduates in developing their employability traits.

There are five components used in CareerEGDE which are; Career Development Learning, Experience (work and life), Degree Subject knowledge, Skills and Understanding, Generic skills and Emotional intelligence. The result should assist in the development of higher levels of self-efficacy, self-confidence, and self-esteem, which is related to employability. Figure 1 below displays a clear view of the model foundation.

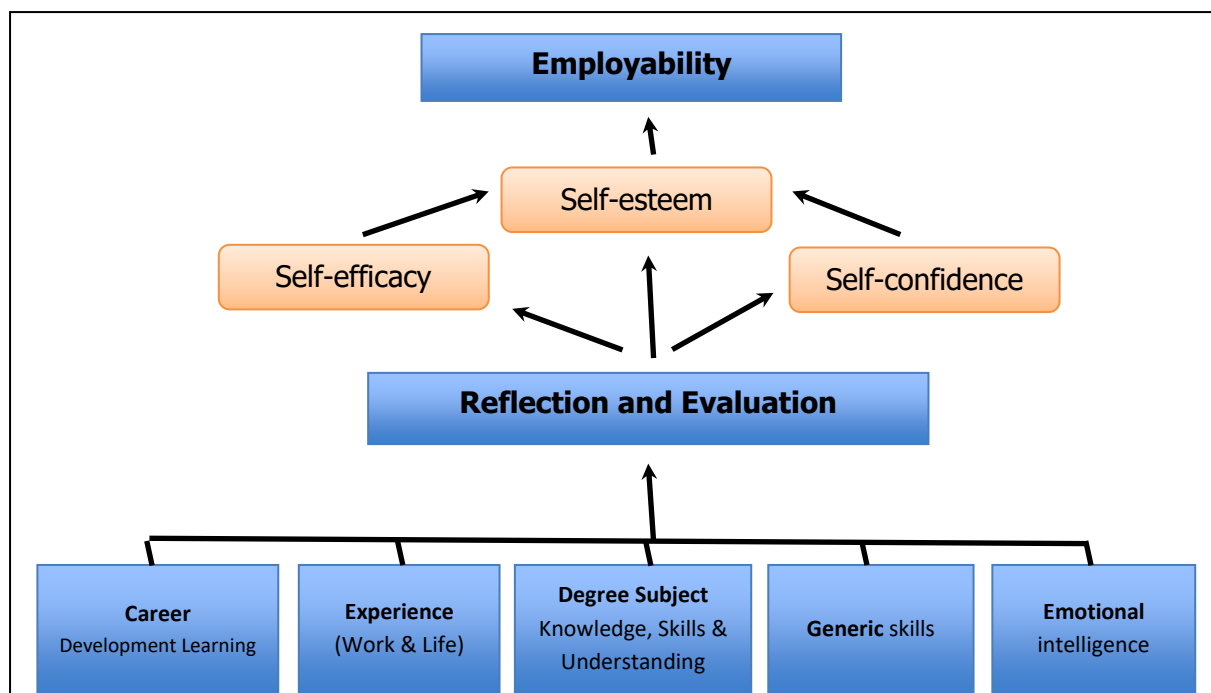


Figure 1 CareerEDGE Model (Soares *et al.*, 2017)

3.0 Methodology

This study employs a mixed approach in which interview sessions and open-ended surveys were conducted with the employers of agriculture-based companies in Sabah to gauge an in-depth understanding of their expectations towards the fresh graduates' capabilities. Two groups of respondents were chosen. The first group is from seven (7) companies that are presently involved in taking UMS students for internship. These companies have prior contact with UMS and are familiar with the faculty and its programmes. The second group consists of 77 FSA students who graduated in the year of 2019.

The questionnaire on employability skills were specifically designed for the employers. The skills and competencies were adapted from the existing employability skills profiles formed by Murphy (2001), Tariq and Cochrane (2003), Tomkins (2004), and lastly Yorke and Knight (2004). Skills, knowledge and personal qualities were the main theme in the questionnaire.

