

**IDENTIFYING THE COMPONENTS AND
FACTORS OF GRADUATE'S EMPLOYABILITY:
THE PERSPECTIVES OF POLICYMAKERS,
UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS,
UNDERGRADUATES AND EMPLOYERS IN
PENANG**

MOO KENG HAO

UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

2023

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PENANG**

by

MOO KENG HAO

**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts**

September 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am deeply grateful to my wife, Jesslyn Wong, for her unwavering support, encouragement, and understanding during my thesis journey. I am also grateful to my parents, siblings, and family for their continuous support and motivation. Their unwavering faith in my abilities is truly appreciated.

I express my sincere appreciation to my supervisor, Dr Majid Ghasemy, for his invaluable guidance, expertise, and mentorship. I am also grateful to my previous supervisor, Dr. Muhammad Muftahu and Dr. Wan Chang Da, now my co-supervisor, for his early contributions to my research.

I would like to extend my thanks to the staff of the National Higher Education Research Institute (IPPTN) and the Institute of Postgraduate Studies (IPS) USM, for their support and assistance throughout my research journey.

Special thanks to ViTrox Technologies for sponsoring my tuition fees and providing work arrangements, alleviating the financial burden of my postgraduate studies. I also appreciate my work supervisor's understanding and support in accommodating my research commitments alongside my work responsibilities.

I am deeply grateful to all those mentioned above and many others who have supported me in various ways throughout my thesis journey. Your encouragement, guidance, and assistance have been invaluable, and I am truly grateful for your unwavering support.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GLFPR	Graduates and Graduates Labour Force Participation Rate
GTS	Graduate Tracer Study
HEI	Higher Education Institute
HREC	Human Research Ethics Committee USM
ILO	International Labour Organization
IR 4.0	Fourth Industrial Revolution
MOHE	Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia
NDTS	National Dual Training System
PROTEGE	Professional Training and Education for Growing Entrepreneurs
SLaPB	Accredited Programme Training System
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UK	United Kingdom
UNIMAS	Universiti Malaysia Sarawak
UNITEN	Universiti Tenaga Nasional
US	United State
WBL	Work-Based Learning

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**MENGENALPASTI KOMPONEN DAN FAKTOR KEBOLEHPASARAN
GRADUAN: PERSPEKTIF DARIPADA PEMBUAT POLISI, PENTADBIR
UNIVERSITI, MAJIKAN DAN PRASISWAZAH DI PULAU PINANG**

ABSTRAK

Terdapat banyak kajian mengenai kebolehpasaran graduan telah dijalankan oleh penyelidik dari pelbagai disiplin sebelum ini. Namun, penyelidikan yang dijalankan tidak melibatkan keempat-empat pihak berkepentingan yang dikaji dalam kajian ini. Selain itu, kadar pengangguran di Malaysia menunjukkan corak peningkatan demi tahun, dan usaha yang diambil oleh setiap pihak tidak seragam dan menyebabkan kebaziran usaha dan sumber. Oleh itu, tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji dan memahami definisi kebolehpasaran graduan dari perspektif pihak berkepentingan dalam pendidikan tinggi, iaitu pembuat dasar, pentadbir universiti, majikan, dan prasiswazah. Dua orang pembuat dasar, enam orang wakil pentadbiran universiti, sepuluh orang wakil majikan, dan enam orang wakil prasiswazah telah dipilih sebagai peserta dalam kajian ini. Mereka dipilih atas sebab mereka yang menghasilkan impak terus dan penerima manfaat langsung dari kebolehpasaran graduan. Data bagi pembuat dasar dikumpulkan dari pembuat dasar daripada Kementerian Pendidikan Tinggi, manakala wakil pentadbiran universiti terdiri daripada sebuah salah satu universiti penyelidikan di Penang dan sebuah kolej antarabangsa di Penang. Manakala wakil majikan yang dipilih terdiri daripada sesiapa yang terlibat secara langsung dalam proses mengupah pekerja dalam syarikat mereka. Akhir sekali, wakil prasiswazah adalah mereka yang masih belajar di universiti dan kolej. Data kualitatif dikumpulkan menggunakan temubual separa berstruktur sebagai instrumen. Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa kebolehpasaran adalah satu proses, dan

