

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION LITERACY IN THE ERA OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION: GRADUATES OF THE POST- PANDEMIC COVID-19 UNEMPLOYMENT CRISIS

Irma Wani Othman¹
Saifulazry Mokhtar^{2*}
Adelaine Tham³
Kelvin Yong⁴

¹Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language Learning, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Malaysia.
Email: irma@ums.edu.my

²Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language Learning, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Malaysia.
Email: saifulazry.mokhtar@ums.edu.my

³Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language Learning, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Malaysia.
Email: adetam@ums.edu.my

⁴Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language Learning, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Malaysia.
Email: kelvinyong@ums.edu.my

*Corresponding Author

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Abstract: *In the context of Malaysian higher education institutions and in accordance with the Industrial Revolution 4.0, all corners of the world are predicted to enter the era of mega trends in which digital transformation pervades all aspects of life, necessitating adaptation by the younger generation. This paper discusses the general knowledge and understanding of entrepreneurship education literacy in the digital transformation era. Graduates facing the post-Pandemic Covid-19 unemployment crisis is the study's primary focus. The qualitative research methodology used is based on the inaugural background, so this paper puts the research lens on a selection of contemporary issues such as emphasis on the university to expose students to have more than one skill through entrepreneurship education, which refers to (i) soft skills as the basis of economic regeneration, (ii) entrepreneurial skills with the existence of new opportunities for entrepreneurs, and (iii) relevance of E-commerce with ICT and technical skills of graduates. Meanwhile, collaboration and industry commitment indicate intense cooperation between higher education institutions, thus providing many benefits to graduates, particularly in overcoming Malaysia's graduate unemployment crisis. Emphasising the importance of universities and industry working together to increase employment opportunities and graduate marketability, among the issues of concern are (i) involvement of the industry in HEIs, (ii) CEO@Faculty Programme, and (iii) 2u2i Programme and Industrial Training Policy.*

Keywords: *Entrepreneurship education literacy. digital transformation, graduate unemployment, post-Pandemic Covid-19*

Introduction

In line with the Industrial Revolution 4.0, all corners of the globe are expected to enter the era of mega trends where digital transformation penetrates all aspects of life, thus seeing the younger generation forced to adapt to the current situation. Unfortunately, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has declared 2019 coronavirus disease, also known as Covid-19, a pandemic on 11th March 2020 (Yusoff, Othman, Mohd Shah, Esa, Zulhazmi, Ibrahim & Ationg, 2021a). The term pandemic refers to an epidemic attack that has a very broad scope and its spread is not just limited to a single community or district. The spread of this pandemic is a public health crisis that has compelled most countries around the world to take drastic measures such as implementing curfews (lockdown). Malaysia has not been left behind in the implementation of curfew orders and has decided on Movement Control Orders (MCO) throughout the country, which prohibit movement and public gatherings such as religious, social, and cultural activities (Yusoff & Sarifin, 2021). The MCO implementation has gone through several phases and has serious economic implications. Unemployment has a significant impact on the country's economic instability.

According to the International Labour Organisation, unemployment refers to individuals who do not have a job but are actively seeking employment and preparing to accept employment within a time frame agreed upon by both the employer and the individual (Aziz, 2020). However, the appropriate definition of this pandemic situation is Bell's (2016) definition of unemployment in which unemployment is categorised as a situation in which qualified workers are ready to work but do not have employment opportunities. The problem of unemployment is most common among youths, particularly graduates of higher learning institutions. Youths aged 15 to 29 years represent a significant component of the national labour market, accounting for nearly 40% of the total labour force (Ali, Che' Rus, Haron & Mohammad Hussain, 2018). With reference to a study conducted by the Institute for Research and Development of Policy (IRDP), the total annual output of local graduates from Higher Learning Institutions exceeds 200,000 students (Othman, 2021).

The submission of this paper demonstrates how successful entrepreneurs or businessmen may be recognized by anticipating their traits. This is due to the fact that being an entrepreneur is not a natural trait but has been influenced by other factors and can be trained. This entrepreneurship is also likely to be influenced by the parents who have ventured into this field, and thus the younger generation now knows the ins and outs of becoming a successful entrepreneur and businessman. This is supported by Ali, Ismail, Suleiman & Tajuddin (2016), who believe that graduates' choice of career is strongly influenced by their family's career relevance.

According to Yusof (2003), students who want to venture into the field of entrepreneurship should be given exposure by correcting their attitudes, perceptions, and interests so that this field is chosen as their employment opportunity after graduation. It is also influenced by the university's internal attraction factors such as the application of subjects related to entrepreneurship and business. Ultimately, graduates should be introduced to entrepreneurship and business in order to ensure their future after graduating from HEI. The Malaysian

government strives to improve people's lives by transitioning them from a society that is solely dependent on the government to a society that is self-sufficient and has its own multiple career pathways.

Background Study

With the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic disaster, the government is once again grappling with the country's difficult state. As in previous years, the government has implemented special packages to alleviate the burden of the people in the event that Malaysia is confronted with a wave that threatens the people's well-being. For example, following the SARS outbreak that swept the country in 2003, the government announced an economic package worth RM8.1 billion (*Astro Awani*, 2020a). Similarly, in 2009, Malaysia faced global financial crisis and the government announced a RM60 billion stimulus package (*Mstar*, 2009). Thus, the government becomes stakeholders in ensuring the country's sustainability in a variety of ways, particularly the national economy.

The government is capable to formulate a plan that can provide benefits as well as ease the burden of Malaysians. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the government has implemented six major strategies namely Revolve, Resilience, Restart, Recovery, Revitalise and Reform (Yusoff & Sarifin, 2021). Under the People's Concerned Economic Stimulus Package (PRIHATIN), the government has demonstrated its resolve to provide protection to the lives, and the lives of the people in the second approach, Resilience (*Sinar Harian*, 2020). This is followed by the Restart phase in which the economic sectors are opened in stages and controlled. On the eve of the Recovery phase, the government is determined to revive the economy by introducing strategic initiatives that will propel it forward.