Another set of questionnaire was developed to gauge the graduates' awareness on the employers' expectations. The questionnaire was used for

the graduates to self-assess their proficiency in the skills under the three main themes. A direct comparison was made by applying the same scoring method to both employers and graduates.

A total number of nine open-ended questions were constructed in order to get more in-depth insights of the employers regarding their expectations towards the new agriculture graduates. The nine questions consisted of three questions for each theme for this research, namely skills, knowledge and personal qualities.

The data from the questionnaire and interview was presented in the qualitative and quantitative data. Both themes and data were tabulated and a descriptive statistical report was presented. This to ensure the results of the research are triangulated and justified via both qualitative and quantitative reporting.

4.0 Results and Discussions

4.1 The Demographic Information of Respondents' gender, programme and sector.

The graduates' questionnaires were distributed to a total of 77 graduated students of University Malaysia Sabah from Faculty of Sustainable Agriculture via online. Interview sessions and employers' questionnaires were carried out and distributed to seven companies which consisted of the government and private sectors.

The graduates' questionnaire contained eight questions on the demographic details, five questions about employability qualities and skills, and two questions regarding their strengths and weaknesses. Compared to the questionnaire distributed to the employers, it consisted of three sections which were personal qualities, core skills and subject knowledge. The results given by the employers were compared to the statements from the graduates' questionnaire. Table 4.1 below displays the demographic information of the graduates.

Table 4.1 The Demographic Information of the Graduates

No.	Details	Frequency	Percentage (%)	
1.	Gender	Male	30	39.0
		Female	47	61.0
2.	Programme	HG34	28	36.4
		HG35	26	33.8
		HG36	23	29.9
3.	Sector	Private	64	83.1
		Government	13	16.9

From Table 4.1 above, according to the total number of graduates from all three programmes; the number of female graduates is higher than the male graduates, which is 61% and 39% respectively. As from the information above, private sector is chosen by most of the graduated students, which is 83.1% from 77 students for their industrial training.

4.2 The top five personal qualities and core skills which are vital and compulsory for the graduates to possess in order for them to perform well at the workplace. A comparison between the employers and graduates' awareness.

The section of personal qualities from the employers' questionnaire was related to the emotional intelligent and career development learning sections in the graduates' questionnaire. Table 4.2 below reveals the comparison between top five personal qualities preferred by the employers to the graduates' suitable statements, which is based on their answers in the questionnaire distributed.

Table 4.2 Top Five Personal Qualities

Employer (Qualities)	Rank	Graduate (Statement)	Fq.	Percentage (%)
Commitment	1	I know what is required for me to successfully secure the sort of work I want to do.	55	71.43
Adaptability	2	I am able to adapt easily to new situations.	63	81.82
Tolerance to stress	3	I am able to manage my emotions effectively.	66	85.71
Cooperation	4	I work well in a team.	69	89.61
Decisiveness	5	I am prepared to accept responsibility for my decisions.	72	93.51
Initiative		I am good at coming up with new ideas.	53	68.83
Integrity		*Not found	-	-

Majority of the employers chose commitment as the first most important personal quality for an employee to have, especially for a fresh graduate followed by adaptability at the second place. From the Table above, only 71.43% or 55 graduates agreed that commitment is vital for an employee to possess based on the statement of "*I know what is required for me to successfully secure the sort of work I want to do*" compared to adaptability, which is 81.82% or 63 students based on the statement of "*I am able to adapt easily to new situations*". Bakar *et. al* (2007) stated that commitment is one of the 29 employability skills mentioned by the employers from their study. In a research carried out by Farias (2017), adaptability was placed in the second rank as one of the employability skills to be instilled by employees as they must be able to adapt to the changing situations and working environment like co-operating and performing competently in a team.

