

Exploring the Role of Internship on Graduates' Employability: A Phenomenon Inquiry on Undergraduate Business Students in Malaysia

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Abstract

Graduate employability requires increased attention across all essential aspects within higher education systems worldwide. Education systems should not only focus on academic teaching and the learning process; they should also shelter a broader range of subjects, such as the progress of a professional identity, supportive economic growth, and, most significantly, improving students' employability. With the unemployment rate at 3.3 percent, this study is viewed from both employers' and graduates' perspectives. Therefore, this study has two objectives. First, to study graduates' employability with the role of internship; second, to identify the roles of internship both from potential graduates and employers' perspectives. The study uses a qualitative approach, and semi-structured interviews were chosen for the data collection process. The selected ten (10) respondents, five from various industries as employers and five as potential graduates or interns, were interviewed. These findings revealed three roles of internship, firstly working experience, secondly, developing soft skills and thirdly building networking. The study proposed using quantitative data for future studies with a bigger sample size.

Keywords: Graduates' Employability, Internship, Working Experience, Soft Skills, Networking, Employer

Introduction

Graduate employability in all crucial parts has to be given more concern in higher education systems around the world. Education systems should not only focus on academic teaching and the learning process; they should also shelter a broader range of subjects, such as the progress of a professional identity, supportive economic growth, and, most significantly, improving students' employability. In the specific condition of business, business education programs must support the growth of graduates' ability to enter the labor force by offering well-informed and talented workers who can satisfy employers' expectations (Cammayo & Gonzales, 2024; Mseleku, 2024). The curriculum makers need to develop globally competitive human, technological resources and services through quality instruction, innovative research, responsive community engagement and viable resources management programs for inclusive growth and sustainable development (Cammayo & Gonzales, 2024).

The most important asset for the organization is human capital. Individuals that had been selected carefully and being placed in the organization are the most competitive asset and cannot be cloned. The human resources that are deemed to be in the highest form of quality is crucial because he or she can strengthen the human capital in an organization. Human capital is unique and different from any other capital in an organization because human capital is the intangible asset that cannot be reported in any financial reporting and not something that is being chased like hot commodities between industrial competition (Azmi et al., 2018; Al-Shehab et al., 2021). Although the concept of human capital is not something new, it is essential to introduce the coherent method in developing the human capital as part of management practice (Ma'dan et al., 2019). The serial trend like the pandemic Covid 19, artificial intelligence, technology revolutions are some of the factors that create the recent placement of the job. This trend changed human resources naturally. The important trend is to create balance between machines and workers. Therefore, the workforce in the future will skew to the era of digital workforce because it combines both the usage of machines and human workforce (Law, 2018). Hence, to ensure that potential workers have the skill that is needed by the employers, is the important priority among leaders in business industries. What will happen to the potential workers that had not been equipped with the right knowledge and skilled and the right quality? These workers' sadly will not be considered by the industrial players for the job opportunities. Therefore, it is a challenge for the graduates to prepare themselves with varieties of skills so that they could be acknowledged as an asset to their future employers and overcome the first barriers in the fluctuating markets.

Graduates' employability is a hot topic that has been debated around the world (Azmi et al., 2018; Law, 2018; Bassah & Noor, 2023; Gupta et al., 2023). In Malaysia, data showed that the unemployment rate is around 3.3 percent or 520,000 people (Puad & Desa, 2020). After five years, the unemployment rate decreased a little bit to about 3.2 percent but still fresh graduates failed to secure jobs that related to their field of study (Saleh & Wahab, 2025). According to Puad & Desa (2020), most of the youngsters who are not working are in the age of 15-24 years old and this is about 10.8 percent of the overall data. According to the authors, these numbers keep increasing each year, making the graduates feel they are not confident of their future. This statement is supported by Darmi et al., (2020) that claimed 60.0 percent of graduates being reported not working even though they had been graduated over a year. This number is worrisome because the numbers of students being graduated keep increasing every year and this created a competitive workforce in the job market (Razali et al., 2021).