The Malaysian government has chosen the fiscal option of announcing the country's Economic Regeneration Plan (PENJANA) with the theme "Together to Generate the Economy" on 5th June 2020 through the People's Caring Economic Stimulus Package (PRIHATIN) (*Sinar Harian*, 2020). The government has taken an inclusive and holistic approach to economic recovery and it is critical that the entire population is included in this plan. The government has identified three main thrusts under PENJANA, namely Empower People, Propel Businesses, and Stimulate the Economy (*Sinar Harian*, 2020). Under PENJANA, there are 40 basic initiatives worth RM35 billion of which RM10 is a direct fiscal injection from the government (*Bernama*, 2020).

The National Economic Regeneration Plan (PENJANA) is a Short-Term Economic Plan that can offer benefits to all citizens, particularly unemployed graduates (Aziz, 2020). This is because it is in line with the objectives of this plan, where one of the objectives is to create jobs and curb unemployment. Every year the statistics on graduate marketability are high, which shows that cases of graduate unemployment can be addressed. In 2019, the tracking study, also known as the Tracer Study, discovered that all HEI or PHEI achieved a marketability rate of around 82.6 percent while public universities achieved a rate of nearly 88 percent (MOE, 2019). However, in 2020, the situation is quite different from before due to the constraints of the contagious Covid-19, which has been proven to have paralysed the economic situation.

Literature Review

Since the inception of Malaysia's New Economic Policy in 1970, the concept of entrepreneur has been introduced (Yusof, 2003). According to Zafir & Fazirah (2007), an entrepreneur is a person who performs any activity related to entrepreneurship. While the term entrepreneur is defined as a large-scale job done for the purpose of producing various industrial goods (Zafir & Fazirah, 2007), it can be said that an entrepreneur is someone who can take the risk of establishing or starting a business or enterprise, then later inventing and finding ways to succeed (Mohd Yusof, Tahir, Abdul Malek & Salman, 2020). A person who starts a business, even on a small scale, or buys a business that has been run by another party is also called an entrepreneur. As an entrepreneur, all the challenges and high risks must be borne in order to ensure that the effort being put in do not cause the business to shut down as a result of large risks.

When a person is proficient in this field, it can result in good internal controls because they are intelligent enough to find ways and means to solve problems and ensure that the business conducted remains consistent. High vision must be instilled in oneself in order for the business to grow more widely. An entrepreneur has the right to demand freedom and make their own business decisions. Therefore, entrepreneurship should be emphasised to university graduates so that they can develop and train themselves to venture into the field. Abdul Rauf & Abdul Rauf (2012) believe this will also help graduates earn enough money to cover their living expenses and will help to alleviate the unemployment crisis for this group after graduating from any university.

According to Othman, Yusoff, Awang & Jupiter (2016), human capital is defined as a person who is talented, knowledgeable and has a high morale. Entrepreneurs are a key factor in expanding business efforts as well as developing strategic plans to generate profits and economic benefits. Human capital and competitive elements are required to instil an entrepreneurial mindset in a graduate. This is due to the fact that it has the ability to move all programmes and activities related to entrepreneurship and business through the role of any institution in order to improve performance and success. As a result, this field is able to contribute to the increase in per capita income as well as encourage changes in the structure of society by opening up employment opportunities for them, particularly for graduates.

The Youth Organisations and Youth Development (Amendment) Act 2019 (Act 668) maintains the government's commitment to ensuring that the youth defined as graduates contribute to the economic and social development of the country. According to Othman & Hussin (2019), the context of social entrepreneurship in human capital development should be highlighted in order to help develop marginalised communities, particularly unemployed graduates. There is no denying that human capital today faces a variety of challenges in order to develop professional capabilities and improve their marketability. With this, Talent Corp is cooperating with University Malaysia Pahang (UMP) in establishing close collaboration between industry and academia with the goal of increasing the number of high-quality graduates (*Berita Harian*, 2016a).

Other Alternatives Graduates Assistance

Aside from monetary incentives, the government focuses on youth skill development. Thus, in collaboration with the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), the government has implemented the KPT-CAP PENJANA, also known as the Career Advancement Programme

(Berita Harian, 2020a). In an effort to increase graduates' marketability, a total of 87 programmes were approved with the entire programme collaborating with 154 training provider companies or companies that issue Letter of Commitment (LOC) as a guarantee of job placement to graduates after training. The government has allocated a fund of RM100 million in an effort to curb the unemployment crisis among graduates (*Berita Harian*, 2020a). This programme initiative implements reskilling and upskilling programmes to hone graduates' skills and abilities. As a result, the programme will be able to produce skilled graduates capable of filling job market openings.

The programme emphasises three main thrusts: Place and Train or training and placement, focusing on GIG sector (Glorious Human Movement) and entrepreneurship (*Berita Harian*, 2020a). Before implementing job offers from the industry, Place and Train is a targeted competency training programme. The second thrust is the entrepreneurship training programme, which focuses on the formation of start-up businesses. Thus, participants benefit from financial assistance from banking institutions and government agencies such as *Majlis Amanah Rakyat* (MARA), *TEKUN Nasional*, and *AmanahIkhtiar* Malaysia through the establishment (*Berita Harian*, 2020a). Finally, GIG Economics (Glorious Human Movement) is a competent training programme that can assist in generating income through GIG economics or freelancing activities.

To ensure the quality of training offerings, the course design under the KPT-CAP PENJANA programme is modified to meet the needs and requirements of the company that will recruit specific graduates after the course has concluded. The Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) has also mandated that the companies involved prepare and issue a Letter of Commitment (LOC), which provides participants with a job guarantee. As a result, after completing the KPT-CAP course, they will be offered a job with an estimated salary of RM2,000 to RM2,500 (*Berita Harian*, 2020a). In other words, graduates who follow and complete this course can be confident that they will find work within the next six to twelve months (*Berita Harian*, 2020a). The Ministry of Higher Education has set a goal of at least 18,000 affected graduates benefiting primarily from this programme in terms of employment (*Berita Harian*, 2020a).

