

University Students' Perceptions of The Obstacles to Employability

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Abstract

The employability of graduates holds significant importance amidst the rise in unemployment rates and job mismatch concerns. Graduates pursue diverse qualifications and career paths, prompting the need for a qualitative study involving structured interviews with ten informants, all students studying education at a public university. The study aims to (i) identify factors influencing students' choice of field of study, (ii) determine their openness to pursuing careers outside their field of study, and (iii) gain insights into their perspectives on job incompatibility. The informants, evenly distributed by gender and ranging in age from 20 to 26, were all pursuing bachelor's degrees in undergraduate programs. While many informants based their field of study on personal interests, financial constraints led some to consider alternative career paths. Addressing the mismatch dilemma, informants stressed the importance of evaluating job prospects about gaining experience. The study suggests that graduates should prioritize developing competencies, holistic values, and quality to enhance their employability. Furthermore, they should emphasize acquiring new skills and knowledge to remain competitive in the job market.

Keywords: Employability, Work Mismatch, Graduates, Unemployment, University Student

Abstrak

Kebolehpasaran graduan memegang kepentingan yang signifikan dalam konteks peningkatan kadar pengangguran serta kebimbangan terhadap ketidakpadanan pekerjaan. Graduan kini mengejar pelbagai kelayakan dan laluan kerjaya, sekali gus mendorong keperluan untuk satu kajian kualitatif yang melibatkan temu bual berstruktur bersama sepuluh informan, terdiri daripada pelajar jurusan pendidikan di sebuah universiti awam. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk: (i) mengenal pasti faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi pemilihan bidang pengajian pelajar; (ii) menentukan keterbukaan mereka terhadap penglibatan dalam kerjaya di luar bidang pengajian; dan (iii) mendapatkan pandangan mengenai perspektif mereka terhadap ketidakserasian pekerjaan. Para informan yang terdiri daripada sepuluh orang, diagihkan sama rata mengikut jantina dan berumur antara 20 hingga 26 tahun, semuanya sedang mengikuti program pengajian di peringkat sarjana muda. Meskipun majoriti informan memilih bidang pengajian berdasarkan minat peribadi, kekangan kewangan mendorong sebahagian daripada mereka untuk mempertimbangkan laluan kerjaya alternatif. Dalam menangani dilema ketidakpadanan, para informan menekankan kepentingan menilai prospek pekerjaan serta keperluan memperoleh pengalaman yang berkaitan. Kajian ini mencadangkan agar graduan memberi keutamaan kepada pembangunan kecekapan, nilai holistik, dan kualiti diri bagi meningkatkan kebolehpasaran. Tambahan pula, graduan disarankan untuk menekankan penguasaan kemahiran dan pengetahuan baharu bagi mengekalkan daya saing dalam pasaran kerja.

Kata Kunci: Kebolehpasaran, Ketidakpadanan Pekerjaan, graduan, Kadar Pengangguran, Pelajar Universiti

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The period of economic downturn and recovery can be challenging as it involves managing expenses and losses across various businesses and organizations. Graduates have had to adapt to these changes. The Ministry of Higher Education (KPT) Malaysia has implemented several measures to improve the employability of new graduates in the academic field, particularly in digital skills, in response to significant economic shifts. The shift towards digitization benefits the work system, but it also implies consequences for the need for human resources (Cheng et al., 2021). On a positive note, digitisation is akin to the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which is expected to create 1.5 million new job opportunities, 60% of which will require human capital with knowledge of IR 4.0, particularly in digital concepts, robotics, artificial intelligence, augmented reality, and similar fields. The Malaysian government has worked towards this goal since introducing the Graduate Employability Blueprint 2012–2017 (GEB). This shift indicates that the nation's level of development is steadily progressing towards a more contemporary and liberal phase as it fully embraces globalisation.

■ 2.0 ISSUES AND RESEARCH PROBLEM

The current economic system shows inconsistent patterns. The gap between the unemployment rate and job availability is narrowing. There is intense competition among the younger generation, especially graduates (Mohamad Zuber et al., 2020; Farah Shazwani, 2022). Despite the decrease in job opportunities, graduates are also declining. According to Abdul Aziz's report (2021), the global unemployment trend shifted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which struck Malaysia at the end of 2019. Consequently, companies and organizations must consider their hiring practices (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020; Khairunesa & Nor Asiah, 2021). The current employment transition and change have made employability factors complex (He & Harris, 2020). Organizations have created job transitions to ensure the quality of their workforce (BERNAMA, 2020). Digital skills have become essential and a prerequisite for employment (Nor Shela et al., 2022). Employers now prioritize candidates' credibility over their qualifications when hiring (Siti et al., 2020; Hyo et al., 2021). Companies are particularly interested in individuals with technology skills and other abilities such as retail, digital, entrepreneurship, and education (Halim & Sahid, 2020; Mohd Shafie et al., 2024). To be considered for employment, prospective candidates must meet these requirements and demonstrate flexibility (Enah et al., 2018; Akmal et al., 2020; Isabella & Haibo, 2021; Mohd et al., 2023).

