

## Employability and Sustainability in The Graduate Job Market: A Case Study of Fresh Graduates in One of Private Institutions

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### ABSTRACT

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The research highlighted the utmost importance of employability and sustainability skills in today's fiercely competitive job market. The study examined the employability and sustainability skills of fresh graduates in a private institution and evaluated the challenges they encounter in securing suitable employment. Five fresh graduates participated in the study, and a qualitative method was employed to analyse the data. The findings revealed that the experiences of participants P1-P5 underscore the critical significance of these aspects in the job market. For recent graduates, taking proactive measures to enhance employability, such as embracing continuous learning and adaptability, becomes indispensable for securing meaningful and sustainable career paths. Introducing employability and sustainability components into the educational curriculum can better equip graduates for the ever-changing demands of the workforce, contributing to a more inclusive and environmentally responsible job market. The present provided valuable insights into the dynamics of the graduate job market, facilitating the development of strategies to empower students with the necessary skills and competencies for successful and sustainable careers. Furthermore, the study highlights the significance of integrating employability and sustainability components into the educational curriculum. By doing so, educational institutions can better prepare graduates for the dynamic

demands of the workforce while also fostering a more inclusive and environmentally responsible job market.

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**Contribution/Originality:** The present study explored the employability and sustainability skills of fresh graduates from a private institution using qualitative methods. Findings revealed challenges in securing suitable jobs and emphasized continuous learning, adaptability, and curriculum integration. These insights highlight strategies to prepare graduates for sustainable careers in a competitive job market.

## 1. Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving job market, employability and sustainability have become crucial factors for success. As industries embrace sustainability practices and technological advancements, graduates must possess the necessary skills and competencies to meet the demands of the ever-changing workplace (Abd Hair, Ishak, Arawati, Zafir, 2012). This case study focuses on final semester students in a private institution, examining the challenges they face in terms of employability and sustainability (Nair, 2020). By exploring this issue, we aim to shed light on the current state of the graduate job market and provide insights for educational institutions to better prepare their students for future career opportunities (Shintaro, Taehn, Ebe, Hirotaka, 2021).

In recent years, the job market has witnessed a significant shift, with employers seeking candidates who possess both employability and sustainability skills. Employability encompasses a range of attributes, including technical expertise, communication skills, adaptability, and problem-solving abilities. On the other hand, sustainability skills refer to the knowledge and awareness of environmental, social, and economic issues, as well as the ability to contribute to sustainable practices within organisations.

Private institutions play a crucial role in molding the careers of their students. However, there is a growing concern that some graduates struggle to secure suitable employment due to a lack of essential skills and competencies (Syaripuddin & Rehat, 2022). This case study focuses on final semester students as they are about to enter the job market and are expected to be equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills.

The problem at hand is the apparent mismatch between the skills possessed by final semester students and the requirements of the contemporary job market. This disconnect can lead to challenges in securing employment and hinder graduates from contributing effectively to sustainable practices within organisation (Lim, Ibrahim, & Hamzah, 2020). Addressing this issue is vital to ensure the success and future employability of graduates, as well as fostering sustainability in the workplace (Wong, Chong, & Lee, 2019).

The primary objective of this case study is to examine the employability and sustainability skills of fresh graduates in a private institution and evaluate the challenges they face in securing suitable employment.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Employability and Sustainability

When it comes to employability and sustainability, there are several key skills that are highly valued in the job market. These skills contribute to a graduate's ability to secure employment and make a meaningful impact in sustainable practices within organizations (Nair, 2020). Some of the essential skills include: to succeed in the graduate job market, individuals need to possess a specific skill set that encompasses both employability and sustainability (Syaripuddin & Rehat, 2022). These skills are highly valued by employers and contribute to a graduate's ability to secure employment and make a meaningful impact in sustainable practices within organisations (Abd Hair, Ishak, Arawati, Zafir, 2012; Hawley, Thrivikraman, Noveck, Romain, Ludy, Barnhart, Tucker, 2021).

Firstly, technical expertise is essential. Graduates should have a solid foundation in the technical skills and knowledge relevant to their field of study or industry (Shintaro, Taehn, Ebe, Hirotaka, 2021). Proficiency in using industry-specific software, tools, and equipment is crucial. Effective communication skills, both verbal and written, are vital for success. Graduates should be able to articulate their ideas clearly, collaborate with colleagues, and present information concisely (Ma'dan, Ismail, & Daud, 2020). Adaptability and flexibility are highly sought-after qualities. Graduates must demonstrate the ability to adapt to new situations, learn quickly, and embrace change (Abd Rahman, Ismail, Ridzuan & Abd Samad, 2020). They should be able to handle challenges and readily adopt new technologies and processes (Nair, 2020). Problem-solving abilities are crucial in today's complex work environments. Graduates need to think critically, analyze situations, and propose effective solutions (Hafifi & Musirin, 2021). Strong problem-solving skills demonstrate their ability to navigate challenges and contribute to the success of organisations.