Razali et al., 2021 had also stated that pandemic COVID19 threatened the economic stability recently and the fluctuating market will make it difficult for graduates to be hired. As the consequences, variety of problems will occur from the financial problems, poverty, debt, and stress at home, stressed from the family that make them unable to survive, bored, feeling embarrassed, have stigma, isolation, social crimes, lacking of self-confidence and low self-esteem, deterioration of job skilled and poor health (Saleh & Wahab, 2025; Zainudin et al., 2024)

In addition, Puad & Desa (2020) stated that one of the unemployment problems is when there is a mismatch between the job seekers and job opportunities. The research stated that some of the graduates had over qualification in terms of academic qualification but lacked the skill that is needed for a certain job. Rahman et al., (2019) reported that soft skill is one of the important factors that had been needed apart from academic reputation. It is not a surprise when this issue is being discussed in Berita Harian in 2019 reported two of the important factors faced by the employers related to fresh graduates were soft skills and attitude (Ngah et al., 2019). Employers claimed that graduates lacked the soft skills that are needed to do their job and had attitude problems. Graduates believed that they are the generation that is special because they want the easy job but want a higher salary even though they did not have powerful communication skills. Graduates also claimed that employers did not give them space and chances because they only want experienced and excellent workers (Ngah et al., 2019). This statement was supported by Hossain et al., (2018). The authors claimed that the employers did not want to employ fresh graduates because they are overqualified and tend to select foreign workers because the foreigners are more obedient, received low salaries and did not have attitude problems like local fresh graduates. Even after six years, Carolyn Crist in HR Dive (2025) reported that most hiring managers feel skeptical about the capabilities and professionalism of young workers aka fresh graduates joining the workforce with 1 in 6 saying they are reluctant to hire the cohort. In the report also, Crist (2025) stated that in a survey of 1000 hiring managers, 8 in 10 said a recent college graduates didn't work out at their company during the past year and claimed among the companies where recent graduates didn't work out, nearly half of the hiring managers said the top issue was a lack of motivation or initiative, lack of professionalism (39.0 percent), excessive usage of phone (39.0 percent), poor time management (38.0 percent), attitude of indifference (37.0 percent), poor communication skills, difficulty in handling feedback and inability to adapt to company culture were among the reasons.

Students usually enroll in universities to earn an academic qualification or degree, gain appropriate skills, and step into the job through employment opportunities (Bisschoff & Massyn, 2024). However, according to (Mseleku, 2024), universities do not equip graduates with practical knowledge and skills that will enable them to be effective and adaptable in the workplace. The curriculum design and teaching method used by universities must be re-evaluated to equip graduates with the skills that the industry requires to adapt to its changing environment. There is an important gap between employers' expectations and graduates' competencies in business and economics, as highlighted in the study conducted by Aung & Asavisanu, (2025) and Valdez et al., (2025). The findings revealed that employers felt there was a lack of important skills, knowledge, and abilities among fresh graduates. This disconnect underscores the need for universities to bridge the gap by enhancing curricula to better align with the skills demanded in the workforce. The study suggests that graduates often enter the

job market without the practical skills and competencies necessary to meet employers' expectations, creating challenges for both employers and new hires in adapting to the workplace environment. It proves that there is a mismatch between the university curriculum and market demand. Similarly, in the study Saleh & Wahab (2025), it was summarized that the competence of new employees is far from the managers' expectations in decision-making, problem-solving, lifelong learning, leadership, and analyzing information skills.

This indicates that there is a need to improve the teaching methods for business students. Additionally, (Presti et al., 2023) the results showed that although intern students fared well in other parameters like self-management, using Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) efficiently, people relations, and team spirit, innovative approach and critical thinking, self-confidence, and assertiveness and drive to learn, it also indicates that they lacked in communication skills, problem solving ability, critical skills, and business understanding. This proves that even though they possess other skills, there are still some that they lack, which employers need. Thus, preparing business students for their careers involves a gap between what employers expect and what intern business students think about job skills. While schools focus on teaching academic and job-related skills, there's a disconnect between what students learn and what employers want. This mismatch makes it hard for new graduates to find jobs and succeed in their careers. Therefore, an internship is one of the suggestions to reduce the gap.

