

# Addressing Unemployment Issues and the Role of Universities as Platforms for Graduate Employability

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## Abstract

Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in Malaysia, it has had a discernible negative impact, especially on the workforce and on university graduates seeking employment opportunities upon completing their studies. This situation necessitated the Malaysian government's implementation of movement control orders, which significantly affected the employment sector. Many job sectors in Malaysia were halted due to movement restrictions, leading to large companies reducing their workforce due to the substantial losses incurred during the Covid-19 pandemic, ultimately resulting in limited job opportunities for university graduates. In line with these circumstances, this paper discusses the research objectives undertaken to analyse trends and identify preparatory measures that university graduates can take to address this unemployment issue. Some of the highlighted issues include: (i) The need for university graduates to deepen their cognitive knowledge or generic skills, (ii) The implementation of the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) in higher education, (iii) The role of universities as platforms for graduate employability, and (iv) Government initiatives offering job opportunities for graduates. The qualitative content analysis method, involving data from secondary sources such as indexed books, academic journals, official websites, online news sources, and books, has been employed in this writing. As a result, this paper initiates a discussion on how to address unemployment among university graduates, emphasizing the roles of individuals, universities, and government efforts in producing competitive graduates akin to those from developed countries. Suggestions and implications related to addressing the unemployment issue are topics that can be further explored, contributing to the rejuvenation of public universities while simultaneously enhancing public knowledge regarding these institutions.

**Keywords:** University Graduates, Cognitive Knowledge, Generic Skills, Employability, Unemployment

## **Introduction**

The unemployment rate has consistently been a major concern for graduates over the years. Every day, thousands of graduates successfully complete their studies in both public and private higher education institutions. However, despite their academic achievements, many of them fail to secure employment, forcing them to consider alternative career paths or remain unemployed while waiting for opportunities to arise (Othman, Mokhtar, & Esa, 2022a). The Department of Statistics Malaysia reported in 2020 that there were 200,000 unemployed graduates, marking a 22.5% increase from the previous year (Prime Minister's Department, 2021). Given the current economic uncertainty and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative to address this issue.

According to data shared by the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) in conjunction with the 65th Merdeka celebration, there are approximately 3.71 million graduates working at a skilled level, 1.77 million at a semi-skilled level, and 128,979 graduates employed in low-skilled jobs (Liyana, 2022). These figures indicate that many of the nation's graduates have placed themselves within the same educational bracket. However, there are still 197,400 graduates classified as unemployed (Liyana, 2022). Therefore, this paper aims to analyze trends and identify preparatory measures that university graduates can take to address the issue of unemployment. Dominant issues that will be discussed include efforts to produce university graduates proficient in cognitive knowledge and generic skills, the implementation of the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) in higher education to facilitate job placement, the establishment of platforms that enhance graduate employability, and government initiatives aimed at creating more job opportunities for university graduates.

Aligned with the prevailing circumstances, this paper delineates the research objectives aimed at scrutinizing prevalent trends and discerning preparatory measures accessible to university graduates for mitigating the challenge of unemployment. The identified focal points encompass

- Explore the importance of deepening cognitive knowledge and generic skills for graduates.
- Examine the impact of the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) on higher education.
- Investigate the role of universities as platforms for enhancing graduate employability.
- Assess government initiatives aimed at providing job opportunities for university graduates.

The identified issues include the necessity for university graduates to improve their cognitive knowledge and generic skills, the incorporation of the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) in higher education, the crucial role of universities as platforms for enhancing graduate employability, and government initiatives focused on creating job opportunities for graduates, as elaborated in the following discussion.

## **Issue 1: Cognitive Knowledge or Generic Skills**

Generic skills are of utmost importance for every graduate, serving as a yardstick for their suitability in the job market. In general, generic skills encompass competencies, efficiency, and proficiency. Competency can be defined as the ability to perform a task skillfully and efficiently. Efficiency, on the other hand, refers to the ability to perform a task quickly and

accurately, with skill, expertise, and promptness (Abbas et al., 2017). Proficiency is described as a high level of competence and skill in problem-solving. Generic skills also extend to non-academic skills such as positive values, leadership, teamwork, communication, information technology proficiency, problem-solving, and lifelong learning (Othman *et al.*, 2021a; Muis et al., 2021).

As a result, employers now emphasize change, cost reduction, increased productivity, new markets, products, and services. They seek employees who are flexible, initiative-driven, and capable of handling diverse tasks (Mohamed et al., 2019). In other words, employers look at employability, which encompasses generic skills and basic skills or fundamental skills and includes cognitive, personal, and interpersonal skills relevant to a job, before hiring. This encourages graduates to be competitive and to prepare themselves from an early stage with the necessary basic skills, enabling them to excel and retain employment. Generic skills are essential not only for employment purposes but also for personal identity and ethical values, influencing an individual's work ethics and social interactions within the workplace (Jannah et al., 2019).

Furthermore, in the era of globalization, intense competition exists within the industrial sector due to economic crises and political issues in our country. Considering this situation, the nation needs to rise and seek initiatives to stabilize the economy for the benefit of its citizens. The workforce requirements in various industrial sectors represent an entry point for unemployed graduates to secure employment (Shah *et al.*, 2021). Human resources in the industrial society must be competent and professional, open-minded, eager to receive and analyze information and knowledge, and able to adapt quickly. It is not easy to face an increasingly challenging, complex, and demanding job market with just a certificate, diploma, or degree. In addition to academic qualifications, individuals need to possess good self-skills, various competencies, and experience. Therefore, graduates need to equip themselves with both theoretical and generic skills as their competitive advantage to attract employers' attention.

## **Issue 2: The Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) in Higher Education**

The Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), also known as the Agensi Kelayakan Malaysia (Abdul Aziz & Hairi, 2016), is a significant player in the realm of quality assurance in higher education in Malaysia. In December 2005, the Malaysian Cabinet made the decision to merge the National Accreditation Board (LAN) with the Quality Assurance Division (BJK) of the Ministry of Higher Education (Abdul Aziz & Hairi, 2016). This merger gave rise to the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), the sole quality assurance agency in the country that spans both public and private Higher Education Providers (PPT). The establishment of the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) took place on November 1, 2007, following the enforcement of the Malaysian Qualifications Agency Act 2007. It was officially launched by YB Dato' Mustapa Mohamed, the Minister of Higher Education, on November 2, 2007 (Abdul Aziz & Hairi, 2016).

The Malaysian Qualifications Agency Act 2007 bestows upon MQA the responsibility of constructing standards, criteria, and instruments in collaboration with stakeholders to serve as a national reference for qualification awards (Bajunid, 2011). MQA's primary role is to implement the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) as the foundation for quality assurance in higher education and the reference point for national qualification criteria and standards. MQA acts as a single body overseeing and coordinating quality assurance (Bajunid, 2011). Furthermore, it provides certification to institutions that meet all criteria. MQA's aim is to ensure that registered programs adhere to the established standards. The vision of MQA

is to become a reputable and internationally recognized higher education quality assurance organization (Bajunid, 2011). MQA's mission is to instill confidence among stakeholders through prudent practices of higher education quality assurance.

Obtaining MQA recognition for a program can take anywhere from 2 to 3 years or more (Abdul Aziz & Hairi, 2016). Ultimately, MQA facilitates diploma and degree-level students in securing better employment prospects, particularly in the public sector. Accreditation by MQA offers students several benefits, including eligibility for loans from financing agencies like the National Higher Education Fund Corporation (PTPTN) (Abdul Aziz & Hairi, 2016). Students may also be considered for credit exemptions at other institutions. Moreover, they are eligible for government positions. MQA is actively involved in international networks, including Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific regions, to promote international recognition and understanding of accreditation processes in Malaysia. This, in turn, eases the mobility of Malaysian graduates across borders (Bajunid, 2011). The recognition and accreditation efforts made by MQA are acknowledged and endorsed internationally. MQA has agreed that all programs accredited by MQA are recognized by the Malaysian Government and will be recommended as the value of the Public Services Department based on the requirements set in the Public Services Scheme. This statement of standard value can be used by the Public Service Department (JPA) or Appointing Authority (PBM) for the purpose of recruitment in the Public Service (Bajunid, 2011).

