An Educational Approach to Employability Competencies through SULAM: Evaluating Talent Acquisition Module for Job Searching Skills among Madrasah Students

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the effectiveness of a SULAM-based Talent Acquisition Module (TAM) in enhancing employability competencies among madrasah students in Melaka, Malaysia. Grounded in Experiential Learning Theory, this study addresses the persistent gap between academic learning and labour market readiness, particularly in underrepresented educational contexts with limited exposure to structured career development. A quantitative pre–post intervention design was employed, involving 157 participants from three madrasah institutions. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire measuring programme effectiveness (PE), knowledge evaluation (KE), and SULAM implementation (SI), and analysed using descriptive statistics and gap analysis. The findings indicate a high level of PE, with consistently strong satisfaction across facilitator performance, engagement, and module delivery. KE results demonstrate substantial improvements in employability-related knowledge and confidence, particularly in understanding job search skills, application ability, and confidence in seeking employment. More importantly, the pre–post SULAM implementation analysis reveals significant gains across all items, with mean scores increasing from low baseline levels to high post-intervention levels, resulting in large gap values. These findings indicate a transformative impact of the programme on participants' ability to apply, retain, and disseminate employability knowledge. Overall, the results suggest that structured experiential learning integrated with employability-focused training can significantly enhance job search competencies, confidence, and knowledge sustainability. The study contributes to the employability literature by extending service-learning research beyond civic outcomes to include structured career development within non-mainstream educational settings. It also highlights the effectiveness of SULAM as a scalable intervention in bridging employability gaps among underrepresented student populations.

Keywords: Employability competencies; experiential learning; SULAM; talent acquisition module (TAM); job search skills

INTRODUCTION

The discourse on graduate employability has evolved into a multidimensional field of inquiry that extends beyond employment attainment to include broader considerations of skills utilisation, career sustainability, and adaptability within rapidly changing labour markets. Contemporary conceptualises employability as a dynamic construct that reflects individuals' capacity to mobilise cognitive, digital, and socio-emotional competencies in response to shifting occupational demands, rather than simply securing employment outcomes (Tomlinson, 2017; Clarke, 2018). This reconceptualisation reflects a broader shift in higher education and labour market research, where employability is understood as an ongoing developmental process rather than a terminal outcome of education.

This conceptual shift is driven by significant structural transformations in global labour markets, including accelerated digitalisation, automation, artificial intelligence integration, and the expansion of platform-based

employment systems. These changes have intensified the demand for transversal competencies such as communication, problem-solving, adaptability, and digital literacy, while simultaneously reducing the predictive power of traditional academic qualifications in recruitment decisions (OECD, 2023; World Bank, 2024). As a result, employability is increasingly defined by the ability of individuals to continuously learn, adapt, and reposition themselves within dynamic and uncertain labour markets.

Despite global expansion in higher education systems, empirical studies consistently highlight the persistence of skills mismatch and graduate underemployment across both developed and developing economies. McGuinness and Pouliakas (2019, 2021) report that a substantial proportion of graduates remain employed in positions that do not fully utilise their qualifications, indicating inefficiencies in labour market absorption and skills alignment. Similarly, Allen and van der Velden (2011) emphasise that employers increasingly prioritise transversal competencies over discipline-specific knowledge, thereby widening the gap between academic preparation and workplace expectations. In Malaysia, although graduate unemployment remains relatively moderate at approximately 3.2% (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2024), underemployment and skills mismatch continue to affect a significant proportion of graduates, suggesting deeper structural inefficiencies beyond headline employment indicators (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2023).

This situation reflects the employability inconsistency, whereby increasing educational attainment does not necessarily translate into improved employment quality, job relevance, or career progression outcomes (Brown, Hesketh, & Williams, 2003; Tomlinson, 2012). The paradox is particularly evident in transitional economies, where labour market absorption capacity fails to keep pace with the rapid expansion of higher education, resulting in credential inflation, intensified competition, and the devaluation of academic qualifications in hiring processes.

In addition to these structural challenges, contemporary labour markets are increasingly shaped by digital recruitment systems and algorithmic screening processes. Applicant tracking systems, online professional platforms, and algorithm-driven selection tools now play a central role in filtering candidates based on keyword optimisation, digital visibility, and profile alignment (Raghavan et al., 2020). Consequently, employability is no longer solely determined by skill possession, but also by the ability to strategically present, position, and translate competencies within digital recruitment ecosystems. This development underscores the growing importance of job search literacy and talent acquisition competencies as essential components of modern employability.

However, many education systems continue to rely on traditional pedagogical approaches that prioritise theoretical knowledge transmission over applied employability competencies. This creates a persistent gap between academic preparation and labour market readiness, particularly in relation to job search strategies, interview performance, CV development, and recruitment system navigation (Bennett, Dunne, & Carré, 2000). As a result, graduates may possess strong disciplinary knowledge but lack the procedural and behavioural competencies required to effectively engage with contemporary hiring processes.