The current job market is highly competitive, and graduates often struggle to find employment. As a result, assessing the potential for graduate development, human capital competence, and human development skills is essential. We must focus on individuals, careers, and organisations to improve employability. It is crucial to start preparing graduates for the workforce while they are still in college. Additionally, early exposure to real-world scenarios, coaching, and mentorship programs can help individuals develop their careers and organizational potential. Dana and Yifat (2022) emphasize the importance of ensuring that the quality of coaching or supervision matches the needs of individuals, careers, and organizations to develop human capital effectively.

The contemporary work shift embodies the concept of digital nomadism, encompassing remote and home-based work. It is essential for recent graduates to recognize the importance of modernized skills in today's job market and to assess and update them continually. Critical factors for employability in the modern work landscape include embracing risk, tackling challenges, adapting to change, and fostering innovation. As a result, when implementing skills development and planning in rural or urban areas, it is crucial to be responsive to the specific needs of each locality. The modern job trend offers a professional landscape that optimizes time, resources, and energy. Graduates should study human capital and development skills from college onwards to prepare for the workforce. Analyzing statistics and economic trends can help make informed decisions about courses of study that align with post-graduation career plans. Misjudgments in the risk-based graduation premise can exacerbate employability issues and contribute to higher unemployment rates in the nation.

■ 3.0 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The study aims to achieve three main objectives:

- i. To identify factors influencing students' choice of field of study
- ii. To determine their openness to pursuing careers outside their field of study
- iii. To gain insights into their perspectives on job incompatibility

■ 4.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 Human Development and Human Capital Skills

Graduates are encouraged to cultivate self-reliance and strive for continuous self-improvement in line with current trends and advancements, as emphasized by Khanzode et al. (2020) and reports in Sinar Harian (2021). It is recommended that graduates explore the realm of self-employability, particularly in the entrepreneurial sector. Entrepreneurship presents an avenue for professional development that can enhance employment opportunities for others. However, it is essential to note that an individual's aptitude for entrepreneurship is heavily influenced by their personality and managerial skills (Nor Shela et al., 2022). Key entrepreneurial traits encompass strong organizational acumen, creativity in identifying opportunities, adeptness in driving business progression, strategic hiring practices, a keen interest in business, negotiation proficiency, and practical communication skills (Manjet Kaur, 2021). Given the evolving industrial landscape, meeting these criteria is crucial for recognizing added value and interpersonal skills (Mohamad et al., 2020).

Regarding graduates' potential employability, a study by Muhammad Rafii, Lee, and Mohammad Izzuan (2020) emphasizes the importance of developing human values, problem-solving skills, teamwork, character development, professional negotiation skills, and effective communication. Moreover, Prince and Richard (2021) underscore the need for graduates to possess advanced knowledge, adaptable skills, the ability to make holistic decisions, automation abilities, and other qualities to meet business demands. A 2020 study by Mohamad Izzuan, Wan Muhammad Faiz, and Yusri suggests that technical graduates have a high employability rate, likely due to their technical abilities creating employment prospects. This underscores the significance of technical proficiency as a recent and valuable skill that significantly influences a person's employability. Graduates are viewed as capable of producing abstract output through procedures.

The role of technological elements and disciplines in providing technical conceptions is significant (Mohd Shafie et al., 2023). Graduates with Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) skills are highly marketable due to their focus on delivering tangible results, as indicated in previous research by Muhammad Rafii, Lee, and Mohammad Izzuan (2020). The organization's output, encompassing goods, services, energy resources, and specialized knowledge that generate profits, is an indirect measure of practical abilities. Proficiency in the latest system software and digital communication ensures work sustainability (Akmal Ariff et al., 2020; Alan et al., 2021). Many technical students have encountered learning challenges throughout the pandemic due to the impracticality of hands-on concept application. Virtual industrial training may be necessary for some students, replacing traditional in-person instruction. Technical

natural aspects involve practical acts that yield tangible results or abstract things, presenting a communication challenge (Motseki & Luneta, 2024; Ting et al., 2024).

Personal traits can add significant value in today's highly competitive job market. Graduates must embrace passion and forward-thinking to acquire additional value through new skills, especially industry-specific and digital competencies. Self-competency traits such as discipline and independence are crucial in shaping an organisational culture (Ab et al., 2022). Soft skills facilitate disciplined exploration (Abang Muis et al., 2021). According to Abd Hamid and Abd Malik (2021), graduates consistently mould their character through confidence and self-efficacy, which is beneficial for task completion. Moreover, the challenges of finding employment and limited job opportunities prompt students to move away from narrow-minded thinking (Abdul et al., 2020) and explore opportunities through reskilling and upskilling programs.