### **Issue 3: Graduate Employability**

Recently, there has been a growing concern among graduates regarding pursuing higher education at the university level. This is due to the lack of employment guarantees or opportunities after completing university studies, leading many young individuals to opt for employment immediately after completing their SPM (Malaysian Certificate of Education). In fact, more than 72 percent of SPM students have no intention of pursuing further education in Malaysia (Mutalib, 2022). This issue should be taken seriously by all responsible parties to ensure that the concerns of graduates about job security do not pose future challenges for the nation. Young graduates are expected to be the driving force behind the country's development, as they will replace the existing workforce in the nation. If industrial players or the country's leadership fail to take effective action, it will indirectly lead to various aspects of national development being affected. This could also deter foreign investors from investing in the country due to the lack of economic and technological progress (Othman, Pullong, & Maidin, 2022c).

According to a study conducted by Sudin et al (2017) on the TN50 (National Transformation 2050) issue, the young generation represents the voice of future leadership. These young individuals are expected to become the driving force in the nation's leadership in the future, producing graduates with higher prestige and advanced skills in various fields in the country. Graduates are advised to seize opportunities for skill development offered by the government and related agencies. Graduates, or soon-to-be graduates, are encouraged to be proactive and strive to gain as much experience as required in their respective career fields. Employers are more inclined to employ educated and experienced individuals in specific fields, so graduates should actively seek opportunities to gain the experience they need. This will not only boost the credibility of a graduate but also open more employment opportunities with confidence (Sudin *et al.*, 2017). If graduates fail to take advantage of the opportunities offered by relevant agencies to gain experience, it will indirectly complicate their job search in any related industry. Therefore, students still amid their education should

plan carefully to make the most of the opportunities offered by universities or external agencies to improve and sharpen the skills that align with their educational background.

#### **Issue 4: Employment Opportunities for Graduates**

Unemployment is an inherent issue in any economy, inevitable even in countries that have achieved full employment levels. Numerous definitions have been posited to elucidate the concept of unemployment. Ali and Abd. Rahim (2020) considers it a situation in which qualified and willing workers are unable to secure employment at current wage rates. On the other hand, Alkatheri (2019) categorizes the unemployed as those who meet job market criteria but remain outside of the labor force. It is a well-known fact that each year, successful students graduate, ready to enter the job market. Upon graduating, they commence their quest for employment opportunities across the nation. However, not all graduates succeed in finding employment. Some undergo numerous job interviews, while others never receive job offers and remain unemployed for years.

As reported by [bharian.com.my](http://bharian.com.my), Malaysia's unemployment rate in November 2021 showed a declining trend, dropping to 694,400 people from 705,000 in October 2021, according to the Malaysian Labor Force Statistics (Harian, 2022). These statistics indicate a decrease in the number of unemployed individuals in November below 700,000 for the first time since April 2020, according to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) (Harian, 2022). Despite the decreasing number of unemployed individuals in the country, the issue remains far from resolved. This underscores that Malaysia still grapples with a substantial number of unemployed citizens. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic, which has affected Malaysia and many other countries, has led to widespread job loss and unemployment, destabilizing the country's economy, and discouraging potential investors. Consequently, job opportunities in the country have dwindled. Each year, hundreds of thousands of graduates seek employment nationwide, and a small percentage remains unemployed. Therefore, all stakeholders must collaborate to address this issue and bolster our nation's economy and the prospects of the coming generation.

#### **Literature Highlight**

The advent of the Covid-19 pandemic in Malaysia marked a critical juncture that reverberated across various facets of society, with discernible repercussions, particularly on the workforce and the professional trajectories of university graduates. This unprecedented crisis prompted the Malaysian government to enforce movement control orders, profoundly impacting the employment sector. The stringent movement restrictions brought several job sectors to a standstill, compelling sizable enterprises to curtail their workforce in response to substantial losses incurred. As a consequence, the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic has presented a landscape characterized by limited job opportunities for university graduates, compelling a closer examination of the multifaceted challenges and implications in the context of employment dynamics in Malaysia. This literature review seeks to delve into the intricacies of these developments, shedding light on the evolving narrative and contributing factors that have shaped the post-pandemic employment scenario for university graduates in Malaysia.

#### **Issue 1: The Need for University Graduates to Acquire Cognitive Skills or Generic Skills**

The endeavor to produce university graduates capable of delving into cognitive skills or generic skills has become a pivotal agenda in the higher education sector, as it is seen to enhance students' generic skills, thus improving their employability before entering the

workforce (Othman et al., 2022b). This clearly reflects the concept of skills development through Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in Teaching and Learning (T&L), aiming at producing graduates who meet market demands. This not only emphasizes that students should fulfill the requirements of skills needed in the workforce but also underlines that this is a critical element that needs to be instilled in students at educational institutions. This is due to the current job market demands, which require not only productive and academically knowledgeable workers but also individuals with generic skills. It is widely acknowledged that Problem-Based Learning (PBL) is a method of T&L based on real-life situations, including the necessary generic elements. PBL can be implemented alongside other T&L methods (Awang, 2010).

PBL focuses on several aspects of assessing the level of generic skills among students. One of these aspects is used for students to find cooperative solutions to problems (Afdareza et al., 2020). Cooperative learning is a teaching strategy based on group work and teamwork towards a common goal. The core of this learning strategy is that it shows positive effects of individuals being independent and showcasing their skills, while managing personal responsibilities. In cooperative learning, students collaborate on tasks or projects. However, an essential aspect to note about this type of learning is that even though students collaborate as a group effort, they each have their own individual tasks to focus on. The idea here is that individuals within this environment will have an opportunity to strengthen their skills and, at the same time, observe how their actions can impact a larger group. The characteristics of cooperative learning include positive interdependence among students. Positive interdependence here signifies a shift from individuality to interdependence among students. This shows that students are cooperating to solve problems.

Another feature is individual accountability. For instance, even though each student is required to cooperate in a particular assignment, they are responsible for their performance (Ab Razak et al., 2020). Assessment of this aspect can be done through individual observations regarding the level of cooperation and responsibility for the assigned tasks. Interaction within groups is also seen as an important aspect of cooperative learning since students help in the learning process of their peers by sharing information and encouraging them to achieve better performance (Ali et al., 2007). Interaction within groups includes actions taken by students to explain, discuss, and teach an understanding to others. Among the benefits of cooperative learning for students are that it can serve as a robust method for uniting teams in a social environment for a better learning experience. Cooperative learning sessions can build a culture and community in a workplace or school setting. It is also the best method for teaching leadership skills and helping students find new ways to work as a team.

Cooperative learning respects individuality and identifies the strengths and weaknesses of each student, giving them the opportunity to develop as part of a team and as individuals (Zakaria & Daud, 2021). As with all teaching strategies, the cooperative learning experience can work better for some students than for others. Furthermore, with cooperative learning, cognitive skills, such as critical thinking, creative thinking, logical thinking, reflective thinking, and metacognitive skills, can be nurtured among students. Critical thinking leads to high order thinking skills (HOTS), encompassing skills in applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating (Ab Razak et al., 2020). Application is the cognitive ability to apply principles and generalizations to new situations. Analysis is the cognitive ability to break down information into components to understand and make connections between those components. Evaluation is a cognitive skill that justifies decisions or actions taken or assesses ideas, materials, and information

based on specific criteria. Creating is a cognitive skill that combines ideas or components using creative thinking to generate new ideas or structures.