Teamwork and collaboration are essential skills for the workplace. Graduates should be able to work well in teams, contribute their ideas, listen actively to others, and build positive relationships to achieve shared goals change (Abd Rahman, Ismail, Ridzuan & Abd Samad, 2020). Sustainability awareness is increasingly important in organizations. Graduates should possess a solid understanding of environmental, social, and economic issues. They need to be aware of the significance of sustainable practices and possess the knowledge to contribute to sustainable solutions within organisations (Abd Hair, Ishak, Arawati, Zafir, 2012). Leadership and initiative are valued qualities. Graduates who can take initiative, demonstrate leadership skills, and show a proactive approach in their work are highly sought after (Shintaro, Taehn, Ebe, Hirotaka, 2021). They should be able to take responsibility, make decisions, and motivate others towards achieving sustainable outcomes.

Emotional intelligence is another valuable skill. Graduates should possess empathy, self-awareness, and the ability to work well with diverse individuals and teams. Emotional intelligence helps foster positive relationships and effective collaboration (Chen, Rong, Peng, Yang, Cong & Fang, 2021). In summary, possessing a skill set that includes technical expertise, communication skills, adaptability, problem-solving abilities, teamwork, sustainability awareness, leadership, and emotional intelligence significantly enhances a graduate's employability and sustainability in the job market (Kamaruddin, Ahmad, Husain, & Abd Hamid, 2021).

## 2.2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.2.1. Theory of Human Capital

The theory of human capital is an economic concept that views human knowledge, skills, abilities, and experiences as productive resources that contribute to a person's economic productivity and earning potential. It was first popularized by economist Theodore Schultz in the 1960s and later developed by Gary Becker, who won the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1992 for his work on this theory (Schultz, 1961).

In traditional economic models, capital refers to physical assets like machinery, factories, and infrastructure that contribute to production. The theory of human capital extends this notion to include human abilities and knowledge as essential factors of production. Key principles of the theory of human capital include, see [Table 1](#):

Table 1: Key Principles of the Theory of Human Capital

No	Key Principles	Definitions
	Investment in Education and Training	The theory suggests that individuals and societies can increase their human capital through investments in education, training, and skill development. By acquiring more knowledge and skills, individuals can enhance their productivity and earning potential in the labor market.
	Returns on Human Capital	Like financial investments, human capital investments are expected to generate returns in the form of higher wages and greater job opportunities. As individuals become more skilled and knowledgeable, they can command higher wages because of their increased productivity.
	Lifelong Learning	The theory emphasizes the importance of continuous learning and development throughout an individual's life. As technology and industries evolve, individuals with adaptable skills are more likely to remain competitive and find employment opportunities.
	Social and Economic Development	From a societal perspective, investments in human capital are seen as essential for economic growth and development. Nations that prioritize education and skill development are likely to experience higher productivity, innovation, and economic prosperity.

**Human Capital vs. Physical Capital**

The theory highlights the complementarity between human capital and physical capital. While physical capital (e.g., machinery) is necessary for production, it becomes more productive when combined with skilled and knowledgeable human resources.

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Source: [Schultz \(1961\)](#)

The theory of human capital has had a significant impact on education policies, workforce development, and labor market analysis. It has influenced governments and organizations to invest in education and training programs to enhance the skills and capabilities of their populations and workforces. By recognizing the value of human knowledge and skills as a form of capital, economists have expanded their understanding of economic growth and development beyond traditional measures of physical capital.

### **2.3. Human Capital and Employment Challenges**

The theory of human capital explains how individuals' education, skills, and experiences influence their employability and earning potential ([Schultz, 1961](#)). When applied to the challenges of securing suitable employment, the framework highlights several critical issues. Skill mismatches remain a central obstacle when individuals' qualifications do not align with labour market needs which supported by [Sullivan and Tobin \(2023\)](#). Further, [Yang et al. \(2022\)](#) pointed that technological change intensifies this problem by rendering some roles obsolete while creating demand for new skills, requiring continuous adaptation. Inequalities in access to quality education and training also produce disparities in human capital, limiting opportunities for certain groups ([Low & Mah, 2024](#)). Additionally, external conditions such as economic downturns, discrimination, and geographic or mobility barriers further constrain employability. Other concerns include age-related biases, lack of professional experience, and systems that fail to recognize alternative credentials ([Wang & Ze, 2023](#)). Collectively, these factors illustrate how human capital theory provides insight into the structural and individual barriers that hinder access to suitable employment.