Upskilling and Reskilling Generation

Upskilling and reskilling generation is intended to assist prospective graduates of Institutions of Higher Learning in obtaining employment opportunities that match their qualifications. The government has approved RM100 million for the Ministry of Higher Education's National Economic Regeneration Plan (KPT-CAP PENJANA), which aims to place 20,000 graduates in industries such as manufacturing, banking, information technology and communication (ICT) (MOE, 2020a). With the continuation of up skilling and reskilling initiatives, the graduate unemployment rate can be reduced and even training to help improve skills will be provided in order to produce graduates who are realistic and meet the needs of the job market.

Under the upskilling and reskilling initiative, three main programmes are implemented. The first programme, namely Job Matching and Placement, aims to train graduates for more competencies before entering the working world in the industry offered. The second programme is the ongoing entrepreneurship programme which teaches participants how to be more knowledgeable about entrepreneurship. The third programme is Gig Economy which is a competent programme that will assist participants in generating opinions through gig economy activities such as freelancing (MOE, 2020a).

Stimulating the SME industry

As the Covid-19 pandemic spread across the country, micro or medium enterprises (SMEs) received the greatest impact, particularly during the period of Malaysia's Movement Control Order (MCO). Within a period of nearly two years, the economy was nearly completely paralysed with the majority of businesses ordered to cease operations (Yusoff & Sarifin, 2021). This situation affects the income of financial resource channels, particularly SMEs and micro-enterprises. This is due to the fact that the owners of these two types of businesses are responsible for two major costs of employee, which are salaries and business premises rent. Therefore, the cessation of operations will present a challenge in terms of cash inflows.

The PRIHATIN Economic Stimulus Package for Additional Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) was created by the government to provide full support to both businesses (*Astro Awani*, 2020b). The government hopes it will be a radical step in terms of alleviating cash flow issues while also preserving employment and preventing the number of laid-off workers from skyrocketing. The government has committed the sum of RM10 billion in this package to revitalise the country's economy (*Astro Awani*, 2020b). This is because the government believes that SMEs are the backbone of the economy and can make a significant contribution to the country's current economic crisis. Based on a report prepared by the Department of Statistics Malaysia, the record contribution of local SMEs to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is RM521.7 billion, accounting for 40% of the market economy (*Berita Harian*, 2019).

Under this additional initiative, local workers earning RM4,000 and below and working in companies that are already registered with SSM and SOCSO will receive assistance in the form of wage subsidies (*Astro Awani*, 2020b). The amount of wage subsidy that an employee receives is determined by the number of employees in a company. Among them, companies with 200 or more employees will be eligible for a wage subsidy for RM600 per person (*Astro Awani*, 2020b). Meanwhile, companies with employees ranging from 76 to 200 will receive RM800 per employee (*Astro Awani*, 2020b). With the implementation of these additional initiatives, company owners can face cash flow challenges faced by their companies. Apart from being able to pay the rent of workplace and the employee's salary, the owner can also hire new employees, particularly graduates from institutions of higher learning. Thus, the recruitment graduates as a workforce can prevent the unemployment rate among graduates from increasing.

Mastering the Field of Digital Technology

In the 21st century, various types of new modern technologies have been introduced to help in the daily lives of modern people. The existence of modern technology such as laptops and gadgets enable two-way communication from a distance, as well as information discovery via websites without requiring physical energy. In terms of employment, modern technology greatly assists workers in performing tasks that are difficult for humans to perform. Examples include the application of machine and robot technology in factories for the production of goods as well as automobiles. Company employees utilise digital technology to expedite the completion of paperwork that would otherwise take an extended period of time. The use of digital technology, such as information technology such as Google Chrome, has made it easier for employees to locate information sources that assist them in completing their work.

According to Omar, Mohamad Zan, Hassan & Ibrahim, (2020), information technology is a combination of the three components of computer, communication and know-how. As a result, people and organisations will be able to work more productively, successfully and effectively.

In the context of graduates, the mastery of digital technology will make it easier for them to find work. Abdul Wahab & Ahmad (2017) defined computer literacy as learning how to use microcomputer software and its devices to produce something using computers. Izzah, Damhuji & Liu (2016) stated that literacy refers to a person's level of knowledge and ability to use a computer. More job opportunities in the IT field are being created and advertised these days. For example, in the field of filmmaking, where almost all filmmaking is realised or screened using graphic elements particularly animated films, which are becoming increasingly popular. Therefore, graduates must have expertise or at least knowledge in the field of digital technology and learn to master the field of information and digital technology to be able to compete in Industry 4.0, known as the Fourth Industrial Revolution. As a result, these prospective graduates will have an easier time finding job opportunities being absorbed into the world of digital technology jobs and adapting to a more realistic work environment. Collaboration between the government and higher education in developing and providing learning facilities in the field of digital technology to prospective graduates in order to facilitate their access to employment opportunities can help to reduce the rate of increase in graduate unemployment (Efendee & Othman, 2019).

Well-Equip with Competency Skills

As we all know, in this K-economy era, competition for jobs among graduates is fierce (Hashim, Chang & Abd. Rahman, 2016). This is because local companies or businesses will seek to hire employees who are of highest quality. As a result, this competition for jobs has resulted in many graduates not getting the job offers they want. Competence means the ability or skills that a person possesses in performing a task in a specific field. Competence is another common method for determining a person's level of ability. Competence also refers to a person's ability to run or perform a job efficiently. As we frequently hear, private companies will determine their organisation's competitiveness based on the capabilities of their human resources, i.e., their employees. Similar to the public sector, this sector requires employees with the necessary level of competence in the areas of services required. For example, in the fields of accounting and security, those who are hired are of course experts in the field who have been trained.

