

THE ALUMNI AND FUTURE GRADUATES EMPLOYABILITY CHALLENGES POST-COVID-19

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*No Distance of Place
or Lapse of Time Can
Lessen the Friendship
of Those Who Are
Thoroughly
Persuaded Of Each
Other's Worth*

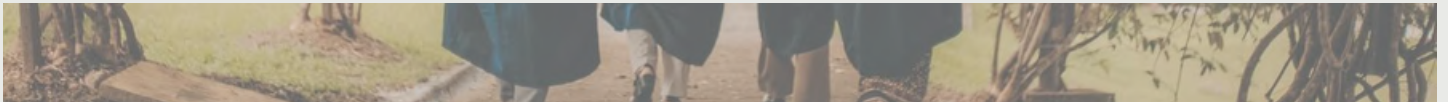
-Robert Southey

Covid-19 which started in Wuhan province, China has spread all over the world. The spread of the virus has had a major impact on the world's economy. No country is unaffected. Therefore, all countries in the world are taking various strategic measures to control the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. Following that, most economic activities stopped and some industries did not operate.

This epidemic has had a major impact on the Malaysia's economic sector. Movement Control Order (MCO) has caused the economic activity to contract where consumers are no longer making purchases as usual and this causes supply to exceeding the demand for goods and services. Due to that, many small and medium enterprises (SMEs) were forced to shut the operations or bankruptcy because of the losses suffered by them. here were reports that stated that some companies cannot run their businesses and having difficulties in paying the workers' salaries in turn resulting in layoffs to minimize the costs operation.

There were also some companies that had to freeze hiring new employees during this period as well as reducing the number of working hours for existing employees to allow their company to continue operating. In general, the industry losses a source of income and incurs costs to be financed. Directly, the industry took reactive action to reduce the operating costs through the method of reducing the number of employees.





Impact on the Employment Sector

The United Nation (UN) states that 1.25 billion workers are at risk worldwide due to the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. The International Labor Organization (ILO) stated that this pandemic has a very serious impact on various employment sectors, especially hotel and food catering services, manufacturing and retailing. According to the International Labor Organization

(ILO) expectations, the world will lose 25 million workers throughout the year 2020. The Malaysian Institute of Economic Research (MIER) has conducted an epidemiological study and a comprehensive analysis published on this year. The findings show that a total of 2.4 million will lose their jobs. 67% of them are unskilled workers. The MIER study also found that online businesses

activities are in very high demand. This provides new employment opportunities for the transport sector and the courier services to provide the delivery services. High demand among customers provides new opportunities in the service sector. It also requires new skills among employees based on the use of digital technology.

Changing Employment Landscape

With the latest developments of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, most of the management of industries and companies were conducted through various of online platforms. This kind of situation has changed the job landscape and new ways of working. Alumni and future graduates are facing a career world that has changed because the competition is getting fiercer and the number of unemployment is increasing due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic which has demanded universities to deal with this issue at the campus level again. University graduates receive the opportunity to prepare



themselves to adapt to the rapid evolution as the marketability of graduates changes according to the current needs of the gig economy and the Industrial Revolution 4.0 (IR 4.0) based on smart technology. For graduates who have not yet obtained a job, they need to try to adapt to the current situation by identifying the new skills required by the industry and the current needs of the career market in line with the gig economy and IR 4.0. Digital entrepreneurship is a phenomenon that overshadows the transformation of gig economy businesses leading to IR 4.0 digital technology with the broad involvement of Malaysian families as a result of changes in entrepreneurship practices globally. Digital entrepreneurship which contains elements of information technology skills and Internet portals through new media platforms in the new millennium business makes it easier for graduates to master gig economy activities without large capital, physical companies, work flexibly and trigger wider employment.

Technical knowledge and the latest new media platforms need to be mastered by university students in line with the demands of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 which is the concept of new media and the digital economy. The gig economy refers to a style of free market system that gives organizations and workers the freedom to undertake voluntary work contacts without having to employ full-time workers as they act as “freelancers”. Online sales and purchases correspond to the new norm of the endemic phase by allowing them to work from home or online companies, use “popular influencers”, dominate viral elements or dominate digital business platforms such as Shopee and Lazada.