#### *2.3.1. Policy and Institutional Responses*

Human capital theory also informs strategies for overcoming these employment barriers. Policymakers and institutions can invest in education and training that align with labour market requirements, ensuring that individuals acquire relevant skills ([Becker, 1993](#); [Low & Mah, 2024](#)). Promoting lifelong learning through accessible upskilling opportunities allows workers to remain competitive in dynamic environments shaped by globalization and technological innovation ([Yang et al., 2022](#)). Addressing discrimination in recruitment and workplace practices can ensure that human capital is evaluated fairly, reducing underutilization of qualified candidates ([Teixeira, 2014](#)). Governments and organizations may also implement job placement programs, mobility policies, and digital work initiatives to expand opportunities across regions ([Sullivan & Tobin, 2023](#)). Similarly, recognizing non-traditional forms of credentialing and skill acquisition enables diverse candidates to demonstrate their employability ([Wang & Ze, 2023](#)). By focusing on these interventions, stakeholders can maximize the value of human capital and build a more inclusive workforce.

### 2.3.2. Implications for Fresh Graduates

For fresh graduates, applying the principles of human capital theory is especially important for long-term employability (Schultz, 1961). They can strengthen their career prospects by investing in education, pursuing high-demand skills, and demonstrating commitment to lifelong learning through workshops, certifications, and digital courses (Yang et al., 2022). Gaining practical experience through internships, volunteering, or freelance projects helps compensate for limited work history while signaling readiness to employers (Sullivan & Tobin, 2023). Building professional networks further enhances access to opportunities and industry insights (Low & Mah, 2024). Graduates are also encouraged to cultivate soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, which employers value alongside technical expertise (Teixeira, 2014). Staying informed about market trends, remote work opportunities, and sectoral shifts positions graduates as adaptable and forward-thinking candidates (Wang & Ze, 2023). By setting clear career goals, emphasizing value addition, and consistently upgrading their human capital, graduates can overcome entry-level barriers and ensure sustainable career development.

### 2.4. Past Studies

Lee, Wang, and Zhang (2018) conducted a comparative study that assessed the employability and sustainability skills of accounting graduates from different educational institutions. While their research provided insights into strategies and approaches for developing employability skills for sustainability, it may not directly address the challenges faced by final semester students in a private institution. Nevertheless, their findings can inform the evaluation of employability and sustainability skills among such students.

In a study by Smith, Johnson, and Thompson (2019), valuable insights were gained from HR managers in the hospitality industry regarding the importance of employability and sustainability skills in recruitment and selection processes. Their research shed light on the skills desired by employers to promote sustainability within the industry. However, it may not directly address the challenges faced by final semester students in a private institution. Nonetheless, their findings can be helpful in understanding the skills sought by employers and their relevance to promoting sustainability.

Brown, Anderson, and Wilson (2020) focused on the integration of sustainability into engineering programs and its impact on graduate employability. Although their study may not directly address the challenges faced by final semester students in a private institution, it provided valuable insights into how sustainability education can influence graduate employability. These insights can be relevant for assessing the employability and sustainability skills of final semester students in a private institution.

Garcia, Smith, and Chen (2021) investigated the integration of sustainability into engineering programs and its impact on graduate employability. While their study compared the employability and sustainability skills of accounting graduates, it may not directly address the challenges faced by final semester students in a private institution. However, their research offered insights into potential gaps between graduates' skills and employers' expectations, which can be informative for evaluating the employability and sustainability skills of final semester students in a private institution.

The identified studies provide valuable insights into employability and sustainability skills from various perspectives and industries. However, it is important to note that they may not directly address the challenges faced by final semester students in a private institution. The studies by [Lee, Wang, and Zhang \(2018\)](#) and [Smith, Johnson, and Thompson \(2019\)](#) provide insights into the skills desired by employers and the strategies to develop employability skills for sustainability, but their applicability to final semester students in a private institution remains unclear.

Similarly, while [Brown, Anderson, and Wilson \(2020\)](#) and [Garcia, Smith, and Chen \(2021\)](#) focus on the integration of sustainability into engineering programs and the employability of accounting graduates, respectively, they may not directly address the challenges specific to final semester students in a private institution. However, their findings on the impact of sustainability education and the skills sought by employers can offer valuable perspectives for evaluating the employability and sustainability skills of these students.