Furthermore, competence refers to the knowledge and skills required to complete a task. However, the definition of this competency has undergone a change in meaning as well as approach to ensure its effectiveness and excellence of individuals as well as organisations. Beaumont, Gedye & Richardson (2016) define competence as "an underlying characteristic of a person" that can be seen in the form of "self-image, traits, motives and social roles" as well as skills and knowledge that have a direct impact on the performance of the work produced. Lack of competency skills among graduates has led to an increasing unemployment rate among graduates. Therefore, the government must ensure that every prospective graduate has competency skills in their field of study during their sessions at HEI or PHEI, so that when they enter the workforce, they can compete with others for jobs in their field of study (Ali *et al*, 2018).

Research Methodology

A qualitative approach is implemented to unravel the general interpretation of positive values, passion and identity when university graduates are trapped in the dilemma of unemployment without a job. The discussion approach of this paper is highlighted by presenting an examination of the study's findings through the selection of secondary sources by examining the pattern of graduates adapting to the new norms. The focus of the discussion is on the study's

findings which show the situation of graduates attempting to understand the rhythm and be more open to accepting this situation when government initiatives, HEIs and stakeholders mobilise to collaborate in order to break the cycle of graduate unemployment. At the same time, the discussion demonstrated the government's critical efforts to not lose sight of their responsibility and trust in assisting in easing the burden of the people despite the government's difficulties in stabilising the economy, particularly for young people looking for work.

Discussion

Among the issues that underlie the discussion of this paper are:

A. Emphasis on the university to expose students to have more than one skill through entrepreneurship education

Entrepreneurship education is critical in order to achieve a vibrant socioeconomic environment that leads to significant development (Efendee & Othman, 2019). According to Syed Sahil & Hassan (2018), entrepreneurship education can provide graduates with the opportunity to discover their natural talents. According to their findings, a large number of students at public universities choose entrepreneurship as a future career aspiration. According to Efendee & Othman (2019) research, formal entrepreneurship education in HEI has a significant impact on their attitudes and proclivity to engage in this field. Furthermore, based on the data submitted to the Companies Commission of Malaysia website since 2017, the number of registered businesses and companies is growing as a result of increased exposure to digital influences such as e-Commerce and ICT which are becoming more prevalent (Efendee & Othman, 2019). With this influence, an increasing number of graduates and the younger generation are attempting to become entrepreneurs because it can be used as a tool to promote their products and strengthen entrepreneurship among graduates (Efendee & Othman, 2019).

(i) Soft skills as the foundation for economic revitalisation

Apart from the government's role in holding an "Economic Regeneration Programme" aimed at overcoming the unemployment crisis among graduates, there are other methods or measures in overcoming such a crisis with an emphasis from the university on diversifying a student's skills (Othman, 2021). This is due to the fact that the emphasis will provide better space and opportunities for prospective graduates to get a job later on. Among the skills that are emphasised beside soft skills as a basis are foreign language skills, management skills, entrepreneurial skills as well as 'Information and Communication Technology' or ICT and technical skills. Outwardly, soft skills are fundamental and important to have because they are a pre-existing skill that only needs to be polished by the master of the body. Syed Sahil & Hassan (2018) stated that while soft skills are frequently used in our daily lives, most people are unaware that we have practiced and applied those skills. Thus, this clearly shows that soft skills are possessed and ingrained in all humans, regardless of age or gender.

However, the context in the workplace is different. This is because according to Fuentelsaz, Juan & Javier (2018) these skills are highly emphasised by employers in the field of industry and training programmes. Obviously, soft skills are the foundation and key for anyone seeking a job or building a career. It follows that there are several elements in these soft skills that are pillars in measuring the level of a person's soft skills, particularly for students as prospective graduates who are frequently used by researchers. The elements are communication skills, teamwork skills, critical thinking and problem solving, professional ethics and morals as well

as leadership skills. Therefore, these communication skills refer to the use of effective and efficient communication methods.

According to Fikri & Mujahed (2018), communication is a process of transmitting information from one source to another involving humans through interaction for situation sharing or through the context of conversation, as well as a process that can be expected based on messages sent or received. So, as a prospective graduate, it is critical to understand and apply the use of effective communication. This is because, as previously stated, communication is a method of transferring resources between people through interaction in order to effectively share situations and information. As a result, if communication skills are not properly applied, prospective graduates will find it difficult to obtain jobs, and thus they end up unemployed. Furthermore, prospective graduates are likely to be familiar with teamwork skills because they must have gained experience through group collaboration in assignments or final year projects.

According to Khoshtinat (2011), there are two important aspects to forming a good team in an organisation, namely forming a team in the proper manner and the need for an adequate environment while performing work in a team. Therefore, there is no denying that when doing teamwork, it is important to form a team in the proper manner without involving sentiments or sensitive issues such as selecting group members solely based on race, religion and skin colour without considering each individual's abilities. Clearly, making a rational selection and group formation is important for prospective graduates to use in order to attract the interest of employers, particularly in providing job offers to prospective graduates. It follows that one of the elements of soft skill is the ability to think critically and solve problems.

According to Asonitou (2015), critical thinking is the process of interpreting and evaluating a thing, information or argument obtained or observed. As a result, prospective graduates from higher education institutions should be able to apply and use these skills to the fullest. This is because it can instil confidence in prospective employers and add value to prospective graduates, attracting interest and opening prospective employers' eyes to take prospective graduates as assets or human capital of quality and ability to solve problems. Therefore, it is clear that prospective graduates should strive to hone and develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills while studying in order to apply them later in the workplace. The next set of soft skills that need to be possessed are leadership abilities, ethical practices and a high level of professional morale. Therefore, it is critical for prospective graduates to have leadership knowledge.

Fuentelsaz, Juan & Javier (2018) mentioned that these leadership skills can be developed when an individual can perform the task as a group leader or as a person who leads well and in an orderly manner. A clear example is through co-curricular activities. This is because leadership skills can be developed through co-curricular activities that include activities or outdoor work that require a leader from among the students to ensure the activity runs smoothly. As a result, having these leadership skills should make it easier for prospective graduates to find work, as they can help employers reduce their workload. Finally, the practice of high professional ethics and morals refers to the prospective graduates themselves. This is because according to Asonitou (2015), ethics is a character, behaviour and a set of moral principles that influence an individual's behaviour. Furthermore, he defines ethics as "a set of values, norms and moral foundations that determine and differentiate whether something done is right or wrong, good or bad."