4.2 Employability Skills by Individual, Career and Organizational

Considering restrictions on physical meetings, online work has adopted a technology-based approach (Conger et al., 2024). Nevertheless, Liu et al. (2023) argue that soft skills remain essential for employability. Graduates without these skills may struggle to secure employment despite academic success, resulting in wasted time, money, and energy (Allaire et al., 2023; Baba et al., 2024). Kanwal, bin Isha, and Ali (2024) anticipate a post-COVID-19 job market that values creativity and imagination. Actions and learning outcomes must reflect the quality of work (Azlah et al., 2020; Alexander & Nikos, 2022).

According to Suriyati's (2022) research, interventions for technical students must be customized to meet the demands of the job market, particularly those involving meetings, discussions, and presentations. Additionally, advancements and the ease of securing a position significantly impact work characteristics that enhance employability. Backhaus, Anderson, and Bedford (2024) found that nearly all individuals worldwide use social media platforms at least once when searching for employment. In Malaysia, specific web pages, including <http://www.spa.gov.my/>, <https://www.mudah.my/>, <https://myjobstreet.jobstreet.com.my/>, <http://mystarjob.com/>, <https://maukerja.my/>, and <https://www.indedn.com.my/>, are dedicated to job hunting. To help students explore employment opportunities, the Ministry of Higher Education (KPT) is developing a dedicated portal for graduates to find suitable professions. Through the portal, KPT provides information on reskilling and upskilling techniques. Additionally, the KPT has established the Graduates Reference Hub for Employment and Training (GREAT) webpage, which indirectly assists potential graduates in promoting their profiles through e-profiling services upon registration.

Individuals must possess career-related skills to ensure the sustainability of organisational activities (Boheme & Christl, 2022). Inaccuracies or mismatches between work and credentials or talents can result in poor analysis and appraisal of work. Alkatheri's (2019) study highlights that employee performance suffered due to job mismatches during recruitment. Noncompliance may lead to layoffs in a relatively short period. Factors such as taking on too many jobs, dissatisfaction within the organization, psychological reasons, and negative stigma, as indicated by Che Ros et al. (2021), Ibrahim & Mahbon (2021), and Dai et al. (2022), can all contribute to employee termination. Consequently, unemployed graduates may contribute to the country's unemployment statistics due to adverse selection and stigma.

Students' awareness can be cultivated through guided study. Considering the cost and focus of their studies can help students assess the breadth of their future careers. This awareness relies on metacognition, which can provide a balance between individuals' competencies, abilities, and skills for future work (Mat Isa, 2022). Effective metacognition contributes to experiential development, character refinement and enhancement of knowledge and skills (Md. Sabil et al., 2021). Moreover, students should acknowledge the soft skills needed to become reliable, adaptable, comprehensive, efficient, and optimistic professionals about their future (Mohd et al., 2020). All these elements are pivotal and will influence students' employability and prospects of securing employment after completing their education in the post-COVID-19 world.

Various factors are believed to impact the selection of organizations that can enhance graduates' employability. According to Ahmad Mokhtar and Lakman (2021), risk factors are among the reasons individuals choose to work for a specific organization. Risk encompasses workplace safety considerations, and the benefits and protection companies provide their employees (Damin et al., 2021). High-risk organizations should offer higher compensation to university staff through essential allowances. Additionally, benefits and protection are crucial for securing employees' future during workplace crises. Failure in risk management also indicates a lack of respect for organizational integrity (Hilton et al., 2024). Therefore, effective risk planning is essential to appropriately address safety and employee well-being (Wan Hanim et al., 2020).

The significance of integrity in the workplace concerns some employees as it directly impacts the organization's reputation. Potential hires may hesitate to join if the organization's image is tainted by negative news and unfavourable employee reviews. Workplace integrity encompasses various issues, including the conduct of leaders and managers (Zainal et al., 2021), the issue of bullying subordinates (Nguyen et al., 2023), and integrity-related matters highlighting leadership, tolerance, and work conflict. Organizational executives must ensure that the organisation's strategy and environment align with current employment trends to prevent employee conflicts (Thuaibah et al., 2020). Prolonged conflicts reflect the organization's failure to address employee issues. Therefore, the International Labour Organization (ILO) recommends that organizations implement a "Global Employment Agreement" to address employment issues among human resources. The organization's function significantly impacts employees' psychological well-being, also known as perceived organizational support (Park & Kim, 2022).

The organizational structure has a significant impact on graduates' job preferences. Many students value flexible and relaxed work environments, as rigid restrictions can lead to stress and hinder their ability to fulfil their responsibilities. Working from home, a practice that has become more prevalent since the COVID-19 pandemic, offers employees flexibility and is considered a viable work arrangement (Conger et al., 2024). Individuals also favour flexible working hours as they help alleviate traffic congestion. Overall, organizational factors primarily revolve around the rewards and privileges an organisation offers, which serve as attractive incentives for graduates. This encompasses compensation, awards, perks, leave, insurance, safety, and health benefits, while environmental factors also play a role in an organization's appeal to potential employees.

