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UNEMPLOYMENT CHALLENGE AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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UNEMPLOYMENT ISSUE

Unemployment, defined as the lack of a job for those actively seeking work, is a critical economic indicator. Notably, a high unemployment rate signals a weak economy (International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO, 2019). The Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM, 2020) measures unemployment as the percentage of the labor force that is jobless. Unemployment indicates labor market health, with higher rates suggesting weaker markets (Othman et al., 2023).

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has led to a global recession, causing Malaysia's unemployment rate to rise to 5.3% (Baharin et al., 2022). The unemployment rate in Malaysia was 3.2% in 2019, slightly lower than the 3.3% in 2018 (Son, 2019). Youth unemployment is particularly concerning, with rates of 11.9% for ages 20 to 24 and 4.5% for ages 25 to 29 (Shakur, 2020). Graduate unemployment has also increased, with many unable to find work despite completing their studies. Key issues include poor English language proficiency, lack of soft skills, and high job expectations (Kumar et al., 2023). As of 2020, the unemployment rate for recent graduates was 25%, affecting 116,161 individuals (Husin et al., 2021). It was mentioned that many first-degree students at public universities remain unemployed due to lack of experience, inadequate communication skills, and pursuing degrees not aligned with market needs (Othman et al., 2023).

ENHANCING SOFT SKILLS, CREATING NETWORKS, AND ALIGNING EDUCATION WITH THE JOB MARKET

Hence, the question now is, what is the matter? What skills and knowledge do these fresh graduates lack? When hiring graduates, employers or industry players now prioritize soft skills over academic reputation. Soft skills, such as communication, leadership, teamwork, and interpersonal skills, are essential for career success. Higher education should develop professionally skilled individuals capable of contributing to society (Mwita et al., 2023). In addition, it was mentioned that those who attend courses that require internships would have a better chance of getting employed. Internships provide practical experience, industry connections, and a window into the corporate world. Industry involvement in education can enhance student networks and provide practical experience, which is crucial for career readiness (Achmad et al., 2023). Likewise, networking is crucial for job opportunities, with many jobs filled through connections (Akkas, 2023). A lack of professional networks can hinder employability. Choosing educational programs aligned with job market demands is vital for securing employment.

CONCLUSION AND OUR VIEWS

With due respect, students are often encouraged to choose courses based on current job market demands. However, this can be problematic due to the time it takes to complete their education and potential market changes (Winson et al., 2021). Students need to adopt a broader perspective in anticipating future job market demands. Therefore, selecting a college major is indeed crucial as it affects short-term job prospects and long-term career stability. Furthermore, social influences, such as family and media, significantly impact students' major choices.

Unemployment is a critical issue that needs to be addressed for students' future professional success. Enhancing soft skills and choosing educational programs aligned with the job market significantly reduce unemployment among university students. Soft skills are crucial for career success, and choosing market-relevant education increases employability. Although networking with professionals was reported to have an insignificant effect in this study, it remains vital for career advancement. A comprehensive approach, including enhancing soft skills, aligning education with market demands, and fostering professional networks, is necessary to address unemployment.

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