

# Malaysia Public Universities' Graduate Employability Policies: An Analysis of First Degree Graduates Unemployment and Underemployment Issues

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**Abstract:** The graduate unemployment and underemployment issues that have given rise to many policy implications for higher education in many developing countries such as Malaysia. Among the youths in the workforce, the percentage of those unemployed is higher among those with a tertiary education compared to the ones without a tertiary education. In 2015, of the 405,000 youths with tertiary education, 15.3% were unemployed. In the context of first degree graduates in Malaysia, there were 27.9% unemployed in 2015, and 26.3% in 2016. In Public Universities, there were 28.9% first degree graduates unemployed in 2015, and 25.6% in 2016. It is also study what are recommendations can be suggested to Malaysia government in order to improve graduates' employability. There are factors to be examined and discussed before recommendations put up from the point of view of employers as industry players to provide jobs and opportunities for graduates. The literature on graduates' employability can be integrated in a conceptual model: (1) graduates' factors, (2) demand supply factors, and (3) employer factors. Based on literature review on the incident, duration and determinants and discussion on some yearly statistics of graduates' unemployment problems in Malaysia, there are some recommendations from the perspective of a manager of an employer for Malaysian government as the suitable policies to address the graduate unemployment, in the short run and long run: (A) For government policies, (1) Launch a particular financing call to kick-begin activities, (2) Share best practice and standards resources, (3) Position employability skills as a driver of quality, (4) Standardize the process for placements and work experience, and (5) Support the transition between second level and third level. (B) From employers to support government policies, (1) Provide work placements and work-related projects, (2) Advise on curriculum design and delivery, and (3) Contribute the business perspective in career clinics to help prepare students for the future.

**Keywords:** Graduate employability, unemployment, underemployment, government policies.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Globalization, disruptive technology and digitalisation, changing in ways of life and consumer preferences mean employments and professions are as a rule quickly changed, and the pace of progress is quickening. It gives comprehensive chances, and furthermore risks [9]. The new world of work is all the more energizing, yet in addition less unsurprising. Government policy must focus on putting resources into a graduate's employability as opposed to keeping up parts that will in the end up excess. It must organize a comprehensive and deep-rooted way to deal with abilities improvement. Adaptability, flexibility and a hunger for learning must be instilled in what to instruct and how to show it all through the training framework. These days, every single creating nation are confronting the issue of joblessness among graduates. The feasible and economic development of a nation is particularly affected if joblessness is high [18]. It is interrelated with economic advancement that ought to be tended to genuinely by government in its policies [7]. In

Malaysia, findings show that unemployment among the youth is required highly attention. There are about six out of ten of those unemployed are below age 24. Every year, there are more than 250,000 students graduated, but one in five fresh graduates remain unemployed 6 months after graduation. Among of these fresh graduates with tertiary education, about 26% first degree holders are unemployed and of which 52% are come from arts and social science study. Most unemployed fresh graduates are from Public Universities which is about 50% and 47% from Private Universities [5]. The infers that Malaysia tertiary institutions are not creating the workforce that is required by the market. There is a mismatch between the supply and demand of the workforce. A degree from universities is the ticket to a fruitful life may not make a difference in the present focused market condition [11]. A significant number of youthful universities qualification graduates are not acquiring enough to adapt to the increasing typical cost for basic items. According to statistical report from Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), about 57% first degree graduates from Public Universities earn RM2,000 and below in 2014, and it remained at 40% by end of 2016. As which about 57% are working in local private companies and multi-national corporations (MNCs) in 2016 [4]. Subsequently, numerous youthful graduates are in employments that may don't coordinate their capabilities and goals and being paid accordingly. This circumstance is for the most part indicated as underemployment. It has negative ramifications for Malaysia as the arrival on training is decreased. Government is subsidizing tertiary training foundations and graduates just turn out to work for low pay rates. Underemployment likewise keeps a graduate from necessary career development [12]. This report will put up some recommended policies for Malaysia government from a perspective of a manager. If employers are looking for work-ready graduates, they should be engaging with universities to ensure that they are providing opportunities for students to participate in their workplaces, and to have structured learning opportunities. There should be an acknowledgement and a respect that the purpose of the university degree is not to just provide a work-ready graduate but there are other aspects of what makes a complete graduate to increase the potential of employability in job market [3].