Fresh graduates sometimes struggle to find employment owing to the lack of relevant and adequate work experience (Zainudin et al., 2024; Valdez et al., 2025). This is particularly true for graduates who completed degree programs which are theory-focused. Students who are at the exit levels in their academic programs generally experience nervousness about their chances to secure employment after graduation due to the lack of work experience (Ting & Ying, 2012; Aung & Asavisanu, 2025). In Malaysia, some of the companies generally require some level of work experience even for entry-level jobs. Thus, the lack of work experience is a common barrier to the labour market for most Malaysian fresh graduates (Zainudin et al., 2024; Shethiya et al., 2025). Clearly, both qualifications and work experience are equally important for employability in the modern labour market characterised by job scarcity (Presti et al., 2023). While internships are primarily designed to provide work experience to graduates (Pianda et al., 2024), it is evident that some internship programmes play a critical role on the employability of graduates. This study thus addresses an important question on the role of internship on graduate employability. In Malaysia, numerous studies have analysed graduate unemployment (Saleh & Wahab, 2023). Some other studies have focused specifically on the strategies to address graduate unemployment (Zainudin et al., 2024). While an adequate body of knowledge exists in this field, there are limited studies addressing the role of internship on employability, particularly among fresh graduates in Malaysia. Therefore, this study has a unique focus in terms of target population – fresh graduates. Unlike previous studies which focused on graduates' unemployment, this study is based on the notion that graduates (young graduates) are extremely vulnerable in the labour market and the contribution of internships towards their employability should be explored. The purpose of this paper is to explore the role of internship on fresh graduate employability in Malaysia. It argues that properly designed internships can facilitate the transition of fresh graduates from higher learning institutions to the working world.

As the value of the workers can be seen not only from their academic qualification but also from other aspects, the theory behind the graduates' employment is the human capital theory (Azmi et al., 2018; Olaniyan & Okemakinde, 2008). Human capital is the basis to employment and marketability of workers. What is human capital? Human capital is being classified as intangible asset or human quality with economic benefits. The value of the workers, working experience and skill are all included in human capital. The human quality assets including education, training, intelligence, skills, health, and various criteria that had been needed by the employers liked loyalty and time management skills. Based on the statement above, it is clear that graduates' employability is being influenced by the quality of its lecturers, competencies, university curriculum and employers' factors. Even though there are limited studies that connect between graduates' employability and human capital, and this is the gap that this research wants to fulfil that is relate the graduates' employability with internship and human capital (Saleh & Wahab, 2025; Zainudin et al., 2024; Mseleku, 2024; Azmi et al., 2018; Olamiyan & Okemakinde, 2008; Olichi & Pyiki, 2019; Puad & Desa, 2020). Therefore, this research has two objectives to achieve:

- To study the graduates' employability with the role of internship.
- To identify the role of internship from the perspectives of potential graduates and employers.

The study of graduate employability is important for individuals, educational institutions, employers, and society, as it helps identify skill gaps, improve educational curricula, enhance workforce competitiveness, and contribute to economic growth. Research on employability highlights the critical role of «soft skills» such as communication and teamwork, often prioritized over academics by employers, and the need for educational systems to foster these transferable skills to bridge the gap between education and the rapidly evolving demands of the 21st-century job market.

Studies on graduate employability contribute by identifying crucial employability factors beyond academics, such as soft skills (communication, teamwork) and digital/AI literacy, highlighting the importance of practical experience, and analyzing the gap between employer expectations and graduate skills. They also provide practical recommendations for universities on curriculum enhancement and for employers to address skill deficits, offer frameworks for improving graduate tracer studies, and contribute to broader discussions on factors influencing employability at individual, institutional, and societal levels.

Literature Review

Even though graduates' employability depends on various factors, the researchers only focus on two aspects: quality of the graduates and employers' perspective. Focusing on these two aspects will make the research emphasize on two important criteria: graduates and employers.

