

# Systematic Literature Review of Employability Skills of Hospitality Graduates after Covid-19 Era

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## Abstract

Local skills are essential for a nation's pulse, and Malaysia's government recognizes that education is a critical platform for developing human capital with high competitiveness and employability skills. Similar to other industries, the hospitality industry faces sudden and unexpected changes that have led to the existence and creation of new technologies and skills due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite this, there remains insufficient research systematically reviewing existing literature on employability skills necessary for success in this field. Hence the present article conducted a systematic literature review to determine which set of achievements is required for the future resilience of hospitality graduates in the post-covid-19 era. The present study integrated multiple research designs and the review was based on the publication standard, namely PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses). This study selected articles using three leading databases, namely Web of Science, Scopus, and ScienceDirect. Three major themes emerged from the analysis, which covered three broad thematic areas: knowledge, skill, and attitude. The results of this study make it possible to bridge the gap in information available about traditional knowledge and additional employability skills that are required in the current environment to provide future researchers with value-added knowledge.

**Keywords:** Employability Skills, Soft-Skills, Hospitality Industry, Hospitality Graduate, Covid-19.

## Introduction

The heart of a nation is propelled by local talents that can be cultivated through a proficient education system. As education serves as a crucial platform for the development of human capital, the Malaysian government is continuously striving to enhance its education system in terms of accessibility, quality, equity, unity, and efficiency, as outlined in the Malaysia

Education Blueprint 2015-2025 for higher education (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015). Nevertheless, many employers have reported a dearth of expertise among job seekers, which can be attributed to issues regarding education quality (Fajaryati et al., 2020). According to Zakari et al. (2022), the Malaysian National Graduates Employability Blueprint (2012-2017) has identified several challenges faced by employers concerning graduates, including inadequate communication skills, poor English proficiency, suboptimal attitudes and personalities, insufficient problem-solving experience, and limited knowledge. Furthermore, Tahir et al. (2018) have found that leadership, critical thinking, and decision-making skills among graduates are still at a rudimentary level and require the attention of the education ministry to equip potential graduates with the requisite skills demanded by the industry.

During this technological disruption era, it is critically important to have qualified human resources with high competitiveness and employability skills. This situation is more urgent since the Covid-19 pandemic has drastically affected the world starting at the end of 2019 and has created new norms in various sectors (World Health Organization, 2022). Education has changed dramatically where teaching is done remotely on a digital platform causing Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to completely switch to online learning with an unprecedented challenge (Sia & Adamu, 2021). Many HEIs are also experiencing unexpected changes as the closure of the institutions causes teaching and learning to move from classrooms to distance learning, which is a challenging and weak substitute for hands-on education (World Bank Group, 2020). Furthermore, the pandemic has created difficulties in providing hands-on training using tools and machines through online courses (Hayashi et al., 2021). However, online learning provides advantages in independent learning and developing new skills leading to life-long learning for the students (Dhawan, 2020).

Hospitality courses are one of the training areas available in higher education programs or skills at public and private institutes because this industry is labour-intensive and requires highly skilled workers (Rahimi et al., 2018). As the hospitality industry continually changes, employees need both hard and soft skills to ensure their ability to work and succeed (Adeyinka-Ojo, 2018). Foremost, graduates need to have job competencies and skills for them to be competitive in the job market (Abas and Imam, 2016). Therefore, educational institutions as providers of graduates must respond quickly to any changes in employability skills, including the knowledge and skills required by the industry (Nugraha et al., 2020). The right evaluation guidelines could influence graduate competency and employability, and students need competency-based assessments since industries are looking for students with higher competencies (Ismail et al., 2021).

Numerous studies have linked employability skills to the hospitality industry. For instance, Adeyinka-Ojo (2018) conducted a study aimed at analyzing the deficits in employability skills in Rural Hospitality and Tourism (RHT) destinations. The authors of this study assert that the findings have significant implications for the existing knowledge, managerial practice, and respective rural hospitality and tourism destinations. The study identified 14 employability skills deficits in RHT and highlighted the most valued skills by employers in the hospitality and tourism sector. Similarly, Commey et al. (2020) have stated that the key competencies of hospitality graduates include good interpersonal skills, leadership skills, problem-solving skills, teamwork, the ability to use technology, good decision-making skills, and good communication skills. Furthermore, Nawawi et al. (2017) have argued that the hospitality industry in Malaysia requires 13 generic skills, which have been adopted from the Hospitality