## II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Central Bank of Malaysia's latest annual report has devoted a section to the unemployment among youths, touching on Malaysia's position compared to other countries, and what the possible long-term implications are and measures that need to be taken. Among the youths in the workforce, the percentage of those unemployed is higher among those with a tertiary education compared to the ones without a tertiary education. In 2015, of the 405,000 youths with tertiary education, 15.3% were unemployed. In the context of first degree graduates in Malaysia, there were 27.9% unemployed in 2015, and 26.3% in 2016. In Public Universities, there were 28.9% first degree graduates unemployed in 2015, and 25.6% in 2016. Malaysia government allocated colossal spending plan yearly to develop local Public Universities. In any case, graduate's joblessness issues and troubles in getting employment are issues that offer ascent to negative impression of the nation's higher education development policies. Numerous youthful graduates today are in occupations that don't coordinate their capabilities and desires and being paid in that capacity. This is quandary in Malaysia when the expanded of highly educated graduates are not able to meet the needs of the available job market.

## III. LITERATURE REVIEW

For over two decades, the meanings of employability have changed from interest drove specialized abilities towards a more extensive perspective of graduate qualities which incorporate non-exclusive, transversal, transferable, delicate aptitudes and fundamental abilities, tied with subject-particular learning and capabilities. Other worldwide research on employers proposes that occupation-particular abilities are never again enough to meet labour market needs [18]. Employability isn't simply focused around the underlying progress amongst education and employment. It is additionally grounded in having an enquiring mind and a hunger for lifelong learning, something that is demonstrable in many meanings of employability [16]. Employability can be seen as helping one create as an "capable person". These are individuals who know their specialization or specialism as well as apply the learning and abilities they have in differed and dynamic circumstances which enable them to build up their skills further [15]. The graduates' academic qualification is not just result to choose their employability, however the graduates' capacity to convey particular abilities like personal leadership, subject knowledge, and business sharpness. Moreover, effective communication, demonstrating initiative and efficiency, and vitally the part of state of mind and individual attributes in the push to achieve wanted employment. Graduates' employability skills are a set of accomplishment, comprehension, and individual characteristics in the person which filled in as high potential to get wanted job and successful in profession improvement and to compete in competitive environment [6]. A large portion of employers are requesting a more independent and leader rather than a

follower, and greater administration inclined graduates. The graduates are encouraged to change themselves in meeting the market needs of the expanding vital of both delicate and specialized skills for better job opportunities. In respect of this, universities could create educational programs in sustaining graduates under the deliverance of all around educated scholastics on the present market needs [8].

#### ***Overview of Graduate Employability Policies in UK:***

In the course of the last two and half decades, there has in the UK been an expanding number of activities focussing upon the part that higher education establishments should play in connection to graduate work. This advancement might be viewed as having two aspects. Initially, there have been and keep on being different examinations to find out what is going on as far as graduates going into work: vast scale information accumulation, manageable to analysis in term of gender, ethnicity, subject discipline studied, degree classification, salaries earned, institution awarding, et cetera [13]. The second part of the increasing focus upon the part of higher education in connection to employment is currently ordered by the idea of employability. Given that higher education institutions don't themselves control the labour market, they cannot ensure employment results [13]. What they can do, it is contended, is find a way to advance the probability that their graduates will pick up what might be considered as fitting to employment. The emphasis on graduate employability was further enhanced in the policies promoted by the Labour Government in 2009 (Department for Business Innovation and Skills 2009) and has continued under the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government that took over in mid-2010. A circular letter from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), in June 2010, to coincide with a speech by David Willetts, the Minister of State for Universities and Science, required all higher education institutions in England to develop and publish 'employability statement', intended to be a short summary of what universities and colleges offer to their students to support their employability and their transition into employment and beyond [8]. As passage to the higher-skilled occupations for which employment request is required to increment is more often than not through a university degree, the interest in graduates ought to develop, supporting extension of the higher education sector. That, in any case, expect that universities prevail with regards to raising the expertise level of graduates, so they can fill these parts. The positive outcome of initiatives and policies implementation by UK government can be seen in QS Graduate Employability Rankings 2018 for UK. There are 10 best UK universities featured in the QS Graduate Employability Rankings 2018. The ranking does not just consider employer reputation 30%, it also assesses alumni outcomes 25%, graduate employment rates 10%, employer partnerships 25% and employer-student connections 10%. The employer reputation metric was sourced from the most competent, innovative and effective graduates. In average, UK scores 91.4 in employer reputation. 71.8 scores in alumni outcome which from universities that value the careers of its graduates tends to produce successful alumni. 70.2 scores in graduate employment rate which indicated how successful universities are at nurturing employability. 50.6 scores in partnerships with employers which showing universities are collaborating successfully with global companies to produce citable and transformative research. It also considers work placement-related partnership that are reported by universities. 70.7 scores in employer and student connections which involves number of employers who have been actively present on universities' campus and providing motivated students with an opportunity to network and acquired information.

