Investigating the Relationship between Perceived Importance and the Development of Employability Skills: Evidence from Undergraduate Business Students in Higher Education

Khin Than Myint*, Dr. Tanusree Chakravarty Mukherjee

Lecturer, Faculty of Business, Curtin University, Malaysia

***Corresponding Author**

DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.907000142

Received: 19 June 2025; Accepted: 01 July 2025; Published: 04 August 2025

ABSTRACT

This study investigates business students' perceptions of employability skills, focusing on their importance and development through the Decision-Making unit at an international branch campus of an Australian university in Malaysia. Given the growing concern over graduate employability, particularly in the post-COVID-19 Malaysian job market, this research aims to evaluate the skills that students consider most vital and their perception of how effectively these skills are acquired during their studies. A survey of 95 undergraduate business students was carried out online to measure the impact. The survey assessed 15 employability skills, measuring both perceived importance and perceived acquisition/development using a 7-point Likert scale. Descriptive statistics revealed that students rated problem-solving, time management and decision-making as the most important skills. Language, digital and presentation skills were rated as the least important. In terms of perceived skill development, analytical, decision-making and digital skills were rated as the most important, which aligns well with the unit's learning objectives and content. Spearman's correlation analysis revealed moderate, statistically significant positive correlations between perceived importance and acquisition for most skills. The strongest correlations were found in working under pressure, digital skills, and written communication. However, oral communication showed the weakest correlation, highlighting a discrepancy between perceived importance and perceived development. The findings suggest that, although the unit effectively fosters technical and analytical competencies, there are gaps in communication, leadership and interpersonal skills, which are increasingly prioritized by employers. This study identifies trends in employability skills development and guides curriculum design to meet industry needs by recommending more hands-on learning through activities such as presentations, teamwork and leadership to improve results.

Keywords: Graduate Employability, Employability Skills, Perceived Importance, Perceived Acquisition, Curriculum Design.

INTRODUCTION

Graduate employability is crucial in today's competitive job market, driving researchers to emphasize the significance of employability skills. These skills, such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and critical thinking, enable individuals to excel in the workplace (Kenayathulla et al., 2019). They are essential for securing and retaining entry-level jobs (Yorke & Knight, 2006), as they are transferable across various situations. The graduates believed that business schools are critical in enhancing graduate employability by providing practical skills and experience (Gurung et al., 2023).

Graduate employability is a critical issue in Malaysia, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Malaysian Employers Federation reported unemployment rates as high as 15%, affecting over two million individuals (Hoh, 2020). In this challenging job market, students need to acquire employability skills to enhance their job prospects. The issue of employability has emerged as a significant concern among a substantial portion of educated youth, indicating a gap in their skill sets. Consequently, there exists a pressing need to address the deficiencies within the current educational system and equip students with the necessary

skills to succeed in the workforce (Khare, 2014; Chaturvedi et al., 2021). Higher education institutions collaborate with employers to integrate both technical and transferable employability skills into the curriculum to meet evolving industry demands (Lowden et al., 2011; Gurung et al., 2023.). Incorporating work experience into the curriculum enhances employability (Succi et al., 2019). Employers prioritize a blend of academic excellence and soft skills in graduates (Juhdi et al., 2004). Recognizing the need for innovation, universities aim to equip students for success in a dynamic job market (Succi et al., 2019). Today's students understand the importance of employability skills beyond academic qualifications. However, some struggle to identify or develop them. Universities can help by offering opportunities like internships, work placements, and volunteering (Helyer & Lee, 2014; Lowden et al., 2011).

The literature on graduate employability delves into various facets, encompassing the significance of employability skills (Husain et al., 2010), the educational role in enhancing employability (Asonitou, 2015; Rao, 2014), and challenges faced by graduates in job acquisition (Lee et al., 2019). Studies indicate that individuals are faced with a considerable obstacle in staying abreast of the ever-evolving industry standards, navigating intricate work environments, and meeting stakeholder expectations. Additionally, these findings reveal a growing disparity in competencies, frequently resulting in recent graduates being underprepared for the job market. Furthermore, these studies have highlighted a widening skill gap, which often leaves many recent graduates unprepared for the workforce (Pillai et al., 2019; Chaturvedi et al., 2021). Research has identified a gap in assessing the impact of innovative teaching practices on graduates' employability skills (Ornellas et al., 2019). While the Malaysian studies acknowledge this gap, they lack specific recommendations. Existing studies, such as Mohamad Shukri et al. (2014) and Goh and Abdul-Wahab (2020), highlight differences in employer expectations. However, the impact of innovative teaching on employability skills, particularly in Malaysia, requires further empirical research. Such research could help improve the outcomes of graduates and address the challenges of employment.

This study explores the business students' views on employability skills at an international branch campus of an Australian university, focusing on the Analytics for Decision-Making unit. It assesses the importance of different skills and their development through the unit as well as the correlation between perceived importance and perceived development of employability skills by the students. The curriculum integrates analytical and decision-making skills using Blackboard and Pearson's MyLab platforms. The assignment involves applying analytics to real-world scenarios. These methods encourage collaborative learning and problem-solving. This research is significant as it explores how these innovations influence students' perceptions of the importance and development of their employability skills. Such approaches can potentially enhance students' readiness for the dynamic job market. Furthermore, this research is expected to contribute to the higher education literature by addressing employability skills development among business undergraduates.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employability Theory

Historically, higher education aimed to boost employability (Robbins, 1963). Employability and work readiness, though often synonymous, are distinct (Yorke, 2010). Employability entails necessary abilities, while work readiness enables success in the first job (Sachs et al., 2016). Institutions of higher learning organize employability events to improve students' job readiness and adequately prepare them for the workforce. The idea of employability has taken centre stage in labour and educational policies during the past few decades. International organizations such as the United Nations and the OECD have actively promoted solutions to improve employability (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005). Contemporary views include technical skills, non-technical traits like networking (Bridgstock, 2017), and professional identity (Zegwaard et al., 2017). The evolving concept emphasizes personal qualities, generic skills, and industry-specific knowledge. Chaturvedi et al. (2022) studied the impact of higher education on employability, particularly focusing on the Education Policy 2020 in India. They compared this policy with those from 1968 and 1986 to assess changes in addressing the employability gap. Thus, it is evident that employability is a dynamic concept.