Graduates' Employability

There is much literature on the definition of graduates' employability whether from employers' perspective or workers perspectives. For example, Law (2018) connected the graduates' employability with graduates' attributes. Another comprehensive definition came from Lubna et al., (2017). They had conducted the research for five years (2010-2015) about

graduates' employability and found two clear themes: first, skilled, characteristics and value related to graduates' employability and secondly, graduates or potential graduates' perception and their awareness level on employability and marketability. On the other different perspective, Bhola & Dhanawale (2013) stated that research on employability needs to encourage both employers and graduates. This research led to one different definition of employability. The research found that both employers' and workers seen employability as individual capabilities to get and sustaining their job (Bhola & Dhanawale, 2013; Sumanisiri et al., 2015)

Another study by Rowe & Zeqwaard (2017) and Azmi et al. (2018) defined employability as graduates' preparation to join the workforce, self-employed or becoming an entrepreneur. Laskhmi & Siddharta (2019) described that employability as one competency to achieve organizational objectives and suit themselves with their skills in order to fulfil employer expectation. Romgens, et al., (2019) defined employability as competency development in various dimensions that they received in school or at work. This research explained employability as graduates' ability to suit their knowledge, skills and attitude towards their potential job and potential employer. Wafi et al., (2022) added that soft skills need to be taught when they are in academic condition whether in their degree or diploma. Wafi et al., (2022) also stated that skills they learnt during their academic tenure are not sufficient to ensure their job after they graduate and in the real work force context, need to have skills that are beneficial for future employment. Valdez et al., 2025; Aung & Asavinasu, 2025; Mseleku, 2024; Bisschoff & Massyn, 2024 explained that employability depends on the soft skills of the graduates.

Quality of Graduates'

The researchers and industrial players had discussed and debated in detail about the quality of graduates. Dafou (2009) stated that organizations seek graduates that have good technical skills, working experience, good personality, and self-motivation to work even though they are faced with problems and challenges. This view was supported by Auta & Onwisuru (2022) and Sothshangane & Ohioha (2022). Finch et al., (2013) said that soft skills are one of the effective measures to appraise the candidate selection. Dicker et al., (2018) claimed that personality is significant to determine the quality of graduates and employability.

Safie & Nayan (2010) stressed that personality of candidates are the important factors in graduates' employability, apart from self-management and teamwork. Hossain et al., (2018) listed attributes that had significant relationships and influenced the graduates' employability: responsible, selfless and positive, gives and takes. Even though many studies support the relationship between quality of graduates and graduates' employability, but in certain cultures, the social background is deemed to be more important than the quality of graduates. For example, in China, employability and marketability did not have significant relationship with graduates' skills but depending on the social background and relationship networking (Chan, 2012)

The employers' need workers to equipped themselves with efficiencies in technology skills, efficient language, and can communicate efficiently in third language, time management, analytical skills, problem solving and leadership skills, communication skills, creative, innovative and reflective skills (Saleh & Wahab, 2025; Zainuddin, 2024; Rahman et al., 2022;

Rido, 2020; Bhola & Dhanawade, 2013; Azmi et al., 2018). Olichi & Pyiki (2019) and Lakshmi & Siddharda (2019) stressed that good competencies are essential but to have graduates that could use the human capital will be an asset to the organization. In this study, the quality of graduates can be classified as attributes, attitude, competency and soft skills of the graduates.

Employers' Factor

Employers factor refers to the role of employers as the creator of the job and in selecting the candidates that are really suitable for the human capital for their company. Even though Puad & Desa (2020) exposed that there is a mismatch between the job creator and the job seekers for graduates. Azmi et al (2018) also found that there is a mismatch between the numbers of fresh graduates with the job opportunity offered in the market that explains why there is a low percentage of graduates' employability and mismatch between their qualification and job offered.

Chan (2012) stated that there is no relationship between employers' factor and graduates' employability because there are other factors that are more dominant like graduates' background. In International Labor Conference (ILC) 2009, with participation from government, and employers' delegation and workers from ILC members showed the role of employers and government involvement in the issue of employability and take the "Global Job Fact". One of the purposes of this conference is to prepare for the job. Therefore, employers seek solutions in matching the job with candidates' qualifications. Bhola & Dhanawade (2013) supported this idea and found that there is a correlation between employers' factors and graduates' employability.