#### ***Overview of Graduate Employability Policies in Malaysia:***

The economies of developing country like Malaysia are directly connected with the rate of unemployment. Malaysia is experiencing a financial crisis in 1997 has recorded a high unemployment rate of 2.5% and it can be controlled. According to MIDF Research report in 2017, youth unemployment rate hits 10.5% with number of unemployed youth reached 273,400 persons in 2016. In 2017, youth unemployment was highest ever at 10.8%, which graduate unemployment constituted about 40.5% or 204,000 of total unemployment due to skills mismatch amid a backdrop where demand for low-skill jobs continues to reign. About 86.3% of job vacancies in 2017 were for low-skill jobs which was deemed less suitable for a fresh graduate while high-skill jobs such as professional, technicians and associate professionals, comprised 4.1% of the total job vacancies [17]. Malaysia recognizes the high significance of English yet graduates from public universities experience challenges in speaking, writing, reading, and listening in the English language for job related requirements at the working environment [2]. Privately companies that consist multinational corporations and international subsidiaries are recruiting graduates majoring or conversant in English communication. Organizations trust that high skilled graduates are conversant in English communication and work all the more viably

inside the organization to enhance efficiency [12]. The National Graduate Employability Blueprint 2012-2017, there is employability attribute framework consists of academic, personality management, exploration, and connectivity attributes. Firstly, academic attributes that graduates ought to have good academic performance in their particular field of study, which is reflected in their grades. Secondly, graduates should have good personality management attributes such as a positive attitude, a good sense of responsibility, and a critical awareness of the role must play. Thirdly, a graduate must acquire exploration attributes, be imaginative and innovative with characteristics that indicate high employability. Finally, connectivity attributes consist of communication and team-working skills, which are the essence in achieving good group dynamics and developing excellent interpersonal relationships [14].

#### IV. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the literature that focuses research on graduates' employability, it was found that many factors affect Public Universities graduates' employability. To be employed immediately upon graduating depends on many factors that could be controlled or outside the control of graduates. The theoretical framework in Fig. 1 is clearly define the dependent variable (DV) and independent variables (IV) for graduates' employability. The graduates' employability (DV) in Public Universities is contributed by its IVs which are graduates' factors, demand supply factors, and employer factors.