### Skills Standards.

A systematic literature review that specifically analyzes this relationship is rare in the existing literature, despite the well-established and evolving relationships between employability skills and the hospitality industry. Several literature reviews are available in the domain of employability skills (e.g., Abdullah, 2018; Abas & Imam, 2016; Aliu & Aigbavboa, 2021; Alfiral & Raju; 2019, Azmi et al., 2018; Bano & Shanmugam, 2019, Bhangra & Sharma, 2018, Eldeen et al., 2018 and Zaharim et al., 2010). However, these reviews mainly discuss the different streams, conceptualization, and measurement issues of employability skills or general drivers, barriers, outcomes, and theories that are used in employability skills research.

The review is guided by the central research question: What employability skills are required for the future resilience of hospitality graduates in the post-covid-19 era? this study aimed to fill the gap by reviewing related studies systematically to gain more understanding of recognizing and describing the demand for employability skills to meet the needs of the hospitality industry after Covid-19. The pandemic has dramatically disrupted the hospitality industry, where several underlying issues have been highlighted, including skill gaps and the adoption of new technologies (Huang et al., 2021). This is because, previously many luxury hotels emphasize the human touch at every point in the guest experience (Lau, 2020). However, the spread of Covid-19 has forced businesses to look at creative digital solutions such as self-service applications, kiosks, and robots to use so that organizations can continue to function remotely and continue to serve and attract their guests in the future (Narisetti, 2020). Additionally, higher hygiene standards, contactless service, and effective digital marketing are what hotel guests will demand in the post-Covid-19 era (Pillai, et al., 2021). This statement has been supported by UNESCO (2021) argues that all industries will require additional skills due to as the world has gone through a new phase. Therefore, the results of this study make it possible to bridge the gap in information available about traditional knowledge and additional employability skills that are required in the current environment to provide future researchers with value-added knowledge.

This study has several important contributions to both practical application and the body of knowledge. By using the information provided in this study, interested parties such as policymakers can gain insight into the employability skills needed by employers in the hotel sector for TVET hospitality graduates to be hired after the COVID-19 pandemic. In future endeavors, it is hoped that management and curriculum developers will improve their skills in planning curricula that will enhance the employability of TVET graduates majoring in hospitality. This study will also provide TVET graduates with a better understanding of the necessary employability skills to enter their chosen profession. Through their academic journey, they will gain skills and knowledge to better equip themselves with the latest industry-specific skills needed in the post-COVID-19 era. This will enable them to remain highly marketable and competent in their field.

### **Methodology**

In order to evaluate the existing literature, the study conducted the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis) protocol (Liberati et al., 2009). This protocol has been widely adopted across various sectors due to its thoroughness and ability to enhance precision as well as minimize researcher bias (Pahlevan-sharif et al., 2019, Haque et al., 2021) as such, the PRISMA protocol was utilized in this study to generate a

superior quality systematic literature review that provides precise and comprehensive data. The authors used this protocol to formulate suitable research questions for their systematic literature review (SLR) and Figure 1 displays the applied PRISMA framework in the study selection process. The development of the research question in this study relied on PICO. PICO serves as a guide for authors to develop fitting research inquiries for their review, focusing on three key elements: Population or Problem, Interest, and Context (Lockwood et al, 2015). Using these elements, the authors incorporated three significant aspects into the review: hospitality graduates (Population), necessary employability skills for the post-Covid-19 era (Interest), and the Hospitality Industry (context). This outline then led the authors to generate their primary research question - What are the necessary employability skills needed for the future resilience of hospitality graduates in the post-covid-19 era?

### Identification

An extensive review was conducted on Scopus and Web of Science as the most esteemed and authoritative databases for accumulating relevant articles to address the research question. Additionally, ScienceDirect was considered due to its commendable performance in terms of search result accuracy and relevance (Tober, 2011). The search process commenced with an identification phase, wherein synonyms, related terms, and variations of the main keywords for the study, namely employability skills, hospitality, and graduates, were searched. The objective was to expand the options available to the selected database and retrieve more related articles. The keywords were developed based on the research question, as suggested by Okoli (2015), and the identification process relied on an online thesaurus, keywords used in previous studies, keywords recommended by Scopus, and keywords suggested by experts. The authors enriched the existing keywords and formulated a comprehensive search string, utilizing Boolean operators, phrase searching, truncation, wild card, and field code functions, across the three primary databases, namely Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect (Table 1). Scopus and Web of Science databases are considered leading databases in systematic literature reviews due to their numerous advantages, such as advanced searching functions, comprehensive indexing of over 5000 publishers, control of article quality, and multidisciplinary focus, including environment management-related studies (Shaffril et al., 2020). Multiple keywords were employed to locate pertinent literature associating employability skills in the hospitality industry, with question marks and asterisks used to acknowledge search term variations. The terms were searched in the title, abstract, and keywords of each document. The search process across these three databases is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