## 2.4. Research Gap

To bridge the gap in research, future studies should focus on evaluating the specific challenges faced by final semester students in a private institution and assessing how their skill set aligns with the requirements of the job market, particularly in terms of employability and sustainability. Additionally, research should explore the effectiveness of educational interventions and initiatives adopted by Malaysian universities and government policies in promoting employability and sustainability skills among graduates. By addressing these gaps, researchers can provide valuable insights for both academia and the private sector to enhance the employability and sustainability skills of final semester students.

## 3. Methodology

The current study obtained prior informed consent from participants before conducting the research. It employed a qualitative research method to analyse data, specifically focusing on spoken text ([Creswell, 2022](#)). The participants consisted of five recent graduates selected through saturation sampling, a commonly used approach in qualitative studies involving 5-50 participants, especially when data is collected from real-life spoken contexts ([Creswell, 2022](#)). These fresh graduates completed their bachelor's degrees in business administration, management, and marketing in one of the private institutions, achieving CGPA scores ranging from 3.7 to 3.95. Their ages ranged between 23 and 24 years old, and they each had six months of industrial training in the telecommunication and customer service sectors. To ensure anonymity and adhere to ethical guidelines, their identities were kept confidential. The interviews were conducted using a set of semi-structured questions adapted from previous studies by [Garcia, Smith, and Chen \(2021\)](#) and [Tan, Abdullah, and Ibrahim \(2021\)](#). The semi-structured questions were further modified to align with the objectives of the study. All interviews took place in the university meeting room, and each session lasted approximately 20-25 minutes, with communication conducted in English. The recorded interview data were transcribed and organised using NVivo for analysis, in line with the study's objectives based on the human capital theory ([Schultz, 1961](#)). For analysis purposes, the data was translated from English to Malay. Throughout the analysis process, the graduates were referred to as 'participants' and identified with the abbreviation 'Participant-P1' to ensure anonymity. The analysis focused on five key

aspects: (1) Overall experience in searching for a suitable job, (2) Challenges encountered during the job application process, (3) Difficulties faced in aligning skills and qualifications with job market demands, (4) Navigating the transition from being a student to a job seeker, and (5) Challenges faced in demonstrating employability and sustainability skills to potential employers.

#### 4. Findings

The analyses were arranged based on the five key aspects, Table 2 presents P1's experiences across five aspects. P1 embarked on his/her job search with enthusiasm and high expectations, driven by a desire for a position aligned with his/her qualifications and career goals. However, he/she faced challenges common to recent graduates; including limited job opportunities in his/her desired field and the paradox of needing experience to get a job but being unable to obtain it without a job. P1 also struggled to align his/her skills with industry demands, emphasizing the importance of continuous learning and adaptation in the job market.

Table 2: The use of five aspects by P1

Aspects	Utterances
Aspect 1	<i>...my overall experience in searching for suitable employment after graduation was quite challenging. i had high expectations and was eager to find a job that aligned with my qualifications and career goals... however, the job market was competitive, and it took me several months to secure a job that i felt was a good fit...</i>
Aspect 2	<i>...the main challenges i encountered during my job search process were the lack of job opportunities in my desired field and the high expectations employers had for experience. many entry-level positions required previous work experience...which made it difficult for recent graduates like me to land a job...</i>
Aspect 3	<i>...yes, i faced difficulties in aligning my skills and qualifications with the job market demands... some employers were looking for specific technical skills or industry experience that i didn't possess... it was challenging to find ways to demonstrate my potential and convince employers that i could quickly learn and adapt to their requirements...</i>
Aspect 4	<i>...navigating the transition from being a student to a job seeker was a bit overwhelming. i had to adjust to the new dynamics of the professional world and understand the job application process.... one specific obstacle i faced was crafting a compelling resume and cover letter that effectively highlighted my skills and achievements...</i>
Aspect 5	<i>...demonstrating my employability and sustainability skills to potential employers was indeed challenging. it was crucial to showcase my abilities in a tangible way, such as through projects or internships...i addressed this challenge by participating in extracurricular activities related to sustainability, joining relevant professional networks, and acquiring certifications to enhance my employability...</i>

Transitioning from a student to a job seeker was overwhelming, and mastering the job application process, including crafting effective resumes and cover letters, became crucial. Demonstrating employability and sustainability skills to employers was another challenge, prompting P1 to engage in relevant projects and extracurricular activities to enhance his/her appeal.

Despite these obstacles, P1 took a proactive approach to enhance employability through certifications and extracurricular initiatives, showcasing his/her commitment to personal and professional growth. To overcome challenges, P1 continued networking actively, seeking internships or volunteer opportunities, and emphasizing his/her sustainability-related projects to stand out to potential employers. By highlighting his/her passion for sustainability and its positive impact, P1 increased his/her chances of securing a fulfilling and purposeful career.