Graduates' employability skills will inevitably shift from being more technically oriented to being more sociable and compassionate due to the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Graduates must shift their skill

concentration from developing only hard skills to developing soft skills, such as problem-solving, teamwork, project management, leadership, communication, and creative thinking (Teng et al., 2019; Ahmad Tajuddin et al., 2022).

A thorough literature analysis was carried out to determine the main theoretical frameworks of employability for recent business graduates and their underlying features (Gupta and Mahajan, 2024). Career Development Learning, experiences from work and life, degree subject knowledge, general skills, and emotional intelligence are some of the essential elements of career development that are highlighted by the Career EDGE model, which was created by Dacre Pool and Sewell in 2007. Patil et al. (2008) highlighted the importance of global competencies in multicultural and multinational contexts.

To achieve career growth, Bridgestock (2009) emphasized the importance of acquiring and utilizing the general and specific skills necessary for effective career management. Harvey (2010) emphasized how universities may help students develop a lifelong learning mindset that will increase their employability. Harvey's findings were contested by Copps and Plimmer's (2013) Journey of Employment (JET) model, which maintained that students have no one-size-fits-all approach because every person's career path is different.

Williams et al. (2016) identified three main underlying themes based on their systematic review of various employability approaches conducted by other researchers in the past: "capital" (Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007), the "career development" dimension (Tomlinson, 2007; Bridgestock, 2009), and a "contextual" component of employability. Few studies address the "hard" skills required of business students, arguing that they vary based on the specific business domain one wishes to concentrate on ((Di Gregorio et al., 2019; Gonzalez-Serrano et al., 2018). Various models and perspectives have been utilized to examine employability (Alvarez-Gonzalez et al., 2017; Singh et al., 2017; Van van Heijden et al., 2018; Chhinzer and Russo, 2018). Employability skills were redefined by Peeters et al. (2019) to assist individuals in both successfully changing jobs and keeping their current ones. Tomlinson's (2017) Graduate Capitals Model includes internal characteristics that are more comprehensive and pertinent to the graduates.

Clarke's (2018) holistic redefinition of employability incorporates both human capital and individual factors, creating a robust framework that aligns with the expectations of higher education stakeholders and employers. Clarke's model particularly emphasizes the interplay of social, psychological, and human capital in enhancing graduate employability, offering a foundation that institutions worldwide can adapt to improve graduates' employment outcomes. This study draws upon Clarke's integrative model to assess employability within a specific analytics course, connecting it to curriculum design practices that can enhance skill acquisition.

Student's Perception towards employability skills

Assessing student perceptions of employability skills is crucial for policy shaping. The graduates themselves must, above all, develop the knowledge, abilities, attitudes, traits, and understandings that will allow them to (i) find employment stability, (ii) obtain a new one when needed, and (iii) contribute their expertise to the employers, guaranteeing adequate and efficient operation. The Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), who promote suitable learning to ease the transition from school to the workplace, are the second actors. HEIs are progressively integrating academic and vocational learning in several subjects at the same time (Martin, Lord, and Warren-Smith 2020). This trend supports the argument made by Powell and Solga (2010) that higher and vocational education systems should ideally be examined as a nexus rather than as separate systems when analyzing the production of skills.

The employability skills framework must require that students be given the skills and information necessary to manage job-life ambiguity as well as the resources necessary to proactively and consciously address their long-term professional goals (Yawson et al., 2020; Gupta and Mahajan, 2024). However, prioritizing these abilities and integrating them best to give business graduates a comprehensive employability skill framework (Kornelakis and Petrakaki, 2020; Griffin and Coelhoso, 2019).

Quasi-atomistic level studies, which focus on small case studies assessing employability activities, are popular in this context. These studies typically analyze a specific course within a degree program, a particular faculty,

or a specific higher education institution (HEI). Mainga et al. (2022) surveyed 189 fourth-year business students, finding communication, learning, positive attitudes, and problem-solving crucial for entry-level roles. The authors emphasized academia, teamwork, and personal management as essential employability skills. Given the pandemic, these skills are precisely essential. They emphasised the need for new competencies to navigate complex workplace interactions effectively. This includes the ability to collaborate virtually using technology, as well as skills in reasoning, ideation, articulation, curiosity, imagination, and ongoing self-directed active learning, especially in the post-pandemic environment.

Continuous learning and soft skills aid in navigating volatile labour markets. Abbasi et al. (2018) assessed business graduates in Pakistan, noting deficiencies in listening, problem-solving, communication, leadership, and analytical skills. Recommendations emphasize adaptability and evolving skill acquisition for students, shifting from the pressure for job-ready graduates (Osmani et al., 2019). Graduates' opinions of the abilities required for the job were examined by Carr et al. (2006), who found that professionalism, communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, and generic skills were the most desired. Like employers, students say they lack important soft skills and need more experience or knowledge to hone them (Andrews & Higson, 2008). Lim et al. (2016) found a perception gap between recruiters and accounting graduates regarding employability skills' importance, affecting candidate selection. Employers prioritize dedication, professionalism, communication, analytical, and time management skills, often undervalued by students. The industry-led experiences in WIL sessions greatly enhanced the student's perceptions of their employability. Students reported improved employability abilities and chances to use their general and disciplinary skills in novel contexts. Most respondents indicated that their professional, interpersonal, and teamwork skills had improved after completing the activity, which is good overall. It suggests that WIL opportunities can be created to focus on these abilities. Responses to the industry-led workshops illustrated the value of the WIL experience and revealed how essential students thought it was to interact directly with industry partners (Twyford et al., 2024).

Student's Perception towards the acquisition/development of employability skills

Perception of acquiring employability skills is crucial in this context, yet literature in this area is lacking. Research and discussion on business students' perceptions of their employability skills proficiency are still underway (Benati and Fischer, 2020; Griffin and Coelhoso, 2019).

According to graduates, it is essential to prepare students for their future responsibilities. Tomlinson's (2017) a pproach emphasises several dynamic and overlapping dimensions, including psychological, social, cultural,

human, and identity capital. Abbasi et al. (2018) emphasize the importance of skills like listening, communication, and interpersonal abilities for graduates aspiring to work in banking. These skills are vital for managing complex monetary transactions and interacting effectively in a dynamic banking environment. Studies by Bennett and Ananthram (2022), Finch et al. (2013), McMurray et al. (2016), and Saeed (2015) corroborate the significance of these skills for employability. Al-Mutairi et al. (2014) found that numerical, computing, and analytical skills are crucial for Kuwaiti employers but moderately important for bankers in this study, reflecting variations in graduate skills and work environments across countries. The communication skills are crucial for business graduates' academic success and employability (Shrestha 2021). In order for future graduates to tackle complex and interconnected global challenges, Al-Shehab et al. (2021) emphasised the importance of developing crucial abilities like risk-management, decision-making, and teamwork (World Economic Forum, 2020; Deloitte, 2020).