ia mempunyai empat ciri iaitu kesesuaian pekerjaan, keupayaan untuk dipekerjakan, kesiapan untuk pekerjaan, dan kelestarian pekerjaan. Kajian ini juga mendapati bahawa kebolehpasaran boleh ditafsirkan dalam jangka pendek dan jangka panjang. Atribut kemahiran dan atribut pengetahuan adalah penyumbang kepada kebolehpasaran jangka pendek, manakala atribut kompetensi dan atribut kecekapan, bersama dengan dua jenis atribut lain, menyumbang kepada kebolehpasaran jangka panjang bagi graduan. Kajian ini juga mentakrifkan faktor-faktor luar yang mempengaruhi kebolehpasaran graduan, iaitu perubahan ekonomi, perkembangan teknologi, kompetensi pensyarah, dasar kerajaan, dan reka bentuk kurikulum, di mana kajian ini mentakrifkannya sebagai pemboleh ubah bebas kepada kebolehpasaran graduan. Bagi mengurangkan impak negatif faktor luar terhadap kebolehpasaran graduan, setiap pihak berkepentingan perlu memainkan peranan masing-masing. Oleh itu, kajian ini mengemukakan cadangan peranan pembuat dasar, pentadbir universiti, majikan, dan prasiswazah dalam meningkatkan kebolehpasaran graduan. Pembuat dasar digalakkan memainkan peranan sebagai jejantas untuk semua pihak berkepentingan dan fokus kepada peningkatan kemahiran prasiswazah. Pentadbir universiti perlu memberi tumpuan kepada penyediaan pelajar, kerjasama dengan industri, dan pembangunan profesional pensyarah. Majikan perlu bersedia untuk mengupah prasiswazah sebelum tamat pengajian, bersikap terbuka kepada yang lain tentang keperluan dan syarat mengupah, dan mengupah graduan dari pelbagai bidang. Graduan perlu memberi keutamaan kepada peningkatan diri, pembelajaran berterusan, dan penglibatan proaktif dengan perkhidmatan kerjaya.

**IDENTIFYING THE COMPONENTS AND FACTORS OF GRADUATE'S
EMPLOYABILITY: THE PERSPECTIVES OF POLICYMAKERS,
UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS, UNDERGRADUATES AND
EMPLOYERS IN PENANG**

ABSTRACT

There numerous of study about employability has been conducted by researchers from different discipline previously. However, the research that conducted did not touch on all four stakeholders that this study looks into. Beside that, the unemployment rate of Malaysia is having the trend of increase yearly, and effort that taken are not uniform. Therefore, this study explored the concept of employability by unpacking this from the perspectives of policymakers, university administrators, employers and undergraduates. Policymakers, university administrators representatives, employer representatives and undergraduate representatives were recruited as participants in this study. These respondents were selected because they are the ones who produce the direct impact and direct beneficiary of employability. Data for policymakers was collected through the policymaker who is from the Ministry of Higher Education, whereas the university representatives are from a public research university in Penang and an international college in Penang. While for employers, the chosen employers' representatives are those who are involved directly in the recruitment process of that particular company. Lastly, student representatives are the students who are still studying at the public research university and the international college in Penang. Qualitative data were collected using semi-structured interviews as instruments. Results showed that employability is a process, and it has four characteristics which are job suitability, ability to be employed, readiness of

employment and job sustainability. The study also found that employability skill can be interpreted in both the short-run and long-run. Skill-based employability and knowledge-based employability primarily contribute to short-term employability, while competence-based employability and capability-based employability, along with the other two employability types, contribute to long-term employability for graduates. This study also defined the external factors that affecting the graduate employability which is changing of economy, evolving of technology, lecturer's competency, government policy and design of curriculum where this study defined is as dependent variable of graduate employability. To reduce the impact of the external towards the graduate employability each stakeholders need to play their roles subsequently. Therefore, this study made the recommendation for the of roles of policymakers, university administrators, employers, and graduates in enhancing graduate employability. Policymakers can promote stakeholder collaboration and skills enhancement. Universities should focus on preparing students, fostering industry collaborations, and faculty professional development. Employers need to be willing to employ graduates before graduation, be transparent to all about requirement of hiring, and hire from diverse fields. Graduates should prioritize personal improvement, continuous learning, and proactive engagement with career services.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Higher education is commonly perceived as preparation for workplace learning, an assumption that underpins research on the transfer of knowledge between different contexts, such as from education to the workplace. Other authors go a step further, arguing for close connectedness between learning in higher education and the workplace (Römgens, Scoupe & Beusaert, 2020).

