

# Job Opportunities and Employability Skills Required of Business Graduates in Malaysia: An Investigation through Online Job Advertisements

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## ABSTRACT

This study looks at the employment landscape for business graduates from three disciplines namely Accounting/Finance, Administration/Human Resource and Sales/Marketing. Results show that Sales/Marketing jobs are the most sought after, followed by Accounting/Finance and Admin/Human Resource jobs. Job opportunities are mainly centred on Selangor and Kuala Lumpur as they offer around 70% of the total job openings in Malaysia. The top five skills required by the employers for the Accounting/Finance jobs are presentation of ideas, information technology (IT) skills, language fluency, ability to think and act independently and communication skills. For Administration/Human Resource jobs, the top five skills required are English, IT skills, multi-lingual, presentation of ideas and communication skills. Lastly, the top five skills required in the Sales/Marketing jobs are presentation of ideas, English, communication skills, listening skills and IT skills. The findings of the study show that soft skills are more preferable than hard skills among the employers.

*Keywords: Employability Skills, Soft Skills, Job Opportunities, Business-related Jobs*

## INTRODUCTION

Students in Malaysia graduating from the higher learning institutions with a degree are on the rise. Increasing awareness of the importance of higher education and life-long learning as a cornerstone of a better life has led many school leavers to seek higher learning beyond secondary education. To individuals, education is the key to improving lives, to become a successful person who can contribute to the society and the country. To a nation, education is central to its development and unity of its people (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Many institutions of higher learning have been set up to offer higher education opportunities to young adults. Higher education is now accessible to many people to further their studies, to develop their competencies, or to be retrained (Pop, 2016). Higher education is defined as education provided by universities, colleges and other institutions of learning that award students with academic degrees at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Higher education also includes most professional education (Allen, 2007).

According to UNESCO, tertiary school enrolment for Malaysia stood at an average value of 12.25% from a minimum of 3.82% in 1979 to a maximum of 44.12% in 2016 (Malaysia:

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Tertiary school enrollment, 2018). The February 2017 issue of Penang Monthly reported that there were a total of 576 higher education institutions in the country in year 2015 (including private institutions) with approximate 1,272,071 students. This further indicates that tertiary enrolment in the country for the last two to three decades is on the rise. In the same article, it was reported that Social Sciences and Business and Law topped the list of having the highest number of graduates from the public universities in Malaysia at 40,500 (33.07%) as compared to other fields of study. The field of Engineering, Manufacturing, and Construction comes in second with 25,044 (20.45%) graduates, followed by the Faculty of Science, Mathematics and Computer at the third place with 17,898 (14.62%) graduates.

The robust expansion of higher education in Malaysia in the last couple of decades has produced a high volume of graduates in a variety of disciplines. Given the huge number of graduates entering the labour market, the possibility of disproportion between job seekers and job market demands has become an issue of concern and one that is worth to be further examined (Kartz-Gerro & Yaish, 2003; Teichler, 2000 both cited in Ismail, 2011, p.94). This raises the question of graduates' employability in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century business world. In 2015, 75.1% out of 227,421 graduates found employment within six months of graduation. However, the Department of Statistics reported that about 160,000 Malaysians with tertiary education still remain unemployed (Rahman, 2016). The Bank Negara Malaysia Annual Report (2016 cited in Mohd Zakaria, 2017) revealed that the country's youth unemployment rate in 2015 was 10.7%, three-fold of the country's unemployment rate of 3.1%. Youth unemployment is unhealthy to a nation as it can bring about serious social problems like illegal activities connected to drugs and other forms of criminal activities. Youth unemployment is a burden as government will need to allocate money to assist this group of population (Mohd Zakaria, 2017). The Bank Negara Malaysia in its 2016 annual report as found in Syed Jaafar (2018, p.57) also said that increased youth unemployment and rising income inequality can cause serious consequences for the society and the nation.