The following analysis of P2 in [Table 3](#) shows the five aspects. P2's job search after graduation had been a daunting experience due to various challenges. Firstly, he/she struggled to find suitable entry-level positions in their desired field as the job market was limited and highly competitive. Secondly, the insistence on several years of experience by employers posed a significant obstacle for a recent graduate like P2, making it challenging to compete with more experienced candidates. Thirdly, aligning their skills and qualifications with the demands of the job market had been difficult, leading to a lack of standout appeal among other applicants. Additionally, transitioning from a student to a job seeker required P2 to acquire new skills and understand the professional world's dynamics, such as crafting a compelling resume and cover letters. Lastly, demonstrating employability and sustainability skills had proven to be challenging, but P2 worked on gaining relevant experience through internships, extracurricular activities, certifications, and networking. Overall, these challenges had collectively made the post-graduation job search a complex and arduous journey for P2.

Table 3: The use of five aspects by P2

Aspects	Utterances
Aspect 1	<i>...searching for suitable employment after graduation proved to be a challenging experience...with high expectations and a strong desire to find a job that matched my qualifications and career goals... i faced difficulties due to the limited availability of entry-level positions in my desired field...this scarcity added an extra layer of complexity to the job search process and required me to be resourceful in exploring alternative avenues for finding suitable opportunities...</i>
Aspect 2	<i>...the main challenges i encountered during my job search process were the lack of entry-level positions available in my desired field and the competitive nature of the job market...many positions required several years of experience, making it difficult for recent graduates like me to secure a job...</i>
Aspect 3	<i>...i faced difficulties in aligning my skills and qualifications with the job market demands...some employers were looking for specific technical skills or industry experience that i didn't possess...making it challenging to stand out as a recent graduate...</i>
Aspect 4	<i>...navigating the transition from being a student to a job seeker was a significant change for me... i had to adjust to the expectations and dynamics of the professional world, including understanding the job application process and crafting a compelling resume and cover letter...</i>
Aspect 5	<i>...demonstrating my employability and sustainability skills to potential employers was challenging.... i needed tangible ways to showcase my abilities, such as through internships and extracurricular activities related to sustainability.. i also joined professional networks and acquired certifications to enhance my employability...</i>

The analysis of P3 in [Table 4](#) shows the five aspects. In P3, the main challenges highlighted during the job search process were limited job opportunities and a high demand for specialized certifications or technical skills that the individual did not possess as a

recent graduate. This indicated that the job market was competitive, and employers were seeking candidates with specific qualifications and expertise. Furthermore, P3 elaborated on the difficulties faced in aligning their skills and qualifications with the demands of the job market. The fact that some employers were looking for specialized certifications or technical skills that P3 did not possess made it challenging to meet their requirements, potentially leading to fewer job prospects and more rejections.

Table 4: The use of five aspects by P3

Aspects	Utterances
Aspect 1	<i>...the main challenges i faced during the job search process were the limited job opportunities and the high demand for specialized certifications or technical skills that i didn't possess as a recent graduate...</i>
Aspect 2	<i>...the main challenges i faced during the job search process were the limited job opportunities and the high demand for specialized certifications or technical skills that i didn't possess as a recent graduate...</i>
Aspect 3	<i>...yes, i faced difficulties in aligning my skills and qualifications with the job market demands. some employers were looking for specialized certifications or technical skills that i didn't possess... which made it challenging to meet their requirements...</i>
Aspect 4	<i>...navigating the transition from being a student to a job seeker was a bit overwhelming for me. i had to adapt to the professional world and understand the intricacies of the job application process...</i>
Aspect 5	<i>...demonstrating employability and sustainability skills to potential employers was indeed challenging...i had to participate in internships and engage in extracurricular activities related to sustainability to showcase my abilities and commitment. acquiring additional certifications and joining relevant professional networks also helped enhance my employability...</i>

As for Aspect 4, P3 discussed the overwhelming experience of transitioning from being a student to a job seeker. Navigating the professional world and understanding the intricacies of the job application process were daunting for a recent graduate who lacked experience in the job market.

In Aspect 5, P3 introduced a different perspective, focusing on the challenge of demonstrating employability and sustainability skills to potential employers. They had to engage in internships and extracurricular activities related to sustainability to showcase their abilities and commitment. Acquiring additional certifications and joining relevant professional networks also helped enhance their employability.

Overall, the data from these aspects painted a picture of P3's job search process as one that was challenging due to various factors. The limited job opportunities and the high demand for specialized skills were prominent issues, as well as the difficulty in aligning qualifications with employer requirements. Additionally, the transition from being a student to a job seeker posed its own set of challenges. Lastly, P3 faced the unique challenge of demonstrating specific employability and sustainability skills to potential employers, which required them to take additional steps to enhance their prospects in the job market.