4.3 Modernization for Enhanced Employability

Using various advanced applications, humans stay connected through laptops and smartphones. Employers can continue to display work and communicate with their employees through cameras and videos (Mohd Shafie et al., 2022). Modern technology allows employers to monitor their employees' locations throughout the workday. For instance, location tracking can be implemented through WhatsApp accounts (Tandoc et al., 2024). This approach can help companies track their employees' movements, especially those working remotely or online. This flexibility allows graduates to choose remote work, which benefits those skilled in digital technology and unwilling to relocate (Jaiswal et al., 2024).

He and Wang (2024) consider technology and digital speed as an aspect of the modernization theory. Ali et al. (2021) emphasizes the need to enhance digital skills, knowledge, and competency, especially among students and universities, to prepare for new career patterns. Identifying expanding and contracting economic landscapes is vital to helping graduates find jobs matching their academic qualifications (Kamri et al., 2021). Additionally, salary payment should be considered, ensuring that degree graduates are compensated based on their salary grade.

5.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology employed in this study was qualitative, involving ten students selected as research informants from two public institutions in southern Malaysia. Five informants from various university groups were chosen to ensure an unbiased sample. These informants were explicitly enrolled in bachelor's programs at the two public universities. Detailed background information, including age, gender, marital status, and degree of education, was gathered. The study focused on three key questions related to employability, with each informant allotted 20 to 30 minutes to respond. To maintain consistency and accuracy, no additional inquiries were made. The first question sought to understand the factors influencing student's choice of university majors. In contrast, the second they explored whether students were willing to work in a non-study field, with justifications required for their responses. The third question delved into students' perspectives on working in their field of study. All respondents provided positive feedback, and the information gathered was considered sufficient. The study protocol was meticulously prepared to ensure a systematic approach to information acquisition. The questions were meticulously designed to address the research requirements directly, considering contemporary circumstances and challenges from previous research. As a result, no validation of the questions was deemed necessary. Overall, all the informants provided valuable input, responding to the questions in line with the research objectives. Importantly, they remained unbiased and consistently delivered accurate and comprehensive responses, aligning with the research goals.

6.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Background of The Informant

Table 1 and Figures 1, 2, and 3 analysis summarizes the study informants' backgrounds. The informants' ages are distributed as follows: five are 20 years old, two are 22 years old, and one is 23, 24, and 26 years old. The gender distribution is balanced, with five females and five males. All the informants are single and hold a bachelor's degree.

Table 1 Informant background

Informant	Age	Gender	Marital Status
Informant 1	20	Female	Single
Informant 2	20	Female	Single
Informant 3	20	Male	Single
Informant 4	26	Male	Single
Informant 5	20	Male	Single
Informant 6	24	Female	Single
Informant 7	20	Female	Single
Informant 8	22	Male	Single
Informant 9	22	Male	Single
Informant 10	23	Male	Single

In Figure 1, the analysis is based on the participants' age. They are segmented into five age groups. The results reveal that 50% of the participants are 20, while 20% are 22. The remaining participants are distributed among the age groups of 21, 23, and 26, with each group constituting 10% of the total.

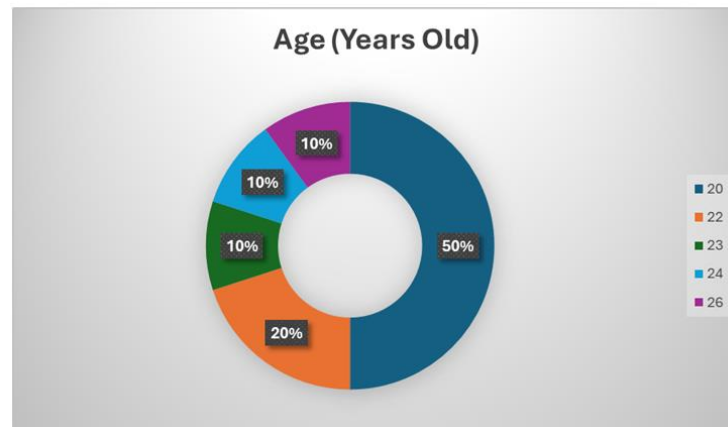


Figure 1 Number of informants by age

Figure 2 depicts the results of the gender-based informant analysis, revealing that 67% of informants are male, while only 33% are female.

