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The Role of University Training in Addressing Challenges in International Employment

Introduction

Higher education plays a crucial role in equipping graduates with the skills to thrive in a workforce that is global by nature. The universities in Malaysia are gradually reforming their courses according to the complexity of foreign employment (Mohd Thas Thaker et al., 2021). The need for graduates who can adapt to diverse cultural and professional environments increases as globalization intensifies. As globalization intensifies, there is a growing need for graduates who can adapt to a wide range of situations. Artistic and professional contexts increase. This makes Malaysian institutions critical centers for students not just to obtain technical know-how but also develop the adaptability, resilience, and global outlook necessary for success abroad (Margatama et al., 2023).

Many Malaysian graduates face severe challenges in finding jobs abroad despite repeated attempts. These barriers range from misalignments between academic training and corporate expectations to difficulties navigating cross-cultural situations. As an illustration, students might face difficulties in the soft skills needed for cross-border cooperation or remain unaware of overseas work customs even though they can be prominent academically (Mohd Thas Thaker et al., 2021). There has been pressure on universities to calibrate their offerings with global standards by including cross-cultural proficiency, international internships, and foreign language courses in their programs.

One focus for higher education institutions (HEIs) in Malaysia has been how their programs can help overcome problems in international employment (Rozaimie, 2024). Due to the growing process of workforce globalization and the dynamic nature of the employment environment, universities are being pressured to prepare graduates who are not only academically qualified but also possess the essential skills to thrive in the rapidly evolving global economy (Carvalho et al., 2023). This part examines what universities in Malaysia are doing to prepare graduates for employment worldwide, including what has been done, the issues encountered, and how it is implemented in Malaysian universities to build a pipeline of employable graduates.

This paper examines the trend of how university education is evolving in Malaysia and considers how educational institutions prepare their graduates for the real world of global employment. It highlights the innovative ideas being deployed to ensure graduates are prepared for the demands of a connected world, as well as the limitations of those ideas.

Literature Review

There has been a considerable amount of research on how higher education prepares graduates for employment, particularly in the context of a globally competitive job market (Tomlinson, 2017). According to research, universities are important in providing students with skills that are relevant to industry, international exposure, and exposure to soft skills to increase their competitiveness in foreign job markets (Jackson, 2019). The extent of consensus on the differences between university curricula and labor market expectations varies within countries (for example, between sectors), with scholars stressing the importance of improving bridging between academia and industry, career support services, and intercultural training to close employability gaps.

A study of Malaysian higher education has shown that, despite universities' efforts to integrate global perspectives into their curricula, graduates still encounter difficulties in obtaining international employment (Khalid et al., 2020). Pakistan has a dual-tier system of education, with both public and private institutions facilitating the learning process, albeit the adequacy of such institutions for preparing students as human capital is still a question in the global market (Abdullah et al., 2021). Public universities are typically responsive to local industry requirements and aligned with government-driven education

policies. In contrast, the private sector can be more innovative in studying international accreditation, foreign faculty, and international mobility programs (Chan, 2016). However, research shows that graduates of the two sectors encounter similar barriers, including language proficiency challenges, limited networking opportunities, and insufficient career counseling focused on international jobs (Zainuddin et al., 2019).

Research on the effects of university education on global employability highlights the complex interplay between academic training and labor market needs. Zainal et al. (2022) highlighted the growing need for colleges to internationalize their courses and prepare students with relevant skills for a global economy. Idris & Bacotang's (2023) work highlights the concept of internationalization at home, which suggests that, in the same way, technical skills are necessary, global competencies like cultural intelligence and multilingualism will be required.

Marfunizah Ma'dan, et al. (2020) explore how public universities in Malaysia could increase the employability of their graduates through boosting their competencies. This is very important in view of the worsening problem of graduate unemployment in the country. The research has highlighted that institutions can take several measures to enhance graduate employability. This involves aligning the curricula to industry needs, building more co-curricular activities, and aligning with industry partners to ensure graduates have the right skills.