#### *The Search Strings*

Database	Search String
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ( ( "Employ* skill*" OR "soft skill*" OR "foundational skill*" OR "work-readiness skill*" OR "generic skill*" OR "key skill*" OR "core skill*" ) AND ( " TVET graduate*" OR "hospitality

	graduate*" OR "graduate*" OR "hotelier*" OR "student*" OR "trainee*" OR "worker*" OR "staff*" ) AND ( "hospitality" OR "Hotel" OR "tourism" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( PUBYEAR, 2023 ) OR ( PUBYEAR, 2022 ) OR LIMIT-TO ( PUBYEAR, 2021 ) OR LIMIT-TO ( PUBYEAR, 2020 ) OR LIMIT-TO ( PUBYEAR, 2019 ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( DOCTYPE, "ar" ) OR LIMIT-TO ( DOCTYPE, "ch" ) OR LIMIT-TO ( DOCTYPE , "re" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( LANGUAGE , "English" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( SRCTYPE , "j" ) OR LIMIT-TO ( SRCTYPE, "b" ) OR LIMIT-TO ( SRCTYPE , "k" ) )
<b>Web of Science</b>	TS=((Employability skills in hospitality and tourism) ) and 2022 or 2021 or 2020 or 2019 (Publication Years) and Article or Early Access (Document Types) and English (Languages)
<b>ScienceDirect</b>	Employability skills in hospitality and tourismYear:2019-2023

### Screening

The initial phase of the screening process involved the identification and exclusion of any duplicate items from consideration. A total of 469 articles were generated by the keyword search, with Scopus yielding 136 articles, WoS providing access to 42 papers, and ScienceDirect contributing a substantial number of 316 publications. Microsoft Excel software was utilized to identify and sort out a total of 25 overlapping articles that emerged in both databases. The selection criteria for this study are aligned with those proposed by Kitchenham & Charters (2007). Given the vast array of published works available on this subject matter, Okoli (2015) suggests that researchers should determine an appropriate time frame within which they can conduct their review. However, Higgins & Green (2011) advise that restricting publication timelines should only be implemented if it is known that relevant studies could only have been reported during a specific period. Consequently, based on these selected criteria, the outline below the screening procedures adopted for the study.

First, only journal papers in the form of studies were considered for inclusion in the process, with publications consisting of articles, book chapters, reviews, journals, books, and book series included. Second, only articles written in English and Malay are incorporated in the review to avoid confusion in understanding. Third, during a short period between 2019 and 2023. The reason for limiting the search for publication year between 2019 to 2023 is that this study is focusing on employability skills that are required by hotel employers in the post-Covid-19 era. However, the year 2019 also will be considered it considered under the recovery period, hence the authors consider reviewing the paper in this time frame. Therefore, the timeline between 2019 and 2023 was selected as one of the inclusion criteria. following the

screening procedure, only 203 papers were accepted and 266 were excluded because not meet the criteria.

