

# **ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND PERCEIVED EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS OF HOTEL AND RESTAURANT MANAGEMENT GRADUATING STUDENTS**

Nenita A. Daquiz, MaEd

## **Abstract**

This study aimed to determine the relationship between the respondents' academic performance and their level of employability skills. The researchers used descriptive correlation research method. Results show that for the academic performance of the respondents, the majority has a grade point ranging from 80-84%, with a verbal interpretation of Average. In terms of the level of employability skills, the respondents had overall weighted mean of 3.18, which had a verbal interpretation of "high", showing their knowledge of the various employability skills presented. For the relationship between academic performance and level of employability skills, the result was not significant for the respondents' academic performance and level of employability skills.

*Keywords: Academic Performance, Graduating Students, Employability, Skills*

## **Introduction**

Employability skills are one of the most important things that graduating students must possess in order for them to increase their employability. On the other hand the lack of such skills, particularly at the entry stage of occupation. School learning was a basic component in getting equipped with such life skill, however, a mere finishing of a particular course in college/university does not assure employment skills (Allen, as cited by Manning, 2009).

Mismatch of jobs and workers due to lack of skills was often associated with unemployment according to Experimental Economics Center (2006); the explanation behind high unemployment rate in the United States was because businesses can't simply find workers with the right skills to take the jobs (TheHuffingtonPost.com, Inc., 2013). The employment-status in London, according to Labor-Employee Assistance Program (LEAP, 2011) shows that most of the applicants have no qualification, such that one in five lack basic numeracy and

literacy skills, while many lack adequate soft skills such as social or interpersonal skills, critical thinking, and confidence. A survey conducted by the Confederation of British Industry shows that more than two thirds of employers were dissatisfied with their young employee's

employability skills, especially their poor time management and lack of customer awareness (Staszko, 2011).

Understanding the necessity of being equipped with basic employability skills, the researchers were encouraged to study the influence of basic subject-knowledge in developing the set of skills. For this reason, the study aims to determine the influence of academic performance on the acquisition of basic employability skills among the graduating Hotel and Restaurant Management (HRM) students. Additionally, the study hopes to identify if academic performance relates differently with the respondents' level of employability skill upon consideration of their gender.

This study was anchored on the theory of social cognitive development by Bandura (1986). Social cognitive theory states that students learn by watching what others do, and student thought processes are central to understand personality. This theory provides framework for understanding, predicting and changing human behaviour. The main tenets of Bandura's theory are that: people learn by observing others, the same set of stimuli may provoke different responses from different people, or from the same people at different times, the world and a person's behaviour are interlinked and personality was an interaction between three factors: the environment, behaviour, and a person's psychological processes (Boeree, 2008). Social Cognitive Theory revolves around the notion that learning correlates to the observation of role models.

This study aimed to determine the relationship between the respondents' academic performance and their level of employability skills. Specifically, this sought answers to the following:

(1) The respondents' academic performance; (2) The respondents' level of employability skill in terms of communication skills, teamwork skills, problem solving skills, self-management skills, initiative and enterprise skills, planning and organizing skills, learning skills, and technology skills; (3) Find out if there a significant relationship between the respondents' academic performance and level of employability skills.

Employability skills are those basic skills necessary for getting, keeping and doing well on a job and they can be divided into three categories: Basic Academic Skills, Higher-Order Thinking Skills and Personal Qualities (Robinson, 2000). Zinser (2003) shares a similar view. He believes that career and employability skills should be taught in schools, since many students leave education without the requisite skills to succeed in the adult work world. In addition to that, Washer (2007) emphasizes that graduates should leave higher education better in many ways than when they enter it. This improvement should be attributable to the undergraduate curriculum which was important to equip them with skills they can use to 'sell themselves' to employers.

According to Commonwealth of Australia (2013) employability skills are skills that apply across a variety of jobs and life context and they are sometimes referred to as key skills, core skills, life skills, essential skills, key competencies, necessary skills, and transferable skills but industry's preferred term is employability skills. He added that employability skills as skills required not only to gain employment, but also to progress within an enterprise so as to achieve one's potential and contribute successfully to enterprise strategic direction.

Employability skills are not specific to one particular occupation or industry ; they are required for working in today's changing environment and in the future, not only important for

gaining employment; but also needed for making progress in a workplace, can be developed through participation in the workplace, family and community sometimes referred to as generic skills; core foundation or key competencies; workplace know-how (gatewaysforyouth.com.au, 2008).

The two greatest concerns of employers today are finding good workers and training them. The difference between the skills needed on the job and those possessed by applicants, sometimes called the skills-gap, was of real concern to human resource managers and business owners looking to hire competent employees. While employers would prefer to hire people who are trained and ready to go to work, they are usually willing to provide the specialized, job-specific training necessary for those lacking such skills(Alabama Cooperative Extension System, 2000).