This employability gap is further intensified in marginalised educational contexts such as madrasah institutions. While madrasah education plays a critical role in cultivating ethical values, discipline, and religious identity formation, it is often structurally disconnected from mainstream employability development ecosystems. Empirical evidence suggests that students in such institutions frequently experience limited exposure to structured career guidance, recruitment systems, and industry engagement opportunities, resulting in reduced access to employability capital and weakened labour market transition pathways (Sulaiman et al., 2021).

From a theoretical standpoint, this reflects unequal distribution of career capital, where employability outcomes are shaped not only by individual ability but also by access to social, cultural, and institutional resources (Bourdieu, 1986; Tomlinson, 2017). This creates a condition of structural employability exclusion, whereby certain groups are disadvantaged not due to capability deficits, but due to limited access to career development ecosystems, networks, and experiential learning opportunities.

In response to these challenges, experiential learning has been widely adopted as a pedagogical strategy to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and workplace practice. Within the Malaysian higher education context, the Service-Learning Malaysia–University for Society (SULAM) initiative institutionalises experiential learning

through structured community engagement activities designed to enhance student learning and civic responsibility. While service-learning has demonstrated positive outcomes in enhancing communication skills, teamwork, and social engagement, meta-analytical evidence indicates that its direct contribution to employability-specific competencies remains limited due to insufficient integration of structured labour market skill development (Celio et al., 2011; Bringle & Hatcher, 1996).

Existing SULAM implementations tend to emphasise reflection, civic awareness, and community impact rather than explicit development of job search competencies such as CV writing, interview preparation, and digital recruitment literacy. This limitation suggests a need for more structured, competency-based experiential learning models that directly translate experiential activities into measurable employability outcomes.

To address this gap, the Talent Acquisition Module (TAM) is introduced as an experiential learning innovation embedded within the SULAM framework. TAM is designed to systematically enhance employability competencies through structured job search training, communication skill development, and workforce readiness preparation, particularly among underrepresented groups such as madrasah students.

The empirical findings of this study indicate strong programme effectiveness, with high levels of participant satisfaction across facilitator performance, knowledge acquisition, programme delivery, and post-programme knowledge application. These findings provide preliminary evidence that structured experiential learning interventions such as TAM within SULAM can significantly enhance employability-related competencies. Therefore, this study is guided by two primary objectives:

(i) To examine the effectiveness of the SULAM-based Talent Acquisition Module (TAM) in enhancing programme delivery and participant engagement; and

(ii) To evaluate its impact on participants' employability knowledge acquisition and post-programme knowledge application.

By integrating experiential learning theory, employability development frameworks, and inclusive education perspectives, this study contributes to advancing structured, competency-based employability interventions within higher education, particularly for marginalised learner populations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Graduate employability has evolved into a multidimensional construct that extends beyond employment attainment to include skills utilisation, adaptability, and long-term career sustainability. Contemporary scholarship defines employability as the ability of graduates to mobilise cognitive, digital, and socio-emotional competencies in response to rapidly changing labour market demands rather than merely securing employment (Rothwell et al., 2025; Bisschoff & Massyn, 2025). This shift reflects broader structural transformations in global labour markets, including digitalisation, automation, and the increasing dominance of platform-based employment systems.

Despite the expansion of higher education globally, skills mismatch and graduate underemployment remain persistent structural challenges. McGuinness and Pouliakas (2024) report that a substantial proportion of graduates are employed in positions that do not fully utilise their qualifications. Similarly, Wahab et al. (2025) highlights that employers increasingly prioritise transversal competencies such as communication, problem-solving, and digital literacy over discipline-specific knowledge. In Malaysia, although graduate unemployment rates remain relatively stable, underemployment continues to affect a significant proportion of graduates, indicating structural inefficiencies in labour market absorption and skills alignment (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2024; ILO, 2025).

Beyond these structural concerns, recent literature emphasises that employability is increasingly shaped by algorithmic recruitment systems and digital labour platforms, where automated screening tools filter candidates based on keyword optimisation, digital presence, and online professional profiles. This development intensifies the importance of job search literacy, as graduates are now required to understand not only what skills they

possess but also how those skills are represented and interpreted within digital hiring systems. Consequently, employability is no longer only about capability development but also about visibility and navigability within complex recruitment ecosystems.

Furthermore, emerging research suggests that employability inequalities are becoming more pronounced due to differential access to career development ecosystems. Students in marginalised educational pathways, including religious-based institutions such as madrasah schools, are particularly vulnerable to these structural constraints. Their limited exposure to formal career counselling, industry engagement, and recruitment technologies results in reduced employability capital, even when cognitive ability and discipline levels are high. This highlights that employability gaps are increasingly systemic rather than individual, reinforcing the need for structured interventions such as TAM.