The topic of unemployment or under-employment among Malaysian graduates has been widely studied from various contexts and perspectives. Dr. Kamaruddin Mohd Nor, Chief Economist at MIDF Research said that uneven development in generating employment and the amount of people searching for jobs, and mismatch of skills as among multitude of factors hindering employability (Mohd Zakaria, 2017). Many graduate job-seekers found that their skills sets do not match those expected by potential employers. At the same time, businesses lamented that it is difficult to recruit the right people to fit the bill (Bhattacharjee & Syed Jaafar, 2018). In today's modern, technologically-astute, and rapidly changing business environment, good academic grades alone will no longer guarantee employability. Employers do not hire solely based on academic qualifications but rather look for those with the right soft skills and generic competencies (Spenser & Spenser, 1993 cited in Ismail, 2011, p.95). Prior surveys found majority of employers rated the standard of fresh graduates to be mediocre and lacking in soft skills needed for the job, with poor communication skills listed as a major skill deficit in graduates (see for example, Employers: Fresh graduates have unrealistic expectations, 2015; Syed Jaafar, 2018, p.57). Another survey carried out by a recruitment consultancy firm on current jobs and skills trends found that employers emphasize on generic skills such as communication, interpersonal skills, adaptability, creativity, and collaboration when recruiting graduates (Bhattacharjee & Syed Jaafar, 2018).

As the world evolved to be more globalized, academic education will become less important as compared to people-developing skills. Education of the 21<sup>st</sup> century should emphasize on developing people on soft skills like thinking and leadership (Shariff, 2018). Acquiring

generic or soft skills will be more relevant in preparing students for the working world and raised students' employability in the future. This is consistent with modern global market expectations and these additional qualities are highly sought-after by potential employers. Employers seek candidates who are job-ready and be able to contribute to the industry immediately. Employers of the present days do not assume the role of providing training to employees in this modern business world. Yeo (2018) posited that providing technical and vocational education and training (TVET) that armed graduates with knowledge and skills that are in demand is better than churning out graduates that have no job prospects. For these reasons, the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) is mindful of ensuring that higher education institutions are offering education that equips students with skills, knowledge, and expertise that meets job-market demands (Bhattacharjee & Syed Jaafar, 2018). The initiatives of the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education) that encompass programs like iCGPA, "2u2i", CEO @ Faculty, Malaysia University English Test (MUET) and Massive Open Online Courses (MOCC) are launched by MOHE to boost graduates' employability. These initiatives are part of the government's effort in enhancing graduates' employment prospect (Rahman, 2016).

In view of the current employment requisites and the elevated demands of employers, this study aims to: (i) examine current job opportunities for business graduates in Malaysia, and (ii) to identify the types of employability skills that employers' seek in business graduates. Information from an online job advertisement site is used for the purpose of this study. This study looks at the employment landscape for business graduates from three disciplines namely Accounting/Finance, Administration/Human Resource and Sales/Marketing.

The rest of the article is organized into the following manner. In the second section we review prior research on employability skills of graduates in general, perceived to be highly-sought after by employers. The third section outlines the research design, data collection and analysis method. The fourth section presents the results of the study. The conclusion, limitations as well as the recommendations for future research are found in the fifth section.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Employability Skills for 21st Century Business World

The 21st century business world is more intricate and vibrant as compared to how it used to be in the past. Innovation and advancement in information and communication technologies has turned the world into a seamless global market place. Businesses are no longer operating within their own national environment but decisions and performances are closely affected by the global environmental changes (Krishnan, 2009). Organizations can now easily integrate trade, communication and financial services internationally. Globalization enables businesses to be conducted across borders and cultures, thus transforming employers' expectations on employees' skills in handling various challenging situations. In the past, mastering subject-specific knowledge and hard skills are considered as great assets and would put a graduate student in a good stead for the entry-level positions. Good academic credentials used to be sufficient for a rewarding career. But today, the graduates need to be technically prepared and sharpen their employability skills to secure and stay on the job. Soft skills become an essential aspect of graduates' employability in confronting global market demands (Bhagra & Sharma, 2018; Tan, Cham & Chuah, 2018). This is echoed by (Shivoro, Shalyefu, & Kadhila, 2018) that employers' decision to hire a graduate is based on the incumbent's qualities and

abilities besides his/her discipline-specific knowledge and skills. Graduates employability is about skill development. A well-blended combination of technical knowledge/skills (hard skills) and generic skills (soft skills) will shape any applicant into a person with employable quality to achieve a greater success at work.