Basically, skills in the workplace are important. Gibb et al., (2011) stated that candidates cannot choose the job because of a lack of communication skills when facing future employers. Stone et al.,(2013) mentioned that effective communication in the workplace is based on the message received and delivered precisely and that is important as compared to high prestige culture. Incapabilities in stating the ideas and message can make the graduates have problems in negotiating their salary scales. In addition, Hossain et al., (2018) found that employers practised discrimination towards graduates including offering a lower salary than the foreign workers. When this happens, graduates are left with no choice, either accepting the work with low salary or declining the offer. Bassah & Noor (2023) found that employers' readiness is the key to graduates' employability. Ali et al., 2023 stated that there is a gap between employers' expectation towards graduates' real potential. In general, employers view graduates lacking the ability to think, make decisions and problem-solving skills therefore graduates miss the opportunities to be hired. One of the roles that could be played by the employers' is to develop human capital that needs the employer creating an important environment where the workers could learn and use innovative ideas, learn and get the new competencies and develop their skills, improving their attitude and behaviour. Therefore, worker development is created by sharing things between employer and employee and this is deemed very important (Dachner et al., 2019). In this research, employers' factors are translated into demand for the job, scale, salary and the employer's ability to have on and off the job training.

The Role of Internship

Due to the increase in graduate unemployment, universities are also pressured to improve the employability of graduates. These institutions have since invested considerably in what can be referred to as internship programs in universities. This is done through the establishment of a curriculum where a student in a final year will intern in the company of their choice. According to Mseleku (2024), the internship program is where the students' theoretical knowledge coupled with practical work experience is crucial in ensuring graduate employability. The results of this study suggest that study programmes that include internships improve graduate employability significantly (Mseleku, 2024; Valdez et al., 2025). Similarly, a study conducted by Presti et al., (2023) showed that partnerships between universities and firms in providing internships smoothen the transition of students from university to the labour market. These results underscore the importance of integrating experiential learning into university curriculum as also evident in many other studies (Msleleku, 2024; Presti et al., 2023; Valdez et al., 2025). In Malaysia, internships are increasingly recognised by universities as providing opportunities for students to acquire practical skills and learn about the world of work (Zainudin et al., 2024). Furthermore, a study conducted by Shaheem et al., (2022) indicated the role of internships in providing employability skills and work readiness to graduates. Based on the available literature, providing practical skills to students is crucial for their employability.

The Human Capital Theory on Employability

The human capital theory has been studied thoroughly in graduates' employability (Azmi et al., 2018; Ma'dan et al., 2018). This theory is based on intangible individuals on their capabilities and strengths. Intangible assets of individuals seen as expansion of human capital like specific information expansion, habit, social attribute, and personality of an individual like value added economic to individual and organization. The human capital theory explained how education can improve productivity and efficiencies of the workers. There are three important aspects in this theory, first, the new generation need to expose to the accepted knowledge by the old generation, secondly, the new generation need to learn how to use the knowledge to develop new product, new process or new method and third, human need to be encouraged to develop new ideas, product, process and method through creative approach (Olaniyan & Okemakinde, 2006). Hamat & Nordin (2012) had identified education and training as the important aspect in developing the human capital.

However, human capital theory has its own limitations because this theory is linear in nature and cannot explain things that are complex. Therefore, it cannot explain how education can improve productivity, how salaries become imbalanced or how to explain the role of status (Ma'dan et al., 2019). This theory stated that assets or quality that cannot be listed in company accounts in value form can only be classified as economic value in terms of experience and workers experience including asset like education, training, wisdom, skills, health and others that often been valued by employers like loyalty and time management (Ma'dan et al., 2019; Hamat & Nordin, 2012). In the context of graduates' employability, the university's ability to prepare a good human capital through dynamic curriculum, that could produce graduates that are highly skilled with good attributes, efficiencies that help employers in offering jobs to graduates with reasonable starting salaries. In conclusion, graduates, firms and countries can add value to the organization and strengthen economic power.