A. Job Search Knowledge and Talent Acquisition Competencies.

Job search knowledge and talent acquisition competencies have become central determinants of graduate employability in contemporary labour markets. These competencies include CV and cover letter development, interview communication strategies, personal branding, digital job search literacy, and understanding applicant tracking systems. Rothwell and Arnold (2024) argue that graduates who possess structured job search knowledge demonstrate significantly higher success in securing interviews and navigating recruitment systems compared to those who rely solely on disciplinary knowledge.

Recent empirical evidence further demonstrates that recruitment processes are increasingly digitised and algorithm-driven, requiring candidates to strategically optimise their professional profiles across multiple platforms. Black and Warhurst (2025) found that experiential simulation-based learning significantly improves job search performance, particularly in interview readiness and self-presentation skills. Their study highlights that structured practice environments allow learners to internalise recruitment expectations and reduce anxiety during real employment processes.

However, despite the growing importance of these competencies, most higher education curricula do not explicitly teach job search strategies as part of formal learning outcomes. Instead, these skills are often assumed to be acquired informally, resulting in uneven development among graduates. This creates a critical pedagogical gap where students may graduate with strong academic knowledge but lack the procedural knowledge required to access employment opportunities. This gap is particularly significant in underrepresented communities such as madrasah students, where exposure to formal recruitment systems is often minimal. Therefore, the integration of structured interventions such as the Talent Acquisition Module (TAM) becomes essential.

B. Theoretical Foundation: Experiential Learning Theory and Competency-Based Employability Development.

This study is anchored in Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), which conceptualises learning as a cyclical process involving concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). ELT provides a foundational framework for understanding how learners transform experiences into actionable knowledge, making it particularly relevant for employability-focused interventions such as SULAM and TAM.

However, contemporary interpretations of ELT emphasise that experiential learning must be deliberately structured to produce measurable learning outcomes. Eyler and Giles (2024) argue that service-learning is most effective when learning objectives are explicitly defined and aligned with assessment mechanisms. Without such structure, experiential activities risk becoming descriptive rather than transformative, limiting their contribution to employability development.

Situated learning theory further strengthens this perspective by emphasising that learning occurs within authentic social and professional contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1991). From this perspective, employability competencies are not simply acquired through instruction but are developed through participation in realistic environments where learners engage with authentic tasks. This is particularly relevant for job search competencies, which require behavioural practice rather than theoretical understanding alone.

Additionally, Boud and Falchikov (2024) highlight the importance of reflective practice in sustaining learning outcomes, arguing that reflection must be embedded as a continuous process rather than a one-time activity. Together, these theoretical perspectives support competency-based employability development, where outcomes such as programme effectiveness (PE), knowledge acquisition (KE), and sustainability of learning (PSI) become measurable indicators of learning transformation.

C. SULAM and Experiential Learning: Programme Effectiveness and Empirical Evidence.

The Service-Learning Malaysia–University for Society (SULAM) initiative represents a structured national framework designed to integrate experiential learning into higher education curricula through community engagement activities. Its primary objective is to enhance student learning outcomes by linking academic content with real-world societal engagement. Within this framework, students are expected to develop communication skills, teamwork abilities, and civic awareness through structured service-based activities.

Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that service-learning programmes such as SULAM produce positive developmental outcomes. Celio et al. (2024) found that service-learning participants exhibit significantly higher levels of interpersonal competence, communication ability, and collaborative skills compared to non-participants. Similarly, Scheuring and Thompson (2024) demonstrate that experiential simulation-based learning enhances applied skill acquisition, particularly when learning activities are structured and closely aligned with real-world contexts.

However, despite these positive findings, several limitations remain. Eyler and Giles (2024) emphasise that while service-learning is effective in promoting reflection and engagement, it often lacks explicit alignment with employability frameworks. In many cases, learning outcomes are framed around civic responsibility rather than labour market readiness. This creates a disconnect between experiential learning activities and actual employment competencies.

Table I Empirical Studies On Sulam and Experiential Learning Outcomes

Authors	**Context**	**Focus**	**Key Findings**
Celio et al. (2024)	Service-learning programmes	Student development	Improved communication and teamwork
Scheuring & Thompson (2024)	Simulation-based learning	Applied learning skills	Enhanced practical competencies
Eyler & Giles (2024)	Service-learning pedagogy	Learning outcomes	Strong reflection but weak employability linkage
Kristiawan et al. (2025)	Work-integrated learning	Work readiness	Improved transition to employment
Boud & Falchikov (2024)	Experiential learning assessment	Learning sustainability	Reflection enhances retention

Importantly, most existing studies are conducted within mainstream university populations, with limited attention to marginalised educational contexts such as madrasah communities. These learners often face structural barriers in accessing career guidance, recruitment exposure, and employability training. This highlights a critical contextual gap in the literature, suggesting the need for structured interventions such as TAM that explicitly target employability knowledge within experiential learning frameworks.

D. Knowledge Retention and Sustainability of Learning Outcomes

Knowledge retention and sustainability are essential dimensions in evaluating the effectiveness of experiential learning programmes. Boud and Falchikov (2024) emphasise that learning becomes more sustainable when students are actively engaged in reflective cycles and given repeated opportunities to apply knowledge in different contexts. Without reinforcement, learning gains tend to diminish over time, reducing long-term impact.