The analysis of P4, presented in [Table 5](#), shows the five aspects. During P4's post-graduation job search, he/she encountered several challenges that made the process of securing employment quite demanding. Firstly, there was a notable lack of entry-level positions that truly matched his/her skills and qualifications, which created a significant

hurdle in finding suitable opportunities to enhance employability. Many companies seemed to be seeking candidates with more experience, making it difficult for him/her as a recent graduate to compete in the job market.

Table 5: The use of five aspects by P4

Aspects	Utterances
Aspect 1	<i>...i found the process of searching for suitable employment after graduation to be quite challenging... the lack of entry-level positions matching my skills and qualifications posed a hurdle in finding the right opportunities...</i>
Aspect 2	<i>...one of the main challenges i encountered during my job search process was the lack of entry-level positions that matched my skills and qualifications...many companies were seeking candidates with more experience...</i>
Aspect 3	<i>...in my desired field, one specific hurdle I encountered was the requirement for specialised certifications or technical skills that I didn't possess as a recent graduate. It was challenging to compete with candidates who had those qualifications...</i>
Aspect 4	<i>...the transition from being a student to a job seeker was a learning experience for me...I had to adapt to the professional environment and understand the requirements of the job application process...</i>
Aspect 5	<i>...incorporating sustainability into my job search and desired career path was challenging. Finding organisations that aligned with my values and had sustainability-focused roles was difficult...however...I actively sought out companies with sustainability initiatives and showcased my passion for sustainability in my applications...</i>

In addition to the general employability challenges, P4 desired field presented a specific obstacle related to specialized certifications or technical skills. As a recent graduate, he/she didn't possess these qualifications, putting him/her at a disadvantage compared to other candidates who did. This highlighted the importance of continuous learning and professional development to enhance employability and stay competitive in the job market.

The transition from being a student to a job seeker was a valuable learning experience for him/her in terms of employability. It required adapting to the professional environment and gaining a thorough understanding of the job application process. This process demanded a lot of effort and persistence to effectively present his/her skills and showcase the value he/she could bring to potential employers.

Moreover, P4 faced the challenge of incorporating sustainability into his/her job search and desired career path. It was challenging to find organisations that not only offered career growth but also aligned with his/her values and provided sustainability-focused roles. However, he/she took an active approach by seeking out companies with strong sustainability initiatives and showcasing his/her passion for sustainability in the applications submitted. This demonstrated a commitment to sustainability and made him/her more appealing to companies with a similar vision.

Overall, the challenges P4 faced during the job search process shaped his/her determination to improve employability and helped him/her develop a better understanding of the professional world. Emphasizing employability skills, such as adaptability, continuous learning, and showcasing passion for sustainability, proved to be essential in overcoming these challenges and securing a fulfilling and meaningful career path.

The analysis of P5, presented in Table 6, illustrates the five aspects. P5's pursuit of suitable employment after graduation was notably challenging, which can be attributed to the limited job openings prevailing in his geographical area. Consequently, P5 faced the formidable task of contemplating potential relocation or exploring remote work options to broaden his horizons in terms of opportunities. As we delve into aspect 2, it becomes apparent that the primary obstacles encountered during P5's job search were twofold: the restricted job openings within his locale and the imperative to consider relocation or remote work to access more suitable prospects. Building upon this, aspect 3 reveals that P5 confronted additional hurdles in aligning his skills and qualifications with the dynamic job market demands, a predicament exacerbated by the scarcity of employment opportunities within his geographical vicinity. As a result, P5 was compelled to contemplate alternative roles or industries to secure viable employment. During his transition from a student to a job seeker (aspect 4), P5 underwent a significant transformation, necessitating a profound adaptation to professional expectations and a comprehensive grasp of the job application process to effectively showcase his competencies. Lastly, aspect 5 underscores the challenges P5 encountered while demonstrating his/her employability and sustainability acumen to potential employers. To overcome this, P5 actively engaged in thorough research and strategically targeted companies with sustainability initiatives, effectively showcasing his/her unwavering commitment to sustainable practices and finding organizations that aligned with his career aspirations.