**Eligibility**

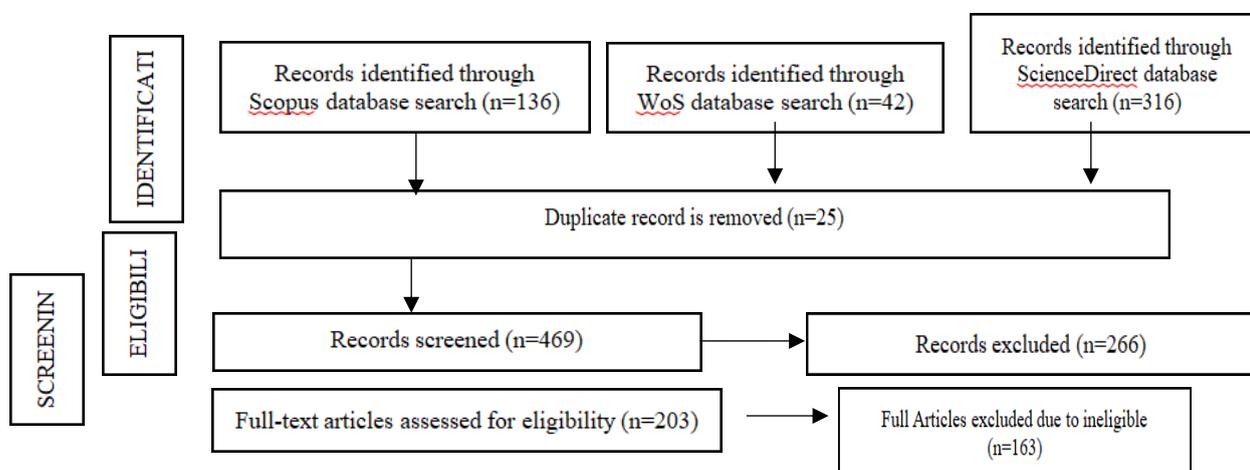
The eligibility stage involves manual monitoring by the authors to ensure that all articles remaining after the screening process meet the established criteria. This is achieved through a thorough review of article titles and abstracts, to select more specific articles that will help answer the research questions outlined in Table 2. A total number of articles were prepared for this stage, and each title and key content was meticulously reviewed to ensure inclusion requirements were met and aligned with current research aims. Following filtration, 163 irrelevant articles were removed, leaving a final count of 40 eligible articles for further review. The inclusion or exclusion status at each stage is depicted in Figure 1.

Table 2  
*The Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Timeline	2019-2023	< 2019
Document Type	Articles, book chapters, reviews, journals, books, and book series	conference proceeding
Language	English and Malay	Non-English
Industry	Hospitality and Tourism industry	Non-Hospitality and Tourism industry

**Data Abstraction and Analysis**

The PRISMA framework was utilized to showcase and elucidate all the procedures involved in selecting articles for a systematic literature review, as illustrated in Figure 1. To identify crucial topics, an inductive thematic analysis method was employed based on Braun & Clarke's (2006) approach. The analysis revealed three principal themes that encompassed knowledge, skills, and attitudes within three broad thematic domains. This process comprised six stages: familiarizing oneself with the content, classifying and arranging it, accordingly, identifying vital concepts, and lastly defining, and labelling them appropriately before finally reporting the findings obtained.



INCLUDE

Figure

Studies included in synthesis (n=40)

1. PRISMA framework of the study selection process

## Result and Findings

### Themes

All 40 articles underwent a rigorous and comprehensive examination, commencing with the abstract and advancing through the entirety of each article, to identify factors that enhance the employability skills of graduates as demanded by today's hospitality industry. Ascertained from this analysis, employability is defined as the acquisition of attributes comprising knowledge, skills, and attitudes that increase graduates' probability of attaining success in their selected professions. Accordingly, the assessment of these articles has been partitioned into three categories: knowledge, skills, and attitudes; illustrated in Table 3.

### Knowledge

The Covid-19 pandemic had a severe impact on the tourism and hospitality industries as many countries-imposed lockdowns. The surviving businesses in these sectors are striving to maintain their competitiveness, which makes it imperative for professionals in hospitality and tourism worldwide to understand and identify the necessary competencies and skills. In today's service industry, hospitality is highly valued, with education aimed at imparting knowledge and honing skills that will enable graduates to meet industry demands (Kay & Russette, 2000; Tesone & Ricci, 2005; Andrades & Dimanche, 2019). Digital proficiency and employability skills are critical components of success in this field. As such, graduating students should have a proactive grasp of technology from existing institutions of higher learning (Adeyinka-Ojo et al., 2020), while higher education institutes must emphasize developing knowledge and attributes that prepare students for the careers they wish to pursue (Chen & Gursoy, 2008; Schreck et al., 2020).

Employability skills involve the ability to contribute to work efficiency in an organization combined with good oral and written communication skills and critical thinking, which form the foundation of both academic and workplace success (Munro, 2007; Mahazir et al., 2019). Singh & Jaykumar (2019) stated that employability skills range from oral and written communication and positive body language to the ability to plan and execute, to creativity and innovative approaches to problem-solving. Stefanini et al. (2021) argue that employers are increasingly recognizing new technologies for solving professional activity and self-learning problems because they provide a broader and more critical view of their role as professionals and their contributions to society as a whole. Meanwhile, Huang & Baker (2021) argue that hospitality and tourism workers should enhance their technological skills to increase their employability. This is because information technology is becoming an increasingly important aspect of hospitality and tourism (Marneros et al., 2021) whereby the system can extract relevant and reliable information to obtain business benefits and the technology used can cross borders for strategic advantage (Ali et al., 2018; Adeyinka-Ojo et al., 2020). Therefore, using new technologies in the tourism market can support tour

operators in facing new challenges to quickly respond to the demands of the tourism market and the needs of customers in a technologically advanced world (Bilotta et al., 2021).