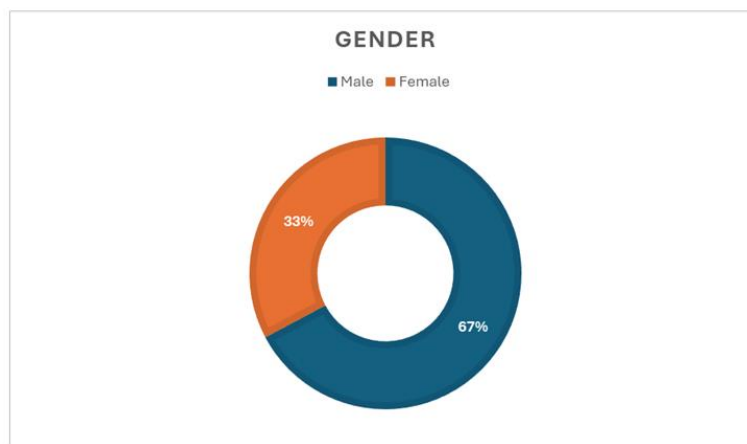


Figure 2 Number of informants by gender

Figure 3 illustrates the study findings regarding the marital status of the informants. It is noteworthy that all informants interviewed were identified as single and unmarried. This implies that 100 per cent of the informant pool did not report being married.

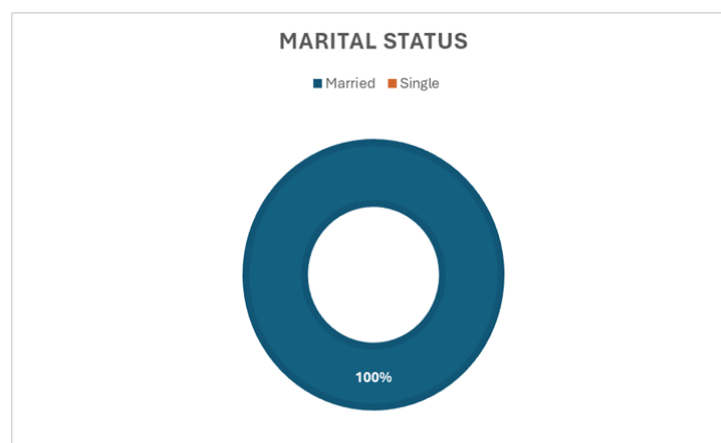


Figure 3 Number of informants by marital status

6.2 Selection Factors: Informant Fields of Study

Table 2 and Figure 4 display the analysis and informants' perspectives on the factors influencing their university field of study choice. The survey's findings revealed that all informants, except for informants seven and nine, chose their field of study based on interest. The initial informant stated that they chose biomedicine, a new field in Malaysia. The informant believes combining engineering and medicine is the basis for choosing their university study topic. The second informant finds the chosen topic of study fascinating. However, the informant did not clarify the specific criteria and characteristics that make the topic appealing. It can be argued that the chosen field has its unique appeal, influencing the second informant's decision to study it. The third informant holds the same views as the fourth, sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth informants. They all believe that the individuals being studied have a high potential for employment and that there are plenty of career opportunities in their respective fields in the job market. This shows that six informants considered predictions and potential employment before choosing the subject of their research. The fifth and tenth informants reported that the subject of their study would involve a job with significant challenges.

This indicates that they are seeking challenging employment opportunities. Consequently, the research suggests that the informants consider potential work areas challenging. However, the two informants did not specify whether the professional challenges they anticipated would be emotional or physical. The sixth informant emphasised the role of personality traits in predicting employment outcomes based on the field of study. This emphasis can be attributed to the informant's introverted nature. The evidence suggests that the informant prefers working in an introverted environment with minimal interaction with others. The type of job under study appears to be less concerned with interpersonal connections, indicating that the informant is less inclined towards roles that require teamwork or collaboration.

As a result, potential communication challenges at work may arise, leading to a lack of solid communication skills. Numerical and data-driven research methodology heavily influences the seventh informant's study area. His research centres on data processing, information, and a wide range of digital resources. This type of work demands strong mathematical and digital skills and intense concentration—no wonder the seventh informant is focused and has a strong sense of job control. The eighth and ninth informants yielded relatively standard results. Both informants chose this field of study because it aligns with the subjects they excelled in during their school years. This underscores the impact of a strong interest in education during school years as a motivating factor for pursuing higher education. It also reflects a commitment to the chosen field, which may lead to future expertise for both informants.

The perspective of the ninth informant is considered constructive, focusing on income development. He sees his field of study as versatile and adaptable, suitable for commercialisation as a business. Viewing business as a form of entrepreneurship that can boost income and generate employment opportunities, the informant also noted the potential for commercialisation within his field. This unique perspective sets the ninth informant apart from others. Additionally, the informant believes his field of study suits both genders. On a different note, the tenth informant foresees future work involving practical components, such as hands-on learning. This preference suggests that the tenth informant prefers an active role and responds proactively while working.