"The Implications of Work-Based Learning Initiatives in Malaysian Universities" (2023) discusses how work-based learning initiatives (WBLi's) could facilitate international postgraduate students' employment readiness in Malaysian universities. It emphasizes that these initiatives are in development and shows that improvements are needed in the curricula of WBLi, the industry, and for policy changes to overcome obstacles to international employment. Thus, by taking these into account, Malaysian universities will be better able to prepare their graduates as transnational human capital able to satisfy the rise in demand for the progressive job market.

Belderbos, Tonatiuh (2019) investigates the employability of graduates from international branch campuses in Malaysia: Soft skills and personal attributes study of graduates, proving that IBC education helps build soft skills and other personal attributes that employers highly value. However, it notes that IBC education does not significantly raise transnational human capital compared with studying abroad. The study emphasizes the role of IBC educational attributes and exposure on global employability skills, suggesting that while IBCs have a positive influence, they only act as a limited substitute for overseas educational experiences.

According to Rozaimie (2024), to address international employment challenges, university education in Malaysia plays a vital role in aligning academic and practical syllabi with global employability benchmarks. It highlights the importance of internationalisation at home (IaH), intercultural competency, and global citizenship – to be enhanced with institutional support. To address the skills gap highlighted in Malaysia's Critical Occupations List (MyCOL) against the backdrop of the global digital economy, higher education institutions and their collaborators (stakeholders and the government) have to ensure that graduates are equipped with adequate skills to remain competitive.

In the Malaysian context, Zainal et al. (2022) found that graduates often face challenges to global career mobility as a result of not being adequately trained in soft skills. The findings suggested that Malaysian universities excel in providing academic knowledge but lack in fostering more practical, experiential learning that simulates workplace environments one may encounter after graduation, especially in an international context. (Idris & Bacotang, 2023) validated this statement, arguing that engaging in partnerships with international industries and exchange programs significantly improved employability.

Yusuf et al. (2024) explored the alignment of international education and national policy, with findings showing how policy at the international level shapes practice. His research found that even structured international exposure, such as virtual collaboration with worldwide universities or global research

projects, for instance, can help minimize the challenges that foreign graduate job seekers face as they enter foreign labor markets.

Research conducted by Demissie et al. (2021) explored employer perspectives, suggesting many international companies prefer candidates with prior overseas experience or understanding of diverse teams. It is consistent with the findings of Samaden et al. (2021), who argued that globally oriented experiences of an internationalized university could act as a connection for its graduates, transferring them into their roles in the world.

The body of literature highlights the importance of an integrated model of education in a university setting that balances academic excellence with practical training, cultural literacy, and industry relevance. Malaysian universities, however far advanced, have to keep adjusting to the new realities of employment around the world.

Methodology

Malaysian graduates had previously faced challenges in securing employment by pursuing a university education; therefore, the study adopted a quantitative research design to explore the effect of university education on the challenges Malaysian graduates faced in finding foreign employment. A structured survey was used to collect data from students enrolled in both public and private universities, capturing a comprehensive representation of Malaysia's diverse higher education system. All candidate universities (10 public, 10 private) were considered based on their institutional ranking, program diversity, and graduate employment rates. The inclusion of religious-owned and foundation-based universities aimed to study the effect of religious curricula on students' employability skills and career aspirations. The final sample consisted of 400 students (20 per university), derived according to the statistical formula for a representative sample:

Figure 1 — Statistical formula for a representative sample

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1 - p)}{E^2}$$

where $Z=1.96$ (the confidence level of 95%), p the estimated population proportion, and E the margin of error. Students were recruited through a method of stratified random sampling to control for disciplinary and class (e.g. first-year or fourth-year) representation. To analyze the data, a standardized questionnaire was used to collect the necessary information centered around three main constructs: perceptions of university education effectiveness in terms curriculum relevance, industry collaboration, and skill enhancement; barriers to employment abroad (language challenges, cultural adaptation, and job market competition); and international work readiness considering self-confidence, adaptability, and overall career preparation. Students' responses were objectively measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). In terms of cultural background, given Malaysia's multicultural environment, the study also sought to explore how religion and cultural background may shape their employability perception, especially among students who were attending religion-owned institutions. Although the research yielded important insights, several limitations were noted, including restrictions in the sample size; potential biases in self-reported data; and gaps in institutional representation, since smaller or specialized universities were underrepresented. Even with these limitations, the results provided valuable insights for improving Malaysian university curricula, enhancing industry collaborations, and broadening student support services to increase graduates' prospects for global employability.