Employability was an issue of direct concern to students. The prime motivation in attending university for the majority of students was not to study a particular subject in depth, but to enhance their employment status (Stewart and Knowles, 2000). Therefore there was a greater need for graduates to develop and enhance their employability skills from time to time.

Australian Government (2012) added that employability skills are the non-technical skills and knowledge necessary for effective participation in the workplace. acwa.asn.au (2008) also mention employability skills, such as communication or teamwork, are sometimes referred to as 'soft skills'. *McQuerrey (2013) also mention that employability skills are traits and talents that make an individual attractive candidate for a job, improving employability skills through education, training and practical application can give an individual edge in the job market. In*

*addition, it give the individual an advantage in their job search, these employability skills may also position them for higher-earning roles with greater growth potential.*

Monash University (2012) also defined employability as an improved by a good academic record plus skills and attributes that enable you to adapt and manage to constantly changing work environment and it include hard skills and generic or soft such as teamwork, communication, problem solving, initiative and enterprise, planning and organizing, self-management, learning and technology.

Based on the research done to students at a technical training institute in Malaysia, Ab. Rahim & Iva (2007) find out that the employability skills should not be taught since students acquire them on their own during training and education. Their research findings also reveal that production technology and Industrial Electronics students from a technical training institute in Malaysia have acquired slightly high degree of employability skills during their education and training program. Students in this institute are equipped with the skills needed for current workplace environment, especially in industrial sectors that focus more on technical and employability skills. However, Robinson (2000) has a different opinion. She believes that employability skills are teachable skills and may be taught in both schools and employment settings. Therefore, the authority should set goals and objectives for teaching employability skills. Furthermore, she suggests that instructions should be designed to ensure goals and objectives are attainable.

The Malaysian Government conducted a survey on Malaysian graduates and it was discovered that about 60,000 Malaysian Graduates were unemployed due to a lack of experience, poor English, poor communication skills and because they had pursued studies irrelevant to the

market place (Malaysian Today, 2005). The research further mentioned that the typical unemployed graduate was female, mainly from the Malay ethnic group and from the lower income group. Most unemployed graduates had majored in business studies or information technology. A total of 81 percent of the unemployed graduates had attended public universities where the medium of instruction in many courses was the Malay Language. The Ministry of Human Resource recently reported that a large number of graduates are still jobless. According to the report, 70 percent graduates of from public universities and institutions of higher learning are still unemployed. This is in contrast with 26 percent from private institutions of higher learning and 34 percent who are foreign graduates (Suresh, 2006).

The general consensus among Malaysian employers indicates that Malaysian graduates are well trained in their areas of specialization but unfortunately they lack the 'soft skills' (Nurita, Shaharudin, Aion, 2004). This 'deficit' in graduate skills has also been acknowledged by the UK government with respect to its graduates (Dickinson, 2000). Lawrence (2002) adds that America is also experiencing the same problem. Studies of employers have repeatedly stressed the priority which they give to 'personal transferable skills' (Dearing Committee, 1997). Employers today are looking for graduates not only with specific skills and knowledge but with the ability to be proactive enough to see and respond to problems. In Malaysia, more employers are searching for graduates who are balanced, with good academic achievement and possessing 'soft skills' such as communication skills, problem solving skills, interpersonal skills and the ability to be flexible (Nurita, Shaharudin & Aion, 2004). These 'soft skills' (also known as employability skills) are foundation skills that apply across the board, no matter what job the employee is performing (Lawrence, 2002).

One Malaysian report (Chang, 2004) claimed that the reason graduates are unemployed is that they do not have the right degree. Some graduates with specific qualifications are already abundant in the market, whereas Engineering and other Science degree graduates are still in high demand. Another reason was that graduates with a degree no longer automatically qualify for getting their first job. Instead, graduates who possess the greatest knowledge and skills in their study domain get hired first. In addition, the business world is becoming very competitive and computerization makes job performance measurement very transparent. Managers will only want to hire people who can contribute to team success. Proficiency in English, the ability to present ideas, explain issues and problems, to speak up in a constructive manner, to resolve problems, to understand issues and problems faced by companies and to come up with workable solutions to problems are all good communication and interpersonal skills sought after by employers. Therefore employees are expected to contribute from day one of being hired. (Chang, 2004).

According to a survey conducted on 3300 human resource personnel and bosses by JobStreet.com, a Malaysian employment agency, (2005), the factors relating to graduate unemployment are; Weak English – 56%; Bad social etiquette – 36%; Demand too much pay – 32%; Degrees not relevant – 30%; Fresh graduates too choosy – 23%; No vacancies – 14%. Weak English and bad social etiquette are the top reasons for graduates being unemployed. These findings show that Malaysian graduates are unemployed not because they are unintelligent but rather because most of them lack soft-skills.