Previous research conducted found that some business-related skills, namely, consumer psychology, business strategy, and marketing are very important before and after Covid-19 because it is beneficial in employability and can reduce the amount of time employers have to spend training new employees (Sato et al., 2021). Meanwhile, in sports business, consumer psychology as well as business and marketing strategies, are very important before and after the Covid-19 pandemic, thus, special attention should be given to consumer psychology as a necessary skill for students to succeed in this field (Miller et al., 2022). Other than that, as stated by Andrades & Dimanche, (2019), generic management competencies typically are the most preferred of employers when they will select employees with good customer orientation skills.

The service industry perceives innovation as a critical driver of competitive advantage and performance improvement (Khan et al., 2021). Hotels that embrace innovative practices are more likely to achieve higher occupancy rates and customer loyalty, thereby enhancing their economic resilience (Tsai, 2017; Wikhamn, 2019). In response to the current global health crisis, the hospitality sector has sought out pioneering business strategies to build customer confidence and offer safe experiences (Khan et al., 2021). For example, employing advanced machinery can expedite services while maintaining efficiency and effectiveness (Olowoyo et al., 2020). Xu et al. (2022) conducted a study utilizing curriculum theory and stakeholder theory to address this gap in the literature. The findings revealed that curricula emphasizing technology marketing, culture diversity, safety or crisis management, and entrepreneurship skills development alongside soft skills were indicative of a greater need for novel innovative business ideas with an emphasis on safety measures in the post-Covid era.

Currently, the hospitality industry prioritizes digital skills as they are highly sought-after (Magalhães et al., 2022). Open innovation has emerged as a crucial field in the industry due to the shift towards e-business and e-commerce prompted by the pandemic (Marasco et al., 2018; Khan et al., 2021). With AI technologies such as robotics and machine learning capable of automating repetitive tasks, positions that involve routine work, including sales managers, receptionists, and customer service agents may soon be replaced by AI. Therefore, employees must focus on upskilling and reskilling themselves to prepare for future employment opportunities (Huang et al., 2021).

### **Skill**

Currently, the hospitality industry in the current context is being influenced by the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic, resulting in changed consumer trends in tourism, gastronomy, and hospitality (Chalupa & Chadt, 2021). New employment opportunities will be created as a result of digitally enabled growth, although it may also mean that human cognition becomes more complex as a result of digitally enabled growth (World Economic Forum, 2017; Ruhanen et al., 2021). Consequently, employers are placing increasing emphasis on attributes such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and creativity to ensure that employees possess the expertise necessary to adapt quickly to changes in their environment (Eldeen et al., 2018; Ruhanen et al., 2021). As a highly practical field of study, tourism demands graduates who are ready for work and equipped with the skills and abilities required to tackle real-world challenges (Ruhanen et al., 2021). Andrades & Dimanche (2019) contend that tourism

businesses require personnel who are business-savvy, people-savvy, and self-aware. In this regard, students should cultivate employability skills that will significantly enhance their prospects of being recruited (Singh & Jaykumar, 2019). Sisson & Adam (2013); Chalupa & Chadt (2021) maintain that hospitality education providers must shift away from intensive hard skill training towards soft skill development to meet the industry's diverse needs. Furthermore, Schreck et al.'s study (2020) discovered that knowledge of the profession as well as leadership and communication skills are essential traits sought by recreation employers. Knowledge of the profession was identified as the most frequently mentioned category supporting experiential learning approaches which can serve as a foundation for teaching recreation within higher education institutions.

The concept of employability skills can be broadly defined as the academic, personal, and teamwork skills that employers expect of their employees, and these skills should be developed through education (Ismail et al., 2019). Meanwhile, previous research found that the implementation of team-based learning in the education system is crucially important to develop the student's skills and competencies that are useful for enterprises, organizations, occupations, and teams to perform various tasks (Lu, 2021). Moreover, as a basic competency, teamwork is an essential skill to develop in hotel and tourism students to promote the development of emotional communication skills as well as management skills, both of which are important for the student's ability to work in a team, which is viewed as an important skill by employers (Stefanini et al., 2021). In the sports industry, interpersonal skills are seen as important soft skills for students to get a job because studies have shown interpersonal relationships have a significant impact on the services provided to users (Miller et al., 2022), and leadership skills also were referred as highly relevant because as part of a team, they need to know to lead the work and take decisions (Silva et al., 2019). Williamson et al., (2020) relate interpersonal capabilities relate to an individual's capacity to influence or empathize with others.

