

MEASURING EMPLOYABILITY AMONG SPORTS GRADUATES: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract. Graduate employability remains a central concern for higher education institutions as labour markets increasingly demand graduates who can demonstrate adaptable capabilities and workplace-ready competencies. This study examined the level of employability among sports graduates from Universiti Teknologi MARA in Malaysia. A quantitative cross-sectional design was employed involving 369 employed sports graduates from five campuses. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of 20 items measuring employability through capabilities and competencies. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data, with mean scores used to determine the level of employability among respondents. The findings revealed a high level of employability among respondents, indicating that sports graduates perceived themselves as possessing strong attributes for workplace participation, including adaptability, communication, problem-solving, learning readiness, and professional competence. This suggests that their academic preparation and employment exposure may have supported the development of employability attributes aligned with organizational expectations. The study contributes empirical evidence to graduate employability research by providing a focused profile of sports graduates within the Malaysian higher education context. Practically, the findings offer useful guidance for universities, employers, and policymakers in strengthening curriculum design, career development initiatives, and graduate support programmes. Future research should examine employability across disciplines, institutions, and employment sectors to provide a broader understanding of graduate readiness in changing labour markets.

Keywords: *employability, sports graduates, graduate employability, higher education, Malaysia*

Introduction

Employability has become a central concern for higher education institutions and employers because it signals whether graduates can translate formal qualifications into sustainable career outcomes and organizational value. Contemporary organizations increasingly recruit fresh graduates who demonstrate employability skills that fit dynamic work demands, and employability is widely viewed as essential for individuals who aim to build successful careers in competitive labour markets. In this regard, employability is shaped by adaptability, competencies, and the capability to complete organizational tasks effectively (Van Der Baan et al., 2022). The emphasis on employability reflects a broader shift from credential-based selection to capability-based assessment, where graduates are expected to demonstrate functional skills, behavioural attributes, and readiness to contribute within complex work settings. Consistent with this view, employability is strengthened when individuals can integrate academic learning with practical competencies demanded by industries, thereby improving both entry into employment and performance continuity across changing environments (Kovács and Zarándné, 2022).

Recent literature further indicates that employability increasingly requires a balanced portfolio of technical and non-technical capacities, particularly as digital transformation

reshapes job roles across sectors (Adewolu Ogwo, 2024). Employees' capability to remain relevant depends on continuous learning and the ability to generate opportunities that expand their skill sets in response to new requirements. Digital proficiency has become a baseline expectation in many industries, and the importance of digital technologies as a prerequisite for employability has been highlighted in contemporary scholarship (Arshed Butt et al., 2026; Ciarli et al., 2021). At the same time, employers also differentiate candidates through soft skills, including leadership and interpersonal competencies, which are crucial for collaboration, influence, and sustainable performance (Galster et al., 2023). Taken together, these developments imply that employability functions as both an individual resource for career resilience and an organizational resource for competitiveness, where the alignment between individual capabilities and market demand becomes a defining determinant of employment opportunities and long-term success.

Despite the broad recognition of employability as a strategic asset, labour-market outcomes remain constrained by persistent challenges related to job stability, workforce mobility, and skill mismatch. In Malaysia, graduates who possess the requisite skills are more likely to be prioritized for hiring because employers expect employees to adapt effectively to workplace environments, thereby enabling long-term job sustainability (Seng, 2018). However, employability is not merely an individual responsibility; it is also shaped by organizational practices that refine and develop employees' skills over time. At the policy level, employable employees are considered essential for advancing knowledge-intensive economic activities, increasing labour productivity, and attracting investment, as emphasized in the Twelfth Malaysia Plan (2021-2025). Nevertheless, achieving these goals is complicated by workforce behaviour shifts, including job hopping among younger employees, which contributes to rising turnover and undermines retention strategies (Zahari and Puteh, 2023; Ghazali et al., 2018).