There are four main stakeholders in higher education which are policymakers, universities, industry and students. Each of them plays a big role in contributing to national higher education. Just like how the stakeholders attempted to solve the problem of unemployment over the years. However, the effort may be wrong in the first place due to the stakeholders having a different understanding of the term employability. This is because most of the differences go beyond the definition of the term, to debates on how employability can be developed, how it should be developed and the responsibility of various stakeholders in its provision (Cheng et al., 2022).

The issue of unemployment has a very close relationship with the stakeholders of the Higher Education Institute (HEI) including policymakers, universities, students and employers. The reason is that, universities play the role of the producer of the workforce, and it is named the ‘supply side’ of the workforce. Universities need to be constantly informed of the academic and non-academic skills required by employers which are the demand side of workforce (Longhi & Jewell, 2022).

Consequently, employers are the ‘demand side’ of the workforce because they need the workforce to contribute. As described by Tomlinson and Anderson (2021), the demand side is what employer organisations expect from employable graduates and the effect this has on employability.

Clearly, the students are the main role here. They are the future workforce. Policymakers and universities, especially the management team, are trying their best to shape the students to fit the needs of employers. While for policymakers, they are playing a big role as the coordinator between the other 3 stakeholders. This was highlighted by Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2016), which emphasised the importance of policy coherence through a whole-of-government approach with full stakeholder engagement, including the private sector, and strengthened interactions between the world of work and the world of education and training.

The stakeholders may be confused about employability and employment. Therefore, they will believe that when a student is hired, it means the student is equipped with employability skills. The truth is, there are differences between employability and employment. Employability is about how likely the students will get hired by the employer and accepted by the industry with the skills that the students are equipped with. While employment is defined as the employer being willing to pay the student in order to obtain the talent, namely the student with acquired skills (Longhi & Jewell, 2022). Thus, this study needs to be conducted to establish a uniform interpretation of employability for the stakeholders in higher education.

1.2 Background of the Study

The issue of unemployment has remained unresolved for a few decades ago around the world, and Malaysia couldn't escape from it as well. This study will look into the common understanding of employability among policymakers, universities, students and employers in order to standardise the effort of solving the problem of 20% of fresh graduates who remain unemployed in Malaysia (Husin et al., 2021). The nation produced 4.94 million graduates in 2018, while for 2019 there is an increase of 6.9% which is 5.29 million. The trend continued to rise from 4.4% to 5.36 million graduates (Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM), 2022). With that being said, the number of fresh graduates is increasing yearly which means the competition among fresh graduates is increasing, therefore increasing the employability of fresh graduates is needed badly (Ma'dan, Ismail & Daud, 2020).

The main characteristic of employability for fresh graduates is to place themselves as one of the workforce. Securing a good job after graduating from university and finding an exciting place to begin a career is the prime focus of every fresh graduate (Rehman et al., 2019). However, the common definition of employability from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) differs from the students' expectations. Employability, as described by ILO, should include skills which may be of use to students in choosing their desired occupations. This narrative is very much in line with students whose aim is to secure a job when they finally graduate from university. ILO has defined employability as a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy (Sarkar et al., 2020).

The understanding of employability has been defined by researchers and scholars from different perspectives and disciplines in order to solve the problem of unemployment ever since a few decades ago, a clear definition and concept of employability has been defined by them from different perspectives, even with a clear-cut of what employability is and came out with the suggestions and recommendations that are applicable to overcome the issue of unemployment (Römgens, Scoupe, & Beusaert, 2020). However, the contributors to the concept of employability mainly focus on their specialisation and view the concept only from their professional perspective. With that being said, concept and understanding of employability still describe by previous researcher from only one angle which is their speciality. As time goes by, the concept of employability has become more important due to the changing nature of the graduate labour market (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020). Consequently, all challenges led this study to be conducted because the understanding of each party of Higher Education stakeholders is different (Otache & Edopkolor, 2022).

1.3 Problem Statement

The concept of employability has been extensively researched from different disciplinary perspectives, resulting in varying definitions of graduate employability (Williams et al., 2015). This has led to the lack of a common understanding of the term, hindering effective communication and collaboration among the stakeholders involved in enhancing graduate employability (Cheong, Leong, & Hill, 2021).