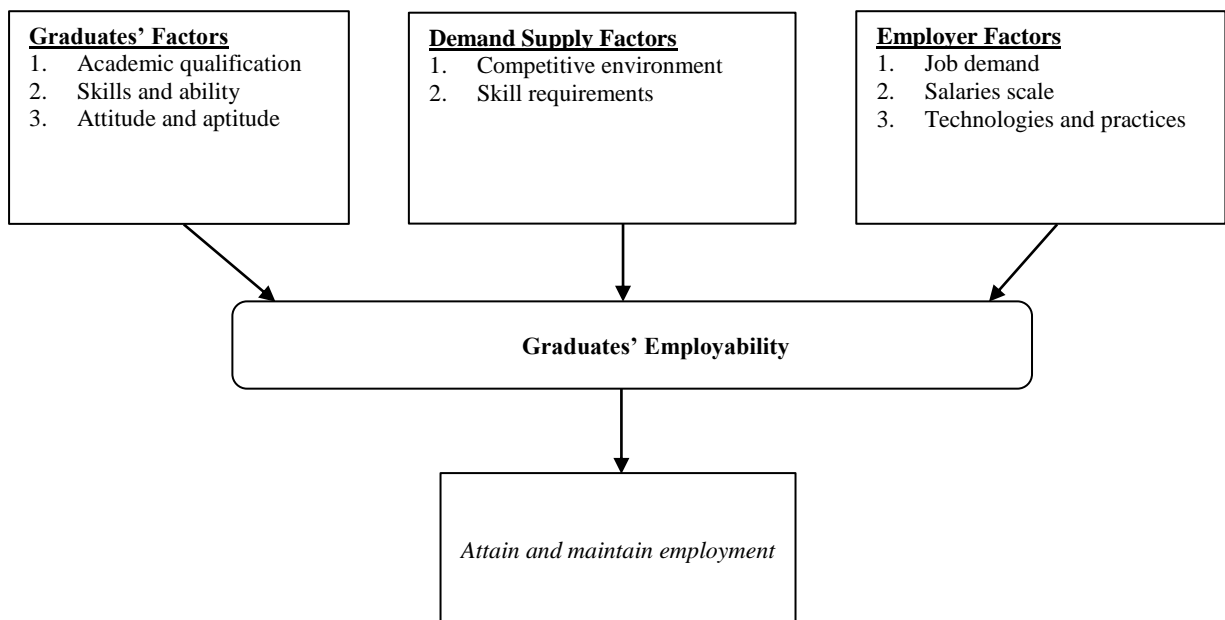


Fig 1: Conceptual framework of Malaysia Public Universities first degree graduates' employability

#### V. LITERATURE MATRIX

There are massive number from the past literature about the graduates' employability. These articles have been studied methodically and a table developed to summaries the major findings by carefully examine its effect and directness to the conceptual framework in this study. The directness impact could be in direct and indirect to current independents variables. There are 18 references from journal papers and books in recent years from 2007 to 2018 have been sourced from direct web site, Google Scholar, Questia and EBSCOhost.

TABLE I: LITERATURE MATRIX FOR GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY (2007 – 2018)

Researcher	Year	Context of Study	Effect to Current Variables
Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (Graduate Tracer Study)	2007-2016	Graduates' employability statistics	Graduates factors, demand supply factors, employers factors
High Fliers Research	2017	Graduate employability market	Graduates factors, demand supply factors, employers factors

Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia	2012	Graduates' employability framework	Graduates factors, demand supply factors, employers factors
MIDF Research	2017	Malaysia labour market outlook	Graduates factors, demand supply factors
Peter, Tom, Al	2016	Funding model for universities	Graduates factors, demand supply factors, employers factors
Fadzila Amru	2013	Graduates' employability in public universities	Graduates factors, demand supply factors
Shamsuddin Baharin	2013	Graduates' employability	Graduates factors, demand supply factors, employers factors
Che Mohd Zulkifli, Shanmuganathan	2016	Graduate unemployment in Malaysia	Graduates factors, demand supply factors, employers factors
Leonard Holmes	2016	Graduates' employability	Graduates factors, demand supply factors
Denise Jackson	2016	Graduates' employability skills	Graduates factors
Caroline, Shelly, Madelaine, Linda, Cecily	2015	Graduates' employability enhancement	Graduates factors, demand supply factors, employers factors
Danny McCoy	2017	Graduates' employability skills	Graduates factors
Matthew, Shelley, Linda, Madelaine, Cecily	2015	Graduates' employability enhancement	Graduates factors, demand supply factors, employers factors
Dian Hikmah, Mohd Zaidi	2017	Youth unemployment in Malaysia	Graduates factors, demand supply factors, employers factors
Norzaimah Ramli	2015	Graduates' employability programs	Graduates factors, demand supply factors
John Anthony Xavier	2015	Graduates' employability strategies	Graduates factors, demand supply factors, employers factors
Yeo Bee Yin	2018	Graduates' unemployment and underemployment	Graduates factors, demand supply factors, employers factors
Nooriah, Zakiyah	2015	Graduates' employability	Graduates factors

## VI. DATA ANALYSIS

Malaysia higher education institutions providers are now required to respond to the rapidly changing skills needs of industry, and to reflect the more dynamic economy and society in which to live and work. The Ministry of Education's Graduate Tracer Study tracks the status of graduates of higher learning institutions after graduation to ascertain whether they have started working, are continuing their studies, or are still looking for employment [5]. As refer to TABLE II, the number of first degree graduates in overall higher learning institution in Malaysia entering the job market in 2016 was 73.7%. The unemployment rate was at highest rate in 2013 which at 31.4% and decreased steadily afterwards to 26.3% in 2016. TABLE III shows the numbers of first degree graduates in Malaysia Public Universities entering to job market was 74.4%. The unemployment rate was higher in 2013 at 33.9% and gradually decreased to 25.6% in 2016. There were 81% of graduates waiting for their first job within 3 months. As refer to TABLE IV, 72.2% of first degree graduates in Malaysia Public Universities were actively searching for their first job before graduation in 2016. 20.8% of graduates were actively searching for first job within 3 months after graduation. As refer to TABLE V, 49.4% of graduates earned monthly income of RM2, 000 and below in 2016. 28.8% of graduates earned between RM2, 001 to RM3, 000, and 17.5% earned between RM3, 001 to RM5, 000. Only 4.4% able to earn above RM5, 000 per month in 2016 even though show increasing from past years.