Additionally, PBL focuses on cultivating creative thinking and effective communication skills, which are essential social skills for each student (Amin *et al.*, 2020). Social skills encompass aspects of leadership, decision-making, developing other skills, effective communication, and conflict management, with communication elements being assessed through oral and written proficiency in both Bahasa Melayu and English (Othman *et al.*, 2021f). Conflict management, on the other hand, involves an individual's ability to control emotions when faced with various problem situations. PBL also ensures that students can develop concrete ideas into abstractions. Stages of abstract thinking can be observed in terms of memory (recalling facts), discrimination (making distinctions between ideas), prioritization (determining what is more important), and notification (communicating your thoughts to others). These are fundamental skills in critical thinking (Dakabesi & Louise, 2019).

Furthermore, PBL is also a tech prep-conceptualized T&L method (Thomas & Surat, 2021). Tech prep, or Technology Preparation, refers to career and technical education and academic preparation planned for the secondary and postsecondary levels, culminating in associate degrees, apprenticeships, certificates of completion, or associate degrees. The tech prep approach aims to integrate elective subjects. Students are expected to be able to understand and apply technology, solve problems, communicate more effectively, work in groups, assume responsibility for their productivity, and have customizable technical skills to meet current needs. Hence, PBL is used as an alternative T&L method to identify the application of generic skills. This is one of the preparations to equip students to face job situations in line with the demands of various industrial sectors. PBL provides curriculum through cooperative learning in small groups because individuals who cooperate in small groups are seen as more effective in making judgments and solving problems. With the PBL method, students can demonstrate their individual abilities, foster mutual dependence, create social skills and accountability awareness, and implement non-academic skills such as leadership, teamwork, communication, and problem-solving. Generic skills are identified elements that meet job requirements and needs in the working world.

## **Issue 2: Implementation of Mqa in Higher Education**

MQA serves as a reference point for educational programs for students. The establishment of MQA has led to a unified system of quality assurance in Malaysian higher education under a single agency that oversees all higher education institutions (IPTs). These institutions encompass public universities (IPTAs), private universities and colleges (IPTs), polytechnics, community colleges, and foreign branch campuses (Bajunid, 2011). MQA ensures the quality of higher education in Malaysia through two primary approaches. The first approach is program accreditation and qualification. Program accreditation is an evaluative process conducted by the authorities to determine whether a program meets the desired quality standards. The second approach is the auditing of institutions or their components. Various forms of institutional audits may be carried out comprehensively or thematically. These audits can also take the form of periodic audits of academic performance at higher education institutions or assessments designed to maintain the accreditation status of a program (Abdul Aziz & Hairi, 2016).

The institutional accreditation process involves internal assessments that engage administrative and academic staff, students, trustees, and other stakeholders. This internal assessment allows institutions to evaluate their effectiveness in achieving their stated

missions. Furthermore, it is seen as an effort to enhance the quality of the programs and services they offer (The Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Achievement, 2012; Mokhtar *et al.*, 2012). A study by Christian (2011) states that accreditation is an official recognition that an institution is competent to carry out specific tasks. The primary function of the accreditation system is to ensure minimum standards in delivering education. Both outcomes and outputs are closely linked to accreditation, as both entail external assessments based on predetermined standards before obtaining recognition. However, the measurement of outcomes and outputs still receives limited attention, and outcome-oriented assessment remains an issue for improving quality (Abdul Aziz & Hairi, 2016). Additionally, Abdul Aziz & Hairi (2016) suggest that accreditation is a process of professional and academic oversight. Standards and policies are developed to assess institutions and programs for quality improvement.

Institutional self-assessment is also conducted to assess compliance with the established standards before accreditation status is awarded. Adherence to these standards and policies is crucial for ensuring the quality of the offered programs. The quality of recognized programs is a significant factor influencing students' decisions to choose a particular program to ensure their employability and prospects upon graduation (Abdullah & Majid, 2022). Bajunid's study (2011) indicates that the accreditation process is a critical element in strengthening the education system at all levels. This suggests that the accreditation process directly and indirectly impacts teaching and learning and even the curriculum of the program. Furthermore, the accreditation process also affects educational resources such as libraries, technology access, and educational supplies. The outcome-based education (OBE) approach is used to meet the requirements of the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) in recognizing diploma and degree programs to ensure they meet the established standards (Damit & Omar, 2018).

The implementation of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) in higher education requires every program to have Programme Education Objectives (PEOs), which describe the direction of students from four to five years after completing the program. Furthermore, each program can establish Program Learning Objectives (PLOs), which indicate the competencies students are expected to have immediately after completing the program in higher education. According to the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF), every Program Learning Outcome (PLO) statement must encompass three domains of learning: Knowledge (cognitive), Practical Skills (psychomotor), and Values (affective) (Damit & Omar, 2018). Once Program Learning Outcomes are achieved, each course under the program also defines Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) (Damit & Omar, 2018). CLOs serve as guidelines for instructors in implementing outcome-based education. Each CLO, PLO, and PEO must be interconnected and clearly state the knowledge, skills, and values students need to achieve in the program (Damit & Omar, 2018). The achievement analysis from CLOs to PLOs to PEOs depends on the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) set by the institution.

Each learning outcome represents a statement about what students should achieve at the end of the teaching process, and it is assessed to obtain recognition from the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (Abdul Aziz & Hairi, 2016). In institutions, the teaching and facilitation process is conducted based on a semester system, where the annual calendar is divided into two semesters. At the beginning of each semester, students are given course outlines, providing an overview of the course's learning outcomes, content, and assessment methods by the course instructor. Assessment to measure students' mastery levels is done through continuous assessment and final assessment. The weighting for continuous assessment is



60%, while the final assessment is 40%. Institutions across Malaysia offer 16 programs, and each program must meet the required credit hours to qualify a student for graduation. The credit hours taken must meet the standards set by MQA (Abdul Aziz & Hairi, 2016). The Code of Program Accreditation Practice stipulates that instructors should diversify teaching and learning methods to achieve the eight domains of MQF learning outcomes. This ensures that students take more responsibility for outcome-based learning, which is credit-based on the National Standard Learning Time (SLT) (Abdul Aziz & Hairi, 2016).

Curriculum delivery is the process of achieving program learning outcomes and is supported by assessment. From this perspective, leadership in university reform is critical, as it is necessary to build an organization's strengths, especially in leading the organization towards achieving its shared goals, particularly through MQA. The acceptance, generation, and institutionalization of global best practices in teaching and learning are crucial criteria for every university (Bajunid, 2011).

Moreover, Mokhtar et al (2012) also emphasize the importance of clear vision and careful planning in managing quality. They argue that, without a specific vision for change, leaders' expectations for organizational development may stagnate. Quality management requires continuous improvement to enhance efficiency and effectiveness (Mokhtar *et al.*, 2012). Additionally, an active presence from MQA, which predominantly standardizes the quality of higher education in Malaysia, through a set of prescribed program standards and policies, requires branding and differentiation by institutions to stand out, especially among private higher education institutions. Private universities in Malaysia that have a 'high-quality image' are found to have a competitive edge, lower marketing costs, and consequently higher returns on investment due to lower student attrition and higher enrollments referred mainly through word of mouth (Ong & De Lara, 2014). In summary, public awareness also contributes to the most significant barrier to promotion. Overcoming these barriers involves not only strengthening institutional frameworks but also raising awareness.