Bhagra and Sharma (2018) focus their research on understanding the changing requirements of the industry on employability skills and to identify important skills for the 21st century workforce. Management academic, Capelli (2012 cited in Bhagra and Sharma, 2018, p.7) asserted that changing career requirements and job market trends have made many companies reluctant to invest much in training workforce fearing that trained employees may leave to join another company without contributing benefits of training to the company. This is supported by Jackson and Hancock's (2010 cited in Bhagra and Sharma, 2018, p.8) view that it became necessary to develop job-ready graduates with both technical knowledge and soft skills to meet industry demand and save corporations from substantial investment in employees' training. Rao (2010 as cited in Bhagra and Sharma, 2018, p.8) said that Higher Educational Institutes (HEI) has been entrusted to instil employability (soft) skills in students. All in all, Bhagra and Sharma (2018) concluded that holistic view of employability skills include personal attributes, workplace skills, applied and core knowledge skills influencing personal, academic and professional performance in work setting.

Nirmala and Kumar (2018) conducted a study among final year undergraduates of Arts and Science colleges in Tamil Nadu, India, and found that the following skills are needed to be equipped by job applicants in securing a job: (i) basic skills (e.g. numeracy skills, reading, comprehensive skills, and presentation skills), (ii) higher order thinking skills (e.g. creative thinking skills and critical thinking), and (iii) affective skills (e.g. self-motivation skills). Another study conducted by Alshare and Sewailem (2018) aimed to explore existing gap between skills/competencies provided by the business colleges and the needs of the current job market. The researchers examined the views of both the business educators and employers on 20 employability skills deemed important for the 21st century workforce. They found that employers placed an emphasis on the soft skills and ranked work ethics, communication, adaptability/flexibility as skills that employees should possess.

Subbu and Rajasekaran (2018) carried out a study reviewing various literatures to explore the diverse kind of employability skills perceived as important by the employers and the role of these skills in helping graduates to excel in their careers. The study found that the following are the most common skills that are highly-sought after by the employers: oral communication skills, written communication skills, non-verbal communication skills, teamwork skills, and positive attitude skills. Similarly, Rosenberg, Heimler and Morote, (2012 cited in Shivor et al., 2018, p.222-223) found that literacy and numeracy skills, critical thinking skills, leadership skills, management skills, interpersonal skills, IT skills, system thinking skills, and work ethics are eight employability attributes seemingly expected by the employers. Correspondingly, a study by Lim, Lee, Yap and Ling (2016) examined perceived importance of employability skills and personal qualities of accounting graduates in Malaysia from the perspectives of employers, lecturers, junior auditors, and students. The findings of the study showed that employers ranked communication skills, problem solving skills, analytical skills, critical thinking skills, and time management skills as most important while sense of responsibility, positive attitudes, dedication, continuous improvement and independence are the personal qualities most preferred by employers.

Perhaps the study that is most akin to the current paper is the study carried out by Tan and Laswad (2018) where the authors examined the employability skills listed in job advertisements for accountants in Australia and New Zealand. Advertisements are considered an objective indication of skills that are most required at the work place. The study found that 13 skills were most cited in the ads and sought after by the employers. They are collaboration with colleagues (team work), ability to present, discuss and defend views (communication, presentation and speaking skills), positive attitude (committed, passionate, dynamic, energetic, vibrant, and self-driven), using information technology, application of leadership skills, meeting datelines, understanding group dynamics, observant and aware, act strategically, think and act independently, analyse, reason and conceptualize issues, be flexible, and solve problems and construct arguments.