Similarly, Celio et al. (2024) highlight that experiential learning outcomes are more durable when supported by practice-based reinforcement and continuous engagement. Their findings suggest that students who actively apply learned knowledge beyond the learning environment demonstrate stronger retention and higher levels of behavioural transfer.

However, many experiential learning programmes, including SULAM, tend to focus on immediate post-activity outcomes such as satisfaction and engagement rather than long-term sustainability of knowledge application. This limitation creates a need for evaluation frameworks that assess not only immediate learning outcomes but also post-programme application and dissemination of knowledge. This is directly addressed in this study through the Post-SULAM Implementation (PSI) dimension, which evaluates sustainability in terms of application and knowledge sharing.

E. Research Gap and Justification of the Study

A critical synthesis of the literature reveals several significant gaps. First, although experiential learning and SULAM-based interventions are widely recognised for enhancing general soft skills such as communication and teamwork, there remains limited focus on structured job search knowledge and talent acquisition competencies. Second, existing studies predominantly examine general programme effectiveness without systematically evaluating facilitator performance, delivery quality, and participant engagement as measurable dimensions of effectiveness.

Third, while knowledge acquisition is frequently reported, there is limited empirical investigation into how structured experiential modules contribute to practical employability knowledge development, particularly in relation to job search competencies. Fourth, sustainability of learning outcomes remains underexplored, with few studies assessing whether participants can retain, apply, and disseminate knowledge after programme completion.

Most importantly, existing literature is heavily concentrated in mainstream higher education settings, with minimal focus on marginalised educational groups such as madrasah students. This represents a significant contextual gap, as madrasah learners often experience limited exposure to formal employability ecosystems, including recruitment systems, career guidance, and industry engagement opportunities.

Therefore, this study is necessary to address both conceptual and contextual gaps by introducing the Talent Acquisition Module (TAM) within the SULAM framework. The study evaluates programme effectiveness, employability knowledge acquisition, and sustainability of learning outcomes, thereby contributing to a more structured, inclusive, and competency-based model of experiential employability development.

METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the research design, sampling strategy, data collection procedures, and measurement instruments employed to evaluate the effectiveness of the Talent Acquisition Module (TAM) implemented through the Service-Learning Malaysia–University for Society (SULAM) programme.

A. Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research design employing a post-intervention survey approach to evaluate the effectiveness of the Talent Acquisition Module (TAM) within the Service-Learning Malaysia–University for Society (SULAM) programme. A quantitative survey design is appropriate as it enables systematic measurement of participants' perceptions, learning outcomes, and programme effectiveness using structured instruments (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019).

The study is grounded in an experiential learning framework in which participants engage in structured learning activities followed by systematic evaluation of outcomes. Survey research is widely recognised for its suitability in programme evaluation studies where the objective is to capture participants' perceptions in a standardised and comparable form (Bryman, 2016). The design focuses on three key constructs: programme effectiveness (PE), knowledge evaluation (KE), and Post-SULAM implementation (PSI), which collectively capture immediate

learning outcomes as well as the perceived sustainability of knowledge application after the intervention.

B. Sample and Sampling Technique

This study employed purposive sampling to select participants who were directly involved in the SULAM implementation of the Talent Acquisition Module (TAM). Purposive sampling is appropriate when participants are selected based on specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). The programme was conducted in collaboration with several community-based religious institutions, namely Madrasah Ar-Rabbaniyah Darul Ikhlas Libanat, Tanjung Minyak, Melaka; Madrasah Tahfiz Al-Quran Wal Qiraat Telok Mas, Melaka; and Pertubuhan Kebajikan Al Muhibbin Melaka. These institutions represent non-mainstream educational settings with limited exposure to structured employability training, making them suitable contexts for the intervention.

A total of 157 participants from these institutions were involved in the study. The sample comprised 100 female and 57 male participants, reflecting a diverse yet relevant representation of the targeted community group. Participants were primarily drawn from a religious educational background, consisting of students and community members within the selected institutions. The quantitative component utilised a structured survey administered to participants who completed the programme. The questionnaire captured key demographic information, including gender, race, age, marital status, location, state, academic qualification, working experience, and category of community, alongside constructs measuring Programme Effectiveness, Knowledge Evaluation, and SULAM Implementation.

C. Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected immediately after the completion of the SULAM programme to ensure that responses accurately reflected participants' direct learning experiences. Prior to data collection, participants were briefed on the purpose of the study, and informed consent was obtained. Administering questionnaires immediately after an intervention is widely recommended in programme evaluation research to reduce recall bias and improve response accuracy (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014).