**TABLE II: FIRST DEGREE GRADUATES' FIRST JOB WAITING PERIOD – OVERALL INSTITUTIONS**

Year	Yet to Employed	Month			
		0-3	4-6	7-9	> 9
2016	26.3	82.3	11.2	2.1	4.2
2015	27.9	82.4	9.9	1.5	6.2
2014	31.1	87.7	9.0	1.1	2.2
2013	31.4	87.4	7.9	1.2	3.5
2012	28.6	79.3	14.9	2.5	3.3
2011	24.7	86.9	8.8	2.1	2.1
2010	25.6	87.0	8.4	0.8	4.0
2009	29.2	90.5	6.7	0.8	2.0
2008	24.7	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2007	30.3	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

Note: the values are in percent (%); n.a.=not available

Source: Graduate Tracer Study Report (2007-2016), Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, Available from: <http://graduan.mohe.gov.my/skpg-report/Penerbitan/Terbitan.aspx>

**TABLE III: FIRST DEGREE GRADUATES' FIRST JOB WAITING PERIOD – PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES**

Year	Yet to Employed	Month			
		0-3	4-6	7-9	> 9
2016	25.6	81.0	12.0	2.5	4.4
2015	28.9	83.1	9.0	1.4	6.4
2014	32.5	89.5	7.5	0.8	2.2
2013	33.9	89.9	6.4	0.9	2.8
2012	31.5	81.3	14.3	2.1	2.4
2011	25.5	88.9	8.1	1.2	1.8
2010	27.9	90.1	7.4	0.6	1.8
2009	29.1	91.4	6.3	0.7	1.6
2008	26.2	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2007	30.3	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

Note: the values are in percent (%); n.a.=not available

Source: Graduate Tracer Study Report (2007-2016), Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, Available from: <http://graduan.mohe.gov.my/skpg-report/Penerbitan/Terbitan.aspx>

**TABLE IV: FIRST DEGREE GRADUATES' FIRST JOB ACTIVE SEARCH PERIOD - PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES**

Year	Yet to Employed	Month			
		<1	1-3	4-6	>6 & others
2016	25.6	72.2	20.8	2.7	4.3
2015	28.9	75.0	17.6	1.8	5.5
2014	32.5	74.3	21.3	1.4	3.0
2013	33.9	76.1	18.8	1.4	3.7
2012	31.5	77.6	17.6	0.8	4.0
2011	25.5	76.4	19.1	1.2	3.3
2010	27.9	76.2	18.6	1.4	4.6
2009	29.1	80.1	14.4	0.6	4.9
2008	26.2	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2007	30.3	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

Note: the values are in percent (%); n.a.=not available

Source: Graduate Tracer Study Report (2007-2016), Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, Available from: <http://graduan.mohe.gov.my/skpg-report/Penerbitan/Terbitan.aspx>

**TABLE V: FIRST DEGREE GRADUATES' MONTHLY INCOME - PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES**

Year	<= RM1000	RM1001- RM2000	RM2001- RM3000	RM3001- RM5000	> RM5000
2016	15.4	34.0	28.8	17.5	4.4
2015	14.4	26.1	29.5	27.2	2.8
2014	20.7	37.3	30.9	9.7	1.4
2013	20.9	37.3	30.5	9.8	1.6
2012	21.8	38.4	28.9	9.7	1.3
2011	19.0	40.8	30.4	8.7	1.1
2010	17.6	42.4	28.9	10.1	1.0
2009	15.1	46.8	27.5	9.6	1.0
2008	14.0	46.5	31.3	7.1	1.0
2007	18.0	51.0	25.4	4.9	0.8

Note: the values are in percent (%); n.a.=not available

Source: Graduate Tracer Study Report (2007-2016), Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, Available from: <http://graduan.mohe.gov.my/skpg-report/Penerbitan/Terbitan.aspx>