Moreover, the fifth most important personal quality picked by the employers which is decisiveness, were agreed upon by majority of the graduates, about 93.51% or 72 students. It is based on the statement "*I am prepared to accept responsibility for my decisions*", whereby decisiveness is one of the top five personal qualities that should be possessed by a potential employee. According to Jusohet. *al* (2011), decision making was discovered to be significantly related to job satisfaction. Chiru *et. al* (2012) also proposed that decision making skills should be developed by the graduates to satisfy their future employers' expectations. As for initiative, it is at the same rank as decisiveness but only 53 graduates or 68.83% of them agreeing to it as the top five most important personal quality based on the statement of "*I am good at coming up with new ideas*". Integrity was also picked as one of the fifth most important personality by the employers. However, there are no statements to be found from the graduates' questionnaire to make any comparison.

From the section core skills in the employers' questionnaire, it was compared to the section of generic skills and experience from the graduates' questionnaire. Table 4.3 below displays the top five core skills

chosen by the employers compared to the suitable statements from the graduates' questionnaire.

Table 4.3 Top Five Core Skills

Employer (Skills)	Rank	Graduate (Statement)	Fq.	Percentage (%)
Leadership	1	*Not found	-	-
Oral communication	2	I have good oral communication skills.	59	76.62
Planning/ Organization	3	I have good planning and organization skills.	60	77.92
Team-working	4	I work well in a team.	69	89.61
Technical	5	I am a confident user of information and communication technologies.	60	77.92

In a research completed by Sarkar *et. al* (2016), it proves that most employers were dissatisfied with the leadership skill shown by the graduates even though it was one of the important skills needed by the employers. This shows from the Table above, whereby majority of the employers preferred leadership as the first top five most important core skills for an employee to have. Contrastingly, there are no graduates' statement can be found from their questionnaire to be compared with.

For the second most important core skills chosen by the employers, which is oral communication, it has the least number of students agreeing to it at the second place. Only 59 students or 76.62% agreed based on the statement of "*I have good oral communication skills*". Sirat *et. al* (2012) stated that employability skills such as communication and management skills are the skills required in the working world. Based on a study conducted by Krishnan *et. al* (2019), the graduates' communication skills expected by the employers include the ability to use appropriate language, construct complete sentences, be precise in providing details and aware of their grammar while communicating.

Referring to Table 4.3 above, team-working is the skills chosen by most of the graduates about 69 students or 89.61%, which is based on the statement of "*I work well in a team*". It was ranked as the fourth important skills by the employers. Team working skill was also rated as one of the important skills needed in future situations especially by fresh graduates (Sarkar *et.*

al, 2016). The third most important skills picked by the employers, planning/ organization, has the same number of students agreeing in the fifth rank, which is technical. 60 students or 77.92% of them agreed based on the statements of “*I have good planning and organization skills*” and “*I am a confident user of information and communication technologies*” for planning/ organization and technical respectively.

Meanwhile, referring to the study carried out by Alihet. al (2018), communication skill, speaking skill, leadership skill and ability to work in a team were considered as the criteria of soft-skills needed by the employers. These skills were considered to be of the highest demand by the employers as most agricultural industries required employees that can communicate and speak fluently especially in English as it will help them adapt to the new working environment. According to several interviewees, leadership skills are crucial for the agriculture students to possess as the future employers expect them to work as the leaders or managers who can control, lead, and manage their workers.

4.3 The importance of subject knowledge in a particular ranking. A comparison between the employers and graduates’ awareness.

The section of subject knowledge from the employers’ questionnaire was compared with the experience and subject knowledge section from the graduates’ questionnaire. Table 4.4 below displays the ranking of subject knowledge by the employers compared to the statement from the graduates’ questionnaire.