Meanwhile, Syed Sahil & Hassan (2018) stated that good morality is “good behaviour that includes customary values and aspirations that have been accepted in a society in determining the lives of individuals and society.” As a result, prospective graduates who want to find work and avoid being unemployed should apply and practise these ethics and morals in order to inspire employers to hire such graduates. Ultimately, the university’s emphasis on soft skills and its components will undoubtedly assist future graduates in preparing themselves to enter the world of work and obtain job offers that are relevant to their field of study or outside of their field of study.

(ii) Entrepreneurial skills with the existence of new opportunities for entrepreneurs

The most recent advancements in digital technology have resulted in changes to existing business models as well as new creations. Digital entrepreneurship has recently become a very popular topic of discussion especially in light of the Covid-19 contagion that is afflicting all countries around the world. In this regard, there have been many businesses that could not operate physically such as shops and restaurants that had to close down. This has prompted business owners to consider how to diversify their operations while also shifting the method of interacting with customers through digital business. This is to comply with the government’s order, namely Movement Control Order (MCO), which also aims to prevent Covid-19 from spreading in Malaysia.

As we all know, digital business has existed since the 1990s when the internet was first used commercially around the world (Abdul Wahab & Ahmad, 2017). In this case, the website which initially showcased information has evolved into a business platform. The most recent advancements in digital technology are transforming existing business models and new creations, as well as introducing new products and services and increasing the efficiency of business processes, all of which are making business more competitive. Digital entrepreneurship refers to the creation of a new venture and transforming an existing business by developing and using the latest digital technology. The transition of the existing economy to a digital economy is essential to accelerate local and national economic growth.

In order to achieve this goal, the government has launched the National Economic Regeneration Plan (PENJANA) which allocates RM700 million for the development of digital business platforms through grants and loans to SME and mid-level companies to implement digital technology in their operations and trade channels (*Berita Harian*, 2020b). By indirectly focusing on increasing and stimulating the resilience of the country’s digital economy, the government can assist people and businesses affected by Covid-19. Through the development of this digital business, there will be growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as well as the Malaysian economy (*Berita Harian*, 2020b). The digital economy's new wave has the potential to create a diverse range of business and employment opportunities while also increasing overall income, including in rural areas.

As a result, graduates from high school, college, or university, as well as those still in school, no longer have to hope to become job seekers but can instead become successful individuals by becoming creators or employers. An example of a new opportunity that has existed is delivery or e-hailing which has becoming increasingly popular in today’s society. Furthermore, many face-to-face online applications have been developed to help new traders or entrepreneurs conduct business. In this case, there are entrepreneurs who create short video recordings related

to the products they sell, which are then uploaded to applications such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Facebook and others. This will also generate income for the entrepreneur. In general, there are numerous spaces and opportunities to be explored in the digital world. When business and digital skills are combined, entrepreneurs will have more opportunities to explore. They can work from home, shop online or conduct business through digital business platforms like Shopee and Lazada (*Berita Harian*, 2020b). They can also venture out as a dropship which means they will play an important role in promoting and ultimately selling. The fact is online sales and purchases are in line with the new post-pandemic normal.

Undoubtedly, the Covid-19 pandemic disaster has hastened the presence of future jobs into the present. The power of the internet, Facebook live and viral elements in the digital world can now spark a new entrepreneurship phenomenon. Every entrepreneur should explore the digital world in order to recover from the difficult moments of Covid-19. Entrepreneurs must change their mindset to accept that the survival of a post-pandemic business does not require large sums of money or even the presence of a store. According to the findings of previous study, 84% of employers significantly accelerate work process digitisation, while another 50% accelerate process automation. Even remote-controlled jobs such as working from anywhere are quickly becoming a new habit with 84% adopting them (*Berita Harian*, 2020b). As the country continues to grapple with the Covid-19 pandemic, many communities are focusing on jobs that require strong humanitarian skills such as management and strategic planning in business.

New entrepreneurs will now have the opportunity to expand their business by working either from home or store, which is known as working online. Hence, new job opportunities will emerge in the future such as data analysts and data scientist, AI and machine learning specialists, digital transformation specialists, robotic engineers, software and application development, information security analysts and material internet experts. Furthermore, there have been employment opportunities that have become a current trend in the food delivery, food manufacturing sector and products that also provide delivery services during the spread of Covid-19 (*Bernama*, 2021). Technology should be seen as having the potential to improve human capabilities. In this regard, we have experienced three industrial revolutions with all of these technologies transforming traditional employment patterns into the forms and even creating new jobs.

In general, prospective graduates who have completed the study at the university will almost certainly not be able to get a job directly unless it is by way of good luck. Those who do not have luck getting a job will definitely do side jobs, whether trading, farming and others to earn pocket money for themselves. As a result, entrepreneurial skills are among the most important skills that every graduate must develop before graduating because they are also considered soft skills. According to Talib, Yusof, Md Zan & Ngah (2017), entrepreneurship can be associated with attitudes, values, knowledge and skills that enable a person to find, recognise and seize opportunities which then can be translated into business strategies and profit-making efforts. Therefore, a prospective graduate who wishes to expand his or her employment opportunities must possess and apply entrepreneurial skills.

This is because potential graduates with such talents will undoubtedly be appealing to employers because they can undoubtedly help and boost the employer's company's earnings. As a result, a prospective graduate's entrepreneurial talents will almost surely ensure their career if they choose to engage with others in the field of work they intend to enter. . However,

prospective graduates can also become entrepreneurs with knowledge and entrepreneurial skills which in turn help overcome graduate unemployment crisis by providing employment opportunities and ultimately helping to boost economic activity in the country. Obviously, the emphasis on entrepreneurial skills by the university in particular will help reduce the unemployment rate among graduates later on.