Table 2 Informant factors for choosing a field of study

Informant	Factors for Choosing a Field of Study
Informant 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interested in the field. Biomedicine is an emerging field in Malaysia. Engineering and medical aspects are combined in the fields studied.
Informant 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interested in the field. The field is fascinating.
Informant 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interested in the field. The field's potential is projected to expand in the future.
Informant 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interested in the field. The scope of labour is vast. The field contains an element of challenge.
Informant 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interested in the field.
Informant 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interested in the field. The field's potential is projected to expand in the future. The field is best suited to introverts who prefer less engagement with others.
Informant 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are plenty of work opportunities. This field has significant commercial potential. The field's potential is projected to expand in the future. Data and information processing-related fields of interest.
Informant 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interested in the field. There are plenty of work opportunities. The field is like education, as it is learned in school. The field's potential is projected to expand in the future.
Informant 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are plenty of work opportunities. The field is like education, as it is learned in school. Fields that can be commercialised include entrepreneurship and business ownership.
Informant 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interest in the field. Appropriate for gender. The field contains an element of challenge. Practical components are present in the fields pursued. The field is not monotonous and encourages active participation.

Based on the findings in Table 2, the researcher conducted a factor analysis to categorise university students for selection based on their chosen field of study. The results in Table 2 revealed eight themed factors: interest, challenge, gender, previous knowledge, potential, holistic, and emerging. Interest was highlighted as one of the most critical factors in field selection, while potential also played a significant role. Gender, however, was found to be a relatively minor consideration in the selection process. Figure 4 illustrates the specific characteristics used to determine the field of study.

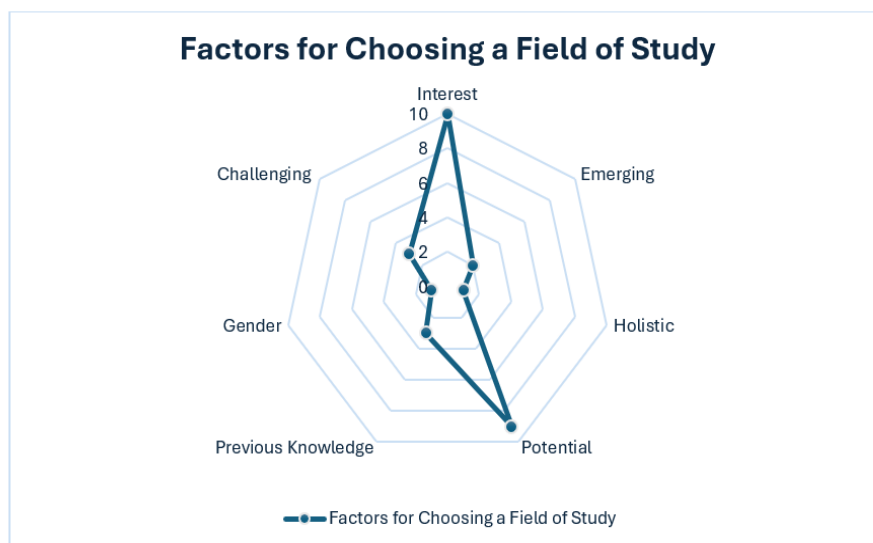


Figure 4 Factors influencing students' choice of field of study

6.3 Informants' Consent to Work in Fields Other Than Study

The following explanation presents each informant's perspective on the agreement to work in disciplines other than their studies. Table 3 and Figure 5 analyze and summarize all the informants' viewpoints. The first, seventh, and tenth informants refuse to take jobs outside their field of study. According to the first informant, their chosen field of study is specific, and their expertise cannot be applied to other jobs. The first informant is determined to work in the chosen sector and is not interested in pursuing a career in an unrelated field. Similarly, the seventh informant, who declined to work in other sectors, is confident about the job prospects in their field. The tenth informant indicated that the practical skills acquired can only be used for related jobs. However, the seventh and tenth informants agree they are open to accepting other work options if the situation becomes urgent. They also want more professional degrees to work in various industries.

According to Table 3, some informants consented to taking job offers outside their field of study. The third informant claims that his subject of study is still relatively young, and few work opportunities are available. Thus, a willingness to work in various disciplines should be demonstrated. The willingness to attend training must be enhanced to be a human resource in a job that does not correspond to one's subject of study. The third and fourth informants are also willing to attend courses to prepare for work in fields other than their studies. This is because the third and fourth informants believe that economic pressures make graduates unable to choose a job. Finally, the fourth informant believes that experience and opportunity are two things that must be attached to success in a career.