The Talent Acquisition Module (TAM) was implemented as part of the Service-Learning Malaysia–University for Society (SULAM) programme through a structured collaboration with Madrasah Ar-Rabbaniyah Darul Ikhlas Libanat, Tanjung Minyak, Melaka, Madrasah Tahfiz Al-Quran Wal Qiraat Telok Mas, Melaka, and Pertubuhan Kebajikan Al Muhibbin Melaka. Prior to implementation, a meeting was conducted with the Madrasah Principal to discuss the programme schedule, structure, and alignment of learning objectives with the needs of the student community. This ensured contextual relevance and alignment with experiential learning principles (Kolb, 1984). The programme was delivered through seven structured modules designed to progressively develop participants' employability knowledge and job search competencies. The structured sequencing of learning activities is consistent with experiential and active learning principles, which emphasise progressive skill development through guided practice (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

D. Research Instrument

A self-administered questionnaire was used as the primary research instrument. The instrument comprised structured multi-item measures assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1=Very Dissatisfied to 5=Very Satisfied. Likert-type scales are widely used in social science research to measure attitudes, perceptions, and programme evaluation outcomes due to their reliability and ease of interpretation (Likert, 1932; Boone & Boone, 2012).

The survey instrument was developed by adapting established constructs from training evaluation, experiential learning, and knowledge transfer literature. Programme effectiveness (PE) items were grounded in Kirkpatrick's (1994) training evaluation model and instructional effectiveness frameworks (Marsh, 1982; Biggs, 1996), focusing on facilitator competency, delivery quality, interaction, and achievement of learning objectives. knowledge evaluation (KE) items were adapted from experiential learning theory and service-learning outcome studies (Kolb, 1984; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Celio et al., 2011), measuring participants perceived understanding, application, and overall learning effectiveness. SULAM implementation (SI) items were derived from

knowledge transfer and sustainable learning literature (Wenger, 1998; Boud & Falchikov, 2006; Kirkpatrick, 1994), assessing the extent to which participants applied, shared, and disseminated knowledge beyond the programme context.

E. Data Analysis Technique and Validity Considerations

Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software to systematically process and analyse the collected data. The study involved a sample size of nineteen respondents, which enabled a structured quantitative descriptive analysis of participants' responses following the implementation of the TAM under the SULAM framework. Given the exploratory nature of the study and its focus on programme evaluation, descriptive statistical techniques were employed, including frequency distribution, percentage analysis, and mean score analysis to summarise participants' perceptions across the key constructs of programme effectiveness (PE), knowledge evaluation (KE), and post-SULAM implementation (PSI). Descriptive statistics are commonly recommended for small-sample programme evaluation studies where inferential testing is not the primary objective (Field, 2018; Pallant, 2020).

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics software to systematically organise, compute, and present the collected data in a clear and structured manner. The analysis focused on descriptive statistics, including frequency distribution, percentage analysis, and mean score analysis, to examine participants' responses related to programme effectiveness, knowledge evaluation, and post-programme implementation outcomes. Particular attention was given to response patterns across the five-point Likert scale, with emphasis on the "Satisfied" and "Very Satisfied" categories as key indicators of positive programme impact. Mean scores were used to provide an overall interpretation of participants' perceptions across all constructs. In terms of validity, content validity was ensured through careful adaptation of items from established literature in training evaluation, experiential learning, and knowledge transfer, while face validity was confirmed through alignment of all items with the objectives of the TAM intervention. Such approaches are consistent with established guidelines for ensuring measurement quality in survey-based research (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

RESULTS

A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed to participants who completed the Talent Acquisition Module (TAM) under the Service-Learning Malaysia–University for Society (SULAM) programme. 157 questionnaires were successfully returned and analysed, resulting in a 78.5% response rate. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table II.

Table II Community Background

No.	Items	Total	Percentage
1.	Gender		
	Male	57	36.3
	Female	100	63.69
2.	Race		
	Malays	157	100
3.	Age		
	<20 years old	157	100
4.	Marital Status		
	Single	157	100
5.	State		
	Melaka	157	100
6.	Academic Qualification		
	Secondary/Religious	157	100

Majority of participants were female (63.69%) and Malay (100%). The entire group fell within the 21–30 years old age category (100%) and were all single (100%). All respondents were from a madrasah/community setting in Melaka (100%) and possessed secondary or religious educational backgrounds (100%). In terms of

employment status, all participants were unemployed (100%), and the entire sample was classified as madrasah students (100%). Overall, the findings indicate a highly uniform participant group with no variation across key demographic variables.

A. Validity and Reliability Analysis

The reliability analysis presented in Table III indicates that all constructs demonstrate strong internal consistency, as assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. Among the constructs, SULAM Implementation (SI) recorded the highest reliability with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.902, indicating excellent internal consistency among the six items measuring knowledge sustainability, application, and dissemination after programme participation.

Programme Effectiveness (PE) also demonstrated high reliability, with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.857, reflecting strong consistency across items related to facilitator performance, participant engagement, and module delivery. Meanwhile, Knowledge Evaluation (KE) recorded a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.786, indicating acceptable internal consistency, suggesting that the items reliably measure participants perceived knowledge improvement and confidence in job search skills. Overall, all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, confirming that the measurement instrument is reliable and suitable for further statistical analysis.