(iii) Relevance of E-commerce with ICT and technical skills of graduates

E-commerce is a process of buying and selling product electronically through mobile applications and the Internet. E-commerce is both retail and online shopping as well as electronic transactions. E-commerce has been popular for the past few decades and in this way, it is replacing traditional stores. Furthermore, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, many people prefer to shop via e-commerce. E-commerce allows us to buy and sell products on a global scale, 24 hours a day. Malaysia currently has the largest e-commerce market in ASEAN. By 2025, the size of Malaysia's e-commerce market is targeted at RM1.5 trillion compared to RM460 million in 2018. In addition, by 2025, a target of 875,000 Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) will use E-commerce compared to 489,958 at the end of 2020 (Hmetro, 2021).

In general, the E-commerce industry is one of the important services not only in Malaysia but also in Southeast Asian countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand and Singapore (Mohd Rawi, Omar & Shahkat Ali, 2012). According to a Malaysian web design agency, since the pandemic spread, people have become more willing to shop online as well as demonstrate lifestyle changes and daily routines such as working from home and exploring new interest while living at home which provide greater opportunities for the E-commerce industry trade on a global scale. Now, with higher demand on online purchases, more consumers are expecting smooth delivery of purchased items. Overall, the Covid-19 outbreak has opened up opportunities for the E-commerce industry to grow as it has become the primary choice of consumers during these trying times.

The university places a strong emphasis on ICT (Information and Communication Technology) and technical skills. As a result, these skills are among the most influential skills that employers are looking for in employees, particularly among prospective graduates. This is because with the passage of time, ICT and technical skills are becoming more highly valued in this era of globalisation. Therefore, in order to compete for a job as a prospective graduate, it is critical to prepare yourself and have a high level of knowledge in using ICT and technical software in addition to high academic results and receiving a Diploma or Degree. Abdul Wahab & Ahmad (2017) define information technology as any method used to transfer, disseminate and display information. Information Technology or IT and Information and Communication Technology or ICT is the technology required in data processing (Abdul Wahab & Ahmad, 2017). However, the title's scope is extremely broad in terms of information management and processing in general. As a result, computers and software are used precisely and simply to modify, store, protect, process, transfer, view, and retrieve data regardless of location or time.

Based on this concept, a prospective graduate should be able to use software on a computer or laptop to do work more efficiently and quickly, thus increasing added value in themselves and opening greater opportunities in finding a job. Obviously, the availability of ICT skills will definitely be an advantage to prospective graduates in finding a good job. Apart from that, prospective graduates must also possess technical skills. In general, technical skills are the

abilities and knowledge required to perform certain tasks. Therefore, these skills are frequently associated with Information and Communication Technology (ICT) which necessitates specific processes and work paths. As a result, in these technical skills it is important for prospective graduates to be able to perform data analysis and interpretation in a work organisation (Fuentelsaz, Juan & Javier, 2018). For example, analysing graphs, compiling statistics, performing calculations and more according to the scope of work done. So, high technical skills will definitely attract employers to provide job offers to such prospective graduates. In short, prospective graduates with good and high ICT and technical skills will almost certainly find it easy to find work because such skills are critical in the pursuit of modernity in this era of globalisation. Therefore, it can be concluded that with an emphasis on each of these skills, namely soft skills, foreign language skills, management skills, entrepreneurial skills as well as ICT and technical skills, the university will undoubtedly be able to provide competitive, quality graduates and obtain a place in the job market, which could help the government address the graduate unemployment crisis in the coming years.

B. Collaborative Cooperation and Industry Commitment

The issue of student unemployment in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is a point of contention in the community at the moment. This is because the unemployment rate for these graduates is increasing, even more so now that the world is grappling with the Covid-19 pandemic. Malaysia's unemployment rate increased by 3.9 percent to 610,500 people in March 2020, up from 521,300 people in 2019 (*Berita Harian*, 2020c). The figure is expected to rise in the coming year as the Covid-19 pandemic prevents the opening of economic sectors capable of attracting job-seeking graduates. Consequently, of the overall increase in unemployment, it was found that the graduate rate also contributed to the increase, which was 29.3 percent (*Berita Harian*, 2020c). Furthermore, in an effort to address this issue, the Ministry of Education has implemented some of the best alternatives to reduce unemployment rates by enlisting industry cooperation.

The participation of industry in the development of the national education system is very important. This is due to the fact that industry's involvement in education is especially important in improving the marketability of students or graduates, as well as curriculum development at the university level. Therefore, this matter needs to be given more attention in order to further increase the marketability of graduates as well as the availability of work for graduates. The globalisation of the world forces local HEIs to produce highly skilled, expert and knowledgeable students in order to compete for employment in this demanding world (Othman, 2021). The production of quality workers is an important focus of the country in leading to the country's development and progress, particularly in achieving the vision that has been set. Thus, one of the most effective ways to produce quality graduates with high marketability is to establish strategic partnership with industry (Yusoff, Othman, Mohd Shah, Esa, Abang Muis, Marinsah & Ramlie, 2021b).

Collaboration with this industry is expected to provide opportunities for graduates to get employment within six months of graduating from university (Awasthy, Flint, Sankarnarayama, & Jones, 2020). In this case, having a higher degree certificate alone does not necessarily guarantee the future of graduates in finding employment opportunities. This is because in this era, a person must acquire a more open and up-to-date knowledge, experience, have soft skills and be more positive to prepare themselves before entering the world of more challenging careers later. Among the methods used is to involve the industry in HEIs such as their

involvement in the formulation of HEIs curriculum. In addition, the introduction to programmes from industry cooperation is also a method carried out to increase the marketability of graduates. The last method is to introduce the industrial training policy to the graduates.

(i) Involvement of industry in HEIs

A group of organisations that have engaged in social or economic activities is referred to as an industry. Meanwhile, the term ‘industry’ also refers to individuals or firms involved in a production activity and provision of services. Industry has a role in improving the knowledge and practical skills of students which in turn is able to bridge the gap between theoretical and practical knowledge (Othman, 2021). The emphasis on involving the industry in institutions of higher learning has been emphasised over the past few years. This involvement has resulted in various programmes being conducted by higher institutions in collaboration with the industry. Today, the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) has emphasised the importance of the university in bringing industry figures to teach all students in the classroom (Yahaya & Seman, 2019). This is because the party or instructor from this industry is capable of advising students on the field within the industry.