In Malaysia, having good grades did not guarantee employment. The graduates must have a good command of English and other soft skills such as analytical thinking, intelligence, independence, leadership, communication and computer skills and work experience. One of the

steps taken by the Malaysian government in enhancing the quality of tertiary education was through the implementation of the assessment of soft skills in public universities. Most public universities had taken steps to improve students' competencies such as making co-curriculum activities and activities in colleges compulsory: presentations in classes, incorporating more application in teaching, encouraging problem-based learning and systematically organized industrial training and many other activities. However, results of these actions are yet to be seen. Steps should also be taken to improve English proficiency and competencies even at earlier stages in the lives of young persons. Most of these challenges are more pronounced for graduates who originate from rural areas because they are less exposed to speaking in English and almost all of them study in the public universities where Bahasa Malaysia is used as the medium of instruction.

## **Methodology**

This study utilized the descriptive correlation research method. The research design enabled the researchers to study the relationship of academic performance to the employability skills of 4<sup>th</sup> year students of University of Perpetual Help System Biñan, Laguna A.Y. 2012-2013.

Descriptive research involves collection of data in order to test hypothesis or to answer questions concerning the current status of the subject of the study. Correlation research seeks to find out whether a relationship exists between two or more quantifiable variables. The purpose of this was to explain important human behaviors and to predict likely outcomes (Alba, 2009).

The population of the study were the 131 graduates of Hospitality and Restaurant Management, University of Perpetual Help Laguna, who were enrolled during the Academic Year 2012-2013. The sample size of respondents was 98 graduates, however, two (2) survey were invalid, hence reducing the number to 96 graduates respondents. The group used random sampling technique.

The researchers used a self-constructed questionnaire for the purpose of collecting the needed primary data. The said questionnaire was composed of employability skills, which was composed of 8 sub-topics. The eight sub topics of employability skills were: A. Communication, B. Teamwork, C. Problem Solving D. Initiative and Enterprise Skills, E. Planning and Organizing Skills, F. Self-Management, G. Learning, and F. Technology.

The said questionnaire which the researchers used underwent validation by the professors of the major subjects in Hotel and Restaurant Management.

Below is the institutional grading system used as reference when encoding for value of x for the relationship of academic grades and employability skills.

<b>Grade Point %</b>	<b>Verbal Interpretation</b>
95-100	Superior
89-94	Above average
80-88	Average
75-79	Below Average

74-below

Low

To determine the employability skills of the graduate students, the scale below was used:

Scale	Range	Indicator	Verbal Interpretation
4	3.51-4.00	Strongly Agree	Very High
3	2.76-3.50	Agree	High
2	1.76-2.75	Disagree	Low
1	1.00-1.75	Strongly Disagree	Very Low

For data gathering, the researchers made a letter addressed to the dean of the College of International Hospitality Management (CIHM) asking permission to conduct the study in the College involving the graduate 4<sup>th</sup> year student. Further, the researcher requested from the college a copy of the Grade Weighted Average (GWA) of the graduate 4<sup>th</sup> year student. The researcher conducted dry run of their questionnaire before distributing to their respondents. In order to gather data, the researchers distributed the questionnaires to the respondents before they graduate. The researchers personally distributed the questionnaires to the 4<sup>th</sup> year student. The graduate students of University of Perpetual Help System Laguna A.Y. 2012-2013 answered the questionnaires with their perceptions about their level of employability skills. The questionnaires were scored, tallied and tabulated by the researchers.

The statistical tools that were used for the quantitative analysis of this study are the following correlation statistics:

Percentage and Frequency - used to describe the profile of respondents.

Weighted mean - used by the researchers to determine the level of employability skills of the respondents.

Pearson r value – Moment Correlation was used to determine the magnitude and directly of relationship between the Academic Performance of 4<sup>th</sup> year student in acquiring their Employability Skills.

## Results and Discussion

**Table 1**  
**Respondents' Academic Performance**

<b>Academic Performance</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1.25-1.49	3	3.12
1.50-1.74	7	7.29
1.75-1.99	15	15.62
2.00-2.24	28	29.17
2.25-2.49	30	31.25
2.50-2.74	11	11.46
2.75-2.94	2	2.08
Total	96	100.00

Table 1 presents the respondents' academic performance. The Table shows the frequency and percentage of the graduate students' Grade Weighted Average or GWA. It shows that 31.25% of the graduate students got an average academic performance with the scale of 2.25-2.49. On the other hand, 2.08% of the graduate students got a below average academic performance with the scale of 2.75-2.94. On the other hand, 3.12% of the graduate students got a superior academic performance with the scale of 1.25-1.49. Students' academic performance is

determined by the equivalent grade point percentage to the scale of 1.0 to 5.0, 1.0 being the highest possible score, considering it superior academic performance.