The Malaysian Context

In Malaysia, employers seek graduates with a balanced mix of academic excellence and employability skills like communication, analytical thinking, and adaptability. However, a deficiency in these skills has led to high graduate unemployment rates. Effective oral communication, particularly during interviews, is crucial for problem-solving. To enhance job prospects, Malaysian students should prioritize English fluency and desired personal qualities, seizing academic opportunities. Many graduates lack essential employment skills, including language proficiency, interpersonal communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving.

Belderbos (2020) investigated IBC graduates' employability in Malaysia, emphasizing transnational skills acquisition and job opportunities. Interviews with 21 employers and a survey of 246 Malaysian students revealed IBC graduates possess vital soft skills crucial for job success. However, the study noted variations in employability impact among IBCs and their curricula. Teng et al. (2019) studied 361 undergraduate students, mostly Chinese, from two universities in China and Malaysia. They found that university coursework significantly contributes to fostering soft skills, particularly in Malaysian universities. This coursework positively correlates with student readiness for employment. Additionally, Malaysian students were more likely to perceive their universities' ability to enhance soft skills positively compared to Chinese students.

Tan et al. (2019) assessed soft skills integration in diploma business education across 12 institutions in northern Peninsular Malaysia. Their survey with 429 respondents highlighted improved communication and teamwork, stressing the importance of soft skills in enhancing problem-solving and critical thinking. Misni et al. (2020) developed a conceptual framework exploring graduates' perceptions of curriculum design's impact on employability competency in Malaysia's talent-shortage context. The study found significant effects, echoing prior research (Iyer & Dave, 2015; Pheko & Molefhe, 2017). Lee et al. (2019) found high demand for graduates in Accounting/Finance, Administration/Human Resources, and Sales/Marketing in Malaysia. Employers prioritize skills like presenting ideas, IT proficiency, language fluency, independent decision-making, and effective communication. Tanius et al. (2019) assessed employability skills among fresh business graduates, noting positive views overall but discrepancies among stakeholders. Nadarajah (2021) evaluated 300 graduates, revealing gaps in communication, problem-solving, and analytical skills, emphasizing the need for targeted skill enhancement. Kenayathulla et al. (2019) emphasize consistent teaching methods and assessment criteria in Malaysian higher education. Collaboration among universities, employers, and governments is vital to enhance students' graduate capital (Hardin et al., 2020). Limited research focuses on students' perspectives on employability, revealing early university students' oversight of specialization and engagement, which may hinder their employability. Employers value academic achievement and personal attributes. Employability literature urges universities to integrate soft and generic skills. Employers' expectations for graduates who are prepared for the workforce and students' concerns would be resolved if employability skills were integrated into the first-year curriculum. The literature on higher education reinforces arguments for a framework-based approach to employability and WIL pedagogies across the degree (Dean et al., 2020). This study, adopting Clarke's (2018) model, explores business students' perceptions of graduate employability within the Analytics for Decision Making unit framework, offering insights for improving graduate outcomes. Clarke’s integrative approach is based in three pillars: social capital (connections and networks), psychological capital (resilience, self-efficacy and optimism), and human capital (skills, knowledge, and credentials). In addition to covering the fundamental hard and soft skills required in a changing labour market, Clarke’s framework is robust and forward-thinking, encouraging ongoing professional and personal development.

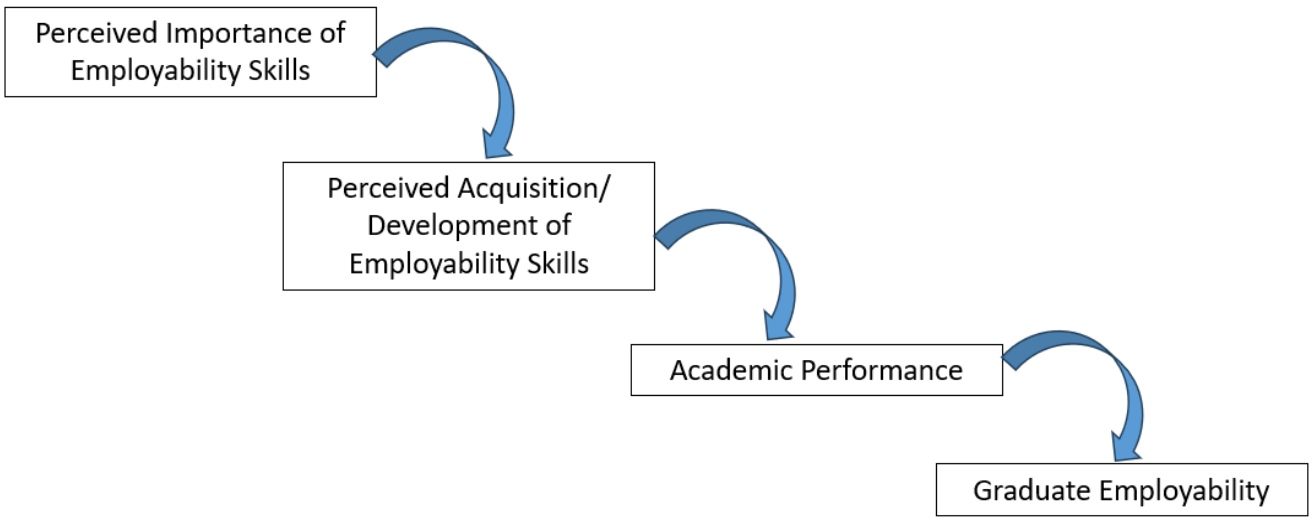

Figure 1: Research Framework of the Study: Relationships among employability skills, academic performance, and graduate outcomes"

ISSN No. 2454-6186 | DOI: 10.47772/IJRISS | Volume IX Issue VII July 2025

This framework hypothesizes that students' perceived importance of employability skills influences their acquisition and development of these skills, which subsequently impacts their academic performance and graduate employability.