Results

Study results presented according to the quantitative questionnaire sections and features 400 students sampled from 10 public and 10 private universities in Malaysia.

Demographic Profile of Respondent

The demographic characteristics of the participants are essential for context around the findings of the study. This study identifies age, gender, kind of university, and field of study as key variables to investigate how different demographics perceive the impact of university education more accurately on foreign employment outcomes. The below image shows the demographic distribution of university students:

Figure 2 — Demographic Distribution of University Students

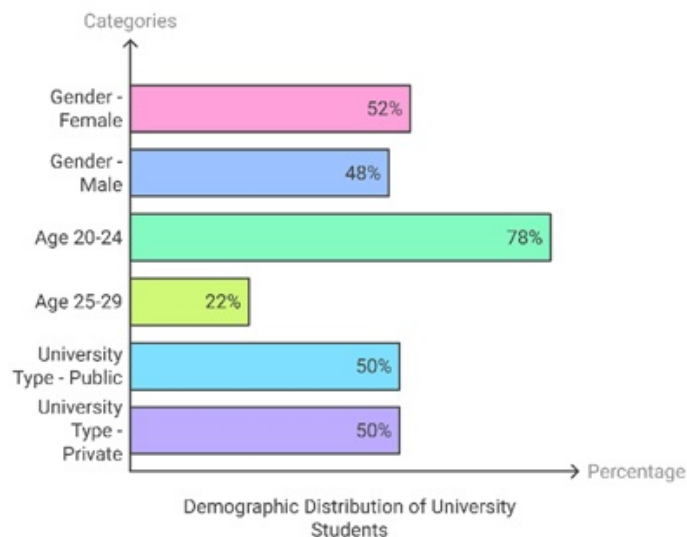


Figure 2 shows the sample distribution of students. The sample included 400 students from both public and private universities in Malaysia. Fundamental demographic traits include age, sex, discipline, previous international experience! This section explores these characteristics in detail, providing a window into the heterogeneity of the respondent pool and its implications for the study results. Here is an overview of the respondent's distribution:

- Gender: 52% female, 48% male
- Age Range: 20–24 (78%), 25–29 (22%)
- University Type: 50% public, 50% private

Assessment of Readiness to Work Internationally

Assessing the quality of university education hinges on how ready students are for overseas jobs. This section explores the opinions of students towards their preparedness, with an emphasis on aspects relevant in terms of both general academic and skill-based aspects contributing to their confidence to moving abroad.

Figure 3 — Survey Results on Education Alignment and Skills Development

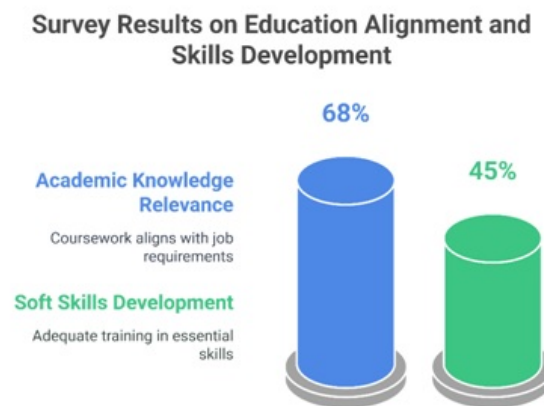


Figure 3 describes the survey results on education alignment and skills development among the respondents. 68% of respondents said their courses fit overseas employment criteria. This implies that while syllabi should be more closely aligned with changing industry norms, Malaysian institutions are making progress in offering globally relevant materials. 45% of respondents believed their institutions provided sufficient instruction in flexibility, teamwork, and communication. Although this shows some institutional effort, it also draws attention to a discrepancy whereby almost half of the respondents felt unprepared in these important spheres. By means of industrial partnerships, enhanced seminars, and experience learning, one can close the preparedness gap.