In view of the knowledge economy, globalization and evolving conditions of the job market, graduates' employability skills become a focal point among the employers. In order to stand out in a competitive job market inundated with graduates with similar qualifications, one has to be equipped with the kind of employability skills that meet the expectations of the employers, thereby raising the chances of gaining employment.

## RESEARCH METHOD

As mentioned earlier, the objectives of the study are to examine the current job opportunities for business graduates and to identify employers' expectations on their employability skills. Two stages of data collection were used in this study. To achieve the first research objective, the number of job advertisements in Jobstreet.com on 28 February 2018 in the three business-related areas namely (i) Accounting/Finance, (ii) Admin/Human Resource, and (iii) Sales/Marketing was captured. The study quantified the number of job vacancy in each discipline. To achieve the second research objective, content analysis was used to analyse the job advertisements. The words and phrases denoting employability skills used in the current study was based on the categorization dictionary found in the Appendix of Tan and Laswad (2018). For the purpose of this study, a total of 300 job advertisements were analysed (i.e. 100 job advertisements in each discipline).

## FINDINGS

### Job Vacancy in Malaysia

This study identifies the number of job advertisements in Malaysia on 28 February 2018 that appeared in the Jobstreet.com portal. It examined the job advertisements in three business-related areas - Accounting/Finance, Admin/Human Resource and Sales/ Marketing. The study found that a total of 15,592 jobs were advertised in Jobstreet.com on the collection period. Results showed that Sales and Marketing jobs were the most sought after with a total of 7,237 vacancies available throughout all the states in Malaysia. It is followed by Accounting/Finance where 5,122 job vacancies were found. The area of Admin/Human Resource ranked the lowest with only 3,223 jobs advertised on the said date.

The study found that job opportunities are mainly centred on Selangor and Kuala Lumpur as they offered around 70 percent of the total job openings in Malaysia. It is followed by Penang and Johore where they contributed about 20 percent of the career opportunities. Such findings are not surprising since majority of the business activity in Malaysia are concentrated in a

few major cities like Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Johor and Penang. The results on the availability of job opportunities are shown in the Table below.

**Table 1: Job Vacancy in Malaysia on 28 February 2018**

State	Accounting/Finance		Admin/Human Resource		Sales/Marketing	
Kuala Lumpur	2,091	40.82%	1,139	35.33%	2,146	29.65%
Selangor	1,520	29.67%	1,049	32.54%	2,395	33.09%
Johor	416	8.12%	309	9.58%	648	8.95%
Penang	415	8.10%	320	9.92%	586	8.09%
Perak	112	2.18%	57	1.76%	171	2.36%
Sarawak	90	1.75%	39	1.21%	189	2.61%
Negeri Sembilan	86	1.67%	58	1.79%	162	2.23%
Sabah	78	1.52%	27	0.83%	172	2.37%
Melaka	71	1.38%	65	2.01%	191	2.63%
Kedah	64	1.24%	44	1.36%	145	2.00%
Pahang	54	1.05%	35	1.08%	144	1.98%
Putrajaya	41	0.80%	33	1.02%	82	1.13%
Kelatan	31	0.60%	19	0.58%	79	1.09%
Terengganu	23	0.44%	9	0.27%	62	0.85%
Perlis	20	0.39%	14	0.43%	40	0.55%
Labuan	10	0.19%	6	0.18%	25	0.34%
Total	5,122	100%	3,233	100%	7,237	100%

The results in Table 1 reveals that job opportunities are limited in other states except for the four major cities as mentioned earlier. For example, in the area of Sales and Marketing, there are only 62 job vacancies in Terengganu and 40 in Perlis respectively. Likewise, only 20 vacancies are available in Perlis and 10 in Labuan in the area of Accounting and Finance. The results of the present study are in line with the study of Rostam et al. (2010 cited in Siwar, Ahmed, Bashawir, & Mia, 2016, p.158) which showed that urban development has been centred on a few large metropolitan cities in Malaysia. Furthermore, intense pressure from the global market economies prompted the Malaysian government to liberalize its trade policies in the last few decades by permitting corporations to focus their business activities in and around a few major cities in Malaysia such as Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Johore. The authors remarked that job opportunities imbalance among the states in Malaysia as found in the present study could well be one of the consequences of rapid urbanization. Naturally, entrepreneurs and investors will set up businesses at commercially viable places and people are drawn to places where more job opportunities exist. As such, places where developments are limited will have less businesses and consequently less job opportunities.