Research Methods

Research Design

The quantitative research employed an online questionnaire survey for data collection, which was considered both viable and appropriate during the Movement Control Order (MCO) period of the COVID-19 pandemic. The online questionnaire survey method was preferred due to its convenience and accessibility, allowing student participants to respond from the safety and comfort of their home – a crucial advantage when travel and in-person interaction were restricted. This approach also offered flexibility in timing for both researchers and respondents. Furthermore, the increased penetration of Internet access and the growing digital literacy among students during this period further supported the practicality of using the online questionnaire survey for data collection.

Additionally, the unit of Analytics for Decision Making, which served as the context of this study, was conducted entirely online throughout the data collection phase. Despite the benefits of using an online survey, the researchers acknowledged certain challenges, including the potential for a lower response rate due to student fatigue from other units and distraction stemming from additional concerns about the pandemic. The researchers also recognised the possibility of sampling bias arising from self-selection among respondents. To mitigate this limitation, the researchers conducted weekly follow-ups with potential participants for a month after the survey commenced.

The study focused on students who completed the Analytics for Decision Making unit in the Faculty of Business. This core unit introduced undergraduates to multidisciplinary business decision-making issues. Students independently developed research proposals on economic and social aspects of a selected country, utilizing data analysis and visualization techniques. All enrolled students were invited to participate via email during the final week of the semester, with no incentives offered. The research successfully gathered responses from 95 students across four semesters, from March 2020 to June 2022, representing 26% of the total student population enrolled in the unit during that period.

While the sample size may seem modest, it is deemed sufficient for preliminary data analysis, especially given the use of descriptive statistics such as frequency, mean, standard deviation, ranking, and simple correlation analysis. This sample provides a foundation for generating hypotheses for future research.

The R package psych was selected for descriptive data analysis and Spearman correlation analysis, given its availability as a free platform and the researchers' familiarity with it. Preliminary data analysis revealed no significant differences among the data collected across the four semesters. Consequently, the datasets were aggregated and analysed collectively. This research has received the approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval code: HREC2021-0609), adhering to the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research (2007, updated 2018), Australia.

Table 1: Respondents' Profile (n = 95)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	32	33.7
Female	59	62.1
Not specified	3	3.2

ISSN No. 2454-6186 | DOI: 10.47772/IJRISS | Volume IX Issue VII July 2025

Course		
BBA	8	8.4
BCom	83	87.4
Not specified	3	3.2
Major		
Accounting and Finance	43	45.3
Management and Marketing	6	6.3
Finance and Management		
Management and HRM	5	5.3
Banking and Finance	5	5.3
Marketing and Public Relation	4	4.2
Finance and Marketing	3	3.2
Finance	3	3.2
	2	2.1
Year		
1	76	80.0
2	14	14.7
3	1	1.1
Not specified	3	3.2
Expected Grade		
Pass	6	6.3
Credit	16	16.8
Distinction	45	47.4
High Distinction	24	25.3
Not specified	3	3.2

The table 1 presents a diverse student demographic with 62.1% female and 33.7% male respondents, alongside 3.2% who did not specify their gender. The majority of students (87.4%) are enrolled in the Bachelor of Commerce (BCom) program, with a smaller percentage (8.4%) in the Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) and 3.2% unspecified. Accounting and Finance emerges as the most popular major (45.3%), followed by other less common majors such as Management and Marketing (6.3%) and Finance and Management (5.3%). Most respondents are first-year students (80%), while 14.7% are in their second year and only 1.1% in their third year. In terms of grade expectations, 47.4% of students anticipate receiving a Distinction, 25.3% expect a High Distinction, while smaller numbers foresee a Credit (16.8%) or a Pass (6.3%). These data suggest that the student body is largely composed of early-stage students, predominantly enrolled in finance-related majors, with high academic aspirations. This insight is essential for understanding the academic environment and could inform further analysis of how factors such as course enrollment, gender, and year of study relate to students' expectations and performance.

Variables and Measurement

The survey instrument of this study was developed based on prior employability studies in the business fields. The research measured 15 employability skills and required the sample to rate their perceived importance and acquisition or development of each skill from completing the Analytics for Decision Making unit. The items for employability skills were adopted from Hassall et al. (2003) and Lim et al. (2016). Recent studies that adopted similar scales include Lee et al. (2019) and Elo et al. (2023). A seven-point Likert scale was used to gauge the perceived importance of each skill from 1- not important at all to 7 – very important, and the perceived acquisition or development of the skills from 1–very low extent to 7 – very high extent.

RESULTS

This study aimed to assess the perceived importance of various employability skills among business students, as well as to determine the degree to which these skills were developed or acquired. Descriptive analysis using mean, standard deviation, and rank was conducted to identify the most important employability skills and perceived acquisition and development of the skills from completing the Analytics for Decision Making unit.

Perceived Importance of Employability Skills

The respondents were asked to rate the importance of the 15 employability skills. Refer to Table 2 for the mean score, standard deviation, and rank of the perceived importance of each employability skill.

Table 2: Perceived importance of employability skills

No.	Employability Skills	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
1.	Oral communication skill	5.88	1.24	6
2.	Written communication skill	5.72	1.04	12
3.	Problem-solving skill	6.08	1.07	1
4.	Analytical skill	5.96	1.09	4
5.	Critical thinking skill	5.88	1.09	6
6.	Time management skill	6.07	1.13	2
7.	Digital skill	5.64	1.20	14
8.	Ability to work in team	5.91	1.12	5
9.	Interpersonal skill	5.81	1.04	10
10.	Ability to work under pressure	5.88	1.07	6
11.	Language skill	5.57	1.16	15
12.	Organizing skill	5.86	1.02	9
13.	Decision making skill	5.98	1.09	3
14.	Presentation skill	5.71	1.20	13
15.	Leadership skill	5.78	1.22	11

The respondents rated 15 employability skills based on their perceived importance. The top three most important skills were **problem-solving** (mean = 6.08, SD = 1.07), **time management** (mean = 6.07, SD = 1.13), and **decision-making** (mean = 5.98, SD = 1.09), ranking first, second, and third, respectively. In contrast, the three least important skills were perceived to be **language skills** (mean = 5.57, SD = 1.16), **digital**

skills (mean = 5.64, SD = 1.20), and **presentation skills** (mean = 5.71, SD = 1.20), ranking 15th, 14th, and 13th. These findings highlight a focus on problem-solving and time management among students, while communication-oriented skills such as language and presentation were deemed less crucial.