In other words, both tangible and intangible educational elements are recognized as essential attributes of the learning institution's brand (Ong & De Lara, 2014). Similarly, Wagner and Fard (1998) hold the same view, suggesting that these brand attributes significantly influence students' aspirations to pursue higher education. This explains why both the international and local student markets are dominated by Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) with strong brand names and images. Mokhtar *et al* (2012) argue that this strong image is achieved through effective marketing communication strategies and public relations efforts, along with participating in 'brand awards' associated with agencies like the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) and the enhancement of accreditation status (SETARA, COPPIA, etc.). Larger universities are also found to have assurance from the MQA, which can promote the university (Bajunid, 2011). This indicates that the assessment system is relatively considered the most significant barrier to the implementation of the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL), followed by 'assessors,' 'Lack of APEL promotion,' and 'Quality Assurance.' According to Wihak (2006); Kalz *et al* (2008), who found that the APEL candidate assessment system is one of the main issues that frequently arise in APEL implementation (Kaprawi et al., 2015). Moreover, determining a suitable assessment model for candidates is a challenging task and is not only a major hurdle in the implementation of APEL but also a major challenge for institutions (Kaprawi et al., 2015).

Public awareness also contributes significantly to the promotion's obstacles. This deficiency leads to many misunderstandings and misinterpretations of what APEL actually entails. Therefore, widespread awareness and promotion can encourage social acceptance

and trust in this new APEL 'service.' Another identified obstacle is the lack of assessor training and competence and the candidate assessment system (Kaprawi et al., 2015). This is an effective strategy for APEL implementation by inviting APEL assessment experts from within and outside the country to advise APEL assessors. The objective of this study is to provide advice in strengthening the APEL assessment system from APEL assessment experts from within and outside the country (Kaprawi et al., 2015). From the perspective of the Islamic Education (PISMP) curriculum, it is seen to be fairly well-structured and comprehensive. However, based on the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) Program Accreditation Compliance Assessment Report, there are still areas of improvement needed within the curriculum. Some of the areas for improvement are in the curriculum content itself.

The National Philosophy of Education and the Philosophy of Islamic Education introduced in the country's education system and recognized by the MQA (Ahmad, 2019). Overall, it is conducted to explore transformation, especially as seen by various stakeholders to ensure the emergence of human capital and the employability of private Islamic IPT graduates in the context of today's world. With this rating, the private Islamic Higher Education sector receives special status and allocation. to ensure Islamic Studies enter the mainstream of higher education recognized by the MQA in terms of effectiveness and employability, which will be taken into consideration in the formation of study programs and curricula (Ahmad, 2019). These private Islamic Higher Education Institutions are also one of the actions in implementing various strategies to ensure the employability of their graduates, as well as to ensure that their graduates obtain quality assurance and have a strong religious identity (Ahmad, 2019).

However, the MQA has previously warned that there are weaknesses in the Islamic Education IPG curriculum content and improvements need to be made and corrective actions need to be taken. According to Taha & Abdullah (2020), these fiqh differences need to be seriously addressed as they may be one of the most dangerous issues that have plagued the global Muslim community. Taha & Abdullah (2020) believe that by mastering fiqh ikhtilaf and some other disciplines, a Muslim can better understand the reasons for differences among scholars because there are specific factors contributing to these fiqh differences. Sometimes, dynamic fiqh factors in current conditions and local issues contribute to the causes of these differences. An open-minded attitude towards the growth of knowledge and mutual respect for others' views is essential in dealing with these fiqh differences, so the public does not arbitrarily judge each other (Taha & Abdullah, 2020). Therefore, it can help build holistic, integrated, and authentic Islamic education that is in line with the needs of society.

Discussing from the same perspective, the study by Rozali & Puteh (2014) explores how the curriculum plays a crucial role in education. This includes efforts to foster character development and unity. Competency-based curriculum is a curriculum concept that emphasizes the development of competency aspects of tasks with certain standards so that the results can be felt by participants in the form of mastery of a set of competencies, including knowledge, skills, attitudes, and interests so that they can perform something in the form of responsibility. According to the Cabinet Committee Report (1979), the curriculum contains all the plans managed by a school or educational institution to achieve educational goals (Rozali & Puteh, 2014). A comprehensive curriculum interpretation is formulated that the curriculum encompasses real and non-real-life experiences selected, organized, and arranged by educational scholars and curriculum experts meticulously and professionally to make various types of learning activities, both inside and outside the classroom, available for

all levels of schooling. The curriculum is not just empty speculation but is the result of systematic research by the community.

Continuing from this perspective, we see that the result of the curriculum is when students are equipped with the information, skills, and values needed to function efficiently and effectively. According to Zakaria & Daud (2021), sharing an approach leads to the true goal of education in producing significant changes in the behavior of students. One of the advantages of this curriculum approach is that it is easy to organize and systematic, and it shapes behavior in delivering clear goals or outcomes. This allows teaching methods and learning materials to be organized neatly and the results can be assessed clearly. Therefore, the continuous quality improvement (CQI) is understood as the content of a subject, concepts and tasks that need to be obtained, planned activities, intended learning outcomes, and experiences, as well as specific cultural products and agendas for the renewal of society. Continuous quality improvement is a system approach that can be used to explain and improve quality in higher education, focusing on the practice of continuous quality improvement in higher education. The important aspects identified in driving quality accreditation success are continuous improvement, enhancing quality, value, and productivity (Mokhtar et al., 2012). Moreover, it is carried out to assess the level of readiness for continuous quality improvement (CQI) among students in higher education through the implementation of continuous quality improvement in higher education institutions.

### **Issue 3: The Role of Universities As A Graduates' Employability Platform**

Yusuf, Ismail, and Sidin's study (2008) delineates that the early job market exhibits a dynamic nature, primarily due to rapid changes in the use of cutting-edge technology and the diversity of employer demands in tandem with the swift currents of globalization. Consequently, this situation has given rise to various complexities within the job market, further compounded by the relatively moderate economic performance of the country. The factors contributing to the occurrence of unemployment are multifaceted and intricate. In this context, the employment scenario is marked by a state of constant flux and heightened competition, largely attributable to the technological transformations and the rapidly evolving needs of the global job market. The ongoing global shifts have intensified complexities within the labor market, which are further exacerbated by the country's middling economic performance. The myriad of factors leading to unemployment is diverse and highly intricate.

The modern job market is characterized by its dynamic nature, driven by rapid technological advancements and evolving employer needs in the era of globalization. This dynamism has given rise to various challenges within the job market, further complicated by the country's moderate economic performance. The factors contributing to unemployment are diverse and highly complex. Studies have shown that individuals need to anticipate intermittent unemployment and career changes throughout their lives (Puad & Nawe, 2021). Zuber & Hussin (2015) suggest that most employers seek proactive graduates capable of using high-level skills, including the ability to analyze, critique, synthesize, and communicate across various age groups. This emphasis on skills enables effective teamwork while fostering innovation and facilitating organizational transformation. According to Zuber & Hussin (2015), employers highly value graduate skills, as they are critical for global competitiveness (Abdullah & Majid, 2022).

Graduates who possess employability skills have a distinct advantage over others. Those equipped with a wide range of high-level skills are more likely to secure employment (Ali et al., 2018). Economic changes and job market competition necessitate educational institutions

to produce a workforce with employability skills (Abdullah & Majid, 2022). Educational institutions must adapt to the dynamic changes occurring globally by updating their curricula more frequently. This ensures that graduates are equipped with relevant skills, making them more employable (Othman et al., 2022). The ideal employability skills relevant in the job market can enable graduates to maximize their potential within their fields (Othman & Hussin, 2020). In the current job market challenges, employers do not solely value technical skills as an opportunity for graduates to secure jobs. Employers require graduates who can perform a variety of tasks and responsibilities effectively (Abd. Majid & Hussin, 2015).