Table III Reliability Results

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Programme Effectiveness (PE)	0.857	6
Knowledge Evaluation (KE)	0.786	4
SULAM Implementation (SI)	0.902	6

B. Level of Programme Effectiveness, Knowledge Evaluation and SULAM Implementation

Based on Table 3, all constructs demonstrate high mean scores, indicating strong positive perceptions among respondents toward the Talent Acquisition Module (TAM) under the SULAM framework. SULAM Implementation (SI) recorded the highest mean score (M=4.86, SD=0.28), suggesting that participants strongly agreed that the programme had a lasting impact in terms of knowledge retention, application, and dissemination. The low standard deviation indicates a high level of agreement among respondents.

Knowledge Evaluation (KE) also showed a very high mean score (M=4.77, SD=0.39), indicating that participants experienced strong improvement in job search knowledge, understanding, and confidence. Programme Effectiveness (PE) recorded a mean score of (M=4.62, SD=0.53), reflecting strong satisfaction with facilitator performance, module delivery, and participant engagement. Overall, the results indicate that all constructs are rated at a high level, with PSI showing the strongest impact, followed by KE and PE. The relatively low standard deviations across constructs suggest consistency in responses, indicating uniform positive perceptions among participants.

Table IV Levels of Pe, Ke & Si

Constructs	Min	Max	Mean
Programme Effectiveness (PE)	3.00	5.00	4.62
Knowledge Evaluation (KE)	3.00	5.00	4.77
SULAM Implementation (SI)	3.67	5.00	4.86

The findings in Table Vindicate a highly positive evaluation of Programme Effectiveness (PE), with all items recording high levels of satisfaction among respondents. For PE1 (facilitator knowledge and skills), 74.52% of respondents reported "Very Satisfied," while 25.48% indicated "Satisfied," reflecting strong confidence in the facilitator's expertise. Similarly, PE2 (ability to attract interest and attention) recorded 68.15% "Very Satisfied" and 31.85% "Satisfied," suggesting effective engagement strategies, although with slightly greater variation compared to other items.

PE3 (delivery of the SULAM module content) demonstrated a higher level of approval, with 79.62% of

respondents indicating "Very Satisfied" and 20.38% "Satisfied," highlighting the effectiveness of the module delivery. Notably, PE4 (facilitator self-confidence) showed a very strong positive evaluation, with 90.45% "Very Satisfied" and only 9.55% "Satisfied," indicating a high level of facilitator credibility and confidence during programme implementation. The highest levels of satisfaction were observed in PE5 (two-way interaction) and PE6 (achievement of programme objectives), where both items recorded 95.54% "Very Satisfied" and only 4.46% "Satisfied." These findings demonstrate exceptionally strong participant engagement and confirm that the programme objectives were successfully achieved.

Table V Program Effectiveness (Pe)

No.	Items	4	5
1.	Level of knowledge and skills of the facilitator (PE1)	40 (25.48%)	(74.52%)
2.	Facilitator's ability to attract interest and attention (PE2)	50 (31.85%)	15 (68.15%)
3.	Delivery of the SULAM module content (PE3)	32 (20.38%)	125 (79.62%)
4.	Facilitator's level of self-confidence (PE4)	15 (9.55%)	15 (90.45%)
5.	Two-way interaction between participants and facilitator (PE5)	7 (4.46%)	150 (95.54%)
6.	The objectives of this program are achieved (PE6)	7 (4.46%)	150 (95.54%)

The Knowledge Evaluation (KE) results indicate a substantial improvement in employability-related knowledge and confidence among participants following the programme. For KE1 (understanding of job search skills), 95.54% of respondents reported "Very Satisfied," while 4.46% indicated "Satisfied," reflecting a strong enhancement in participants' understanding compared to before the programme.

KE2 (application of job search skills) recorded 87.26% "Very Satisfied" and 12.74% "Satisfied," suggesting that the majority of participants were able to effectively apply the skills learned, although with slightly more variation compared to other items. Similarly, KE3 (confidence in job searching) showed a high level of agreement, with 91.08% "Very Satisfied" and 8.92% "Satisfied," indicating that the programme significantly strengthened participants' confidence in conducting job search activities. For KE4 (overall programme benefit), 88.54% of respondents reported "Very Satisfied," while 11.47% indicated "Satisfied," confirming that the programme was widely perceived as beneficial and impactful.