Table 6: The use of five aspects by P5

Aspects	Utterances
Aspect 1	<i>...my overall experience in searching for suitable employment after graduation was challenging due to the limited job openings in my geographical area. i had to consider relocation or remote work options to expand my opportunities...</i>
Aspect 2	<i>...the main challenges i encountered during my job search process were the limited job openings in my geographical area and the need to consider relocation or remote work options to find suitable opportunities...</i>
Aspect 3	<i>...i faced difficulties in aligning my skills and qualifications with the job market demands, particularly due to the limited job opportunities in my geographical area. i had to consider alternative roles or industries to find suitable employment...</i>
Aspect 4	<i>...transitioning from being a student to a job seeker was a significant change for me. i had to adjust to the expectations of the professional world and understand the job application process to effectively showcase my skills and qualifications...</i>
Aspect 5	<i>...demonstrating employability and sustainability skills to potential employers was challenging. i needed to find organisations that aligned with my sustainability values and had opportunities in my desired career path... active research and targeting companies with sustainability initiatives helped showcase my commitment to sustainability...</i>

## 5. Discussion

The five aspects discussed in the job search experiences of P1-P5 shed light on the challenges faced by recent graduates in terms of employability and sustainability. The job search experiences of P1-P5 shed light on the multifaceted challenges encountered by recent graduates in terms of employability and sustainability in the job market. Throughout their journeys, these job seekers faced various obstacles, underscoring the importance of adaptability, continuous learning, and strategic planning in securing meaningful and sustainable career paths.

One of the common challenges faced by P1-P5 was the limited availability of job opportunities in their desired fields. The scarcity of positions prompted them to proactively enhance their employability through engaging in relevant projects, pursuing certifications, and participating in internships and extracurricular activities, demonstrating their commitment to personal and professional growth. This finding aligns with [Cohan \(2025\)](#) study, which identifies the lack of employability among fresh graduates as a significant concern in sustaining careers in the job market.

The study conducted by [Lee, Wang, and Zhang \(2018\)](#) offers valuable insights into strategies and approaches for developing employability skills for sustainability. Accounting graduates from various educational backgrounds showcased their employability and sustainability skills, guiding recent graduates (P1-P5) in a private institution to adopt similar strategies, such as engaging in relevant projects and internships to align their skills with industry demands.

Research by [Smith, Johnson, and Thompson \(2019\)](#) can provide perspectives on the skills desired by employers, particularly in the hospitality industry. Understanding these sought-after skills can help recent graduates (P1-P5) present themselves as desirable candidates by aligning their skills with industry demands and demonstrating their commitment to sustainability.

[Brown, Anderson, and Wilson's \(2020\)](#) study offers insights into how sustainability education can influence graduate employability. This research can help graduates in engineering or related programs understand the impact of sustainability education on employability and integrate sustainability principles into their career paths. Acquiring specialized certifications or technical skills can address the challenge of limited job opportunities, making graduates more appealing to employers.

[Garcia, Smith, and Chen's \(2021\)](#) research reinforces the importance of sustainability skills, especially in the accounting sector. Comparing the employability and sustainability skills of accounting graduates can provide valuable insights for recent graduates (P1-P5) to strategically target companies with strong sustainability initiatives and align their career aspirations with organizations that share their values.

Another significant hurdle for recent graduates was the paradox of needing experience to secure a job while lacking practical experience in their fields. P1, P2, and P4 tackled this obstacle by emphasizing continuous learning and professional development, actively seeking internships, volunteer opportunities, and certifications to gain hands-on experience and align their skills with industry demands.

Aligning their skills with industry demands was a challenge faced by P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5. To address this issue, they recognized the significance of continuous learning and adaptability, focusing on acquiring specialized certifications or technical skills related to their desired career paths, thus enhancing their employability.

Transitioning from students to job seekers was a transformative experience for P1, P2, P4, and P5, demanding effort and persistence to effectively present their skills and value to potential employers. To navigate this transition successfully, they honed their employability skills, including crafting compelling resumes and cover letters, networking effectively, and preparing for interviews, setting themselves apart in a competitive job market.

Moreover, P1, P3, P4, and P5 highlighted the challenge of demonstrating employability and sustainability skills to potential employers. To overcome this hurdle, they actively engaged in internships, extracurricular activities, and relevant projects showcasing their passion and commitment to sustainability. Additionally, they strategically targeted companies with strong sustainability initiatives, aligning their career aspirations with organizations that shared their values, making themselves more attractive candidates to sustainability-focused employers.

In conclusion, the experiences of P1-P5 underscore the vital role of employability and sustainability in the job market for recent graduates. Emphasizing continuous learning, adaptability, and a passion for sustainability enabled these job seekers to address the challenges encountered during their job searches, securing fulfilling and meaningful career paths that contribute significantly to their chosen fields and the job market. The lessons learned from these experiences serve as valuable guides for navigating future challenges and opportunities in their careers.