There are shortcomings from previous study in term of methodology, analytical and theoretical. A methodological problem relates to the procedures and techniques used to collect and analyse data (Duncan, 2018). It points to potential shortcomings in

the research design, data collection methods, or data analysis techniques that might affect the validity and reliability of the study's findings. According to previous research conducted by Baqutayan et al. (2019), and Ma'dan, Ismail & Daud (2020), the examination of graduate employability was primarily limited to specific perspectives or institutions. Baqutayan et al. (2019) and Ma'dan, Ismail & Daud (2020) interviewed representatives from specific universities and industries in the area of Kuala Lumpur & Selangor, Malaysia. However, none of these studies comprehensively examined graduate employability by incorporating all four major stakeholders: policymakers, universities, employers, and students. Furthermore, these studies mainly centered on public universities, neglecting private universities and their contributions to the employability discourse.

Analytical problems refer to issues related to the interpretation and analysis of data (Delen & Zolbanin, 2018). These issues can arise when the researcher misinterprets the data, overlooks relevant variables, or draws conclusions that are not adequately supported by the evidence. previous study on factors that affecting graduate employability in Malaysia have been done by Yahshini and Azlineer (2021). The study defined that soft-skill, English language proficiency and entrepreneurship are the main factors that affecting the graduate employability. However, the study only analyses the relevant literature where this study look into the real voice and opinion from the higher education stakeholders.

Despite the existing research on employability, there remains a theoretical problem concerning the holistic understanding of employability attributes and their dynamic relationship with the changing demands of the labour market. Many previous studies have examined employability from singular perspectives, focusing solely on

skills, knowledge, or specific stakeholder viewpoints. For example, in the study of Tahir et al. (2018), this study solely focus on the perspective of graduates and employers. This fragmented approach could potentially lead to an incomplete understanding of employability, failing to capture the interplay between different attributes and their evolving significance in a rapidly changing job market. Furthermore, these studies might lack a unified theoretical framework that comprehensively integrates the complex dynamics of employability across multiple stakeholders. Therefore, a theoretical problem exists in adequately capturing the multifaceted nature of employability and its intricate relationship with the broader economic, technological, and social trends that shape the employability landscape.

To address this gap in the literature and provide a more holistic understanding of employability, the current study seeks to centralize knowledge on employability by examining the perspectives of policymakers, universities, employers, and students in Penang, Malaysia. By considering all stakeholders, the research aims to identify the characteristics and attributes of employability that are essential for successful and sustainable employment within the region's evolving labor market.

A unified and comprehensive definition of employability will be crucial in facilitating effective collaboration and communication among stakeholders in enhancing graduate employability. To achieve this, the study will integrate conceptual frameworks from various disciplinary backgrounds (Small, Shacklock, & Marchant, 2018; Peeters et al., 2019) to provide a cohesive and multifaceted understanding of employability. The research will explore the diverse definitions put forth by scholars

such as Hillage and Pollard (1998), Harvey (2001), and Tomlinson and Nghia (2020) to uncover the common threads and essential components that define employability.

Moreover, the study will delve into the external factors that affect employability, as perceived by policymakers, universities, employers, and students. Economic fluctuations, advancements in technology, and the purpose of attending university can significantly impact employability. By recognizing and understanding these factors, policymakers and stakeholders can make informed decisions to align workforce development with the evolving demands of the industry. Especially in the year of post pandemic, there is a necessary to reexamine the impact of external factors that influencing graduate employability (Mogaji, et al., 2022).

An examination of the expected attributes of employability from the perspectives of the stakeholders is equally critical. Policymakers, universities, employers, and students may hold unique views on the skills and attributes that are vital for graduates to succeed in the job market. Addressing any mismatches in these expectations can enhance the preparedness of graduates and equip them with the necessary skills and attributes to thrive in their chosen occupations (Irwin, Nordmann & Simms, 2019).

Finally, the study will explore the roles of policymakers, universities, employers, and students in enhancing graduate employability. Understanding these roles is pivotal in fostering effective collaboration and cooperation among stakeholders. By identifying each group's responsibilities and contributions, the research can facilitate dialogue and build a framework for joint efforts to boost

graduate employability. As all of the stakeholders are trying the very best to increase the graduate employability but only from their own point of view (Nwajiuba, et al., 2020).

In conclusion, a common understanding of employability among higher education institution (HEI) stakeholders is essential in overcoming the issue of unemployment. This research aims to bridge the existing gaps in the literature by centralizing knowledge on employability, understanding external factors affecting employability, identifying expected attributes of employability, and recognizing the roles of stakeholders in enhancing graduates' employability. The findings will not only contribute to the existing body of knowledge but also inform policymaking and institutional practices to enhance graduate employability and support the region's economic growth and development.