**Table 2**

**Composite Table for the Respondents' Level of Employability Skills**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Weighted Mean</b>	<b>Verbal Interpretation</b>	<b>Rank</b>
1. Communication Skills	3.07	High	8
2. Teamwork Skills	3.20	High	4
3. Problem Solving Skills	3.10	High	7
4. Initiative and Enterprises Skills	3.20	High	4
5. Planning and Organizing Skills	3.30	High	1
6. Self-Management Skills	3.20	High	4
7. Learning Skills	3.20	High	4
8. Technology Skills	3.20	High	4
Overall weighted mean	3.18	High	

Table 2 presents the composite table for the respondents' level of employability skills. The table shows that the respondents had "High" level of knowledge of all the indicators, with an average score of 3.18. Respondents showed that they had good level of knowledge, when in terms of planning and organizing skills with a rank of 1 and had a weighted mean of 3.30. On the other hand, respondents showed that their level of knowledge was high, when in terms of communication skills with rank of 8 and had a weighted mean of 3.07.

This "high" level of knowledge in terms of level of employability skills is attributed to the repeated discussions of Robinson (2000) that employability skills are those basic skills

necessary for getting, keeping and doing well on a job and they can be divided into three categories: Basic Academic Skills, Higher-Order Thinking Skills and Personal Qualities. Zinser (2003) shares a similar view. He believes that career and employability skills should be taught in schools, since many students leave education without the requisite skills to succeed in the adult work world. In addition to that, Washer (2007) emphasizes that graduates should leave higher education better in many ways than when they enter it. This improvement should be attributable to the undergraduate curriculum which was important to equip them with skills they can use to ‘sell themselves’ to employers.

**Table 3**

**Relationship between Academic Performance and Level of Employability Skills**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Pearson r value</b>	<b>t- value (computed)</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
Communication Skills	0.0322 Negligible Correlation	0.3123	Not Significant
Teamwork Skills	0.0908 Negligible Correlation	0.8840	Not Significant
Problem Solving Skills	0.1235 Negligible Correlation	1.2066	Not Significant
Initiative and Enterprises	0.0150 Negligible Correlation	0.1454	Not Significant
Planning and Organizing Skills	0.0364 Negligible Correlation	0.3580	Not Significant
Self-Management Skills	0.0652 Negligible Correlation	0.6325	Not Significant
Learning Skills	0.0568 Negligible Correlation	0.5516	Not Significant
Technology Skills	0.0106 Negligible Correlation	0.1028	Not Significant
t- critical value at df .94 = 1.988			

Table 3 shows that there is no significant relationship between the academic performance of the respondents and the indicators of the level of employability skills in terms of

communication skills , teamwork skills, problem solving skills, initiative and enterprises , planning and organizing skills, self- management skills , learning skills and technology skills.

In all the indicators, the computed t values did not exceed the t-critical value at df. 94= 1.988, therefore, academic performance is not significant with the employability skills of the respondents.

The salient findings of the study are the following: As the academic performance of the respondents, most of the graduate students or (31.25%) got an average grade of 2.25-2.49 while 2.08% of the graduate students got an average grade of 2.75-2.94. On the other hand, 3.12% of the graduate students got the highest average grade of 1.25-1.49.

In terms of the level of employability skills, the respondents had the highest overall weighted mean of 3.18, which had a verbal interpretation of “high”, followed by Planning and Organizing Skills with the overall weighted mean of 3.30, which had a verbal interpretation of “high” reached number 1. On the other hand Communication Skills and Problem Solving Skills had the lowest overall weighted mean of 3.07 and 3.10 which a verbal interpretation of “high”. There is no significant relationship between the academic performance and employability skills in terms of communication skills, teamwork skills, problem solving skills, initiative and enterprise skills, planning and organizing skills, self-management skills ,learning skills and technology skills among the respondents.

**Conclusions.** In the light of the above findings, conclusions were developed: The academic performance of the Hotel and Restaurant Management graduate was high. The level of

employability skills of the Hotel and Restaurant Management graduate was high, with Planning and Organizing Skills as the highest but Problem Solving Skills and Communication Skills as the lowest. Lastly, that there is no significant relationship between academic performance and level of employability skills among the Hotel and Restaurant Management graduate.

**Directions for Future Use.** CIHM Department should continuously enhance and innovate the curriculum of College of International Hospitality Management program so that students will be more competitive in the world of work. More seminars should be conducted to enhance the Communication and Problem Solving Skills of student. For future researches, to conduct related study to use the practicum grades from second year to fourth year instead of the grade weighted average or GWA and instead of the 4<sup>th</sup> year students themselves, as respondents, let the internship supervisor answer employability skills of intern students.

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