This problem is further compounded when turnover patterns and skill mismatches coincide with organizational expectations for sustained performance. Evidence suggests that a substantial proportion of graduates leave their first jobs within a relatively short period, often in pursuit of roles better aligned with their skills and interests, thereby producing labour-market instability and increasing replacement costs (Zahari and Puteh, 2023). Empirical work also indicates that employability patterns may vary by demographic factors, with differences observed in employability tendencies across groups (Ahmad et al., 2023). Critically, mismatches between graduate skill sets and industry requirements remain a persistent challenge that limits the capacity of employees to maintain long-term employment and may undermine job performance and organizational effectiveness (Koca and Karagöl, 2023). When high employability is paired with perceived limited opportunities, turnover intention may increase because skilled employees experience broader mobility options and may migrate to workplaces offering stronger career prospects. These patterns suggest that employability must be understood not only as a hiring criterion but also as a factor shaping retention, performance, and organizational sustainability.

Although prior studies have developed conceptual definitions and documented employability patterns across diverse populations, empirical evidence profiling employability among sports graduates in Malaysian public universities, including UiTM, remains limited (Razalli, 2024; Jiang et al., 2023; Suyansah et al., 2023; Tan et al., 2014). Sports-related programmes prepare graduates for diverse career pathways across sectors, and employability outcomes may vary according to discipline and

institutional context. Therefore, establishing a baseline estimate is important for informing curriculum enhancement and graduate development initiatives aligned with national employability priorities. Accordingly, this study aims to determine the level of employability among UiTM sports graduates. By producing a focused estimate of employability within this population, the study provides an evidence base to support stakeholders, particularly UiTM and the Faculty of Sports Science and Recreation (FSR) in reviewing employability development priorities in relation to market expectations and institutional targets. In doing so, the study contributes context-specific evidence to guide employability development among sports graduates while supporting institutional efforts toward quality education (SDG 4) and decent work (SDG 8).

Literature review

Employability has been conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing attributes, knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable individuals to secure and sustain employment across contexts. Employability has been defined as a long-term practice through which individuals develop diverse abilities, characteristics, and attitudes needed for success (Tanius, 2018), and as a set of attributes, expertise, and knowledge that labour force entrants should possess to enhance effectiveness at work (Misra and Khurana, 2017). Related accounts highlight employability as a willingness to work paired with work ethics, business skills, creative and inventive interpersonal skills, and learning abilities (Kamaruddin et al. 2020), and as a combination of skills, knowledge, and personal characteristics (Seng, 2018). A further stream of scholarship frames employability as internal and external employability. Internal employability reflects employee development supported by organizational practices, while external employability reflects the capacity to demonstrate value and mobility in the broader labour market (Akkermans et al., 2019). This distinction implies that employability is not only an individual stock of skills but also a function of contextual opportunities, organizational support, and the signalling of competence to multiple audiences. In parallel, employability is frequently aligned with employee competency, defined as individual characteristics comprising skills, knowledge, and attitudes that enable effective job performance (Ahmad and Safwan, 2023; Kaur and Kaur, 2021). Such definitions position employability as both capabilities to obtain employment and competence to perform effectively and remain relevant.

The literature also emphasizes that employability is a shared responsibility among individuals, universities, and organizations, with higher education institutions playing a pivotal role in preparing employable graduates (Abd Majid et al., 2020; Clarke, 2018). As a result, educational programs are expected to cultivate both discipline-specific capabilities and transferable skills. Skills such as communication, cooperation, and entrepreneurial capabilities have been identified as key graduate characteristics that support employability and contribution to national development (Arif and Mir, 2023). In workplace contexts, employability-related skills have been associated with positive attitudes, problem-solving, development, and engagement, and are linked to performance and organizational outcomes. These findings collectively suggest that employability operates through both pre-employment preparation and post-employment development.