The results of the table reveal students' perceptions of employability skills, with problem-solving, time management, and decision-making rated as the most important. These rankings reflect not only students' views but also broader trends in business education and labor market demands. By understanding why these skills are highly rated, educators and curriculum designers can better align educational programs to equip students with relevant competencies for their future careers.

Problem-solving, decision-making, and time management are ranked as the top three most important employability skills by students, reflecting their critical role in today's workplace. Problem-solving, rated the highest, is essential across industries like management, finance, and consulting, where employees are expected to find innovative solutions to complex challenges. Students likely recognize its importance due to its strong presence in business education through case studies and simulations. Closely related, decision-making, ranked third, is vital for strategic thinking and data-driven choices under pressure, which are often emphasized in case-based learning. This underscores the role of decision-making in leadership and management. Time management, the second highest-rated skill, is crucial for balancing workloads and meeting deadlines, particularly in fast-paced industries. Students' awareness of its importance likely stems from their own experiences managing academic and personal commitments. These rankings suggest that business programs should continue to offer opportunities for students to develop these competencies through real-world, time-sensitive projects and decision-making scenarios.

Despite the growing demand for communication and digital fluency in the labor market, these skills were ranked lower by students. Oral and written communication were placed in the middle and lower range (6th and 12th, respectively), which may suggest that students either feel confident in their communication abilities or underestimate their importance compared to other skills. Yet, strong communication is vital across nearly all sectors, especially in leadership, client-facing roles, and team-based projects, indicating a need for business schools to place more emphasis on communication-intensive assignments and presentations. Similarly, digital skills were ranked surprisingly low at 14th, despite the increasing digitalization of the workforce. While students may feel basic digital fluency, such as proficiency in software like Excel, is sufficient, they may overlook the growing importance of advanced digital competencies, like data analytics, artificial intelligence, and coding. This gap points to an opportunity for business programs to enhance their curriculum by integrating more digital tools and technologies, better preparing students for the evolving demands of the workforce.

Perceived Acquisition/Development of Employability Skills

Respondents were asked to rate their perceived acquisition or development of employability skills after completing the Analytics for Decision Making unit. Refer to Table 3 for the mean score, standard deviation, and rank of the perceived acquisition or development of each employability skill.

Table 3: Perceived acquisition / development of employability skills

No.	Employability Skills	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
1.	Oral communication skill	4.77	1.53	14
2.	Written communication skill	5.16	1.18	9
3.	Problem solving skill	5.64	1.15	5
4.	Analytical skill	5.88	1.09	1
5.	Critical thinking skill	5.66	1.14	4
6.	Time management skill	5.48	1.24	7

7.	Digital skill	5.69	1.13	3
8.	Ability to work in team	5.09	1.73	11
9.	Interpersonal skill	5.09	1.34	11
10.	Ability to work under pressure	5.43	1.20	8
11.	Language skill	5.01	1.25	13
12.	Organizing skill	5.54	1.13	6
13.	Decision making skill	5.77	1.05	2
14.	Presentation skill	5.12	1.49	10
15.	Leadership skill	4.84	1.61	15

Table 3 presents data on the perceived acquisition and development of employability skills among students, highlighting their self-assessed proficiency levels. The top-ranked skill is Analytical Skill (Mean: 5.88), indicating students feel most confident in their ability to analyze information critically, which is essential in today's data-driven environment. Decision-Making Skill (Mean: 5.77) ranks second, reflecting students' awareness of its importance in professional settings. Digital Skill (Mean: 5.69) ranks third, suggesting a growing recognition of digital literacy's relevance, while Critical Thinking (Mean: 5.66) and Problem Solving (Mean: 5.64) are also prominent, pointing to the need for more practical application opportunities. In contrast, Oral Communication (Mean: 4.77) and Leadership Skills (Mean: 4.84) are rated lowest, signaling a lack of confidence in these areas despite their critical role in the workplace, indicating a potential gap in the curriculum. Language Skill (Mean: 5.01) also ranks low, highlighting the need for enhancement. The disparity between perceived importance and actual development suggests educators should reassess curriculum designs to incorporate more experiential learning opportunities, such as presentations, group discussions, and leadership projects, and collaborate with industry professionals to ensure the curriculum aligns with the skills employers prioritize.

Spearman Correlation between Perceived Importance and Perceived Acquisition/Development of Employability Skills

The Spearman correlation analysis revealed significant correlations between 14 out of 15 employability skills in terms of perceived importance and perceived acquisition/development, with the only exception being oral communication skills. The significant correlation coefficients ranged from 0.322 to 0.582, indicating moderate correlations between the perceived importance and acquisition/development of employability skills. For detailed correlation values, refer to Table 4.

Table 4: Spearman correlation analysis for perceived Importance and perceived development

No.	Employability Skill	Correlation Coefficient	p-value
1.	Oral communication skill	0.105	0.312
2.	Written communication skill	0.481	<0.001
3.	Problem-solving skill	0.390	<0.001
4.	Analytical skill	0.453	<0.001
5.	Critical thinking skill	0.374	<0.001
6.	Time management skill	0.387	<0.001
7.	Digital skill	0.515	<0.001
8.	Ability to work in team	0.414	<0.001

ISSN No. 2454-6186 | DOI: 10.47772/IJRISS | Volume IX Issue VII July 2025

9.	Interpersonal skill	0.403	<0.001
10.	Ability to work under pressure	0.582	<0.001
11.	Language skill	0.477	<0.001
12.	Organizing skill	0.487	<0.001
13.	Decision making skill	0.450	<0.001
14.	Presentation skill	0.452	<0.001
15.	Leadership skill	0.322	0.001

Table 4 presents the results of a Spearman correlation analysis between the perceived importance and perceived development of employability skills. The correlation coefficients range from 0.105 to 0.582, indicating varying degrees of association between how important students perceive these skills to be and how well they believe they have developed them. The strongest correlations are found in the "Ability to Work Under Pressure" (0.582, $p < 0.001$), "Digital Skill" (0.515, $p < 0.001$), and "Written Communication Skill" (0.481, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that students recognize the significance of these skills and believe they have relatively well-developed capabilities in these areas. "Oral Communication Skill," however, shows the weakest correlation (0.105, $p = 0.312$), indicating a possible disconnect between its perceived importance and students' confidence in their ability to develop it effectively. Most skills have statistically significant correlations ($p < 0.001$), suggesting a general alignment between the importance and development of employability skills, but the variations in correlation strength point to areas where curriculum enhancements could better support skill development, particularly in communication and leadership skills.