Research Methodology

This study is using qualitative study to study graduates' employability from employer perspective and graduates' perspective with the emphasis on internship. Therefore, before the interview being conducted, protocol questions were constructed. This set of questions have semi-structured questions that have been validated by two experts in human resource management and graduates' employability. When the researchers got confirmation from the potential respondents, another set of questions was delivered to the respondents.

First, representatives from the various industries that could represent the employers and secondly, a semi structured interview with business students who went for internship programs in this university. The questions used both open and closed ended questions using the same module as Wafi et al., 2022.

The questions that had been asked to the respondents were based on employer perspective on graduate employability and internship. There are two important factors why employer perspective is being noted, first because future graduates should know what employers need and could formulate things that can be beneficial for both graduates and employers and secondly, potential graduates could be polished into what employers wanted.

From employers' perspective, there are five questions that were being asked. First, how internship contributes to graduates' employability from the perspective of the employer, second, factors that contribute to successful internship programs, third, what is the value of internship to employer, fourth, what are the challenges associated with internship and lastly, the areas that required improvement in internship programs from employers' perspectives. For intern students of potential graduates, there are also five questions that being asked, first, how internship contributes to graduates' employability, second, factors that contribute to successful internship from intern perspective, the value of internship to intern students, the challenges faced by intern students during internship and lastly the areas that required improvement from intern students' perspective.

The completed answers were transcribed in the document and this document was then given to 10 respondents (five from employers, five from intern) for them to assess their answer and validate the transcript. For analysis purposes, one thematic analysis was used to assess the current data. When the data had been validated, the data had been categorized according to the theme with a manual method. When the data had been processed and identified according to the theme, the researchers had prepared one set of forms for expected validation (Bassah & Noor, 2023; Ali et al 2023).

Findings and Analysis

This research had found three themes that dominated this study on graduates' employability and the role of internship that had been agreed by both employers and future graduates. The employers are coded as E while the students' or future graduates are coded as SFG. The themes are working experience, developing soft skills and networking. The respondents' profile is as below:

Code Name	Firm	Sector	Designation	Private/Public Company
E1	A	Education	Officer	Private
E2	B	Investment	Manager	Private
E3	C	Services	Officer	Private
E4	D	Manufacturing	Supervisor	Private
E5	E	Retailing	Executive	Private
SFG1	A	Education	Intern	Private
SFG2	B	Investment	Intern	Private
SFG3	C	Services	Intern	Private
SFG4	D	Manufacturing	Intern	Private
SFG5	E	Retailing	Intern	Private

Working Experience

This study found that the internship program is designed to equip graduates with working experience. This is based on the evidence that graduates require work experience in order to access the labour market. It was reported that most graduates in the internship program acquire some form of work experience which is crucial for employability. For information, the final year degree students are required to do their internship for six months and during this internship, they are provided with allowances from the company, and they are required to do jobs similar to real employees. When interviewed about the role of the internship, both the employers and future graduates (all of them) reported its role on working experience. For example, one future graduate, SFG5 expressed the following:

“Well, internships enhance employability by providing hands-on industry experience and allowing students to apply academic knowledge to real-work settings. It also helps build confidence when entering the job market”.

Her thought was agreed by her friend, SFG4

“Internship has helped me gain hands-on experience that I could never get in the classroom. I learned how to use the actual company system, follow Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and deal with real problems. The practical experience exposure makes me more confident and better prepared to combat in the job market.”

This was echoed by employer, E5 who expressed his view

“Each exposure to industry provides interns with valuable insights and workplace culture, the technology in use and opportunities. These practical experiences are often unavailable in the classroom and will make interns better prepare for the real world work environment and can serve as strong leverage when approaching potential employers.”

The above comments indicate that the internship is recognised for its role in providing work experience opportunities, particularly to future graduates. Through participating in the internship program, future graduates obtain work experience which is crucial for their employability in Malaysia. While data shows that most graduates participate in the internship program to acquire work experience necessary to obtain permanent employment, some are still unable to have their first job maybe because they do their internship in a company that cannot provide jobs to them. In this regard, it is better for the interns to seek internship places who can provide job opportunities rather than a handsomely paid allowance.