Access to International Experiences

Exposure to global happenings is crucial for students preparing for global employment, as it impacts their adaptability, cultural awareness, and practical understanding of work customs across nations. This section highlights the different approaches of Malaysian university students seeking to have exposure abroad and implications of such experiences on their job market ready.

Figure 4 — Distribution of Global Experience Among Graduates



As can be seen from the distribution of global experience, indicating various regions where graduates completed their training, as illustrated in Figure 4. 32% had done an overseas internship. These internships allow students to apply academic learnings to real-world scenarios, gaining an even strong industry network through real-world experience in international work environments. 27% of them participated in interchanges, with a studious abroad in an outside college. Such initiatives enable students to experience multiple educational systems and cultural contexts, thus broadening their perspective and developing their international competence (Manner, 2019; Zou et al., 2014). 40% said they had been instructed once on cultural diversity and business standards. Such instructions cultivate empathy, versatility, and effective cross-cultural communication skills among students while they navigate diverse workplaces.

Challenges Faced in Preparing for Global Careers

For students, the way to foreign jobs are fraught with as many challenges, even with university resources and training. Overcoming these hurdles will lead to better programs for our universities, and ultimately allow students to better achieve their ambitions across the globe.

Figure 5 — Barriers to Global Professional Opportunities

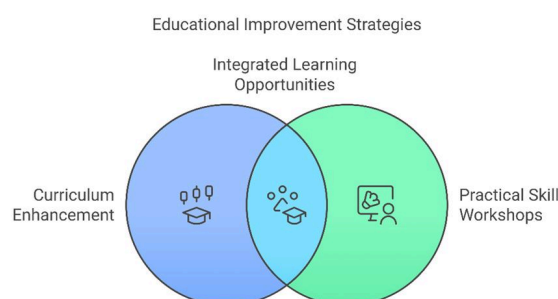


Figure 5 represents the barriers to global professional opportunities. Particularly in professional environments, 55% of respondents voiced worries about their language competency. Although many students get some language instruction, learning industry-specific vocabulary and confidently interacting in a multicultural workplace remains major challenges. Sixty percent of respondents said that career counselling lacked knowledge about foreign employment markets. Students find it more difficult to make wise selections about abroad prospects, grasp changing industry needs, or properly customize their applications to foreign companies because of this gap. 48% of respondents mentioned financial restrictions as their obstacle to access to chances for global learning. Many students are unable to afford the expenses of study-abroad programs, foreign internships, and language classes, therefore depriving them of important practical experience in foreign environments. Expanding language support, improving career services with a worldwide focus, and scholarships for foreign exposure help students to overcome these obstacles and greatly increase their readiness for global professions.

Student Suggestions for Improvement

Increasing the appropriateness of university training programs for the international office will definitely rely a lot on student feedback. Students who have been on these programs are directly affected by this academic system, which provides great & relevant analysis regarding the improvements institutions need to make regarding their end products to bridge the gap between education and the global labor market.

Figure 6 — Educational Improvement Strategies



The strategy of educational improvement is shown in Figure 6. 72% recommended more globally based industry aligned courses including global case studies. Students said they would also like practical situations integrated into their courses to better understand industry methods and dynamics of the global market. 65% of those surveyed requested more results-driven seminars focused on leadership

& problem solving. Such seminars would help students to actively develop key transferable skills like critical thinking, teamwork, and adaptability for working abroad. 58% favored that, along with more internships with multinational firms through universities. These partnerships would also offer students excellent opportunities for experiential learning by placing them in work environments abroad and thereby expanding their professional networks. Hence, adherence to these recommendations can be the penultimate way for the Malaysian university graduates to be globally prepared and making them able enough to cope and be successful in the foreign employment territory.

While Malaysian colleges are 'catching up' in terms of introducing international elements into their courses, according to the results, there remains a long way to go. Graduates' global employability could benefit far more from enhanced career support services, more access to global experiences, and a greater intensity of training to develop soft skills.