Although the industry's teaching staff lacks a higher education certificate, they can share their experiences with students, allowing students' minds and hearts to be more receptive to engaging in fields provided by the industry. Not only that, but due to the industry experience of the teaching staff, university lecturers have gained a new perspective on what is happening in the industry (Yahaya & Seman, 2019). For example, issues and problems that arise related to the industry include technology and so on. Apart from the learning and teaching process carried out by the industry to university students, there is also a method that can be carried out by HEIs in addressing the problem of rising unemployment today. Among the methods is the university's open attitude toward involving industry in the development of the university curriculum (Othman, 2021). In particular, while the curriculum was being drafted, consultation with the industry was also taking place which means that a panel of industry representatives gave their opinions and viewed the courses offered by the university. This is because the industry does not want a course offered by the university that is based solely on theory.

(ii) CEO@Faculty Programme

Graduate unemployment is now on the rise, especially as our world is being hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result of the collaboration of the industry and the university, several programmes that have been successfully implemented in order to increase the marketability of graduates have emerged. The CEO@Faculty Programme is one of the successful university-industry collaboration programmes (Azmi, Wan Fakhruddin, Che Me, Mohd Yusof, Wan Ismail, Abal Abas, Mohd Abbas, Ahmad Sabri & Ya'acob, 2021). The CEO@Faculty Programme is an ongoing method conducted by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) to provide early exposure to university students in the real world of work. In this case, the exposure provided is through lecture sessions, invitational lectures, expert panel discussions as well as co-teaching conducted by the CEO (Chief Executive Officer) or leading industry figures (Rybnicek & Koniggruber, 2019).

The industry figures refer to those who have been invited to co-teach and come from a variety of backgrounds. Apart from that, the CEO@Faculty Programme is part of the Malaysian Education Development Plan's Leap 2 initiative, namely Talent Excellence (MOE. 2017). This has demonstrated that the quality of Malaysian HEIs and the Malaysian Higher Education

system will improve if the academic community excels. The academic community consists of researchers, educators, professional practitioners and support staff. In this regard, Leap 2 in this development plan has focused on improving the quality and diversity of talent in the education system in order to ensure that this group becomes more “Relevant, Referred and Respected”, known as 3R (Rybnicek & Konigsgruber, 2019).

The collaboration between universities and industry is an effort undertaken to address the problem of rising graduate unemployment. Not only that, but complex technological and social problems can also be addressed through this collaboration. As a result, the CEO@Faculty Programme approach has involved nearly 64 CEOs (in 2016) who are competent in providing guidance to students about the real world of work, thereby increasing graduates’ marketability (UMP, 2016). For example, University Malaysia Pahang (UMP) is one of the universities that is no exception in benefiting from this programme. One of the CEOs working with UMP is Motorola Solutions (M) Sdn. Bhd which has been recognised as ‘The Most Dedicated CEO’ by the MOHE as a result of the target meeting hours exceeding the target set for him (UMP, 2016). The industry’s cooperation has demonstrated that this cooperation is a solution to the problems that arise with regard to graduates. The proof is that through the CEO@Faculty Programme, well-known industry figures have opened the minds of students, increasing the marketability of graduates.

(iii) 2u2i Programme

The 2u2i programme is a joint venture programme that has been carried out by the university and the industry in increasing the marketability of students and reducing the rising unemployment rate of graduates. The 2u2i Programme has been defined as the Two Universities + 2 Industries Programme (2u2i) and has been conducted in several public universities in Malaysia (*Berita Harian*, 2016b). 2u2i is a job-based learning programme that provides students with a basic knowledge of the industry throughout their studies. In this case, students will spend two years at university studying and focusing solely on theoretical aspects. Meanwhile, the next two years will be spent in the industry where students will continue to learn while gaining work experience (Awasthy et al., 2020). The industry is also involved in the curriculum design for this programme, ensuring that the types of courses offered, learning methods and delivery are relevant and appropriate to the industry field that graduates will choose after graduation.

The goal of this 2u2i/3u1i Programme is to cultivate students’ entrepreneurial spirit through academic and industry collaboration through a Work-based Learning Afterschool delivery approach (MOE, 2020b). This 2u2i or 3u1i programme is an initiative that has been taken through the Malaysian Education Development Plan under Leap 1 which aims to produce talented, skilled and knowledgeable graduates who are prepared to face the challenges of the 21st century (MOE, 2020b). Furthermore, the combination of academic learning and real-world learning in the workplace provided by this programme can improve experiential learning and provide opportunities for students to earn money while learning (*Berita Harian*, 2016b). Additionally, graduates of this programme will gain more relevant industry experience in their chosen field of study. As a result, graduates’ attributes can be enhanced through active and constructive experience, particularly in the areas of self-confidence, innovation, and professionalism. Hence, this programme can help graduates improve their functional skills such as teamwork, social skills, emotional intelligence, and negotiation abilities (MOE, 2020b). In short, the 2u2i/3u1i Programme, which is the result of collaboration between universities and

industries, can produce graduates who are more sensitive and prepared to face real-world job challenges in the future.

(iv) Basic Industrial Training (Practical Training)

The Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) has made numerous efforts to produce quality graduates who can meet market needs and assist graduates in obtaining jobs, one of which is through industrial training policies. Industrial training is defined as the placement of students in an organisation to receive supervised practical training in a specific industry, either locally or internationally. Students will undertake this practical training within the stipulated time frame and after that they will be awarded a Certificate, Diploma or Undergraduate Degree (Muhammad Jamil, Othman, Abdul Rahman, Faizal Mohamed & Zainuddin, 2016). MOHE has also implemented a compulsory industrial training programme for graduates within a period of four months or six months. In addition, according to certain courses, industrial training programmes have been made mandatory for the purpose of graduation and as a result must be given credit hours in accordance with the Malaysian Qualifications Framework Standards (MQF).