DISCUSSION

The primary objective of this study was to investigate business students' perspectives on the importance of various employability skills and assess their perceived development of these skills following the completion of the Analytics for Decision Making unit. This discussion section explores the implications and nuances of the findings, highlighting the importance of the employability skills identified and the role of curriculum design in developing skills.

Perceived Importance of Employability Skills

The importance of employability skills is perceived to be related to the ability to make career choices and acquire work-related skills while studying to find suitable employment in the field of study. The focus of the study was to measure the perceived importance of employability skills among the business students who were surveyed. The results revealed a clear consensus among the respondents regarding the top three most important employability skills: problem-solving, time management, and decision-making. These findings are consistent with the existing literature on employability skills and emphasise the continuing relevance of these skills in today's dynamic labour market. Among the top important employability skills perceived by the sample, problem-solving skill demonstrates the most consistent finding as compared to the relevant literature (e.g., Lim et al. 2016; Mainga et al., 2022; Osmani et al., 2019; Strong et al., 2020). The relatively higher importance placed on time management skills concurs with that of Osmani et al. (2019) in the UK. The perceived importance of decision-making skills is also in line with most prior literature (e.g., Lim et al., 2016; Osmani et al., 2019; Strong et al., 2020).

However, it is noteworthy that the students rated language, digital, and presentation skills as the least essential employability skills. While this perspective may be influenced by the specific nature of the Analytics for Decision-Making unit, recent literature suggests that employers increasingly value these skills in response to technological advancements and globalization (OECD, 2021). For instance, proficiency in digital skills has become indispensable in the digital era, with studies highlighting its correlation with employability and job performance (OECD, 2021; Kovacs, 2021). Therefore, curriculum designers must reassess the emphasis placed on these skills to ensure alignment with evolving industry demands.

Nevertheless, these findings invite reflection on the alignment of curriculum content with the evolving demands of the employment landscape. In particular, the declining importance of language and digital skills should be critically assessed, given the pervasiveness of these skills in today's professional environment.

To effectively integrate language and digital literacy into curricula, designers should adopt a multifaceted approach. This includes project-based learning (PBL) for real-world challenges and partnerships with industry stakeholders for internships and workshops. Embedding skill development modules within courses—such as effective written communication in digital marketing—reinforces relevance. Simulations and role-playing scenarios allow students to practice articulating ideas clearly while using digital tools. Redesigning assessments to prioritize these skills and maintaining curricular flexibility based on feedback ensures courses remain effective. Through these strategies, course designers can better prepare students for the modern workplace, enhancing their employability in a technology-driven landscape.

Perceived Acquisition/Development of Employability Skills

Following the assessment of skill importance, the study focused on the perceived acquisition or development of employability skills resulting from completing the Analytics for Decision-Making unit. Acquisition/development of decision-making skills also corresponds with the country profile assignment of the unit, where students are required to recommend solutions based on their analysis output. The students reported notable progress in three key areas: analytical, decision-making, and digital skills. This finding suggests that the unit's curriculum and assignments effectively fostered these competencies, aligning with its core content focused on data analysis and decision support.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge the discrepancies between the students' perceptions and some prior research. Specifically, the contrasting result regarding the significance of analytical skills, as compared to the study by Abbasi et al. (2018) in Pakistan, underscores the context-dependent nature of skill assessments. Employability skills are shaped by a multitude of factors, including cultural influences, industry requirements, and educational contexts. Therefore, a nuanced understanding of these dynamics is crucial for curriculum designers and educators.

This study contributes to Clarke's (2018) Graduate Employability Framework by examining human capital aspects, specifically the perceived importance and development of employability skills among business students in a developing economy. The research highlights the diversity of perceptions regarding employability skills across stakeholders and student groups globally, underscoring the importance of collaborative curriculum design between universities and employers to address the unique demands of various fields and regional job markets.

The findings of this study have significant implications for curriculum design and higher education. The alignment between perceived skill importance and development highlights the potential for tailored educational interventions. This knowledge should be leveraged by curriculum designers to enhance the curriculum's effectiveness in cultivating employability skills, with a specific focus on the skills that students and employers deem most valuable.

To enhance curriculum design, several key areas should be addressed. First, business programs should continue emphasizing problem-solving and decision-making by incorporating more data-driven projects and unstructured, real-world problems, potentially through partnerships with companies or live case studies. This approach can help students apply data analytics and financial models in complex situations. Second, communication and presentation skills must be more intentionally integrated through assignments like client simulations, public speaking exercises, and writing tasks that mirror professional business communication. Exposure to cross-cultural communication, especially in international business contexts, would further enrich students' skills. Third, strengthening digital literacy is essential, as students may underestimate the role of technology in business. Offering more coursework on digital transformation, AI, and data analytics, along with certifications in business software and coding, would better prepare students for a digitalized workforce. Finally, the curriculum should place more focus on interpersonal and leadership skills, which are crucial for long-term career growth but are often undervalued by students early on. Team-based projects, leadership

simulations, and role-playing can provide valuable opportunities for students to practice people management and leadership in dynamic, diverse environments.

Correlation between Perceived Importance and Perceived Acquisition/Development of Employability Skills

The correlation between perceived importance and perceived acquisition or development of employability skills reveals several interesting insights. For most skills, there is a significant positive correlation, indicating that students are more likely to feel they have developed the skills they consider important. For example, skills such as decision-making ($r = 0.450$), digital literacy ($r = 0.515$), and the ability to work under pressure ($r = 0.582$) show strong correlations, suggesting that students feel that their educational experiences have adequately helped them develop in these critical areas. However, the lower correlation for oral communication skills ($r = 0.105$, $p = 0.312$) highlights a gap, suggesting that while communication is important, students may not feel they have sufficiently developed these skills in their coursework. This suggests a need for better integration of communication-focused activities into the curriculum. Similarly, interpersonal skills and teamwork, which are essential for career advancement, show moderate correlations, highlighting the need for more practical exercises to reinforce these skills. Overall, this analysis underscores the importance of aligning perceived skill acquisition with industry needs and enhancing the curriculum to address any gaps in skill development.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study aimed to assess the perceived importance and acquisition of employability skills among business students, particularly after completing the Analytics for Decision-Making unit. The findings provide valuable insights into how the perceived importance of skills relates to the actual skills developed within this academic unit. The results showed that problem-solving, time management, and decision-making were consistently identified as the most important employability skills by the students surveyed. These findings are generally consistent with existing literature and underline the universal importance of these skills in today's labor market. On the other hand, language skills, digital skills, and presentation skills were rated as the least important employability skills by the students. This may reflect the specific focus of the Analytics for Decision Making unit, which may not heavily emphasise these skills. It is essential to note that the importance of certain skills may vary across different academic contexts and industries.