### Job Skills Required by Employers

Yorke (2004) defined employability as a set of skills, understandings, and personal attributes that increase graduates' chances of gaining employment and the capacity to function successfully in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy. This section presents the findings on the category of employability skills that employers' expect of potential employees in the area of Accounting/Finance, Admin/Human Resource and Sales/Marketing. The findings were compiled from a total of 300 advertisements obtained from Jobstreet.com Malaysia. For each field of study, 100 advertisements were scrutinized and information on a list of employability

skills was extracted. A quantitative count was done to quantify the number of time each employability skill is found in the advertisements.

### *Accounting/Finance Advertisements*

**Table 2:** Employability skills ranking by frequency

<b>Item</b>	<b>Skills</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
1.	Present, Discuss and Defend Views	51	7.32
2.	Using Information Technology	50	7.17
3.	Fluency in English	44	6.31
4.	Think and act Independently	43	6.17
5.	Communication	43	6.17
6.	Technical	40	5.74
7.	Act Strategically	40	5.74
8.	Listen Effectively	38	5.45
9.	Different Languages	30	4.30
10.	Analyse, Reason and Conceptualize issues	30	4.30
11.	Undertake Assignments and Deadlines	28	4.02
12.	Positive attitude values	27	3.87
13.	Collaborate with Colleagues	27	3.87
14.	Think and Act Critically	26	3.73
15.	Flexibility	23	3.30
16.	Interpersonal Skills	22	3.16
17.	Solve problems and construct Arguments	16	2.30
18.	Commitment to lifelong learning	16	2.30
19.	Adapt and respond positively	16	2.30
20.	Observant/Aware	15	2.15
21.	Numeracy/Calculation	13	1.87
22.	Apply Leadership Skills	11	1.58
23.	Compliance with legislative and regulatory requirements	10	1.43
24.	Review own work for Standards	7	1.00
25.	Negotiate with People	6	0.86
26.	Be Focused on Outcomes	6	0.86
27.	Ethical Reasoning	5	0.72
28.	Apply Delegation Skills	5	0.72
29.	Identify, Evaluate	4	0.57
30.	Understand Group Dynamics	3	0.43
31.	Initiate and Conduct Research	2	0.29
<b>Total</b>		<b>697</b>	<b>100</b>

The content analysis of the Accounting/Finance advertisement captured a total of thirty-one employability skills appearing a total of 697 times in the 100 advertisements studied. Results revealed that the top five most sought-after employability skills in Accounting/Finance, in the order of priority, are (i) present/discuss/defend view/ideas, (ii) use information technology (IT), (iii) language fluency, (iv) think and act independently, and (v) communication. Out of 697 times, the skills to present, defend and discuss ideas/views appeared 51 times in the

advertisements. It was followed closely by expertise in IT at 50 times. Fluency in English was third in the list at a frequency of 44 times. The analysis found that the employers have equal emphasis on communication skill and ability to think and act independently. Both skills appeared 43 times in the advertisements.

The top five skills revealed in the study is particularly vital for the position of an auditor. For example, the job of an auditor is to collect sufficient and appropriate audit evidence to support the final audit opinion. In the process of doing so, it requires the auditor to exercise his/her professional judgement. Hence, to a large extent, the auditor needs to be able to present and defend his/her personal opinion towards the final outcome of an audit function. Furthermore, IT is widely used in the auditing industry in the present day. The auditors need to be IT savvy to carry out their day-to-day operation, as Computer-Aided Audit Tool (CAAT) is commonly used in the course of an audit. Auditors need to equip themselves with some knowledge of audit software programs such as Audit Command Language (ACL) while performing their job. On the other hand, soft skills such as language fluency and ability to think and act independently are essential for the auditors as such skills help them to perform their work more effectively. In the audit field work, auditors need to communicate with their audit clients in order to collect audit evidence. Hence language and communication skills are important. Additionally, auditors are required to think and act independently as they are often put in subjective situation whereby auditors need to exercise their professionalism independently in dealing and resolving with conflicting issues.