Discussion

Malaysian University Education's Current Situation

Towards developing a trained work forces the greater education system of Malaysia has considerably achieved. While public and private colleges highlight industry-relevant skills, graduates sometimes face hurdles when seeking foreign jobs. Accelerated courses of language, cultural adaptation, and work expectations, are the top issues for targeted instructional programs.

Significant Challenges in Global Employment

- Skill Gap: Companies constantly discover that graduates do not possess relevant, employable skills.
- The cultural differences: Many workplaces can be hard to understand and adapt to.
- The Global Competition: Malaysian graduates have to compete with students from countries where international education systems are better developed.

Curriculum Development and Employability Skills

One of the primary strategies implemented by Malaysian institutions to address foreign employment challenges is the development of employability skills through curriculum design. Graduates are increasingly recognizing that employ ability skills—communication, cooperation, problem solving, critical thinking necessary for success in the global job market. As part of this work-based learning initiative WBLi's and outcome-based internships (Asefer & Abidin, 2021), in Malaysia, universities have been integrating these skills into their programs.

As another example, the employability of international students studying in Malaysian universities has been shown to benefit from exposure to industry practices and work experience opportunities through the integration of work-based learning initiatives ("The Implications of Work-Based Learning Initiatives in Malaysian Universities: Developing International Postgraduate Students' Employability", 2023"). In order to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and industry expectations, outcome-based internships which focus on developing specific professional skills and career focus for undergraduates have also been introduced. (Marfunizah Ma'dan, et al., 2020)

Notwithstanding these initiatives, curriculum design suffers difficulties especially in terms of matching academic programs with industry needs. According to some research, graduate employability (Krishnappan, 2024) is a result of the mismatch between the skills taught at universities and the skills needed by companies (Hamid et al., 2022). Universities are urged to work with business stakeholders in curriculum development to guarantee that academic programs are relevant and sensitive to market needs.

Practical Training and Industrial Collaboration

Two important aspects of university education can further strengthen the employability of graduates: practical experience and cooperation with industry. One example of initiative is providing industrial

training programs, such as what the University of Malaya is doing, which could significantly enhance the employability skills of the graduate by exposing the students with relevant experience within the workplace itself (Raghavan et al., 2024). In addition to enhancing technical abilities, courses instill other soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, which are highly valued by employers (Basar et al., 2021).

However, the effectiveness of industrial training programs depends on the quality of the training and the collaboration between universities and industry partners. Some studies have identified issues such as mismatched tasks assigned to trainees and the need for continuous input from industry to ensure that the training benefits all parties involved (Belderbos, Tonatuih, 2019). To address these challenges, universities are encouraged to establish strong partnerships with industry stakeholders and to continuously monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of their industrial training programs (Samaden et al., 2021).

The Role of Soft Skills in Employability

Soft skills, such as communication, leadership, and interpersonal skills, play a crucial role in graduate employability. Malaysian employers have consistently emphasized the importance of soft skills in hiring decisions, yet many graduates lack these skills, leading to employment challenges (Idris & Bacotang, 2023) (Zainal et al., 2022). To address this, Malaysian universities have integrated soft skills into their curricula, with some institutions adopting innovative approaches such as soft skills programs and co-curricular activities (Rozaimie, 2024).

And even with these initiatives, the development of soft skills has not received enough attention within university programs. For instance, according to some researchers, several universities have not adopted common standards for the teaching and evaluation of soft skills, hence differing graduate products may be produced (Azman & Abdullah, 2021). To overcome this, universities should work together toward standardized soft skills development, and cooperate with industry stakeholders (Margatama et al., 2023) (Yeap et al., 2021).

Global Collaboration and International Exposure

Global collaboration and international exposure are increasingly recognized as essential for preparing graduates for international employment. Malaysian universities have engaged in various forms of global collaboration, such as partnerships with overseas educational institutions, to provide students with international exposure and to enhance their employability (Othman et al., 2023). For example, the Malaysia-Japan International Institute of Technology (MJIT) has been at the forefront of such collaborations, providing students with opportunities to learn from Japanese culture and technology, which has been shown to enhance their global employability (Othman et al., 2023).