Regarding the acquisition and development of employability skills, students reported notable progress in analytical skills, decision-making skills, and digital skills after completing the unit. This aligns with the unit's core content and assignments, which emphasise data analysis and decision-making. However, it is worth mentioning that these findings differ from some prior research, suggesting that the significance of analytical skills may vary depending on the context. This study underscores the critical role of problem-solving, time management, and decision-making skills in preparing business students for the job market. While the Analytics for Decision Making unit appears to effectively enhance analytical and decision-making skills, the development of other skills, such as language skills and leadership skills, may require additional emphasis in the curriculum to better align with industry expectations and market demands. These findings provide valuable insights for curriculum designers, educators, and policymakers aiming to optimize the employability outcomes of business students.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, it relies on self-reported data, which may introduce response bias or overestimation of perceived skill development. Second, the sample is limited to undergraduate business students from a single institution, restricting generalizability to other disciplines or institutional contexts. The small sample size also limits statistical power and may lead to non-response bias. Third, the cross-sectional design captures student perceptions at a single point in time, limiting insights into how these evolve throughout their academic journey. Furthermore, the study did not consider external factors such as institutional support systems, labor market dynamics, or cultural influences, all of which may affect employability skill acquisition. It also overlooks personal attributes and core competencies that play a

significant role in graduate employability. Additionally, the analysis was limited to descriptive statistics and basic correlations, which restricted deeper examination of inter-variable relationships.

The findings of this study nonetheless contribute to the growing body of literature on graduate employability by emphasizing the importance of aligning curriculum design with students perceived priorities. While analytical and decision-making skills were effectively developed through the unit, gaps remain in communication, leadership, and interpersonal skills. These findings underscore the need for enhanced experiential learning through team-based projects, presentations, and leadership activities to support more comprehensive skill development.

To address the limitations and expand this line of inquiry, future research should adopt a longitudinal design to track how students' perceptions and skill development evolve over time. Broader inclusion of students across disciplines and institutions will improve generalizability, while qualitative approaches—such as interviews or focus groups—can offer deeper insight into student motivations, barriers, and the contextual influences on skill acquisition. Examining external factors such as institutional support and industry engagement can provide a more holistic view of employability readiness. Investigating subgroup differences, such as gender or academic performance, may also support more tailored educational strategies.

REFERENCES

1. Abbasi, F. K., Ali, A., & Bibi, N. (2018). Analysis of skill gap for business graduates: Managerial perspective from banking industry. Education+ Training, 60(4), 354-367.
2. Ahmad Tajuddin, S. N. A., Bahari, K. A., Al Majdhoub, F. M., Balraj Baboo, S., & Samson, H. (2022). The expectations of employability skills in the Fourth Industrial Revolution of the communication and media industry in Malaysia. Education+ Training, 64(5), 662-680.
3. Al-Mutairi, A., Naser, K., & Saeid, M. (2014). Employability factors of business graduates in Kuwait: Evidence from an emerging country. International Journal of Business and Management, 9(10), 49.
4. Asonitou, S. (2015). Employability skills in higher education and the case of Greece. Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 175, 283-290.
5. Belderbos, T. (2020). The employability of international branch campus graduates: Evidence from Malaysia. Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning, 10(1), 141-154.
6. Bennett, D., & Ananthram, S. (2022). Development, validation and deployment of the Employability scale. Studies in Higher Education, 47(7), 1311-1325.
7. Bridgstock, R. (2017). The university and the knowledge network: A new educational model for twenty-first century learning and employability. In Holmes, L. &Tomlinson, M. (Eds.) Graduate Employability in Context: Theory, Research and Debate. United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 339-358.
8. Carr, S., Chua, F., & Perera, H. (2006). University accounting curricula: The perceptions of an alumni group. Accounting Education, 15(4), 359–376. https://doi.org/10.1080/09639280601011040
9. Chaturvedi, S., Purohit, S., & Verma, M. (2021, June). Effective teaching practices for success during COVID 19 pandemic: Towards phygital learning. In Frontiers in Education (Vol. 6, p. 646557). Frontiers Media SA.
10. Chaturvedi S., Purohit S., & Verma M. (2022). Can new education Policy 2020 serve as a
11. paradigm shift to the employability gap in India?: A viewpoint. In Public Affairs Education and
12. Training in the 21st Century (pp. 139–154). IGI Global.
13. Clarke, M. (2018) Rethinking graduate employability: the role of capital, individual attributes and context. Studies in Higher Education, 43(11), 1923-1937.
14. Dean, B. A., Eady, M. J., & Yanamandram, V. (2020). Advancing non-placement work-integrated
15. learning across the degree. Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice, 17(4), 1–4.
16. https://doi.org/10.53761/1.17.4.1
17. Elo, T., Pätäri, S., Sjögrén, H., & Mättö, M. (2023). Transformation of skills in the accounting field: The expectation–performance gap perceived by accounting students. Accounting Education, 1-37.
18. Finch, D.J., Hamilton, L.K., Baldwin, R., & Zehner, M. (2013). An exploratory study of factors affecting undergraduate employability. Education + Training, 55(7), 681-704.