1.4 Research Objectives

This study will look into the different understanding of employability for HEI stakeholders, which are policymakers, universities, students and employers. The research objectives are as follows:

1. To explore and identify the understanding of employability and characteristics of employability from the perspective of policymakers, university administrators, undergraduates and employers.
2. To understand the five external factors that affect employability from the perspective of policymakers, university administrators, undergraduates and employers

3. To identify the expected attributes of employability from the perspective of policymakers, university administrators, undergraduates and employers
4. To identify the policymakers, university administrators, undergraduates and employers' roles towards enhancing graduates' employability.

The first research objective of this study is to understand the concept of employability and to explore the characteristics of employability from the higher education stakeholders. The characteristics of employability here is about the characteristics of the term of “employability” itself, it is about how the stakeholders see employability as. However, this objective can be derived into another two sub-objectives which is:

- Examine the understanding of employability among policymakers, university administrators, undergraduates, and employers.
- Investigate the individual characteristics of employability as perceived by each stakeholder group.

The second objective of the study is to look at the understanding of external factors that influencing the graduate's employability and examine the differences of understanding towards external factors from the higher education stakeholders. The third objective is to explore what is the expected attributes of employability from each higher education stakeholders.

The fourth research objective is about how each of the higher education stakeholders expect each other play what kind of roles in enhancing graduate

employability. The reason being that one might believe that they have done a good job, but this might not be what other expect. Therefore, this study looking into this aspect and manage the expectation of each other.

To clarify the term of “characteristics of employability” that stated in the first objective and the term of “employability attribute” that mentioned in third objective are different. The characteristic of employability is about the characteristics of the definition of the term of “employability”, while for employability attributes is what make the student to be employed (Coetzee & Engelbrecht, 2020).

1.5 Research Questions

1. What is the understanding of employability and characteristics of employability from the perspective of policymakers, university administrators, undergraduates and employers?
2. What is the understanding of the external factors that affect employability from the perspective of policymakers, university administrators, undergraduates, and employers?
3. What are the expected attributes of employability from the perspective of policymakers, university administrators, undergraduates, and employers?
4. How the policymaker, university administrators, undergraduates and employers can enhance the graduates' employability?

1.6 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework employed in this study elucidates the intricate interplay of factors that collectively shape the understanding of employability among

key stakeholders in higher education. Positioned at the heart of this framework is the core concept, "Factors that Affecting Definition of Employability," denoting the dynamic nature of employability in response to evolving influences. Four pivotal actors in this framework - "Policymakers," "University," "Employer," and "Student" - represent the diverse perspectives that converge to form the composite understanding of employability.

The conceptual framework illustrates a mutual interaction between these stakeholders and the evolving concept of employability. Each stakeholder, represented by a distinct box, influences and is influenced by the evolving factors. This bi-directional interaction is symbolized by arrows connecting the stakeholders with the central concept.

The progression of this influence culminates in the emergence of "Different View of Employability." This stage signifies the distinctive perspectives that stakeholders hold as a result of the dynamic interplay. From this juncture, arrows extend to "Different Expectation of employability skills, attributes, and knowledge." This represents the translation of divergent viewpoints into tangible expectations about the competencies graduates should possess.

This framework underscores the complex, ever-evolving nature of employability as a construct. It emphasizes the influence of multifaceted factors on the perceptions and expectations of stakeholders. The conceptual framework serves as a compass, guiding the exploration of these intricate dynamics in the context of this study. By comprehending this nuanced interplay, the study gain a richer understanding

of the complex realm of graduate employability and the diverse factors shaping it (James, Crawford & Oplatka, 2019).