#### *Admin/Human Resource Advertisements*

**Table 3:** Employability skills ranking by frequency

Item	Skills	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Fluency in English	58	9.40
2.	Using Information Technology	55	8.91
3.	Different Languages	46	7.46
4.	Communication	42	6.81
5.	Present, Discuss and Defend Views	38	6.16
6.	Act Strategically	34	5.51
7.	Listen Effectively	32	5.19
8.	Flexibility	31	5.02
9.	Positive attitude values	30	4.86
10.	Think and Act Critically	28	4.54
11.	Think and act Independently	28	4.54
12.	Interpersonal Skills	28	4.54
13.	Undertake Assignments and Deadlines	24	3.89
14.	Compliance with legislative and regulatory requirements	16	2.59
15.	Adapt and respond positively	14	2.27
16.	Analyse, Reason and Conceptualize issues	13	2.11
17.	Collaborate with Colleagues	13	2.11
18.	Ethical Reasoning	11	1.78
19.	Observant/Aware	11	1.78
20.	Apply Leadership Skills	11	1.78
21.	Be Focused on Outcomes	8	1.30



22.	Technical	6	0.97
23.	Solve problems and construct Arguments	6	0.97
24.	Understand Group Dynamics	6	0.97
25.	Apply Delegation Skills	6	0.97
26.	Review own work for Standards	6	0.97
27.	Commitment to lifelong learning	5	0.81
28.	Initiate and Conduct Research	4	0.65
29.	Negotiate with People	4	0.65
30.	Numeracy/Calculation	3	0.49
<b>Total</b>		<b>617</b>	<b>100</b>

The content analysis of the Admin/Human Resource advertisements captured a list of thirty employability skills. The skills appeared 617 times in total. Results pointed out that the top five most sought-after employability skills in Admin/Human Resource, in the order of priority, are (i) fluency in English, (ii) using IT, (iii) different languages, (iv) communication, and (v) present, discuss and defend ideas. Out of 617 times, English proficiency appeared 58 times in the advertisements. The second top employability skill is expertise in IT which appeared 55 times. The skill in different languages was captured 46 times in the 100 advertisements studied. Communication skills ranked fourth at 42 times followed by skills in presentation, discussion and defending ideas which appeared 38 times in the advertisements.

Based on the top five skills required by the employers, it can be observed that employers are recruiting people that are equipped with good communication skills. Emphasis has also been placed on the ability to converse not only in English but other languages since Malaysia is an international business centre where multinational corporations have their business establishments in this country. It is certainly an added advantage for multi-lingual graduates seeking for a job in Malaysia. Once again employers are expecting their employees to be IT savvy. This is particularly true as the world is moving towards business analytics where administrative employees are expected to manage a large volume of data with the help of IT technologies.

### *Sales/Marketing Advertisements*

**Table 4:** Employability skills ranking by frequency

Item	Skills	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Present, Discuss and Defend Views	49	7.97
2.	Fluency in English	49	7.97
3.	Communication	46	7.48
4.	Listen Effectively	44	7.15
5.	Using Information Technology	38	6.18
6.	Different Languages	38	6.18
7.	Positive attitude values	37	6.02
8.	Think and act Independently	34	5.53
9.	Act Strategically	33	5.37
10.	Think and Act Critically	31	5.04
11.	Interpersonal Skills	24	3.90