19. Goh, P.S.C., & Abdul-Wahab, N. (2020). Paradigms to drive higher education 4.0. International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research, 19(1), 159-171.
20. Gurung, S. K., Chapagain, R., & Thapa, B. G. (2023). Perceptions of employability of undergraduate business program graduates: A qualitative analysis. Journal of Business and Management, 7(01), 138-157.
21. Hardin-Ramanan, S., Gopee, S., Rowtho, V., & Charoux, O. (2020). Graduate Work-Readiness in Mauritius: A Multi-Stakeholder Approach. Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability, 11(1), 93-109.
22. Hassall, T., Joyce, J., Arquero Montano, J.L., & Donoso Anes, J.A. (2003). The vocational skills gap for management accountants: The stakeholders' perspectives. Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 40, 78-88.
23. Helyer, R., & Lee, D. (2014). The role of work experience in the future employability of higher education graduates. Higher Education Quarterly, 68(3), 348-372.
24. Hoh, K.S. (2020). MEF: 2 million Malaysians Lose Jobs, The Sun, 24 April, available at: https://www.thesundaily.my/covid-19/mef-2-million-malaysians-may-lose-jobs-JG2329795 [Accessed 8 May 2023].
25. Husain, M.Y., Mokhtar, S., Ahmad, A., & Mustapha, R. (2010). Importance of Employability Skills from Employers' Perspective. Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 7, 430-438.
26. Iyer, V.M., & Dave, K. (2015). Industry's role in employability. Industrial and Commercial Training, 47(3), 151-158.
27. Juhdi, N., Abu Samah, A.J., & Yunus, S. (2004). Perceived employability skills of graduating students: Implications for SMEs. UNITAR e-Journal, 4(1).
28. Kenayathulla, H.B., Ahmad, N.A., & Idris, A.R. (2019). Gaps between competence and importance of employability skills: Evidence from Malaysia. Higher Education Evaluation and Development, 13(2), 97-112.
29. Khare, M. (2014). Employment, employability and higher education in India: The missing links. Higher Education for the Future, 1(1), 39-62.
30. Kovacs, I. (2021). Digital marketing soft skills and university students' perceptions of employability. GILE Journal of Skills Development, 1(1), 25-36.
31. Lee, T.H., Ling, C.C., Lim, Y.M., & Cham, T.H. (2019). University education and employment challenges: An evaluation of fresh accounting graduates in Malaysia. International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, 9(9), 1061-1076.
32. Lim, Y.M., Lee, T.H., Yap, C.S., & Ling, C.C. (2016). Employability skills, personal qualities, and early employment problems of entry-level auditors: Perspectives from employers, lecturers, auditors, and students. Journal of Education for Business, 91(4), 185-192.
33. Lowden, K., Hall, S., Elliot, D., & Lewin, J. (2011). Employers' perception of the employability skills of new graduates. University of Glasgow, The SCRE Centre and Edge Foundation.
34. Mainga, W., Murphy-Braynen, M.B., Moxey, R., & Quddus, S.A. (2022). Graduate employability of business students. Administrative Sciences, 12(3), 72.
35. McMurray, S., Dutton, M., McQuaid, R., & Richard, A. (2016). Employer demands from business graduates. Education+ Training, 58(1), 112-132.
36. McQuaid, R.W. and Lindsay, C. (2005) 'The concept of employability', Urban Studies, 42 (2): 197-219.
37. Misni, F., Mahmood, N., & Jamil, R. (2020). The effect of curriculum design on the employability competency of Malaysian graduates. Management Science Letters, 10(4), 909-914.
38. Mohamad Shukri, A.H., Islam, R., & Noor Hazilah, A.M. (2014). Malaysian graduates' employability skills enhancement: An application of the importance-performance analysis. Journal for Global Business Advancement, 7(3), 181-197.
39. Nadarajah, J. (2021). Measuring the gap in employability skills among Malaysian graduates. International Journal of Modern Trends in Social Sciences, 4(15), 81-87.
40. OECD (2021), OECD Economic Outlook, Volume 2021 Issue 2, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/66c5ac2c-en.
41. Ornellas, A., Falkner, K., & Edman Stålbrandt, E. (2019). Enhancing graduates' employability skills through authentic learning approaches. Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning, 9(1), 107-120.

42. Osmani, M., Weerakkody, V., Hindi, N., & Eldabi, T. (2019). Graduates' employability skills: A review of literature against market demand. Journal of Education for Business, 94(7), 423-432.
43. Pheko, M.M., & Molefhe, K. (2017). Addressing employability challenges: A framework for improving the employability of graduates in Botswana. International Journal of Adolescence and Youth, 22(4), 455-469.
44. Pillai, K. R., Upadhyaya, P., Balachandran, A., & Nidadavolu, J. (2019). Versatile learning ecosystem: a conceptual framework. Higher Education for the Future, 6(1), 85-100.
45. Rao, M.S. (2014). Enhancing employability in engineering and management students through soft skills. Industrial and Commercial Training, 46(1), 42-48.
46. Robbins, L. (1963). Report of the Committee on Higher Education. Available at: http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/small/cab-129-114-c-173.pdf [Accessed 20 July 2023]
47. Sachs, J., Rowe, A., & Wilson, M. (2016). 2016 Good Practice Report-Work Integrated Learning (WIL). Canberra: Department of Education and Training.
48. Saeed, K. (2015). Gaps in marketing competencies between employers' requirements and graduates' marketing skills. Pakistan Business Review, 17(1), 125-146.
49. Succi, C., & Canovi, M. (2019). Soft skills to enhance graduate employability: comparing students and employers' perceptions. Studies in Higher Education, 45, 1-14.
50. Strong, M.H., Burkholder, G.J., Solberg, E.G., Stellmack, A., Presson, W.D., & Seitz, J B. (2020). Development and validation of a global competency framework for preparing new graduates for early career professional roles. Higher Learning Research Communications, 10(2), 67-115.
51. Tan, C., Kanesan Abdullah, A. G., & Ali, A. J. (2019). The effects of soft skill integration on quality of college life of diploma business students: Evidence from Malaysian private higher education. Journal of International Education in Business, 12(2), 133-146.
52. Tanius, E., Johari, H.B., Yulia, A., Heng, C.S., & Pazim, K.H. (2019). The employability skills performance of business graduates in Malaysia: Do employers, graduates and academicians speak the same language. International Journal of Asian Social Science, 9(1), 11-17.
53. Teng, W., Ma, C., Pahlevansharif, S., & Turner, J.J. (2019). Graduate readiness for the employment market of the 4th industrial revolution: The development of soft employability skills. Education + Training, 61(5), 590-604.
54. Twyford, Erin, and Bonnie Amelia Dean. "Inviting students to talk the talk: Developing employability skills in accounting education through industry-led experiences." Accounting Education 33, no. 3 (2024): 296-318.
55. Yorke, M. (2010). Employability: Aligning the message, the medium and academic values. Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability, 1(1), 2-12.
56. Yorke, M., & Knight, P. T. (2006). Embedding employability into the curriculum (Vol. 3). York: Higher Education Academy.
57. Zegwaard, K.E., Campbell, M., & Pretti, T.J. (2017). Professional identities and ethics: The role of work-integrated learning in developing agentic professionals. In Work-Integrated Learning in the 21st Century (International Perspectives on Education and Society, Vol. 32). Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited, pp. 145-160.