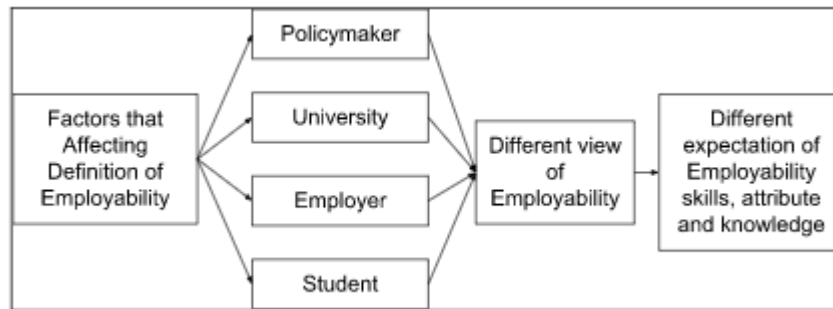


Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework of The Study

1.7 Significance of the Study

The employability of graduates has become an important concern for policymaker, university administrators, undergraduates, and employers. With the increasing number of graduates entering the job market, it is essential to understand how the stakeholders define employability and what factors affect graduates' ability to secure and sustain employment (Mainga et al., 2022), which in this study examined about what attributes contributing to what stage of employment be it secure or sustain the employment. Therefore, this study aims to explore and identify the understanding of employability from the perspective of policymaker, university administrators, undergraduates, and employers in Malaysia.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the existing literature on employability. By examining the different perspectives of the stakeholders, this study can provide a comprehensive understanding of employability, which is essential for developing policies and strategies that can enhance graduates' employability in Malaysia (Ahmad, Mohd Dian & Ahmad, 2018). The findings of this study can also

inform universities and students about the skills and knowledge that are necessary for graduates to succeed in the job market.

Moreover, the study can benefit employers by providing insights into the factors that affect graduates' ability to secure and sustain employment. Understanding the employers' perspective can help universities to develop curriculum that is aligned with the demands of the job market, thus improving graduates' employability (Al Asefer & Abidin, 2021). Policymakers can also use the findings of this study to develop policies and programs that can enhance graduates' employability and contribute to the overall economic development of the country.

In conclusion, this study can provide valuable insights into the understanding of employability from the perspective of policymaker, university administrators, undergraduates, and employers in Malaysia. Its findings can contribute to the development of policies and strategies that can enhance graduates' employability and contribute to the overall economic development of the country.

1.8 Operational Definition of Terms

The inclusion of an 'Operational Definition of Terms' section in this study serves the purpose of enhancing clarity, precision, and methodological transparency (Buie, 2019). In qualitative research, where nuances and contextual variations play a significant role, providing explicit definitions for terms like 'policymaker,' 'university administrators,' 'employer,' and 'undergraduate' is pivotal.

By offering precise definitions for these terms, the study aims to prevent any potential confusion or misinterpretation that could arise from varying interpretations of these roles. This is particularly pertinent considering that these roles can differ across contexts and disciplinary boundaries. By stipulating what these roles encompass within the scope of this research, the study ensures a consistent and shared understanding among readers, including the examiners, regardless of their background or familiarity with the subject matter.

Furthermore, operational definitions contribute to the transparency of the research methodology (Charuplakkal & Kumaramkandath, 2021). They demonstrate the careful and systematic approach taken in this study, adding to its overall credibility and rigor. This section explicitly outlines the boundaries of the study's focus and provides readers with the necessary context to comprehend the roles and perspectives under investigation.

In essence, the 'Operational Definition of Terms' section acts as a bridge between the researcher's intent and the reader's understanding (Dima, et al., 2021). It aligns the study with established academic practices, where precision, transparency, and communicative clarity are paramount. By offering a comprehensive and standardized framework for understanding these key terms, the study aims to facilitate a more accessible and comprehensible reading experience for its audience, including the esteemed examiners.

1.8.1 Existing Concept of Employability

Existing definitions of employability can be broadly categorized into three main groups. The first group focuses on the capabilities and intrinsic characteristics of individuals, such as skills, understandings, and personal attributes, which are seen as absolute dimensions of employability (Cheng et al., 2022).

The second group critiques these individual-centric definitions, arguing that employability is primarily influenced by the labour market and external factors, such as social, institutional, and economic factors, which are seen as relative dimensions of employability (Sin & Amaral, 2017). This perspective highlights how broader social structures, such as gender, race, social class, and disability, can intersect with labour market opportunities and affect employability (McGinn & Oh, 2017).

Finally, the third group of definitions emphasizes the "duality of employability," which acknowledges the need to understand both absolute and relative dimensions of employability (Williams et al., 2019). These definitions recognise the importance of the personal characteristics and skills of individuals while also acknowledging the influence of external factors on employability opportunities within a social context (Delva, Fourier & De Cuyper, 2021). It is noted that skills and competencies are essential and must be acquired for employability.

1.8.2 Policymaker

A policymaker refers to an individual or group responsible for creating, implementing, and enforcing policies or guidelines within a government or organizational context (Birkland, 2019). Policymakers use their knowledge, expertise,

and authority to develop policies that address specific issues or challenges, and their decisions can have significant impacts on various aspects of society, including the economy, social welfare, public health, and the environment (Lewis, McGann & Blomkamp, 2020). Policymakers often consider multiple perspectives, stakeholder input and evidence-based information when making policy decisions, and their role is critical in shaping the direction and outcomes of public policy.