12.	Collaborate with Colleagues	22	3.58
13.	Be Focused on Outcomes	20	3.25
14.	Undertake Assignments and Deadlines	20	3.25
15.	Technical	15	2.44
16.	Solve problems and construct Arguments	14	2.28
17.	Analyse, Reason and Conceptualize issues	13	2.11
18.	Commitment to lifelong learning	11	1.79
19.	Negotiate with People	11	1.79
20.	Understand Group Dynamics	11	1.79
21.	Apply Leadership Skills	11	1.79
22.	Ethical Reasoning	10	1.63
23.	Flexibility	9	1.47
24.	Adapt and respond positively	6	0.98
25.	Review own work for Standards	5	0.81
26.	Compliance with legislative and regulatory requirements	3	0.49
27.	Numeracy/Calculation	3	0.49
28.	Observant/Aware	3	0.49
29.	Initiate and Conduct Research	2	0.33
30.	Apply Delegation Skills	2	0.33
31.	Receive, React to Ideas	1	0.16
<b>Total</b>		<b>615</b>	<b>100</b>

For Sales/Marketing, the content analysis of the 100 advertisements netted thirty-one employability skills. The skills under study appeared 615 times in total. Results showed that the top five most sought-after employability skills in Sales/Marketing, in the order of priority, are (i) present, discuss and defend ideas, (ii) fluency in English (iii) communication, (iv) listen effectively, and (v) using IT. Out of the total frequency of 615 times, English proficiency and the ability to present, discuss and defend ideas are perceived to be equally important since both skills appeared 49 times in the advertisements. The next two skills are communication and effective listening which appeared 46 and 44 times respectively. Skill in IT was the least important for Sales/Marketing positions as it has a frequency of only 38.

To be good sales representatives and excel in their job functions, one must have the ability to convince their clients. In order to do so, one should be able to present and defend his/her ideas to their clients. A well trained salesperson must maintain a good mutual communication with their clients and hence, they must possess a good language proficiency. Besides, the job may require them to listen and understand the needs of their clients in order to be effective in their work. These skills are not restrictive to salespersons but they are also vital to service and people-oriented industries like hospitality and retailing.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, the common skills required by the employers across the three business-related fields are language proficiency, communication skills, ability to present ideas and skills. Out of these required skills, soft skills dominate. This study would provide useful information for

higher learning institutions to develop more effective curricula or programs that will better equip graduates with skills that meet the changing needs of the current employers (Lim et. al., 2016). Employers are seeking more well-rounded graduates with soft skills. Students who excel in academic performance with technical skills and knowledge only may not have a competitive advantage in the job market. Students must show that they have acquired some soft skills throughout their respective degree programs in schools. Students' participation in various extra curriculum activities and soft skills programs should be documented in their transcripts.

This study is subject to two limitations. The first limitation is the data collection method. Only job advertisements in one online job site were used to collect data. The second limitation is the examination of job requirements and availability in the business discipline. In collecting data, future studies may include other online job sites, both online and traditional job sites, or primary data from the perspectives of the employers, educators, employees, and graduating students. The inclusion of multiple data sources will provide further insights to the employability issues among the fresh graduates. Collection of primary data may call for a triangulation approach involving both quantitative and qualitative methods. Future studies should also examine job requirements and availability in other disciplines such as engineering, medical, arts and computer-related jobs. A comparison can then be done across industries or disciplines in relation to the common skills needed for most jobs in the market.

Nonetheless, this study provides a platform to increase the awareness of the importance of collaboration between academia and industry in providing students with more practical exposure and experience. Active collaboration between institutions of higher learning, career centres and employers would ensure more structured internship programs could be created to develop soft skills for the students. It would raise employers' awareness of their social responsibility in shaping the future workforce. The World Bank and TalentCorp surveys have reported the limited collaboration between firms and universities in terms of providing internship programs and developing curricula and programs together (Syed Jaafar, 2018). The findings of this study would also help MOHE to progressively develop action plans to improve graduate employability and to reform the education system in line with the evolving needs of the industry (Seismic Change Imminent in Learning, 2018). The ultimate goal is to close the gap between job and skill mismatch.

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