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ISSN 3083-6116



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Getting Ready for The Future: How Universities Shape Soft Skills

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When you think about going to university, you probably imagine studying hard and getting excellent grades. But did you know that universities do a lot more than just teach you from books? They also help you develop important skills that you'll need when you start working. These skills, called "soft skills," include things like communicating well, working in teams, solving problems, and using technology. These non-technical skills, such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence, play a significant role in a professional's success and are applicable across various roles and industries. They are not job-specific and can be beneficial in almost any professional context.

According to Cimatti (2016), the term "soft skills" refers to all competencies not directly related to a specific task. Individuals can use these personal attributes and traits to interact effectively with others, enabling them to handle challenging situations in a professional and effective manner. Life experiences, social interactions, and ongoing practice can all contribute to its development. Formal educational settings typically do not teach soft skills, but workshops and training programs can enhance them. Developing soft skills requires self-awareness and a willingness to reflect on personal behaviour and interactions with others. Conversely, employability encompasses a range of skills, knowledge, and personal attributes that enhance an individual's security and success in their chosen career, thereby benefiting themselves, the workforce, the community, and the economy (Ahmad Ridhuwan, 2019).

The role of higher education institutions extends beyond imparting academic knowledge. They are increasingly responsible for equipping students with employability skills that enhance their readiness for the workforce. According to UNESCO, higher education institutions (HEIs) are essential actors in the promotion of lifelong learning (LLL). They have a unique capacity to develop skills and foster knowledge and the potential to mobilize educational resources and provide learning opportunities for diverse populations.

For students, the academic curriculum plays a crucial role in selecting a program and course, as it significantly influences their knowledge and essential skills. UiTM works closely with industry leaders to make sure the courses they offer are relevant to today's job market. This partnership ensures that students learn the skills that employers are looking for. Universities design their courses to teach more than just facts. At UiTM, students learn how to work together in groups, give presentations, and solve real-life problems. These activities help students develop both "soft skills" like communication and "hard skills" like using specific tools or techniques. In a world where problems come spontaneously, students need to be able to think across disciplines by integrating and combining knowledge from different subjects. This will help them to become better problem-solvers and more innovative thinkers, as well as help students navigate complex challenges, equipping them to tackle the kinds of multifaceted problems they'll face in their careers.

Principles, theories, and philosophies are essential in academics but cannot substitute for real-world experience. Industrial training and internships provide pre-professional work experience with specific assignments and responsibilities. It also encourages and stimulates personal career interests, serving as a bridge between university and the world of work. Besides that, it helps students improve their marketability after graduation as well as encourage students to apply the skills and knowledge gained at the university to benefit the organizations. UiTM collaborates with companies to provide internships where students can put what they've learnt into practice in real-world settings. This hands-on experience is valuable because it shows students what it's really like to work in their chosen

field. Through real work experience, students will also learn how to lead, collaborate, and think critically—skills that are essential in any job. Professionals from various industries have shared their knowledge with students through guest speakers and company visits. These experiences give students a first-hand look at what different careers involve.

University life isn't just about studying. Universities provide a variety of opportunities for students to enhance their soft skills through participation in extracurricular activities. Students can join any clubs, societies, and sports teams that suit their interests. They will learn how to present ideas and engage an audience, how to interact with people outside their inner circle of friends, and how to interact with people with different life experiences, allowing them to build new relationships and make new connections using a variety of media. In addition to joining clubs, volunteering and community service also help them develop interpersonal skills. UiTM encourages students to volunteer in their communities because helping others is a great way to build empathy and social responsibility.

As the workplace becomes increasingly digitized, digital literacy is more important than ever. In its programs, UiTM includes digital literacy and technology training, preparing students for a technology-driven job market. As an example, online learning, which UiTM also uses UFuture platform to offer flexible learning options. The use of the latest technology and special equipment, such as smart classrooms and up-to-date labs and tools, allows students to learn at their own pace and gain new skills outside the traditional classroom setting.

Higher education institutions play a crucial role in developing employability skills among students. This can be achieved by providing practical experiences, offering extracurricular opportunities, and fostering industry collaborations. Universities, such as UiTM, are preparing graduates for successful careers. Investing in the development of employability skills not only enhances students' readiness, but also contributes to their long-term career growth and adaptability in an ever-changing job market.

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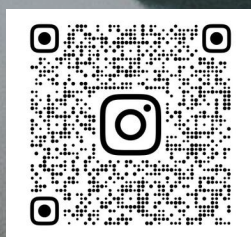
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