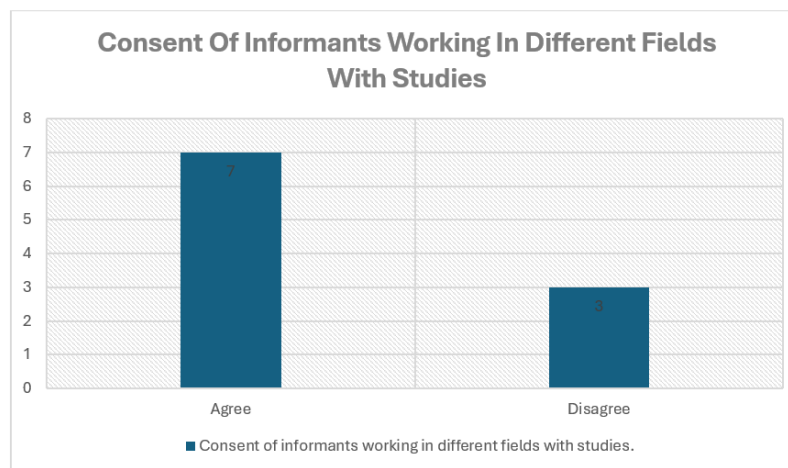
The fifth and sixth informants consider employment in any profession to raise the value of human resources. It can add value when filling out a resume. As a result, the fifth and sixth informants also attend additional courses. The fifth informant's initial preparation should always emphasize an open mindset towards gaining new experiences. An open nature is necessary to deal with the increasingly difficult economic crisis. The sixth informant also stated that career prospects are becoming smaller, more constrained, and more competitive. Then, all viable work prospects should be pursued.

Finally, the perspectives of the seventh and eighth informants are consistent with those of the other informants regarding the necessity for extra courses and taking advantage of job chances as an added value to the experience. However, the ninth informant has a different perspective on the rationale for choosing a job that does not match the sector, citing the development of work networks with people from diverse fields. This strategy is a multidisciplinary field that aims to develop more competent and robust knowledge. The tenth informant's point of view is also deemed elite since he believes that business and entrepreneurship are the most critical cross-cutting fields. Compensation payment is the primary element that influences the tenth informant's decision. The informant took any work as long as the pay was consistent with his qualifications.

Table 3 Consent of informants working in different fields with studies.

Informant	Informed Consent	Reasons
Informant 1	Disagree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The field of study is distinct and cannot be related to other fields. I am concerned that the fields of study and career are unrelated. The informant wishes to work exclusively in their field of study.
Informant 2	Agree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Willing to take further courses to pursue a profession in another field if necessary. The field of study is relatively new. Gain experience by working in different professions.
Informant 3	Agree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work on the economic pressures. Willing to take further courses to pursue a profession in another field if necessary.
Informant 4	Agree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not want to pick a job. Always be willing to take chances. Gain experience by working in different professions. Willing to take further courses to pursue a profession in another field if necessary.
Informant 5	Agree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Boost your resume's worth. Work on the economic pressures. An open approach should be emphasised. Gain experience by working in different professions. Willing to take further courses to pursue a profession in another field if necessary.
Informant 6	Agree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jobs are competitive. Receive additional value. Job opportunities are limited. Other areas offer advantages and expertise.
Informant 7	Disagree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confident in the field of study, with excellent job prospects. If the case is urgent, I am still open to other career opportunities. Willing to pursue additional professional qualifications for different field positions.
Informant 8	Agree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance other skills. Acquiring new experiences. Create a network of collaborators in diverse fields. Willing to take further courses to pursue a profession in another field if necessary.
Informant 9	Agree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acquiring new experiences. Employment must be comparable to the wage of a graduate. The research topic has applications in various fields, particularly business and entrepreneurship.
Informant 10	Disagree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practical work relies solely on prior knowledge. Still receiving other employment offers in a short period. Willing to take extra courses if needed for a career in another field.

Table 5 illustrates the informants' viewpoints regarding providing consent to work in a non-study field. The study's findings indicate that seven out of ten interviewees are open to working in various industries to gain experience, acquire new knowledge, ensure economic stability, and for other reasons. However, three informants declined to take a job outside their profession, deeming it inappropriate. They are also reluctant to pursue opportunities in other sectors due to misalignment with their personal preferences.

**Figure 5** Student openness to pursuing careers outside their field of study

6.4 Informants' Perspectives on Job Mismatch

Table 4 shows the study's findings on the informants' perspectives on job incompatibility. Ten informants share this viewpoint, which may be found in Tables 1 through 3. The informants' perspectives are presented one by one below.

The first informant described the preliminary steps taken before enrolling in university. Prospective students must prepare and determine their study background before deciding on a university subject. Among the factors to be examined are the likelihood of finding work and the issue of unemployment in the field of study pursued. Preparedness to improve abilities should be achieved through additional training in preparation for graduates' added value.

The second informant believes that graduates can refuse employment in their chosen field. This is because the time and effort expended throughout the study were significant. Graduates thus have the exclusive right to work in their subject of study. Graduates view that if a job is unrelated to their subject of study, it is meaningless and a waste of time.

The third informant agrees with the first informant and stresses the significance of understanding present and future career trends. This demonstrates that the third informant believes that students should understand the scope of the work requirements in their subject of study. Employability data and unemployment rates must be examined to continue attending university.

The fourth informant presented a versatile and comprehensive viewpoint. The informant saw the economic situation and the current scenario as catastrophic. As a result, graduates should avoid taking on too many jobs, as this could raise the country's unemployment rate. To ensure employability and sustainability, graduates are urged to accept job offers outside their field of study. Graduates can also gain new experience.