Moreover, graduates need to seek opportunities for self-improvement to remain competitive in the job market. In team-based work, aside from high-level skills such as analytical, communication, and synthesis skills, employers also favor proactive and innovative graduates to accomplish organizational goals and transformations (Che Ros *et al.*, 2021). Unlike technical skills, employability skills encompass non-technical competencies such as communication and critical thinking, which are equally important for graduates to excel in their roles (Abd. Majid & Hussin, 2015).

The combination of these skills enhances organizational productivity and contributes to national development (Abdullah & Majid, 2022). Educational institutions must consistently strive to improve their academic programs and develop employability training programs that engage and motivate students. Time constraints and busy schedules can be obstacles for students to participate in employability training programs. However, with proper motivation and encouragement from educational institutions, students will manage their time better and participate in these programs (Abdullah & Majid, 2022). Employability training programs are essential for producing a knowledgeable and skilled workforce capable of facing employment challenges, whether seeking permanent salaried positions or exploring more demanding entrepreneurial opportunities (Othman *et al.*, 2022e). Furthermore, most employers today value graduates with strong soft skills, such as communication and critical thinking, over those with only outstanding academic achievements. High academic achievements alone do not guarantee employment in today's competitive job market.

The Malaysia Education Development Plan 2015-2025 emphasizes that education assessment should not solely focus on academic achievements but also on the balance of soft skills. Soft skills include critical thinking, language proficiency, national identity, unity, leadership, problem-solving skills, ethics, mindset, and readiness for entrepreneurship, all of which are crucial for producing graduates who can compete in the digital economy-based job market (Abdullah & Majid, 2022). The failure to master soft skills among graduates can have an impact on the graduates themselves and on a job market that continually requires competent workers in various fields (Rameshan & Hamzah, 2022). Soft skills are heavily emphasized in today's job market due to their role in gauging a graduate's adaptability to rapid technological changes (Rameshan & Hamzah, 2022). Soft skills are taught during the learning process to create a holistic individual with intellectual, spiritual, emotional, physical, and social balance, while adhering to religious teachings (Amin *et al.*, 2013). Graduates need to ensure that they have reinforced their soft skills to become the preferred choice for employers in the highly competitive job market today (Mat *et al.*, 2015).

Soft skills are lifelong learning skills required by graduates to enhance the quality of their lives for a better future. These skills aim to strengthen the graduates' spiritual and physical aspects, enabling them to face career challenges with sound reasoning and determination (Amin *et al.*, 2013). Graduates today must recognize that job search dynamics are rapidly changing, especially in technology-related fields. They need to continually acquire

various skills and be ready to learn new things to adapt to the available jobs. The increasing number of graduates entering the job market intensifies competition, making it difficult for graduates to secure employment immediately upon completing their studies, especially for those who have not seriously prepared with specific skills (Rameshan & Hamzah, 2022).

#### **Issue 4: Government Initiatives in Offering Employment Opportunities to Graduates**

The issue of unemployment has been a persistent challenge faced by our nation over the years. It is a predicament stemming from diverse contributing factors involving various stakeholders, including the populace, employers, and the state's own economic framework. The extent of unemployment in Malaysia is notably substantial, giving rise to an escalating population of underprivileged and impoverished individuals within our nation, a concern that grows increasingly pronounced with each passing year. Unemployment has long been a pervasive issue in our country, influenced by various factors from different stakeholders, including the general populace, employers, and the country's economy. Malaysia faces a significant unemployment problem, resulting in rising poverty rates. The issue of unemployment is a macroeconomic problem that directly affects individuals and is a topic of continuous discussion. It is not surprising that unemployment is a frequently discussed topic in political debates, with politicians often using it as a political platform, promising ample job opportunities if elected to office (Alwi *et al.*, 2020).

Unemployment is defined as a condition in which an individual is classified as a job seeker who desires employment but has not yet obtained it (Alias & Akhir, 2022). A nation is considered to have a good economic growth if its unemployment rate is low. In contrast, a high unemployment rate in a country signifies mismanagement of human resources. Therefore, unemployment remains a critical economic issue that demands immediate attention. Certainly, it presents a new challenge to today's graduates. The oversupply of graduates has led to a surge in unemployment in Malaysia, where alternative exposure to digital transformation and entrepreneurship is becoming increasingly significant (Othman *et al.*, 2021b).

Statistics from the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) in 2019 show that the number of local graduates increased by 6.9%, from 4.94 million in 2018 to 5.29 million (Berita Harian, 2020a). Additionally, the percentage of graduate students in the workforce rose from 4.14 million to 4.42 million, an increase of 6.8% from 2018 to 2019 (Harian, 2020a). With such an abundance of graduates, employment opportunities become scarce due to job quotas being filled by experienced individuals. Furthermore, some graduates are overly selective in their job choices, demanding high salaries disproportionate to their experience, causing them to miss out on job offers from companies (Rameshan & Hamzah, 2022).

It is hoped that relevant authorities, including the government, will take steps to address this issue. Addressing this long-standing problem is not an easy task, but the government of our country has been making extensive efforts to address this issue. We understand that the creation of jobs is essential for economic recovery, which is why job creation remains a primary focus in government budgets. This is evident in the 2020 Budget, in which the government targeted the creation of 500,000 job opportunities. The Jamin Kerja 2022 Initiative is set to create more than 600,000 job opportunities for Malaysians (Bernama, 2022). This promises a brighter future for job seekers and strengthens the nation's economy. Job creation is essential for economic recovery, which will attract more investors to our country and lead to more job opportunities for graduates who have successfully completed

their studies. They will undoubtedly contribute to their families' financial well-being and daily expenses.

The government has also provided financial incentives to employers to create new job opportunities through the PERKESO Job Generator Program (Harian, 2020b). In the first six months of 2021, more than RM170 million was distributed, benefiting over 10,600 employers and 75,800 employees (Harian, 2020b). Financial assistance for small business owners is also an effective effort to help graduates who want to start small businesses. The government is also implementing programs to sharpen skills that will help graduates in the job market, such as technical skills, computer skills, English language skills, and more. This makes it easier for employers to absorb them into existing teams, as they already possess the skills sought after by the company.

### **Methodology**

According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016), qualitative research is defined as an endeavor aimed at comprehending phenomena experienced by research subjects, encompassing actors, perceptions, motivations, actions, and more, in a holistic and descriptive manner, primarily employing words and language within a specific, natural context, all while harnessing various scientific methods. Flick (2014) offers another perspective, asserting that methodology constitutes a set of research methods employed in the exploration of subject matter. On a parallel note, Creswell (2013) posits qualitative research as an empirical undertaking founded upon scientific methods, revealing a particular phenomenon by elucidating data and facts primarily through language and words, all-encompassing in relation to the subject of inquiry. Qualitative research findings typically manifest as descriptive in nature, comprising observation records, document analysis, article or journal compositions, research papers, and data subjected to inductive analysis (Creswell, 2013). The research methodology adopted within this study is distinctly qualitative in essence. Researchers analyze information resources through primary source materials, specifically focusing on analyses derived from the works and articles of past researchers who have addressed the challenges of graduate unemployment and the revitalization of public universities in our nation. The resultant analyses are dedicated to discussing the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders involved in addressing the issue of graduate employability in Malaysia.

### **Discussion: Issues and Challenges**

#### **Issue 1: The Need for Students to Master Cognitive and Generic Skills**

In this context, the paramount importance of students mastering both cognitive and generic skills cannot be overstated. These skills serve as essential prerequisites for university students as they prepare to enter the job market upon completing their education. The term "generic skills," also referred to as soft skills or human skills, underscores the necessity for students to gain competence in these areas to enhance their employability post-graduation. These skills are integral in shaping well-rounded and competent graduates.