They can also venture into “dropship”, to promote and eventually sell. Universities need to improve the digital entrepreneurship agenda through skills training to produce graduates who have value-added skills compared to mere academic supplies to meet the challenge of employability. Apart from the re-evaluating their respective academic curricula and programs so that digital entrepreneurship measures enhanced, this agenda can be strengthened at the credit co-curriculum level or at the residential college and association level on campus. The graduates need to highlight the difference of their ability with digital entrepreneurship as an added value to be hired during the job interviews. The opportunity to enrich knowledge through training programs and online skills certificates organized by domestic and foreign parties is very important without having to wait for training from superiors.



These elements of digital entrepreneurship will help graduates during the interview process or when they have not yet getting themselves a job so that they can run a gig economy business first. The experience that graduates gain while managing gig economy products can equip them with the skills to build even bigger businesses and become more creative, innovative, “job generators” and loved by companies. Exposing students to the knowledge and skills of digital entrepreneurship can create job opportunities and contribute to the economic development of alumni and future graduates. This kind of valuable experience and exposure of students through international level activities at the campus also needs to emphasize international entrepreneurial collaboration between the two parties as an important agenda because so far these activities revolve around normal mobility activities only.

Preparation of Alumni to Face the Challenges

& Government Assistance

The fact is the current situation is very affected to the prospective graduates or alumni for the year of 2020.

The competition rate in getting a job is also very fierce. Prospective graduates have to compete to meet the needs of the job market. Graduates who have skills and competence, will have an advantage in job marketability. It allows employers to make choices in facing the challenges of the current economic uncertainty. The alumni or prospective graduates need to be well-prepared to face these challenges and use creativity to run a business. For those who have graduated and have not obtained a job, they need to try to adapt to the current situation by identifying the new set of skills that required

In the context of this country, Malaysia, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin has presented an Economic Stimulus Package of RM250 billion. It is one of the government initiatives in order to provide assistance to all groups affected due to the implementation of Movement Control Order (MCO) to reduce the spread of Covid-19 epidemic. This kind of government efforts aims to reduce the cost of living due to the job loss.

The assistance provided includes the exemption of business premises rental fees, electricity bill discounts, telecommunication service incentives to support work from home efforts.

A wage subsidy assistance program of RM600 is implemented for three months for people with an income of RM4000 and below. There are many more assistance programs such as financial assistance for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), loan funds and levy exemptions to ensure business activities run smoothly. All these efforts are expected to help reduce the risk of job loss among the people.



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Ready to Compete

In addition, alumni and future graduates need to be well-prepared in order to be able to compete by offering diverse abilities, have high entrepreneurial power and can easily adapt to the current situation more quickly. It is clear that there are various opportunities that exist to be utilized in order to continue a more prosperous life. In this kind of situation, the Ministry of Higher Education (KPT) need to focus on solving the graduates marketability issue. KPT needs to establish strategic collaboration with various ministries in this country itself to explore new opportunities, new sectors and provide initiatives to strengthen skills among graduates.

In this regard, the government needs to take the initiative to provide new skills training programs, improve existing skills and retrain alumni and future graduates to be more competent and able to meet the current needs. One fine example, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia has explored this initiative by introducing the “Ready Life Graduates” framework. This program emphasizes the cultivation of innovation and entrepreneurship among students, the value of sustainability and well-being for all the stakeholders to benefit from.

Through this initiative, all parties need to work together or be cooperative to prepare a program towards enriching the experience of students so that they can explore strategic job opportunities. In addition, they also can play a continuous role to improve the lives of the community. In other words, all prospective graduates need to be given enough exposure needed and preparation to enter the more challenging world of job.

Conclusion

With the cooperation of all relevant parties, especially in the organization of various programs, prospective graduates will be able to prepare themselves through soft skills that are a priority such as mastering the English language well in communication skills can be possessed by future graduates and the alumni then, the unemployment statistics among graduates will decrease every year due to the ability of then graduates of foreign universities. Therefore, graduates should prepare themselves with various skills so that they can compete in a very competitive job market. They should also be aware that academic achievement alone no longer guarantees them in a position that equivalent to the qualifications they have obtained.