The prevailing evidence suggests that employability levels are generally high among employees and graduates who have benefited from adequate organizational support and personal skill development. Ybema et al. (2020), in a study of employees in the

Netherlands, reported a high average mean score for employability. This finding is consistent with Tan et al. (2014), who reported a similar outcome among sports science graduates. Comparable findings were also observed by, whose studies indicated high levels of employability among their respective samples (Veth et al., 2019; Hahn and Kim, 2018; Liu, 2018). However, the literature is not entirely consistent. Kaur and Kaur (2021), in a study of employee competency within the food-processing manufacturing industry, reported a moderate level of employability, suggesting that employability outcomes may vary across occupational and organizational contexts. Beyond definitional and measurement issues, the literature also identifies several pathways for strengthening employability through coordinated educational and organizational strategies. Higher education institutions are expected to design curricula and developmental initiatives that enhance graduate readiness, while employers are expected to support continuous capability-building through workplace learning and human resource strategies. Within organizations, employability is reinforced when individuals possess distinctive skills that enable effective adaptation to existing work environments (Schislyaeva and Saychenko, 2022). Employees with diverse skills and adaptive capacity are more likely to demonstrate stronger job performance, which in turn supports organizational success.

In applied terms, employability can be enhanced when higher education institutions provide structured programs that increase students' awareness, career readiness, and entrepreneurial capacity, and when employers provide development opportunities that allow graduates to apply and strengthen what they have learned (Yusop and Umar, 2018). Employers may also respond to employability-related personality, self-confidence, and presentation attributes in recruitment decisions, reflecting the importance of holistic capability signalling (Nor Zamira and Siti Farah, 2019). At the same time, employability development may be weakened by organizational disengagement and insufficient managerial support, implying that enhancement requires commitment from graduates, institutions, and employers. Collectively, these studies indicate that although employability is widely recognised as an important outcome and is frequently reported at a high level, it remains influenced by contextual factors and environmental constraints. This highlights the need for focused empirical evidence within specific populations where employability development is strategically prioritised.

Materials and Methods

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional design to determine the level of employability among UiTM sports graduates. The cross-sectional design was suitable as data were collected at a single point in time from graduates who were already employed. A total of 369 respondents comprised employed UiTM sports graduates from five campuses: Negeri Sembilan were participated in the study. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of two sections. Part A gathered demographic information, while Part B measured employability using a 20-item scale adapted from Baker et al. (2017), covering two dimensions: capabilities and competencies. All items were assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A pilot study was conducted prior to the main data collection. The employability scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.94, indicating that the instrument was reliable for the study (Ahady et al., 2017). Data were collected via an online survey using Google

Forms. The questionnaire was distributed to eligible respondents across the selected campuses, and participation was voluntary. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data. Frequency and percentage were employed to describe demographic characteristics, while mean and standard deviation were used to determine the level of employability.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study on the level of employability among UiTM sports graduates. The analysis focuses on respondents' demographic characteristics and the overall level of employability based on descriptive statistical analysis. Frequency and percentage were used to summarize demographic information, while mean and standard deviation were employed to determine the level of employability. The interpretation of mean scores was adapted from Aziz et al. (2009). The demographic profile of respondents is presented in *Table 1*. A total of 369 UiTM sports graduates participated in this study. The demographic analysis focused on gender distribution to provide an overview of the respondents involved in the research. As shown in *Table 1*, 204 respondents were male, representing 55.3% of the total sample, while 165 respondents were female, accounting for 44.7%. The findings indicate that male respondents constituted a slightly larger proportion of the study sample compared to female respondents. The interpretation of mean scores used in this study was adapted from Aziz et al. (2009), as presented in *Table 2*. The interpretation guideline was applied to determine whether the level of employability among UiTM sports graduates falls within low, moderate, or high categories. According to the interpretation scale, mean scores ranging from 1.00 to 2.33 indicate a low level, scores between 2.34 and 3.66 represent a moderate level, while scores between 3.67 and 5.00 indicate a high level. This interpretation framework provides a systematic approach for evaluating respondents' employability perceptions based on the descriptive statistical findings.

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents.

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Male	204	55.3
Female	165	44.7
Total	369	100.0

Table 2. Interpretation of mean score.