It is essential to acknowledge that excellent academic achievements alone do not suffice to secure one's desired employment in the current competitive job market. Most employers do not solely prioritize academic performance but also value the mastery of generic skills as a crucial criterion in selecting potential employees (Rameshan & Hamzah, 2022). Graduates are often perceived to lack effective communication skills, even in their native language, which consequently makes them less receptive to the learning process and diminishes their self-confidence (Othman et al., 2022f). In addition, essential skills like

information technology application, data transfer, and efficient work planning and management are often found to be deficient.

This is due to the insufficient application of information technology in learning. Furthermore, students are seen to lack leadership skills in tasks and have limited teamwork skills. Hence, the opportunity to enhance these soft skills is vast and should be utilized by students in building a strong personality in university. Soft skills that encompass elements such as communication skills, critical thinking, decision-making skills, adaptability, entrepreneurial skills, and the like should be sown and practiced within individuals from the very beginning so that students are better prepared in terms of physical and mental aspects, and these skills should be relevant to career requirements (Rameshan & Hamzah, 2022).

Cognitive skills constitute a set that leads to high-level thinking processes that allow graduates to analyze, pay attention, learn, and remember. They are also skills used to understand situations and solve problems. Cognitive skills are key to success because success requires problem-solving and analyzing the environment. Final year graduates, in particular, need to develop both cognitive and generic skills in line with the excellence of the curriculum and co-curricular activities to enhance their potential. Having both cognitive and generic skill sets is a symbiotic or communal relationship that is very important once students step into the world of work. However, graduates must strive and compete in the job market. The level of application and use of information technology is still at an unsatisfactory level among students. Core skills such as handling information management through the internet technically attract employability outside. Core skills refer to the ability of students to transfer and exchange information, provide information in the form of images and graphics, work within and with technical systems, and monitor and improve system performance.

Technical skills are often overlooked by students because they focus solely on theoretical learning and fail to apply these skills. For Malaysian Skills Certificate (SKM) and Malaysian Skills Diploma (DKM) students, core abilities should be mastered fully (Ali *et al.*, 2018). Nevertheless, all students should learn to manage information through the internet, as tasks are now easier to complete with today's internet accessibility. Skills in using social media and the internet are crucial to enable students to be more skillful in adapting to existing knowledge, utilizing new information, and manipulating this information to find relevant answers. The challenge of 21st-century learning is to establish a learning environment that promotes high-level thinking skills (KBAT). Such learning means that students can interpret, analyze, and manipulate information for new situations. With an approach to mastering information technology skills, students are sure to attract employers' attention. Therefore, ethical values and integrity, which measure the excellence of human behavior, remain at a low level among current students.

The value of trust with professional ethics is essential for inculcating integrity within each student. A nation that seeks to achieve the status of a developed and advanced nation should have a solid and effective educational system that does not focus solely on material development but also promotes value development covering human behavior issues (Zakaria & Daud, 2021). In recent times, the spread of social issues and the decline of ethical and moral values involving students from public and private universities have had negative effects on society. Students are the future workforce, contributors to culture, drivers of progress, and pioneers of development in a community. The concern is that these ethical and moral issues persist and carry over into the working world. Some studies have found a strong correlation between negative behavior during studies and unethical behavior in the workplace. This clearly indicates that the tendency to cheat in the workplace is closely related to unethical

and unvirtuous practices in education. This moral fragility will affect graduates' employability after graduation. Therefore, students should always maintain behavior and integrate human values into themselves, making it a life rule until it becomes a habit to be carried into the world of work. Hence, the national subjects covering customs, etiquette, and civilizational culture to shape a pure identity and a high spirit of unity are highly relevant (Othman *et al.*, 2021c).

Furthermore, the challenge in mastering entrepreneurial skills among students is the lack of interest in entering the field of entrepreneurship. This is because some students are very busy with their tasks and do not have time to learn entrepreneurial knowledge. The lack of interest makes students less motivated to delve deeper into the field of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship is seen as less popular among students today. Therefore, even though students have an interest in entrepreneurial skills, they are not skilled in these areas due to a lack of knowledge and the best marketing strategies. Students do not try to gain experience in entrepreneurship because they are afraid of failure. Students should see entrepreneurship as an opportunity to generate income while waiting for their preferred job, which promises a high-paying job market (Othman *et al.*, 2021d). Entrepreneurial skills can be defined as the interest and ability to explore opportunities and develop awareness of risk, creativity, and innovation in business and job-related activities (Ahmad & Fazil, 2021). Entrepreneurial activities are a process of nurturing and producing students with a business culture. With entrepreneurial skills, students can also apply cognitive skills by developing students' potential to be more creative, initiative, and wise in decision-making. Entrepreneurship education also teaches individuals to identify opportunities and seize opportunities arising in their environment, translate ideas into reality, or an economic activity, and to endure and be sensitive to changes and uncertainties (Abdul Malik *et al.*, 2022).

Another issue in the application of cognitive and generic skills among students is the lack of communication skills in foreign languages such as English. The lack of foreign language proficiency among students in our country is a matter of concern to many. English proficiency is crucial as it is the global lingua franca. Many companies require employees to be able to communicate in various foreign languages such as Mandarin, English, and others.

Our country is a multiracial nation with diverse ethnicities, cultures, and nationalities. This unique diversity colors daily life with various ways of communication from different cultures and nationalities. Therefore, proficiency in English is important for students to interact with a varied society (Abdullah & Majid, 2022). Collaboration with foreigners becomes more effective when a communication interaction is effective and can capture their attention. Good information delivery can ensure high success potential. Furthermore, our country enjoys increasing collaboration opportunities every year. Students should view this opportunity as a right step in standing out by mastering a high level of English proficiency. Proficiency in foreign languages is a useful advantage and attracts employers' attention as good communication skills can attract the attention of many foreign investors. This situation will benefit the students themselves and the company. Therefore, students must prepare themselves by mastering the basics of global culture and ethics. Communication skills in multiple languages should also be improved based on real communication in student learning.

Additionally, in the context of students, the challenge of applying generic skills is that they face high pressure that leads to stress. The stress of life burdens students because it can affect their thinking. High expectations are placed on the shoulders of high-level students by their parents. This will affect the physical and mental health. Parents aspire to have successful children with promising qualifications to enter the public or private sector. The high



expectations and hopes of parents can place a heavy burden on students, especially those from low-income families. A bright future with a stable job is a source of pride for parents as they have successfully raised a productive child. Student loans such as the Education Savings Fund loan and the National Higher Education Fund (PTPTN) that promise to provide loan repayments can encourage students to maintain high Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA). Former Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob, said this special privilege would be given to graduates who completed their studies starting in 2019, regardless of economic status, race, and religion (Ab Razak et al., 2020). This situation makes students more focused and solely focused on their curriculum performance. At the same time, students should balance themselves with generic skills to obtain a complete package to become an all-rounded graduate after graduating. Students should be wise in managing stress and be able to solve problems rationally. Sacrifice in terms of time and effort should be accepted if they want good results. Patience and high determination should be instilled in students as a life spirit to rise and strive for a bright future. Students must be prepared to make commitments and commit to them by applying cognitive and generic skills during their university years. Universities should always monitor the development of students' generic skills and provide various channels to assist students.

