

Strategies To Improve Employability Skills For Post Graduate Students In Social Science

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Abstract

Universities today are reckoned to be responsible not only on creation and dispersion of knowledge but to prepare career for the graduates. Employability of graduates is not only the concern of Malaysian Universities but rather a global concern. Universities in various parts of the world are also embarking on serious measures to ensure that graduate employability is a serious business. More importantly in today's environment one of the key performance indicators for a university is graduate employability. The relationship between employability and university are vital as employability acts as the brand of the University, further emphasizing the marketability and quality of the graduates. The issues on employability of graduates are the responsibilities of many parties, the government, the universities, the employers and the graduates. Over the years, due to the changes in the graduate recruitment market, owning a degree is no longer sufficient to guarantee a satisfying career. There seem to be a mismatch between supply and demand of manpower. This paper discusses the skills employers seek for and how universities especially faculties can create strategies to increase the employability of the graduates. The focus of the paper is on the strategies for social science graduates especially at the post graduate level. This paper employs the mapping of strategies from website information and articles on Institutions of Higher Learning, locally and internationally. The result of the mapping shows pattern of strategies that universities can replicate and share.

Keywords: employability, postgraduate, skills

INTRODUCTION

Any person who enters the university expects to get job once they graduate. It used to be a competitive advantage to own a degree. As time goes by, it seems everybody has a degree. To make worse, people with degree are also among the high numbers without job, contribution to the unemployment rate. Today, employability has become the buzz word and more importantly it is the key performance index for Vice Chancellors of University (Zuhrin Azam Ahmad, 2011).

Danial Rahman (2016) reported that in 2015, 75.1% of 227,421 graduate leaving university (both public and private), polytechnics and community colleges were able to find employment within six months of completing their studies. This number of graduate employability numbers increased to 76.1% as of May 2016. The rate of GE for community colleges was 94%, an impressive rate of GE.

To further improve graduate employability, the government has identified and implements various initiative. Among the initiatives are Integrated Cumulative Grade Point Average (iCGPA – the assessment of students inclusive of other indicators, such as communication, entrepreneurial traits, problem solving abilities and ethics beside knowledge), 2U2i (2 years two years in university and two years in the industry and is a work-based learning programme), industry-government collaboration through CEO @ Faculty programme and on-line learning through MOOCs. Some of these programmes are at the pilot stage while others are already running and showing positive feedback.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

What is employability?

Employability of graduates requires various elements, from relevant academic qualifications, skills and specific attributes as required by industry. Yorke (2006) described employability as a set of achievements. He illustrates further that this means skills, understandings and personal attributes that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupation. This occupation in turn will benefit themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy. The description given highlights the ability to adopt and use knowledge, adapt to situation and finally benefiting the whole system in the nation.

The University of Edinburgh (2014) defined employability as the capacity to function successfully in a role and to move between occupations, thus remaining employable throughout their life. As such employability is ongoing success for any career graduates chose in the current and future. The definition illustrates various roles that need to be played by different parties. Employability is a universities-wide

responsibility, for example, the career unit has its function on promoting the graduates to employers, the faculty has the responsibilities to create curriculum in line with the requirement of the industry and the nation, and the educators are required to instill culture and skills in tandem with the curriculum. The students are responsible to inculcate the culture, build the skills and deepen their knowledge.

While one definition emphasized the current skill, the more recent definition on employability looks into the future. It further characterizes the ability to gather experience and moving further into the career ladder or moving into new career. It is in line to express, graduate employability means that higher education alumni have developed the capacity to obtain and/or create work (Kinash, 2015).

What employers seek for?

Research by Salina Daud, Nurazariah Abidin, Noraina Mazuin Sapuan and Rajadurai (2012) reported on the gap between important attributes that graduates of Higher Education Institutions should exhibit and their actual performance when they are employed in industry. The four areas researched on are knowledge, skills, abilities and personality. The knowledge dimensions consist of two factors, namely explicit and tacit knowledge, skills dimensions included hard and soft skills, abilities dimensions comprised of intellectual and physical abilities and five factors for personality dimensions consisted of conscientiousness, agreeableness, emotional stability, openness and extroversion personalities. The results showed that graduate performance has failed to meet managers' perceptions of the attributes that should be possessed by these graduates. In another study done by Mohamed Shukri Abdul Hamid, Rafikul Islam and Noor Hazilah Ab Manaf (2013), employers seek for graduates employees who are able drive organization to compete successfully in the market. The ability to communicate verbally and written in English is placed as highest requirement, followed by the ability of the graduates to think critically.

The Liverpool Hope University (2014) identified 10 employability skills, namely, communication, teamwork, leadership, initiative, problem solving, flexibility/adaptability, self-awareness, commitment/motivation, interpersonal skills and numeracy. These skills were documented in their strategy for enhancing students' employability.

STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE EMPLOYABILITY FOR POSTGRADUATES

Many strategies were formed to further enhance graduate employability worldwide.

The global practice as reported by Department of Business, Innovation and Skills looks into various countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, Canada, Finland, USA and many others. Table 1 highlights four different countries in their practices and innovative practices for graduate employability..

Table 1: *Practices for employability in Australia, Canada, India and UK*

Country	Practices	Innovative Practices
Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established practice and current government policies Employability refers to the capacity to operate in the global knowledge-based economy. Well-established relationship between university education and employers – Graduate Career Australia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Australian Higher Education Workplace Skills Olympiad (HEWSO) – it connects students with a host employer to work on a real business challenge
Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Availability of a number of organizations to help staff working in career services and organizations to develop and enhance career service offering, example Canadian Association of Career Educators and Employers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasis the role of secondary schools in getting student ready for the world of work. Highlights the importance of higher education of pre university students receiving quality support before becoming undergraduates
India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some universities have specific training programmes to improve the employability of their students, especially on soft skills The cost of the employability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sponsor programmes by multinational organizations, e.g. Infosys. An example is the Finishing School (Campus to Corporate Program) run by private sector

	skills courses is paid for by the individual in the vast majority of cases	training provider Bodhih Training Solutions in Bangalore.
UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The range of practices aimed to develop employability in graduates is diverse • Examples – reflection on learning through Personal Development Planning (PDP); coaching and mentoring schemes that are available to all and to specific target groups such as international students; award bearing units of career development learning and the formal accreditation of practice, as well as activities more traditionally associated with job-search, such as CV construction and interview practice. • Some employers are actively engaged in providing support to institutions • UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) in commissioning skills audits, research projects and ‘think pieces’ is stimulating employer engagement in high level skills development and promoting higher education/business collaboration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On line career management portfolio of tools called Destinations. This portal provides undergraduate and postgraduate taught students with access to a wide-range of resources and information on career management. • It was developed for the University of Reading, • The portal is now also used in around 60 other HEIs, mainly but not only in the UK. • Destinations can be adapted to suit each institution’s requirements and areas of focus. • This portal allows staff to help direct a student’s learning and also gives students the opportunity to work through the materials in their own time and reflect on how the content of their degree course can relate to their career preparation.

Source: Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011

Table 1 showed the various strategies across the continental. The strategies might differ from one university to another but the apparent elements are the collaboration of various parties to ensure employability. The universities work hand in hand with the

government and the potential employers, may it be businesses or even conglomerate over various nation. Universities and governments are working in various ways, may it be through having a specific organization structure, a system or even an online portal.

Kinash (2015) suggests various ways to enhance graduate employability. Among them are the role of students, graduates, employers and higher education personnel. The role of the higher education personnel, namely the faculty or the university can support increased opportunities for students experience, placement and internship. This strategy allows the student to have work experience and prepare them for the industry they are interested to work in the future. The faculty and the academic staff can explicitly articulate relevant graduate employability skills in the learning outcome of every subject. This exercise will support the development of graduates as in accordance to the job market in the area of study.

Students need to take the responsibility to ensure and equipped themselves with the relevant skills. These skills can be developed through specific courses or even through extra-curricular activities such as voluntarism, professional bodies or even competitive sports. Employers too need to contribute in terms of sharing of ideas on the changing requirement of the job market. Employers too need to facilitate the transition and adjustment of graduates into their organization.

Kinash, Crane, Judd, & Knight (2016) found discrepancies between the perceived strategies graduates employed and the actual strategies graduates used to improve their employability. The survey found that part-time work does not boost employability it takes valuable time away. Instead volunteering is seen as enhancing a graduate's leadership and teamwork skills.

CONCLUSION

Graduate employability is on the priority agenda to all higher education institution. As things changes globally, the universities needs to ensure the graduate produced are in line with the requirement of the market. But this responsibility does not lie on higher education institutions alone. It is a collective responsibility of students, universities, employers and government. Graduate employability is the key performance indicator for the Vice Chancellors; as such it becomes the main agenda of all faculties in the Universities. Success in having high rate of graduate employability is in fact says a lot about the programme, the faculty and the Universities. This itself becomes a marketing point to recruit students, may it be locally or internationally. It is also

important to ensure the transferable skills and broad-based students' experiences are reflecting in the curriculum, as these will develop confident and knowledgeable graduate. A point to note, numerous strategies are already tested, some are successful while others might not worked well. Sharing what are done by others and replicating them might help to further increase the employability rate.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research is supported by ARAS research grant 600-IRMI/DANA 5/3/ARAS (0196/2016)

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