Developing Soft Skills

In this borderless world and when the economy is not based on agriculture or industries but focusing more on knowledge-based economy, therefore they also demand for a worker that possesses high valued skills or what we called as soft skills. If future graduates did not possess adequate relevant skill sets, it might be impossible for future graduates to assess the labour markers. In exploring the role of internship on graduate employability, this research found that one of the expectations from the graduate internship programs is to provide graduates with employability skills. This study found that the graduate internship provided some soft skills required by employers. One future graduate, SFG3 expressed her view.

“Internships enhance employability by improving communication and problem-solving skills and allowing students to be confident”.

Her view was echoed by her friend, SFG2 who expressed

“Internship helps graduates understand job expectations. It improves soft skills like communication skills, system knowledge and increases their chances of getting hired . Employers prefer candidates with internship backgrounds as emphasized by my supervisor.”

The employers also agreed that future graduates can develop their skills as expressed by E4.

“Internship gives students a chance to apply what they have learned in class, building up their skills, especially their soft skills like analytical and problem-solving skills, and understand how things work in the actual job market. It makes them more ready and confident to enter the workforce”.

Professional Networking

In the era of globalization, networking has become even more critical for future employment and career growth. Workers either new or old workers, sometimes depend on networking to get their job done and working opportunities. Some study conducted in China shows that background showed more impact than good academic qualifications (Chan, 2012). The study discovered that a good background could lead to good connections and provide more opportunities. This study found that one of the roles of the internship is to provide networking opportunities for future graduates. Most graduates reported that the internship did provide opportunities for networking as showed in the sentences below as noted by one of the employers E1,

“Internships provide graduates with real-work experience, help them develop relevant skills and most importantly build professional networks and understand work culture, all of which make them more competitive and employable in the job market”.

Another employer, E5, said the same sentiment and expressed his view

“Early exposure to industry provides interns with opportunities to build professional connections and networking. This can prepare interns with a real world work environment”.

The same views were also shared by the future graduates, SFG5 who said

“Internship helps build professional networking and enhance confidence when entering the job market”.

Her sentiment is also being shared by another future graduate, SFG1.

"Internship gives opportunities to students to understand the industry or employers' needs and build up professional networking".

Based on the findings above, therefore, internship is not only critical for future graduates to gain working experience and develop soft skills, it is also crucial for future graduates to build professional networking. Networking is an important factor contributing to graduate employment in this borderless era when all the information is easy to obtain at your own fingertips.

Discussion

This study recognizes graduate employability as a pressing economic concern, with Malaysia's unemployment rate standing at 3.3 percent. Research on employability offers potential solutions to this challenge. Within Malaysia, exploring the role of internships in supporting future graduates and improving university graduate employability is paramount. Internships function as transitional experiences that bridge academic and professional life, equipping students with the capabilities to navigate the job market successfully.

This study uses qualitative data since it is an exploratory study and this research has found out the role of internship according to interns or future graduates and employers' perspective. The first role according to both sides is preparing the graduates with working experience that could enhance the employability of the future graduates. The second role according to both sides is developing soft skills as these soft skills are deemed important and beneficial for a company. The soft skills that could be developed by doing an internship are communication skills, problems solving skills, analytical skills and information skills. The third role according to both sides is professional networking as graduates could build their own networking to ensure they can perform their job smoothly. Therefore, the first objective of this study is achieved.

Based on the human capital theory, graduates could secure employment if his or her internship is successful. For the second objective, both future graduates and employers had stressed three same important roles of internship like above, working experience, soft skills and networking. Therefore, we could conclude that the second objective is also being achieved.

Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, it can be summed up that internships play an important role in graduates' employability by providing graduates with working experience, soft skills and networking. Doing internships, future graduates could also prepare themselves for their real world work setting environment and building up their confidence level. However, since this study is exploratory in nature, it has many limitations. Future research should employ quantitative methodologies with an expanded sample size and establish digital platforms enabling employers to submit formal reports on interns to their respective universities.

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