### **Issue 2: Implementation of Mqa in Higher Education**

As we are all aware, every higher education program offered in Malaysia is required to seek accreditation certification from the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA). The primary aim of this accreditation process is to ensure that the programs being offered align with the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF). This alignment involves a thorough examination of key aspects pertaining to the teaching and learning processes within Higher Education Providers (PPT). The MQA accreditation certification serves as an official endorsement, attesting that the certificates, diplomas, or degrees awarded to graduates meet the stipulated quality standards and criteria set forth by MQA, in consonance with the MQF. This MQA accreditation certification awakens students to the crucial importance of program accreditation in determining the future educational journey of an individual. Indeed, without prior investigation or identification of an institution's MQA accreditation status, students may face difficulties in securing financial aid from funding agencies such as the National Higher Education Fund Corporation (Perbadanan Tabung Pendidikan Nasional, PTPTN), and may consequently encounter hurdles in pursuing their studies locally or abroad (Mokhtar *et al.*, 2012). This reality underscores the significance of MQA accreditation in aiding students in the selection of their desired courses.

Furthermore, the implementation of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) represents a process that involves the restructuring of curricula, assessment methods, and reporting mechanisms in education. As such, OBE allows students to attain and master the highest level of learning outcomes each semester, rather than waiting until they accumulate sufficient credits to complete their university studies. OBE holds particular importance within higher education institutions, as it emphasizes student learning by clear learning outcome statements, facilitating students' understanding of the expected outcomes they need to achieve (Damit & Omar, 2018). Institutions are required to provide specific learning activities aimed at enabling students to achieve all the predefined outcomes and to assess students' performance against well-defined and effective assessment criteria. In the absence of OBE implementation, students may remain unaware of the expected outcomes, leading to an unclear and ineffective assessment of student achievements. In the world shaped by

advancements in science and technology, leadership in university reform becomes particularly crucial within higher education.

This is because leadership constitutes a necessity in building organizational strength, particularly in guiding the organization towards achieving shared objectives, more so in the context of MQA (Bajunid, 2011). While leadership is inherently complex, it shares a commonality within its context, characterized as a process, influence, teamwork, and goal determination. This suggests that leadership is a process in which an individual influences other to achieve common goals. In the context of educational management, effective institutional leadership is closely associated with organizational effectiveness. Effective institutions are shaped by competent and quality leadership. Leadership also plays a vital role in generating universities, where a leader within higher education can influence efforts to achieve the aspired objectives. These leaders in institutions can demonstrate that organizational excellence can yield success, enhance the university's reputation, and increase student interest in improving teaching and learning management within the institution. Failure to prioritize leadership in university reform can hinder students from receiving quality education at the university.

Undeniably, branding within a higher education institution can enhance the visibility and reputation, contributing to promoting the university's image. University branding is more easily achieved if the university meets the criteria and standards set by the MQA. In the past, branding received limited emphasis, especially within public sector entities encompassing public universities. Many higher education institutions believed that branding was unnecessary since universities are not commercial entities and did not need to compete (Ong & De Lara, 2014). Consequently, university management showed reluctance in initiating various initiatives to promote their respective university brands. Therefore, universities were not considered a priority in enhancing their capability and success in collaborating with industries, which has now become essential for obtaining significant funding from the public and for achieving university accomplishments and impacts on the people and stakeholders.

Moreover, the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) is a systematic process involving the identification, documentation, and assessment of prior experiential learning such as knowledge, skills, and attitudes to determine an individual's attainment of desired learning outcomes. This, in turn, allows individuals to access a particular educational program. A more critical perspective on APEL highlights the necessity for a structured approach that minimizes time and costs for candidates and institutions (Kaprawi et al., 2015). Considering the low adoption of APEL in Malaysian Higher Education Institutions (IPT), IPTs and providers must develop new approaches to make APEL more user-friendly and accessible. The provision of APEL in Malaysia is still fragmented, with many IPTs having limited or no APEL activities. Despite significant hurdles across all Malaysian IPTs, APEL holds great potential, particularly in technical universities and is relevant within specific contemporary contexts, which encompass employability and the need to ensure the mainstreaming of higher education, offering access to education and training, and the necessity to employ educational and training resources efficiently.

Furthermore, the field of fiqh plays a crucial role in shaping the educational curriculum. It is essential for students of religious studies to master and practice fiqh to navigate intricate matters of jurisprudential disagreement. Improvements to the Islamic Education PISMP curriculum are needed, particularly in subjects related to fiqh curriculum (Taha & Abdullah, 2020). In this context, there are educators who are hesitant to teach certain contents included in the KSSR syllabus. This hesitation highlights a deficiency in the educators' understanding of

and interaction with fiqh-related issues. In more severe cases, some educators disagree with the content of specific topics in the KSSR syllabus formulated by the Ministry of Education (KPM). This reflects poorly on the conduct and attitude of educators in dealing with issues of jurisprudential disagreement. Therefore, elements of fiqh disagreement within IPG curricula need to be studied more deeply, as it is a contemporary requirement in line with the MQA's recommendation that issues and trends at the national, regional, and international levels should be considered when analyzing the requirements of a program. This can be observed as Islamic Private Higher Education Institutions (IPTIS) introduce a new dimension to the development of higher education in the country. The development of IPTIS aligns with the government's suggestion of making Malaysia a center for higher education development in the Asian region (Ahmad, 2019). Education in IPTIS introduces a new dimension to Islamic education in societal development and realizes the country's development agenda at the national and global levels. IPTIS should enhance the quality of education by offering management aspects, curriculum, facilities, and teaching staff to diversify the levels of student knowledge and skills. Educators in the field of fiqh contribute to university branding by demonstrating good moral values.

In this era of globalization, curriculum structure enhancement is essential to ensure the quality of higher education that aligns with the criteria and standards established by the MQA. Curriculum structure enhancement is an effort to strengthen the curriculum system to ensure that students' knowledge and skills are in line with contemporary requirements. The millennial generation represents an asset for the nation in determining societal patterns and the country's future. They should be equipped with relevant and forward-thinking curricula so that the knowledge and skills they acquire can address various challenges. If young generations, such as students, benefit from curriculum structure enhancement, the sustainability and quality of education can be nurtured through the visibility of integrated infrastructure systems and the interconnectedness of university responsibility in generating a sustainable international-standard learning environment (Othman *et al.*, 2021f). Therefore, students will not receive engaging and enjoyable learning processes that produce graduates with critical, creative, and innovative thinking.

In this context, the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) framework is established to provide recognition to Higher Education Providers (PPT) that meet the criteria and standards set by the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF), ensuring the quality of the programs offered (Mokhtar *et al.*, 2012). Lastly, CQI is a continuous effort to improve products, services, or processes. In a more critical perspective, weak human resource management within CQI will result in an imbalance in the performance of staff and lecturers. Thus, the practice of CQI will not be able to achieve the vision, mission, educational goals, and learning outcomes if the practice of CQI is not implemented. Therefore, human resource management needs to be strengthened to achieve a balance in institutional performance.

### **Issue 3: Universities Implementing Platforms or Launchpads for Graduates' Marketability Beyond National Borders**

The public has voiced concerns regarding the employability of graduates in various related institutions, causing distress among students considering furthering their education to a higher level due to the worrisome state of graduate employability (Ismail & Mohamad, 2021). However, there are strategies, steps, and platforms available to enhance graduate employability at various levels. The underlying issue is primarily due to the country's economic state, which is still transitioning towards becoming a developed nation. This, in

turn, has resulted in limited job opportunities for recent graduates. The government faces challenges in creating more jobs, mainly due to economic factors such as a lack of foreign investors willing to invest in Malaysia. Consequently, this restricts economic growth and job prospects for graduates with higher education qualifications like degrees and master's degrees.

Therefore, some school leavers who have completed their Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM) may be reluctant to pursue higher education due to concerns about the job prospects for graduates. Instead, they choose to enter the job market with their existing qualifications, such as SPM or the Malaysian Skills Certificate, even if the salaries offered are modest. This creates a challenge for those with higher education qualifications like degrees, who must compete with those who only possess secondary education qualifications like SPM for employment.