## VII. CONCLUSION

Based on conceptual framework in Fig. 1, this study provides an overview of the literature on graduate's employability. It discovered what challenges faced by graduates in competitive job markets is about particularly for first degree graduates from Malaysia Public Universities, how it affects, and factors that should focus on. The literature on graduates' employability can be integrated in a conceptual model. This model can be used to digest the focus of graduates' employability literature. Local Public Universities with the fund subsidizing from government, they have no less than 90% subsidy and every one of them are so effectively accessible with 1.2 million students in them. With somewhere in the range of 400, 000 students graduating every year, similarly the large number go jobless upon graduation. This is a sheer waste of human capital and resources. It perpetrates untold wretchedness on jobless graduates as they lose income, morale and confidence. By looking at big picture, only 20% of local graduates have the technical skills required by employers. Some other countries such as Germany and Switzerland have among the lowest youth unemployment of less than 4%. This could happen with the successful vocational education system that reducing youth unemployment rate. Organizations might fill graduates' skill gaps by putting resources into preparing and improvement, and they anticipate that graduates will quickly fit into employments. The majority of universities claim that they are not factories for talent. This could find in the present youths do not conceive getting their hand messy doing physical, yet productive, work in their future professions. Many want to wind up with-collar professional, sit in an office or be a supervisor, or CEO.

## VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on literature review on the incident, duration and determinants and discussion on some yearly statistics of graduates' unemployment problems in Malaysia, there are some recommendations from the perspective of a manager of an employer for Malaysian government as the suitable policies to address the graduate unemployment, in the short run and long run [8]. Key recommendations for government policies:

### ***Launch a particular financing call to kick-begin activities:***

Government supported Public Universities will give adequate resource capacity and academic staff development with the devoted financing to drive the employability motivation forward. New teaching techniques and advancement must be given the important backings and space to create and succeed. After some time, the subsidizing must be supported and intermittent all together for the employability activities to end up foundational and mainstreamed over all institutions [9].

### ***Share best practice and standards resources:***

In higher education, the national forum for the improvement of teaching and learning can assume a key part in sharing best practice and giving institutionalized resources on employability skills development. It is significant that employability activities and skills are integral to graduates' professional development.

### ***Position employability skills as a driver of quality:***

Public Universities should ensure that future institution quality review and curricula modification to include a strong focus on employability outcomes and the development of key skills at appropriate levels.

### ***Standardize the process for placements and work experience:***

As there are many businesses are engaging with multiple institutions to support work-based training, Malaysia Public Universities should encourage the standardization of the work-based learning process. A more structured approach, detailed in guide for best practice and supported by a dedicated contact point in institutions would help employers to provide the most authentic and practical experience [9].

### ***Support the transition between second level and third level:***

There are should be more prominent network amongst second and third level careers services to guarantee that graduates are implanting skills at a beginning period [1]. There ought to be certification programs as the initial phase in the development of key skills and articulations of learning, that from multiple points of view reflect employability skills. The change of the career guidance system at second and third level should put a bigger accentuation on whether the service supports underpins graduates to recognize their employability skills and feature potential gaps in status for future work and life.



Malaysia's business community has a significant role to support the development of employability skills. While there are already some activities in place, business-education interaction is often centered on individual relationships which can be lost when individuals move on. Collaboration works best when it becomes systematic for the organizations involved and becomes a core part of how Public Universities and businesses think about skills development. Successful engagement between education and employer recognize the strengths and limitations of the collaborating partners and ensures that outputs meet both employer and educator need [10]. From employers to support government policies:

***Provide work placements and work-related projects:***

Experiential and work-based learning gives graduates the chance to put theory into practice. They take in direct from the experimentation procedure, which can feature potential "pay-offs" for the student. Employers should be encouraged to offer placements to important programs for the particular timeframe. Placements should be as close to a real-life situation as could be expected under the circumstances and have a mentor to help.

***Advise on curriculum design and delivery:***

Employers should be encouraged to support institutions through the development of content for academic programs and ensure institutions are aware of the changing skills demands in their industry. Program and curricula review as part of an industry advisory group which would represent organizations from SMEs to MNEs, could add real value to the teaching and learning experience. This collaboration will also help academics understand how employers gather evidence of competencies and skills used in the recruitment process and ensure that their programs are responding to changing industry needs [2].

***Contribute the business perspective in career clinics to help prepare students for the future:***

Employers have particular ability in their field and ought to support graduate readiness by offering interview skills coaching and CV preparation skills as a major aspect of professions facilities. This will push graduates to accentuate the particular quality they bring to different positions in organizations and distinguish any gaps in their ranges of skills. Furthermore, it enables graduates to comprehend the assorted variety of parts inside business organization and the significance of focusing on these inside CVs, individual profiles and applications [6].

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