Table 4.4 Ranking of Subject Knowledge

Employer (Knowledge)	Rank	Graduate (Statement)	Fq.	Percentage (%)
Understanding concept	1	My level of skills and qualifications meets employer’s needs.	48	62.33
Application of knowledge	2	My academic performance so far is in line with my career aspirations.	45	58.44
Up-to-date	3	I am satisfied with my academic performance so far.	47	61.04
Breadth of knowledge	4	My employer considered my degree and specialization before accepting me.	67	87.01

Based on a study done by Anas and Hamzah (2017), the degree of subject knowledge has a significant contribution in enhancing employability. From the Table above, there are remarkable differences in the comparison between the employers and the graduates on ranking the subject knowledge. Understanding concept was ranked as the first but was agreed upon by only 62.33% or 48 students under statement “*My level of skills and qualifications meets employer’s needs*”. Most of the graduates picked breadth of knowledge based on the statement of “*My employer considered my degree and specialization before accepting me*” as the most important in subject knowledge, which was agreed upon by 67 students or 87.01% but was ranked as the fourth most important skills by the employers.

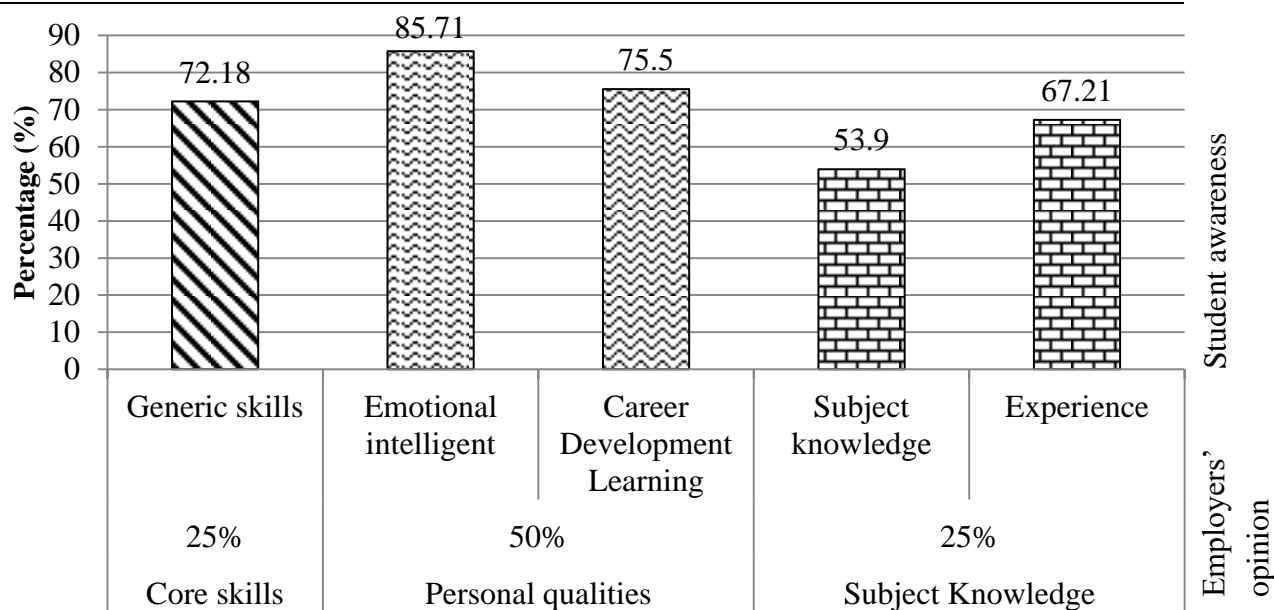
Application of knowledge was ranked as second most important in this section but was the least agreed by graduates with the statement of “*My academic performance so far is in line with my career aspirations*”, which is only by 45 students or 58.44%. Referring to the research conducted by Erickson *et. al*, (2018), subject knowledge is insignificant in certain fields of agriculture such as agronomy and precision farming as they require the application of the knowledge, keeping up-to-date with the advance technology or latest information, and most importantly, employees must understand the concept of the knowledge. According to one of the interviewees, it is compulsory for the graduates to have the ability to catch up with new information or any latest issues in agriculture, and know how to use or apply the basic knowledge about the latest technologies.

4.4 The vital comparison of personal qualities, core skills and subject knowledge between the employers’ opinions and students’ awareness.