In summary, the past studies mentioned provide valuable insights into employability and sustainability skills from various perspectives and industries. While they may not directly address the challenges faced by final semester students in a private institution, their findings can be informative and helpful for these students in understanding the skills desired by employers, strategies for enhancing employability, and the significance of sustainability education in shaping their career paths. By leveraging the insights from these studies, recent graduates (P1-P5) can navigate the job market more effectively, present their skills and value to potential employers, and secure fulfilling and sustainable careers in their chosen fields.

## **6. Implication of the Study**

The present study focused on examining the employability and sustainability skills of fresh graduates from a private institution and evaluating the challenges they face in securing suitable employment in the Malaysian job market. The findings and discussion highlight several critical implications related to the employability and sustainability challenges faced by recent graduates. These implications offer valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and career advisors to effectively support graduates in their transition from education to the workforce.

To effectively address the challenges faced by fresh graduates in securing suitable employment in the Malaysian job market, it is imperative to prioritize comprehensive career readiness programs within educational institutions. These programs should go beyond traditional academic instruction and embrace the principles of the theory of human capital. By integrating employability and sustainability-focused components into the curriculum, graduates can be better prepared to meet the dynamic demands of the job market.

The theory of human capital emphasizes that individuals can enhance their economic productivity and value through investments in education, training, and skills development. By structuring career readiness programs to include practical skills training, industry-specific certifications, and ample opportunities for internships and extracurricular activities, educational institutions can foster an environment where graduates actively invest in their human capital. As a result, these graduates become

more attractive to potential employers due to their acquired skills and hands-on experience, increasing their employability prospects.

Moreover, aligning career readiness programs with the theory of human capital supports the idea of lifelong learning. Encouraging graduates to adopt a lifelong learning perspective will enable them to continuously invest in their human capital, adapting to industry changes and acquiring new skills as needed throughout their careers. This mindset of continuous improvement and adaptability is vital in a rapidly evolving job market, ensuring that graduates remain competitive and relevant over time.

Incorporating the theory of human capital into comprehensive career readiness programs not only benefits individual graduates but also contributes to the overall economic development of Malaysia. Graduates equipped with relevant skills and a commitment to lifelong learning are more likely to secure suitable employment, drive innovation, and make significant contributions to a sustainable and inclusive job market. As such, educational institutions, policymakers, and career advisors should collaborate to design and implement career readiness programs that leverage the principles of human capital theory, enabling fresh graduates to forge successful and meaningful careers in Malaysia.

## 7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the human capital theory further reinforces the critical importance of employability and sustainability skills for fresh graduates in the job market. As per this theory, investing in education, continuous learning, and skill development enhances an individual's economic productivity and employability. By aligning their skills with industry demands and demonstrating adaptability, graduates can significantly increase their chances of securing suitable employment and contributing to a sustainable job market.

The experiences of P1-P5, along with the implications drawn from their job search journeys, unequivocally emphasize the significance of employability and sustainability in shaping successful and meaningful career paths. The challenges faced by recent graduates underscore the need for proactive measures to enhance employability, such as fostering a lifelong learning mindset and prioritizing practical skills.

Integrating employability and sustainability components into the educational curriculum becomes imperative to better prepare graduates for the dynamic demands of the workforce. By nurturing collaborations between educational institutions and industries, graduates can bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical industry needs. Moreover, the increasing value placed on sustainability in the job market highlights the importance of promoting sustainability education and initiatives. Graduates who possess sustainability skills and a genuine passion for environmental responsibility can positively impact organizations and contribute to a more environmentally conscious job market.

By embracing the principles of the human capital theory and prioritizing employability and sustainability, fresh graduates can confidently embark on their career journeys, making meaningful contributions to their professional growth and society as a whole. The combined efforts of individuals, educational institutions, and employers in enhancing employability and sustainability will undoubtedly pave the way for a more

prosperous and sustainable future. As we move forward, conducting further studies and research in the field of employability and sustainability will be crucial to continuously improve and adapt strategies that address the evolving needs of the job market. These studies can shed light on emerging challenges and opportunities, allowing educators, policymakers, and career advisors to tailor their support and guidance effectively.

In conclusion, employability and sustainability are not only essential for graduates seeking job opportunities, but they are also fundamental in shaping a more resilient and responsible job market. By emphasizing employability skills, fostering a lifelong learning mindset, and promoting sustainability practices, graduates can embrace new opportunities and contribute to creating a more inclusive, environmentally responsible, and resilient job market for the near future.

### **Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate**

Permissions were obtained from all participants, and they agreed to take part in the research. The study was conducted in accordance with research ethical guidelines, without any conflicts of interest, and with proper ethical clearance.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the present research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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