1.8.3 University Administrator

University is an institution of higher education offering undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral degrees in various fields (Looney & Lusin, 2019). It is autonomous and grants degrees, conducts research, and provides advanced education. Universities play a vital role in knowledge creation, dissemination, and innovation. They provide opportunities for students to acquire knowledge, skills, and credentials for their careers (Alemu, 2018). Universities engage in cutting-edge research and contribute to advancements in various fields. They foster critical thinking, creativity, and cultural exchange (Connell, 2016). Universities can be public or private, offer diverse programs and services, and collaborate with other entities to address societal challenges and contribute to development.

In the context of this study, a public university refers to educational institutions that are funded and regulated by the government of Malaysia. Public universities are established with the aim of providing higher education opportunities to a broad spectrum of students, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds (Nahas et al., 2019). These institutions are administered and funded by the Ministry of Higher

Education and are known for offering a wide range of academic programs and research opportunities.

The term private college pertains to non-governmental educational institutions that operate independently of state funding (Chin, 2019). These institutions are established by private entities or organizations, often with a focus on specific academic programs or professional training. Private colleges in Malaysia offer a variety of diploma, certificate, and degree programs, catering to diverse fields of study. These institutions are subject to the regulatory framework set by the Ministry of Higher Education and are known for their flexibility in program offerings and teaching methodologies.

1.8.4 Employer

An employer is an individual or entity, such as a company, organisation, or government, that hires and provides employment to workers in exchange for wages or salaries (Prassl, 2015). Employers are responsible for recruiting, selecting, and managing employees to carry out specific tasks or roles within their organizations. They provide job opportunities, set expectations, and establish terms and conditions of employment, such as working hours, compensation, benefits, and workplace policies. Employers may also provide training, supervision, and support to employees to help them perform their job duties effectively (Staniec & Kalińska-Kula, 2021). Employers play a crucial role in the labour market, as they create employment opportunities, contribute to economic growth, and shape the work environment for their employees (Sorensen et al., 2021). They are responsible for complying with labour laws and regulations, ensuring workplace safety, and fostering a positive work culture.

1.8.5 Undergraduate

In the context of higher education, a undergraduate refers to an individual who is enrolled in a college, university, or other tertiary educational institution and is pursuing a course of study to obtain a degree, diploma, or certification (Karatas & Isiksal, 2022). Undergraduate in higher education typically engage in various academic activities, including attending classes, participating in discussions, conducting research, completing assignments, and taking exams (Singh, Steele, & Singh, 2021). They may choose to pursue undergraduate, graduate, or professional programs in diverse fields such as arts, sciences, business, engineering, medicine, law, education, and more. Students in higher education are expected to actively participate in learning, engage in critical thinking, develop skills and knowledge, and meet the academic requirements set by their educational institutions. They may also participate in extracurricular activities, join student organizations, and engage in internships or practical experiences to enhance their learning and personal development (Buckley & Lee 2021).

1.9 Scope and Limitation of Study

The scope of a research study defines the extent and boundaries of the investigation, including the specific aspects or dimensions of the research topic that will be examined, the research questions or objectives that will be addressed, and the population or sample that will be studied (Thomas et al., 2019). It helps establish the context and focus of the study by outlining what is included and excluded from the research.

On the other hand, limitations refer to the constraints or restrictions that exist within the research study. These may include factors such as sample size limitations, time constraints, budget constraints, availability of data, limitations of research methods or tools used, and ethical considerations. Researchers need to acknowledge and discuss the limitations of their research in order to provide a clear and honest assessment of the study's findings and interpretations and to ensure that the research is conducted within its defined scope (Akanle, Ademuson & Shittu, 2020).

The scope of this study is to explore and identify the understanding of employability from the perspective of policymakers, university administrators, undergraduates, and employers in Malaysia. Specifically, the study aims to investigate the various definitions of employability and the factors that affect it as perceived by these stakeholders. It also seeks to uncover the strategies and programs implemented by universities and employers to enhance graduates' employability.

One of the limitations of this study is the potential for bias in the selection of participants. The study will rely on a purposive sampling technique, which may lead to a limited representation of the perspectives of the stakeholders (Thomas, 2022). Another limitation is the possibility of self-report bias as the data will be gathered through interviews, which rely on participants' self-reported responses (Stephenson et al., 2022). The study will also be limited by the availability of participants and resources.