The section from graduates’ questionnaire was classified based on the section in the employers’ questionnaire, which are core skills, personal quality and subject knowledge. The employers were told to choose the most important between the three sections. Responses from the graduates’ questionnaire were used to compare with the employers’ decisions. The purpose was to obtain the graduates’ awareness on employability skills or qualities needed by the employers. Table 4.5 below displays the classification of sections for both employers and graduates’ questionnaires.

Table 4.5 The Classification of Graduates' Questionnaire Based on Sections that are Personal Qualities, Core Skills and Subject Knowledge.

Items	Graduates' Questionnaire
Core Skills	Generic Skills
Personal Qualities	Emotional Intelligent Career Development Learning
Subject Knowledge	Subject Knowledge Experience



Graph 4.1 The comparison between the employers' expectation and graduates' awareness on employability.

From Graph 4.1, it is shown that 50% of the employers picked personal qualities as the most important part in shaping a graduate to become a good employee. Majority of the graduates also agreed that emotional intelligent and career development learning, which are classified as personal qualities, as the most important part of being a reliable employee. Both emotional intelligent and career development learning were preferred by 85.71% and 75.50% from 77 students respectively.

A study by Srisiri (2016) revealed, moral and ethical were second highest most desirable qualities as the employers want potential employees to be responsible for their own professional development and able to adapt in a new working environment. Anas and Hamzah (2017) stated that academic

qualification is the first preference that the employers consider when judging the job applicant. Moreover, they also look for the experiences from his / her internship whereby the graduate might be able to acquire some employability skills like discipline and technical skills.

4.5 Other criteria needed by the employers from the students of agriculture.

4.5.1 The qualities and skills required by the employers before employing the graduates.

Other employability criteria needed by the employers are more than just personal quality, core skills or subject knowledge. The employers required the graduates to prepare themselves in enabling them to contribute to the society. From the interview sessions with the employers, the answers for the question about other criteria that they will look for in the graduates before employing them were analysed. A total of 14 criteria were given by them and Table 4.2 below shows the criteria stated by the interviewed employers.

Table 4.2 Other Qualities and Skills Required by the Employers

Qualities/ Skills	Respondents						
	Government			Private			
	MPOB	KKCH	SDA	GN	JC	SK	SW
Ability to communicate orally and in writing				/			
Advantages	/						
Entrepreneurship	/						
Family background			/				
Interest towards agriculture				/			
Involve in co-curriculum activities	/						
Presentation skills							/
Religion knowledge	/					/	
Report writing skills					/	/	
Second/Third language					/		/
Self-confident						/	
Social skills		/		/			
Technical technology skills/knowledge		/					

Working experience	/		/				
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Based on Table 4.2 above, religion knowledge, report writing skills, second or third language, socials' skills, and working experience were picked twice by different employers.

Religion knowledge was mentioned by Malaysian Palm Oils Board (MPOB) and SawitKinabalu (SK) as one of the criteria an employer will look for in a future employee. According to an interviewee, Mr. Hasbudi from SawitKinabalu, knowledge in religion is essential as it can affect an employee' attitude such as self-discipline. Besides that, working experience was stated by MPOB and Sabah Department of Agriculture (SDA) as criteria they will look for in a job applicant. According to Siratet. al (2012), work-related competencies like the ability to apply theory in the working environment was listed as one of the crucial criteria chosen by the employers. From SK and J.C Chang (JC), they also mentioned about report writing skills is the criteria or skill that an employee must possess in order to work in their company.

The ability to talk and write by using second or third language such as English or Mandarin was stated by JC and Sabah Softwood (SW) as an advantage for a job applicant to have. Lastly, social skill was revealed by Kota Kinabalu City Hall (KKCH) and Gaya Natural (GN) as the criteria they will look for in a good employee. Farias (2017), stressed that an employee must have some social skills so that he / she will be able to work well with fellow colleagues. As for self-confidence and soft-skills, the ability to communicate in English, has become one of the essential 'qualities' that refersto a competent graduate (Siratet. al, 2012).

4.5.2 The Comparison of Qualities and Skills Required by the Employers to the Graduates' Awareness on Employability Qualities and Skills.