Furthermore, the study that been conducted by Marneros et al., (2021) found in the hotel industry, which is labor-intensive always stressed communication skills as the most important competency dimension. This is due to both front-of-house and back-of-house employees being involved in some degree of teamwork and communication with both customers and colleagues Marneros et al., (2021). Besides that, Tankovic et al., (2021) also argue non-verbal communication skills appear to be the most important for future tourism employees. Meanwhile, Susaeta et al., (2020) claimed the most demanded in the hospitality industry are commercial attitudes which are leadership, decision-making, communication, gift of people, problem resolution, and proactivity. A recent study also found after the pandemic pointed to the importance of teamwork, communication, problem-solving, leadership, interpersonal relationships, adaptability, flexibility, and critical thinking (Michel et al., 2022; Magalhães et al., 2022).

Hospitality is an industry that is rapidly growing and competitive, thus, managers and employees must have strong problem-solving skills and analytical abilities to ensure sustainable administration (Adeyinka\_Ojo & Khoo-Lattimore, 2013; Adeyinka-Ojo, 2018; Olowoyo et al., 2020). Adeyinka-Ojo et al., (2020) stated current soft skills that are required by hospitality employers include problem-solving, team player, critical thinking, and interpersonal relationship. Meanwhile, a study conducted on hotel managers to identify key dimensions and relevant crisis management practices in Portugal's Covid-19 pandemic found the most valuable vital skills are adaptability, leadership, teamwork, and motivation are

considered vital to businesses' sustainability and recovery and are ranked by managers as the most important (Melo et al., 2021). Finally, a study conducted by Suhairom et al., (2019) has identified non-technical competencies such as emotional intelligence, social intelligence, cognitive intelligence, professionalism and moral ethics, entrepreneurship, lifelong learning, and leadership as components that support individual work performance for the culinary profession. In light of this, integrating emotional competence into the hospitality curriculum can enhance the employability of graduates, their longevity in the field, and their ability to serve customers in the future (Gibbs & Slevitch, 2019).

### **Attitude**

Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education) highlights the need for graduates to be able to navigate complex challenges successfully, thus graduates must possess a variety of skills and knowledge, as well as the ability to make ethical decisions and the resilience to cope with rapid changes (Ismail et al., 2019). The development of skilled human resources among the graduates can be developed through extended internships (Moya & Özgit, 2022). This is important because personality skills were consequently found to be the critical skill set for entry-level positions in the industry (Van der Merwe et al., 2019). Currently, the hospitality industry may no longer be viewed as an attractive employment sector after the Covid-19 pandemic; thus, hotel managers need to prepare their staff to adapt during such difficult times to ensure not to lose talent (Lee et al., 2021). Meanwhile, higher education should be more adaptive in nature to meet the requirements of the domestic and global economy because fresh graduates are demanded to possess personal attribute skills such as professionalism and self-management, cultural sensitization, and adaptability when they join the industry (Singh & Jaykumar, 2019). Chen et al., (2021) stated that the skills that are required in the current hospitality and tourism industry included personal attributes of flexibility, adaptability, hard work, commitment, and dedication. Meanwhile, there was a gap between academia and industry in India, as a result of the pandemic impact on hospitality and tourism education. To meet the industry's expectations, graduates must possess skills such as adaptability, compassion, multitasking, crisis management knowledge, and proficiency with technology (Joshi & Gupta, 2021). Moreover, a study conducted by Safavi & Bouzari (2019) found that individuals who are more self-efficacious, hopeful, resilient, and optimistic in their working environment will become more adaptable and these personal resources enable employees to demonstrate favorable and positive outcomes.