Graduates who participate in this industrial training will be given credit hours, such as not less than two credit hours or more than 12 credit hours (Muhammad Jamil et al., 2016). Furthermore, this industrial training programme is designed to provide students with opportunities to gain experience in related organisations or companies in line with the desire to produce skilled graduates and experts in a variety of fields to meet the country's current needs. During the training, students will be exposed to the real world of work, as well as to the most recent technology and market knowledge, as well as gain practical experience in their respective fields of specialisation (*Bernama*, 2021b). As a result of this situation, students will strive to apply what they have learned in the classroom to solve problems in the workplace. Apart from that, industrial training is also an opportunity for students or graduates to demonstrate their talents and abilities in order to attract companies to hire them after graduation (Awasthy et al., 2020).

In addition, students' required skills can be enhanced and further developed through this training particularly when guided and trained by industry professionals. This industrial training programme is not limited to Malaysian graduates but also includes international students enrolled in Malaysian higher education institutions (*Bernama*, 2021b). In short, the industrial training programme is one of the initiatives that have been taken to reduce the unemployment crisis among graduates. Therefore, this industrial training programme is mandatory for all students in a particular field at all levels of higher education in order to be competitive with other individuals in choosing employment opportunities. Hence, with all the experience and knowledge and skills gained, students are better prepared to take on challenges in the world of work that they will be involved in later.

Concluding thoughts

In conclusion, this study seeks to understand how the entrepreneurship education literacy in the digital transformation phase benefits graduates of the Covid-19 post-pandemic, particularly when faced with an unemployment crisis. In general, it is undeniable that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a tremendously negative impact not only in Malaysia but in all countries in the world. In the early stages of acceptance, the majority of citizens are still trying to understand what is going on and to comprehend the level of seriousness of this pandemic. This is due to the fact that while the country last experienced such a crisis in 2009, the country was able to

deal with it in a relatively short period of time. However, this time around it was a very different situation due to the limited movement of the people and the level of uncertainty regarding the immediate future. Nonetheless, people were able to adapt to the situation by establishing new norms. They have started to understand the rhythm and are more willing to accept the situation. Despite the government's difficulties in stabilising the economy, the government has not forgotten its responsibility and trust in assisting in easing the burden of the people. The government is aware that such a pandemic will have an effect on the country's economy, causing it to falter. If the economy suffers, it will affect everyone, especially the youth who are looking for jobs. In the context of this paper's discussion, the understanding gained from political education among university graduates involved in this study confirms that the country is capable of producing a young generation capable of facing the turmoil of economic insecurity maturely and resolving increasingly difficult national challenges in line with globalisation. Graduates are expected to be realistic even if they have completed their field of study at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels but have to be unemployed for a long time and continue to look for work.

The current issue is the recent increase in the unemployment rate among local graduates which is not to be taken lightly. This is due to the fact that this matter continues to increase every year in Malaysia and other countries. This is not only detrimental to the graduates, but also to their families as well as the educational institutions. In fact, it also causes many graduates who have great potential in the field in which they are involved to be unable to develop their talent, which will be rendered useless if the talent is unable to be utilised due to the country's limited job opportunities. Not to mention that an increase in unemployment among local graduates will cripple the country's economy because these human capitals will be unable to contribute to Malaysia in the fields in which they are involved at university. Hence, the government and educational institutions collaborate to produce realistic students who can adapt to whatever type of job they are involved in.

It should also be remembered that the key to a person's success is in their own hands and graduates must cultivate the mindset known as positive thinking; in other words, right thinking will determine right action. It means that graduates should not give up easily in finding a job and not be too selective in entering the field of employment. This is because choosing a job will only lead to an increase in the unemployment rate among graduates. Therefore, graduates must be realistic before entering the workforce. For example, having mastery of various types of languages, mastering the field of digital technology knowledge, having competence skills as well as being involved in generating upskilling and reskilling. The issue of rising graduate unemployment can be reduced rather than continuing to rise year after year. This is because if the unemployment rate among graduates continues to rise every year, it will cause a slew of problems in the job market and complicate the country's current relatively modest economic performance.

Economic instability exacerbates the difficulty of avoiding and reducing unemployment among graduates. Graduates can benefit to some extent from the introduction of this excellent value plan. In addition to the proposal of monetary grants, programmes to assist graduates who lack work experience in honing their skills is also suggested. We should applaud the government's efforts to aid the country's recovery and economic growth. Despite the impossibility of reviving the economy, the government continues to seek proactive solutions by introducing various alternatives. In that context, these realistic graduates are critical for reducing the annual increase

in unemployment among graduates of HEIs and PHEI. Furthermore, the students' talents and fields learned during their previous studies were not wasted and did not interfere with their time spent studying at the HEI and PHEI.

In addition to what they learn, it can be used to glorify the country's name, develop the country's economy and promote national progress. It is especially worth noting that the public or private sectors do not need to attract workers from other countries to work in Malaysia, which would incur enormous and unnecessary costs when the country's graduates have realistic skills. This will also be able to produce a new generation that is more knowledgeable and capable of elevating Malaysia's name to a global level. Therefore, the government and higher education must play an important role in ensuring that prospective graduates possess realistic skills and extensive knowledge. Concerning the collaboration between Higher Education Institutions (HEI) and industry, graduates have reaped numerous benefits particularly in overcoming Malaysia's graduate unemployment crisis.

In this regard, the Ministry of Higher Education has also taken the initiative to enlist the participation of more industry figures in efforts to strengthen national education. This is due to the fact that in this borderless world, human resources are recognised as the most important assets for generating national development. The development of quality human resources is critical to a country's success because these are individuals who will contribute to increase productivity and will be able to elevate the country's name to a higher level. Therefore, as the country undergoes current changes, the university and industry must collaborate to realise the country's noble aspirations of increasing employment opportunities and graduate marketability in order to produce graduates who can compete to bring the country's name to the global stage.

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