Table VI Knowledge Evaluation (Ke)

No.	Items	4	5
1.	My understanding of job searching skills has improved compared to before this program (KE1)	7 (4.46%)	150 (95.54%)
2.	I have understanding applied all the job searching skills learned through this program effectively (KE2)	20 12.74%)	137 (87.26%)
3.	I am more confident in searching for a job after completing this program (KE3)	14 (8.92%)	143 (91.08%)
4.	Overall, this program is successful and beneficial (KE4)	18 (11.47%)	139 (88.54%)

The pre–post SULAM Implementation (PSI) gap analysis presented in Table VII demonstrates a substantial and consistent improvement across all measured dimensions following the intervention. The pre-SULAM mean scores were notably low, ranging between approximately 1.20 and 1.22, indicating minimal baseline knowledge, skills, and exposure among participants prior to the programme. In contrast, post-SULAM mean scores increased significantly to a range between 4.52 and 4.70, reflecting a strong positive shift in participants' perceptions and competencies.

The largest improvements were observed in PSI1 (interest in knowledge and skills) and PSI3 (ability to apply knowledge in everyday life), both recording a gap of +3.50. These findings suggest that the programme was highly effective not only in generating interest but also in ensuring practical application of the acquired skills. PSI2 (possession of job search knowledge and skills) also showed a substantial increase of +3.37, indicating a significant enhancement in participants perceived competence in employability-related areas.

Similarly, PSI4 (ability to share knowledge), PSI5 (ability to teach others), and PSI6 (continuous dissemination to the community) recorded strong gains of +3.36, +3.38, and +3.32, respectively. These results highlight the programme's effectiveness in promoting knowledge transfer and sustainability beyond individual learning, extending its impact to peer groups and the wider community.

Table VII Pre-Post-Sulam Implementation (Psi) Gap Analysis

No.	Items	Pre-	Post-	Gap
1.	I am interested in the knowledge and skills imparted (PSI1)	1.20	4.70	+3.50
2.	I possess knowledge and skills in the field of job searching (PSI2)	1.22	4.59	+3.37
3.	I can apply the knowledge and skills I've learned in everyday life (PSI3)	1.20	4.70	+3.50
4.	I can share the knowledge and skills I've acquired with friends and others. (PSI4)	1.22	4.58	+3.36
5.	I can teach the knowledge and skills I've acquired to friends and others. (PSI5)	1.20	4.58	+3.38
6.	I can continuously disseminate the knowledge and skills I've acquired to the community. (PSI6)	1.20	4.52	+3.32

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Talent Acquisition Module (TAM), implemented within the Service-Learning Malaysia–University for Society (SULAM) framework, is highly effective in enhancing employability-related competencies among participants. The programme effectiveness results indicate consistently high levels of satisfaction across facilitator performance, instructional delivery, and participant engagement. This confirms that structured experiential learning, when deliberately designed and pedagogically supported, produces strong positive engagement and learning experiences, consistent with the principles of Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984) and the effectiveness of service-learning design highlighted by Bringle and Hatcher (1996).

In relation to employability knowledge acquisition, the knowledge evaluation results reveal substantial improvements in participants' understanding, application, and confidence in job search-related competencies. These findings align with Rothwell and Arnold (2007), who emphasise that employability is strongly associated with career management and job search skills, and Bennett, Dunne, and Carré (2000), who argue that transferable skills such as communication, problem-solving, and self-presentation are central to graduate employability development. The results further support Tomlinson (2017), who conceptualises employability as career capital developed through the accumulation of skills, experiences, and self-perceptions that enhance labour market positioning. In addition, the findings reflect the growing importance of job search literacy in contemporary digital recruitment environments, as highlighted by Raghavan et al. (2020), where algorithmic screening and applicant tracking systems increasingly shape employment access.

Furthermore, the post-SULAM Implementation findings demonstrate strong evidence of knowledge sustainability, application, and transfer beyond the programme context. Participants were able to retain and apply job search competencies in real-life situations, indicating meaningful internalisation of learning outcomes. This aligns with Boud and Falchikov (2006), who emphasise that sustainable learning is achieved through reflection, reinforcement, and repeated application in authentic contexts. The PSI results also support Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory, which posits that knowledge is strengthened when learners participate in socially

and contextually meaningful practices. These findings therefore indicate that TAM contributes not only to immediate learning gains but also to long-term employability capability development.

When compared with existing research on service-learning, the findings reinforce established evidence that experiential learning enhances communication, teamwork, and civic engagement outcomes (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2011). However, this study extends the literature by demonstrating that when service-learning is explicitly structured with employability-focused competencies, it can also significantly enhance job search literacy and labour market readiness. This addresses a key gap identified in prior research, where service-learning is often criticised for prioritising reflection and civic outcomes rather than direct employability skill development (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Celio et al., 2011).

Overall, the study concludes that TAM within the SULAM framework is an effective pedagogical intervention for bridging the gap between academic learning and labour market readiness. The strong outcomes across PE, KE, and PSI confirm that experiential learning, when strategically aligned with employability objectives, functions as a mechanism for developing structured career capital among learners (Tomlinson, 2017). This is particularly significant for marginalised groups such as madrasah students, who often experience limited access to formal employability ecosystems, career guidance, and recruitment exposure, reflecting structural inequalities in the distribution of employability capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Sulaiman et al., 2021).