The tourism education and tourism industry are two sides that cannot be separated and there should be a combination of both theory and concepts and real-world knowledge (Mohanty & Mohanty, 2019). Considering the needs of the industry can help the higher education institution produce well-trained graduates. Most employers stated that attitudes are crucial for hiring entry-level workers, while aptitudes and skills can be developed with training following hire from this perspective, it can be concluded that developing competencies for self-management and reinforcing the student's ability to learn independently are the cornerstones of tourism education (Andrades & Dimanche, 2019). Silva et al., (2019) also argued attitudes are important because people who high with a positive attitude will have a high capacity to take responsibility for their achievements or the achievements of others under their supervision. In addition, students' motivations have a significant impact on both

their employment aspirations and employability skills (Mohammad, 2020). Employers also prefer tourism graduates to have the skills such as creativity, initiative, autonomy, a sense of responsibility, and empathy (Silva et al., 2019). Other than that, the important qualities that should be equipped are kindness, responsibility, building relationships, and showing respect to achieve career success (Tankovic et al., 2021). Sato et al. (2021) argue sports business experts considered certain soft skills particularly important, including engagement, curiosity, and ethics, while curiosity is the most essential soft skill because employees with a strong curiosity can potentially make a significant impact on the company for years to come. Whereas, positive attitude, passion, patience, people skills, adaptability, and self-confidence are the personal attributes needed by recreation employees currently needed by employers (Schreck et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, in the hospitality industry, sought-after personal qualities include a commercial mindset, optimism, proactivity, independence, interpersonal skills, inventiveness, and drive (Susaeta et al., 2020). Chalupa & Chadt (2021) also emphasized that flexibility, professionalism, empathy, and emotional resilience are equally vital attributes. Williamson et al., (2020) underscored the importance of emotional intelligence for hospitality workers who need to be able to empathize with others effectively in addition to committing. According to Lu et al., (2021), critical abilities comprise effective performance at work along with good ethics and integrity. Self (2019) further agreed that integrity and strong work ethic are key descriptors influencing graduates' job prospects while soft skills remain the top items assessed. In the culinary field too, personal quality is one of the most important competencies necessary for culinary professionals seeking success in their careers because it determines behavior quality at work (Suhairom et al., 2019). To develop graduate employability skills specifically attitudes, learning off-campus is viewed as highly beneficial since it can cultivate generic communication skills alongside adaptation, developmental, group effectiveness, influencing, self-management, and career-building-abilities among graduates according to Yusof et al., (2020). Moreover, students can improve their workplace attitude through internship experiences; positive attitudes increase retention rates within the hospitality and tourism industry as per Chen et al.,(2021). Therefore universities and industries should focus on instilling excellent work attitudes to produce exceptional student personalities in the future.





## Discussion

The main aim of this study is to conduct a methodical review of the literature to identify the set of attainments, such as knowledge, skills, and personal traits that are necessary for ensuring future resilience among hospitality graduates during the post-COVID-19 era. This section provides further discussions on the developed themes. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a substantial decline in demand for hospitality and tourism services, resulting in an adverse impact on the industry. In response to this unprecedented crisis, hotels have had to come up with numerous impromptu innovations aimed at safeguarding health and safety while restoring consumer confidence in lodging (Sharma et al., 2021). Hotels have had to adopt new ways of delivering services based on current circumstances. Hospitality services are traditionally characterized by high-touch and low-tech experiences; however, technological tools can transform them into low-touch and high-tech service experiences (Bitner et al., 2000; Shin & Kang, 2020). Technology also influences guest experience regarding service quickness and proximity. To deliver faster and more straightforward service to customers online reservations, digital check-in/check-out procedures via chat or mobile device communication in some hotels along with disposable electronic keys are being used by hotels (Bonfanti et al., 2021). Contactless check-in/check-out procedures enabled through technology are efficient practices during pandemics that help save labor costs (Smart et al., 2021). As hoteliers have already adopted technology over recent years, it has accelerated its development further due to the pandemic leading practitioners towards developing new hosting methods that speed up entry/exit practices resulting in positive for guests such as relaxation feelings (Kim & Ritchie, 2014; Bonfanti et al., 2021).