The fifth informant shares the same perspective as the fourth informant. Graduates must work in a variety of sectors to maintain their economic sustainability. It also provides graduates with additional value and a unique experience. Soft skills are among the prerequisites to be met, as they will be valuable to graduates as long-term experience. The selective work mentality also hurts the country's economy, increasing the jobless rate among university graduates.

The sixth informant shared the views of the fourth and fifth informants. Acceptance of a job can help graduates gain more information, skills, and experience.

The seventh informant shares the same viewpoint as the preceding informants. The informant uses two perspectives: accepting work in various fields of study and ensuring that graduates make the appropriate decision regarding the cost of their studies. The seventh informant indicated that graduates are encouraged to work in various professions to gain a wide range of abilities. It also pioneered the development of multiskilled graduates. Knowledge and skill development can help raise competency levels. However, the seventh informant cautioned prospective students to carefully select their subject of study before continuing their studies to avoid cost-related blunders.

The eighth informant agrees with the seventh informant and is adaptable and holistic, providing insights. Graduates must grab work possibilities and avoid prejudice in jobs related to their fields of study. However, cautious cost selection must begin early to prevent graduates from losing time, money, and energy because they selected the incorrect cost or a less commercial cost in the job market.

The ninth informant presented a more advanced viewpoint. The informant suggested that graduates should strengthen their language skills, particularly their command of English. Multilingualism enhances graduates' employability. This is due to graduates' ability to enter a variety of organisations (both local and international). Indirectly, it expands area and employability. The ninth informant has a different point of view than the others. The informant emphasised that graduates should not limit themselves to a particular industry. Discrimination in the employment sector must be eliminated. Graduates must be holistic and prepared to work in the public or private sectors. This demonstrates that the ninth informant provides a specific and comprehensive perspective to ensure graduates' employability across various sectors and locations.

This study's ninth and final informant considered the issue of graduates' employability as related to the country's economic changes. Ten informants agreed that graduates should be open in their job searches due to the concerning economic trend. In addition to giving graduates a salary and the potential for a steady existence, it also offers graduates experience, which adds value. Experience is valuable since it can boost employers' competence and confidence in the future if graduates are allowed to work in various fields.

The concept of employability is complex and varies among different communities. Gorbato, Oostrom, and Khapova (2024) note that this study focuses on university students pursuing a degree. The findings suggest that students have a more focused perspective on employability. It is also found that students often choose their study subjects based on their interests, as highlighted by Siti Khairizah, Nor Shela, and Khairunesa (2023) and Akkermans et al. (2024). Moreover, Sparke and Williams (2024) highlight the impact of economic pressures on students' career decisions. The study successfully captured diverse perspectives on employability among Malaysian students, which can be valuable for future research. Beckerson et al. (2024) offer an alternative explanation for human psychology, and students are willing to accept jobs across different fields to avoid unemployment.

Table 4 Informants' views on the problem of work mismatch

Informant	Informants' Views
Informant 1	The study should be carefully selected to avoid the issue of unemployment. Readiness for extra training might be used as a graduate-added value.
Informant 2	Graduates have diverse rights and perspectives when working in other disciplines of study. However, graduates may believe that working in an unrelated field is futile.
Informant 3	Job trends must be discovered to ensure future employment stability.
Informant 4	Grabbing an open position is an opportunity. It is necessary to take steps to reduce unemployment. Furthermore, it can help you gain experience and learn new talents.
Informant 5	Additional soft skills were developed to understand new knowledge. The economic burden will increase if graduates have a "choose a job" mentality.
Informant 6	Graduates cannot choose work and take advantage of opportunities to expand their knowledge, abilities, and experience.

Informant 7	Working in several fields might help you develop a wide range of talents. It also fosters talent and expertise. However, graduates must carefully consider the cost of their studies before continuing their education.
Informant 8	Graduates must seize their professional chances. Graduates must also be prudent in deciding on the cost of their studies before continuing them to lower jobless rates.
Informant 9	Graduates need to increase their command of multiple languages, notably English. The mastery of numerous skills must also be improved. Graduates should also be willing to work in the public and private sectors.
Informant 10	Economic developments have a significant effect. Graduates should accept job offers in various industries because they can add value and provide future experience.

7.0 CONCLUSION

The study sheds light on the factors influencing student's choice of university and field of study. Students make their decisions based on various considerations, including personal interest, career potential, perceived obstacles, and prospects for career advancement. This reflects students' optimism about pursuing a career in their chosen profession. However, economic pressures and concerns about job prospects sometimes impede students' aspirations. The survey revealed that many students are open to pursuing careers outside their field of study to gain experience, enhance their skills, and improve their employability. In response to market demands, students, especially future graduates, must develop their potential and skills by acquiring new knowledge and abilities. Students must acquire technical knowledge and language skills to enhance their employability. Moreover, students should actively research relevant career paths in their fields, indirectly addressing the issue of graduate employability.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper

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