Level	Mean score
Low	1.00-2.33
Moderate	2.34-3.66
High	3.67-5.00

The main objective of this study was to determine the level of employability among UiTM sports graduates. Employability was measured using a structured instrument consisting of 20 items covering the dimensions of capabilities and competencies. The findings of the descriptive analysis are presented in *Table 3*. *Table 3* shows that the overall mean score for employability was 4.39, with a standard deviation of 0.424. Based on the interpretation of mean scores adapted from Aziz et al. (2009), the result indicates that the level of employability among UiTM sports graduates is high. The high mean score suggests that respondents generally perceived themselves as possessing

strong employability attributes and competencies required in the workplace. This finding reflects that UiTM sports graduates believe they are capable of adapting to workplace demands, performing assigned responsibilities, and demonstrating relevant professional skills in their employment settings.

Table 3. Mean score of employability.

Category	Mean	Std. Deviation
Employability	4.39	.424

Employability is defined as the capabilities and competencies in securing and maintaining a suitable job in the industry. It is also seen as a set of attributes that an individual possesses in getting and retaining the job. Basically, the main purpose of graduates when they have finished their studies is to find a suitable job that can enable them to demonstrate their skills effectively and efficiently as required by employers. The employability gained by graduates will make them become valuable assets for the organization to achieve its objectives.

Based on the study’s findings, the employability’s level of UiTM sports graduates at the workplace was at a high level. This shows that graduates strongly agree that the skills gained from implementing various programs organized by higher education institutions have equipped their employability. At the same time, the employability of sports graduates also improves when employers provide a good chance for them to demonstrate their abilities of what they have learned and trained. This is supported by Yusop and Umar (2018), institutional efforts in organizing various programs such as career opportunities and entrepreneurship have become a medium to convey information and awareness that can add the students’ value to secure jobs. Previous scholars also reported that the organization that conducted a good quality of employees’ training had given the opportunities for employees to impact their knowledge and skills resulting in good productivity at the workplace (Ahmad et al., 2022). The result of this study was in line with previous studies that found the average mean score of employability also yielded at the high level (Ybema et al.,2020; Veth et al., 2019; Hahn and Kim, 2018). Employability had by graduates such as problem solving, self-confidence, communication, learning capacity and others was in line with the organizations’ demand. This means that good skills gained by graduates have assisted them in having the opportunity to secure a better career and adapt to the change of working environment. Employers are more interested in graduates who fulfil the aspect of personality, self-confidence and self-appearance to fill vacancies in the organization since their added value can distinguish them from others affecting an organization’s performance (Nor Zamira and Siti Farah, 2019).

Nevertheless, the result of a study done by Kaur and Kaur (2021) shows a contradiction when the average mean score was reported at a moderate level. This finding indicates the organizations probably less needs employability possessed by graduates during the study until it causes their employability cannot be maintained and improved. The graduates who do not have high employability will have little chance to stay longer in the organization if the graduates and employers do not take the initiative to build it up. This is supported by Salman et al. (2020), employees’ disengagement and management's inability to provide enough assistance will influence the development of staff and organizations’ capability. Therefore, the employability of graduates can be enhanced if the graduates, institutions as well as employers carry out their

responsibilities to plan necessary strategies that can contribute in developing and enhancing the employees to sustain the job.

Conclusion

This study examined the level of employability among UiTM sports graduates and found that respondents demonstrated a high level of employability. The findings suggest that these graduates generally possess positive capabilities and competencies that support their effectiveness in the workplace and enable them to meet professional and organizational expectations. However, employability remains a dynamic construct influenced by changing labour market conditions and organizational demands. Therefore, graduates should continue to engage in lifelong learning and professional development to sustain their employability over time. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence on employability among sports graduates within the Malaysian higher education context. From a practical perspective, the findings may assist universities, employers, and policymakers in strengthening graduate development initiatives, employability programmes, and curriculum enhancement strategies. Nevertheless, this study was limited to UiTM sports graduates from selected campuses. Future research is recommended to include graduates from different academic disciplines, institutions, and employment sectors to provide broader insights into graduate employability across diverse contexts.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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