Nowadays, employers require employees to possess both technical or hard skills and generic skills or soft skills to confront the challenges of a rapidly changing world and maintain a competitive edge (Sussman, 2021). Consequently, workers with soft skills can adapt to diverse work environments, possessing multiple competencies that align with the demands of the job market (Ab. Rahim & Ivan, 2007; Saari et al., 2021). As evidenced during recent economic crises, many individuals lost their jobs through voluntary or forced retirement while others were retained by their employers who trained them in acquiring new proficiencies (Saari et al., 2021). In today's unstable economic climate sweeping across the globe, organizations face great difficulty remaining competitive and productive. Thus, soft skills have become more vital than ever before. The development of soft skills such as teamwork ability, leadership capability, and communication proficiency are essential components for personal success as well as organizational growth which must be continuously honed since these attributes are indispensable (Kumar et al., 2022). Students constitute one of a nation's most valuable resources responsible for building its reputation; hence they need to possess high levels of emotional intelligence also known as soft skills (Suryanti & Supeni, 2019). Gibbs & Slevitch (2018) recommend training students in emotional intelligence so that they can become more valuable workers in hospitality industry roles. Conversely, Mustikawati et al. (2016) argue that since developing soft skills is not based on technical knowledge alone, it cannot be taught but instead needs repeated practice under mentorship. Although academic achievement should remain a primary focus within higher education institutions, graduates must also demonstrate competence in essential soft skills like leadership ability, communication prowess, and teamwork competency (Rameli et al., 2018). Henceforth it can be inferred that Soft Skills enable, catalyze, and facilitate effective attitudes, social behaviors, and competencies (Ratka&Pharm,2018).

In a recent study conducted by Marneros et al. (2020), it was revealed that human relations and communication are the most vital competencies in the hotel industry, given its labour-intensive nature where both front and back-of-house employees require such skills to effectively communicate with customers as well as other colleagues. As such, personnel must possess the ability to seamlessly integrate their personal and professional relationship skills while also exhibiting an appropriate level of emotional intelligence to communicate clearly and precisely (Marneros et al., 2020). Therefore, English proficiency is essential for employees since it serves as one of their primary tools for daily communication (Firharmawan & Andika, 2019). It should not be taken lightly since it plays a significant role in facilitating effective communication between hosts and guests - which is crucial in the hospitality sector (Firharmawan & Andika, 2019). Thus, exceptional English language skills are necessary for hotel staff members to communicate efficiently. In addition to this linguistic aspect, interpersonal abilities cannot be overlooked when considering job requirements within hospitality. These competencies often referred to as social or individual competence enable personnel to establish and maintain fruitful relationships with clients from diverse backgrounds (Leon et al., 2021). On the other hand, critical thinking is another indispensable skill set that encompasses logical reasoning techniques leading toward innovative problem-solving capabilities (Subia, 2020).

Furthermore, hotels will look for individuals who specialize in non-traditional fields where they need to express new forms of customer service that need to be adapted to changes in the current environment (Kecić, 2019). Therefore, to achieve service excellence, hospitality organizations must provide a unique blend of products, services, and experiences, as well as manage their diverse workforce efficiently. In this way, the organization ensures employee attitudes and behavior align with organizational goals for customer satisfaction (Datta & Singh, 2018). In addition to developing customer-focused mission and vision statements, training programs, and empowerment practices that will enable employees to develop service attitudes and behaviors, one prevalent practice is to develop a 'service climate' in the workplace. (Saito et al., 2021).

### **Conclusion**

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant disruption to organizations, leading them to adopt new organizational structures, workflows, business models, and digital strategies. This has resulted in a greater reliance on automation through advanced technological innovations, creating knowledge-driven and tech-enabled workplaces. Given this context, the current research is crucial as skilled and employable graduates are essential for the economic development of a country and its individuals. Furthermore, our workforce must possess the skills necessary to adapt to changing job demands. It is widely recognized that higher education institutions place a high priority on graduate employability. However, due to global changes, universities must ensure that their graduates meet market requirements. Nevertheless, higher education institutions cannot solely bear this responsibility; it is a collective responsibility that requires collaboration between students, universities, employers, and the government.

Therefore, a country's higher education system must act as a catalyst in aligning graduates' skills with employers' expectations. The development and delivery of soft skill training and learning necessitate collaboration among multiple

stakeholders. For instance, universities and governments should work together to design and evaluate effective soft skill training programs based on empirical evidence while developing problem-solving pedagogy and experiential learning opportunities. These types of soft skill training should also be open, free, and easily accessible to maximize their benefits. Moreover, these programs should provide immersive experiences that facilitate the assessment of effectiveness through monitoring and formative evaluation using technological tools.

Finally, future design-based research should empirically examine the impact of soft skill training to ensure that the skills applied to students align with current industry demands. One effective approach for developing employability skills is work-integrated learning where most employers believe university-taught programs coordinate what graduates learn with workplace environments. Additionally, relevant entrepreneurial skills are crucial in improving employability since they create differentiation among graduates making them stand out from others while enabling them to think outside the box when advancing companies or becoming independent professionals.

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