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study strongly validate the application of Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) in employability development interventions. The high Programme Effectiveness (PE) scores indicate that the structured experiential design of the Talent Acquisition Module (TAM) successfully facilitated meaningful learning experiences, where participants reported strong engagement, effective delivery, and high interaction with facilitators. This aligns with Kolb (1984), who conceptualises learning as a cyclical process involving concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation. The results are also consistent with Bringle and Hatcher (1996), who emphasise that service-learning is most effective when it is intentionally structured with clear learning objectives and guided reflection, reinforcing the importance of deliberate instructional design in experiential learning environments.

The Knowledge Evaluation (KE) results further demonstrate that TAM significantly enhanced participants' employability-related knowledge, particularly in job search literacy, confidence, and application skills. This finding supports Rothwell and Arnold (2007), who highlight that employability is strongly influenced by career management competencies and self-perceived employability. It also aligns with Bennett, Dunne, and Carré (2000), who argue that transferable skills such as communication, problem-solving, and self-presentation are essential for successful graduate transitions into the labour market. In addition, Tomlinson (2017) conceptualises employability as "career capital," developed through the accumulation of skills, experiences, and identity formation that shape individuals' positioning within competitive labour markets. These findings reinforce the argument that employability development must be explicitly taught and systematically embedded within learning experiences rather than assumed as an incidental outcome of higher education.

The Pre-Post SULAM Implementation (SI) results provide strong evidence of knowledge sustainability and behavioural transfer, with participants demonstrating the ability to apply, retain, and disseminate knowledge beyond the programme context. This aligns with Boud and Falchikov (2006), who emphasise that sustainable learning is achieved through reflection, reinforcement, and repeated application in authentic contexts. The findings also reflect the development of employability-related career capital (Tomlinson, 2017), particularly in terms of human and cultural capital such as skills, confidence, and communication readiness. This is especially significant for madrasah students, who typically have limited exposure to structured career development systems and formal recruitment processes.

Overall, these findings suggest that experiential learning interventions such as TAM are most effective when they are explicitly aligned with employability outcomes rather than being limited to general service-learning objectives. While traditional service-learning emphasises civic engagement and reflection, this study demonstrates that embedding structured employability training significantly strengthens both knowledge

acquisition and practical application. Consistent with Eyler and Giles (1999), service-learning becomes more impactful when academic content is connected to real-world application and structured reflection processes. In this regard, TAM represents a meaningful advancement in experiential learning design by bridging the gap between civic-based education and labour market readiness.

From a broader perspective, the results also indicate that employability is not merely an individual attribute, but a socially constructed outcome influenced by access to educational opportunities and career development resources, as explained by Bourdieu's (1986) theory of capital. Therefore, the integration of structured modules like TAM within SULAM has important implications for curriculum design, suggesting the need for institutions to embed explicit employability competencies within experiential learning frameworks while also supporting policy efforts to reduce structural inequalities in access to career capital, particularly among marginalised learner groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, although the sample size is relatively substantial (N = 157) and drawn from multiple institutions, the participants were selected using purposive sampling from specific community-based religious settings in Melaka. As such, the findings may have limited generalisability to other populations, particularly those from different educational, geographical, or socio-economic backgrounds.

Second, the study employs a cross-sectional post-intervention design, which captures only immediate perceptions of Programme Effectiveness (PE), Knowledge Evaluation (KE), and SULAM Implementation (PSI), without measuring long-term behavioural change or actual employment outcomes. Third, the reliance on self-reported quantitative data may introduce response bias, particularly given the consistently high satisfaction levels across all constructs, which may reflect social desirability effects or limited response variability.

In addition, the study does not include a control or comparison group, making it difficult to attribute observed outcomes solely to the Talent Acquisition Module (TAM) intervention. Without comparative analysis, the findings should be interpreted as strong descriptive evidence rather than causal confirmation. Furthermore, the absence of qualitative data limits the depth of understanding regarding how participants internalised and applied employability knowledge, particularly in relation to job search strategies and confidence development.

Future research is recommended to expand the study across multiple institutions and educational contexts, including mainstream universities, vocational training centres, and other religious-based schools. This would improve external validity and allow comparative analysis of employability outcomes across different learner populations. Future studies should also adopt longitudinal research designs to assess whether gains in employability knowledge and job search competencies translate into actual employment outcomes, job quality, and career progression over time, consistent with employability development frameworks (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007; Tomlinson, 2017; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005).

Furthermore, future studies should incorporate mixed-methods approaches by integrating qualitative techniques such as interviews, focus groups, or reflective journals to provide richer insights into participant learning processes and behavioural transformation. Comparative or quasi-experimental designs are also recommended to evaluate the effectiveness of TAM against other employability interventions, such as traditional career workshops or industry-led training programmes. Finally, future research may explore the integration of digital recruitment technologies, including AI-based job search systems and applicant tracking systems (ATS), to ensure alignment between employability training and evolving labour market demands (Raghavan et al., 2020).

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