Another limitation of the study is it focuses only on Penang, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other countries or regions. Moreover, the study

will only focus on the perspectives of policymakers, university administrators, undergraduates, and employers, and may not capture the opinions of other stakeholders such as the community and parents as they are part of the contributor to employability as well (Jackson & Lambert, 2023).

While the qualitative nature of this study offered rich insights into the perspectives of various stakeholders on graduate employability, it's important to acknowledge a limitation associated with the data analysis process. The data collected through interviews was meticulously analysed manually, without the aid of specialized software. This manual analysis could potentially introduce subjectivity and interpretation biases, as different researchers may approach the data in slightly varying ways. Additionally, the absence of software-driven analytical tools might have limited the ability to swiftly identify intricate patterns or relationships within the data (Clarke, Coates & Jordan, 2021).

Despite these limitations, the findings of this study can contribute to the understanding of employability from various stakeholders' perspectives in Malaysia and provide insights into the strategies and programs implemented by universities and employers to enhance graduates' employability. The study can also provide recommendations for policymakers and universities to improve graduates' employability and support the development of the workforce in Malaysia.

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter elaborated on the current issue happening in the nation which is the increasing number of graduates by year, while the unemployment issue remains

the same despite the stakeholders of higher education striving very hard and putting in a lot of effort to solve the issue. Hence, in order to direct the effort to the right path, all stakeholders need to have a uniform understanding of employability in the first place to avoid waste of resources. Chapter two will dispatch the concept and the definition of employability that have been defined by the previous researcher from a different perspective.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter serves as a comprehensive exploration into the diverse dimensions of employability, focusing on both its conceptual underpinnings and its dynamic relationship with higher education institutions in the context of Malaysia. Herein, the multifaceted nature of employability is dissected, examining its definitions as perceived by various stakeholders such as policymakers, universities, industries, and students. This exploration extends to investigating the transformative factors that influence employability, showcasing how its definition evolves over time. Additionally, the intricate interplay between employability and higher education institutions in Malaysia is elucidated, particularly in light of the Malaysia Higher Education Blueprint 2015 - 2025. Furthermore, this chapter delves into the intricate link between Malaysia's economic landscape and its higher education system, delineating the historical and contemporary threads that intertwine these realms. The challenges that encompass the employability landscape are scrutinized, with emphasis on the fast-paced changes in the environment, perceptions of education and career, mismatches between qualifications and employers' needs, and other critical aspects. In parallel, the external factors exerting influence on employability are systematically probed, encompassing elements like economic restructuring, evolving technology, lecturer competence, governmental policies, and curriculum design. To contextualize these investigations, the chapter reviews a series of related studies that collectively shed light on the multi-dimensional facets of employability. The theoretical framework anchoring this research is also unveiled, charting the course for the subsequent analytical journey. Ultimately, this chapter seeks to build a robust foundation for the

ensuing discussions, fostering a holistic comprehension of employability within Malaysia's educational landscape.

2.2 The Concept of Employability

Empirical studies on the concept of employability show there are different definitions from policymakers, universities, students and employers. Research on employability has been ongoing for a long time, but there is still no agreed-upon definition or consensus on related concepts (Li & Su, 2019). Since 1990, the concept and understanding of employability have been reviewed by several researchers in their studies as stated below:

1. According to Soroush (2022), employability skills consist of personal image, interpersonal skills, and positive habits and attitudes.
2. Weerasombat, Pumipatyothin & Napathorn (2022) define employability as the ability to navigate the labour market independently and achieve potential through sustainable employment.
3. Monteiro, Almeida & García-Aracil (2021) describe employability as the graduate's capacity to secure a satisfying job.
4. Mezhoudi et al. (2021) define employability as the graduate's potential to display attributes that employers anticipate will be necessary for their organization's effective functioning in the future.
5. Suvalova, Mokhova & Zhukov (2021) state that employability relates to the relevance of the knowledge, skills, and competencies obtained through training to the requirements of the labour market/profession.

6. Buheji & Buheji (2020) define employability as a set of achievements, including skills, understandings, and personal attributes that increase the likelihood of graduates obtaining employment and being successful in their chosen professions, which ultimately benefits themselves, the workforce, the community, and the economy.

Some of the studies underlined the need for certain skills and attributes, such as knowledge, in order to choose and be employable in that field. It can also be defined as a person's ability to find and keep work. The concept has been around for a long time and has been given several different interpretations.

That is an overview explanation of the numerous concepts of employability.. It encompasses a range of personal and external factors that contribute to an individual's ability to find and maintain employment in their chosen field.