However, there are challenges in providing international exposure to all students, particularly those from diverse backgrounds. Some studies have highlighted the need for greater inclusivity in global collaboration initiatives to ensure that all students have access to international opportunities (Othman et al., 2023). To address this, universities are encouraged to develop strategies that promote inclusivity and diversity in global collaboration initiatives, such as scholarships and exchange programs for students from underrepresented groups (Othman et al., 2023) (Wei & Yew, 2024).

The Role of TVET in Addressing Employability Challenges

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) plays a crucial role in addressing employability challenges in Malaysia. TVET programs are designed to equip students with the technical and practical skills required for specific industries, making them highly employable upon graduation. However, TVET in Malaysia faces several challenges, including fragmentation and decentralization, which can lead to inefficiencies and redundancies in program delivery (Ahmad & Rosnan, 2024).

To address these challenges, there is a need for greater collaboration and coordination among TVET stakeholders, including government agencies, industry partners, and educational institutions. Some

studies have highlighted the importance of establishing a cohesive accreditation system and improving policy implementation to enhance the quality and effectiveness of TVET programs (Ahmad & Rosnan, 2024). Additionally, there is a need for greater emphasis on employability skills, such as communication and interpersonal skills, in TVET programs to ensure that graduates are well-prepared for the workforce (Noor, 2023).

Policy Implications and Future Directions

This study has a number of implications for higher education policy and practices in Malaysia. I feel there should be a greater emphasis on employability skills incorporation in the University curricula, Soft-Skills, and practical training for in-depth understanding of theory. Second, universities can align their academic programs with industry needs by working closely with industry stakeholders. Third, we need to invest more in global collaboration projects that will not only help in making students globally exposed but also contribute to student's global employability.

In short, the Malaysian international employment challenge is included in the university training. With such refinement in higher education, it is evident that Malaysian universities need to develop their curriculum, carry on with practical trainings having their soft skills trained and collaborative efforts need to be taken all over the world where people can assist students in getting these opportunities. There are challenges that must be overcome, including a mismatch between academic programs and industry needs, a lack of standardization in soft skills development programs, and a need for greater inclusivity in global collaboration initiatives. This will require a collaborative approach between all groups, from government agencies, through industry partners, to educational institutions.

Figure 7 — Key Aspects of University Training in Addressing International Employment Challenges

Aspect	Description	Citation
Curriculum Development	Integration of employability skills, such as communication and problem-solving.	(Raghavan et al., 2024)
Practical Training	Industrial training programs to enhance technical and soft skills.	(Mohammadi et al., 2021) (Carvalho et al., 2023)
Soft Skills Development	Emphasis on leadership, teamwork, and interpersonal skills.	(Che Ibrahim et al., 2021) (Mohammadi et al., 2021) (Mokal et al., 2023)
Global Collaboration	Partnerships with overseas institutions for international exposure.	(Hossain et al., 2024)
TVET Initiatives	Focus on technical and practical skills for specific industries.	(Samaden et al., 2021) (Singh et al., 2024)

This figure of table highlights the key aspects of university training in addressing international employment challenges, along with the relevant citations from the provided contexts.

Measures that promote both international exposure and lifelong learning could be encouraged by policymakers as a way to enhance the effectiveness of university training. Enhancing both public and private collaborations and ensuring that curricula are tuned in with global labor market developments will further bolster the capabilities of Malaysian graduates.

Conclusion

The study emphasizes the critical role of university education in equipping Malaysian graduates with advances in employability, which will enhance their global employment in the future. Even as colleges have made great strides toward aligning their curricula with the needs of the global market, deficits continue to exist in the areas of soft skills cultivation, career guidance, and access to international experiences. The outcome reflects that students want more relevant courses that align with the industry, practical workshops, and an improved university-industry connection.

Strategic improvements in these aspects, including increasing the availability of language programs, fostering international coalitions, and providing grants for studying abroad, can significantly enhance graduates' global competitiveness. Such alignment will help ensure that students graduate with skills and knowledge that are well-suited to migrate into foreign employment and apply the expertise gained in an international workforce.

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