Other criteria given by the employers during the interview sessions were compared to the suitable statements from graduates' questionnaire. Table 4.3 below displays graduates' awareness about the criteria required by the employers.

Table 4.3 The Graduates' Awareness Towards Qualities and Skills Required by The Employers.

Qualities/ skills	Graduate (Statements)	Fq.	Percentage (%)
Ability to communicate orally and in writing	I have good oral communication skills. I am confident about my written communication skills for various audiences.	51	66.23
Advantages	I know what is required for me to successfully secure the sort of work I want to do.	55	71.43
Entrepreneurship	I have a good understanding of how businesses operate.	53	68.83
Family background	*Not found	-	-
Interest towards agriculture	I know where to find out information about jobs that interest me.	52	67.53
Involve in co-curriculum activities	*Not found	-	-
Presentation skills	I am good at making presentations.	54	70.13
Religion knowledge	*Not found	-	-
Report writing skills	I can write for work purposes very well in English.	59	76.62
Second/Third language	I am satisfied with my level of English proficiency. I am able to communicate with others in English.	58	75.32
Self-confident	*Not found	-	-
Social skills	I am good at working out what other people are feeling.	62	80.52
Technical technology skills/knowledge	I am a confident user of information and communication technologies (ICT).	60	77.92
Working experience	I have a lot of work-relevant experience. I can explain the value of my experience to a potential employer.	42	54.55

A total of 62 graduates or 80.52% of them agreed that social skill is one of the most important criteria required by the employers based on the statement of “*I am good at working out what other people are feeling*”. However, regarding working experience based on the statements of “*I have alot of work-relevant experience*” and “*I can explain the value of my experience to a potential employer*”, only 42 students or 54.55% of them were aware about the importance to have working experience in order to be a good employee as mentioned by the employers.

Based on the suggestion of criteria provided by the interviewees compared to the total number of graduates agreeing to the suitable statements, most graduates are not prepared and lacked in several criteria as revealed in the data analysed, for example; working experience, ability to communicate, confidence, technical skills and language proficiency. This was also mentioned by Abdullah (2018) in his study whereby graduates in Malaysia were lacking in confidence, knowledge, technical skills, and communication skill especially in English language. He suggested that practical training should be more than 6 months to produce graduates who would match the criteria required by the labour industry (Abdullah, 2018). According to Ramsey and Edwards (2011), the respondents of their study said that, technical skills should be learned by the students in any supervised agriculture industries for their preparation before entering the real working environment.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

The employability skills are vital issues in the job market especially for fresh graduates. The employers' expectation towards the agriculture graduates concerning the skills, knowledge and personal qualities are quite high and stressed on certain standards. Based on this study, the employers chose leadership, oral communication, planning/ organization, team-working and technical as top five most important skills to be possessed by graduates.

For personal qualities, commitment, adaptability, tolerance to stress, cooperation, and decisiveness, initiative and integrity; these are considered as top five most important qualities required from the graduates. For subject knowledge, the employers picked understanding concept as the first rank, followed by application of knowledge, up-to-date information, and breadth of knowledge. Between these three criteria of skills, knowledge and personal qualities; the employers chose personal qualities as the most important criteria needed from graduates in order to be competent employees. From this study, the graduates also preferred personal qualities as the most important quality when applying for a job.

There is a strong relationship between the industries and higher learning institutions, where both play major roles in producing employable graduates. On the other hand, due to lack of experience especially in the working environment, most graduates are unable to understand deeply about the skills or qualities needed by certain industries, sectors and fields. Therefore, the employers should play an important role by providing in-house teaching and training for the graduates and allowing them to be included in the working environment especially during industrial training. For further study, it is advisable to ensure the questionnaire given to the graduates and employers have similarities especially in the graduates' statement so that it would be easier to match with the criteria from employers' questionnaire. Each item from different criteria of employers' questionnaire should be added in the statement of graduates' questionnaire for easy and smooth analysis.

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