The issue of graduate employability in the country is not only attributed to an underdeveloped economy but also to a lack of generic skills or soft skills among graduates. The possession of such skills is essential for those pursuing higher education as it can significantly enhance a student's quality and employability upon graduation. Therefore, it is crucial for students to acquire these generic skills or soft skills, which are vital to broaden their employment prospects and make them more competitive. The scarcity of these skills is not only a contributor to graduate employability issues but is also influenced by factors such as the competition that exists between graduates and non-graduates (Mohd Amin, 2013). Notably, employers often prefer non-graduates for reasons such as their relevant experience and willingness to accept lower salaries, making them more attractive than those with high-level educational qualifications like degrees.

This situation exacerbates graduate employability concerns, making it increasingly difficult for students who wish to pursue higher education, as employers prefer those with practical experience over those with higher-level educational qualifications. The existence of competition between graduates and non-graduates is not the sole cause of the graduate employability issue, but it is also compounded by recent occurrences, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic, which hit Malaysia in 2020, brought about a multitude of challenges for the country, affecting not only public health and safety but also the economy. Graduates struggled to find job opportunities during the pandemic (Abdul Aziz, 2020). Many employers were forced to lay off employees to reduce costs. This unprecedented situation has not been forgotten by the Malaysian population, and many recent graduates were unable to secure jobs because several companies had to cut back on hiring.

Moreover, the issue of graduate employability is not solely attributed to economic stagnation but is also exacerbated by an influx of foreign workers. It is undeniable that Malaysia is seen as a haven for immigrants, particularly those from Indonesia and Thailand, who find employment opportunities easily, particularly in the manufacturing and industrial sectors (Ismail & Mohamad, 2021). These countries have high population densities, leading to limited job opportunities for their citizens. Consequently, the agricultural, manufacturing, and processing sectors in Malaysia are dominated by foreign workers. This situation is detrimental to the Malaysian population and to recent graduates and postgraduates seeking employment because their job opportunities have been seized. Individuals without a university education face unemployment issue due to the scarcity of job opportunities. This situation has been further compounded by the selective nature of some job seekers, leading to an increase in graduate unemployment.

The situation is exacerbated as many graduates are willing to wait for exclusive, high-paying job opportunities. This is further compounded by the graduates' high expectations regarding workplace infrastructure, company credibility, flexible working hours, commute distance, and efficient transportation systems. Some graduates are also hesitant to choose a career path because they lack confidence in their abilities and their qualifications. Therefore, providing significant financial aid, amounting to billions of Ringgits, is crucial to initiate multiple development projects simultaneously. By doing so, many job opportunities can be created. The government should handle this financial aid wisely by selecting economically stimulating projects, such as those in the technology and high-research sectors (Mamat *et al.*, 2019). It is evident that the nation's economy will experience rapid growth if the government offers substantial financial aid packages to generate more employment opportunities and enhance graduate employability across various universities and colleges.

Additionally, efforts to promote the country should be intensified through exhibitions and economic delegation visits to foreign countries. These efforts enable foreign countries to realize the benefits and importance of establishing businesses in Malaysia based on accurate information obtained from delegation members. The influx of more foreign models into the country will generate economic activities alongside the previously offered economic packages aimed at addressing economic problems and fostering significant developments in various economic sectors. This will increase job opportunities for the Malaysian population and enhance graduate employability. Therefore, the branding of existing economic sectors in Malaysia should be elevated to an international level to attract foreign investors, thus boosting the country's economy and employment prospects (Abdullah & Majid, 2022). Moreover, the government should initiate various programs to enhance the skills of the younger generation, such as offering English language programs and collaborating with foreign countries such as Germany to establish skills institutes.

Through these programs, graduates can develop critical generic or soft skills, thereby improving their image and identity upon completion of their studies. This will not only make them more attractive to employers but also increase their employability due to their possession of essential generic or soft skills. Furthermore, graduates should prepare for post-COVID-19 challenges and use their creativity to initiate businesses. Graduates who have already completed their studies and are yet to secure employment should strive to adapt to the current situation by identifying new skills required by industries. They should seek opportunities to enhance their skills to remain relevant in the current job market. Graduates must highlight their unique expertise as an added value for potential employers. In addition, they should take advantage of online training programs to expand their knowledge. These programs provide opportunities to acquire skill certificates through online learning offered by organizations in Malaysia and abroad. With the rapid technological advancements and changes in the workplace brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, digital skills have become more critical. Graduates must possess basic software skills that enable them to conduct daily tasks online, including conducting meetings and discussions. Software skills are crucial for conducting in-depth analyses on specific topics. Digital skills, such as the use of virtual reality systems and simulation software, are valuable for conducting comprehensive analyses in a specific industry. Many tools and software are designed to streamline work processes, reduce costs, and save time. Moreover, addressing more complex issues may require programming skills. Graduates who possess these programming skills will have a competitive edge in the job market. This approach can indirectly increase employers' interest

in graduates who hold multiple certificates or experiences, making them desirable employees.

#### **Issue 4: Creating More Job Opportunities for Graduates**

Unemployment is a state of joblessness where individuals who desire to work are unable to find employment. These individuals are categorized as the labor force of a country, typically those aged between 15 to 64 years who are willing to work. The issue of unemployment is not unfamiliar in our country, especially among graduates. There are numerous Malaysians who lack employment to support their family and themselves. Data from the Ministry of Higher Education (KPT) also indicates a decline in graduate employability, which fell by 1.8 percent from 84.4 percent last year to 86.2 percent in 2019. Several factors contribute to this situation (Harian, 2021).

One of these factors is that graduates are often very selective about the jobs they are willing to accept and may refuse employment if the offered salary does not meet their expectations. This raises the question of how to address the issue of graduate unemployment in Malaysia. In this regard, all parties need to collaborate effectively to address this issue. Creating more job opportunities within the country is one of the key strategies to address graduate unemployment and foster the development of public universities. The job market serves as a platform where graduates showcase the knowledge, they've gained during their four or more years of education. However, not all graduates can seamlessly enter this market, and some must wait for years before securing employment, while others remain at home without job prospects.

This issue is not new in today's modern world, as discussed in the first sub-issue concerning graduates and the job market. As discussed in the article, job openings in Malaysia cannot keep up with the annual influx of graduates with degrees. The country's relatively weak economic situation is one of the reasons why graduate unemployment remains a challenge. This situation must be acknowledged by the current government. A significant number of job seekers are unable to find work due to the nation's unstable economy, which has limited job opportunities for graduates. Consequently, some graduates accept jobs that are unrelated to their field of study, which can be seen as both positive and negative.

Positive effects include having a job that enables them to support their daily expenses, providing opportunities to learn new skills, and preparing them for life beyond university. However, the negative impact is that they may not fully utilize the knowledge acquired during their studies. Nevertheless, this experience aids in preparing graduates for the workforce and broadening their skill set. Therefore, all stakeholders must work together to address graduate unemployment effectively. Furthermore, graduate unemployment in Malaysia is partly due to graduates lacking the necessary skills that employers seek. While these skills can be acquired independently, universities offer a suitable platform for learning and practicing these skills efficiently.

Graduates with both soft and hard skills are typically preferred by employers in Malaysia. Research shows that employability readiness skills significantly influence a graduate's self-efficacy. Therefore, students should make the most of the opportunities available at universities to hone the skills required by employers in the job market. In the context of graduate unemployment, some graduates are highly selective about the jobs they accept, resulting in extended periods of unemployment. For instance, the construction industry in Malaysia is largely dominated by foreign labor. This phenomenon is due to locals having a skeptical view of the industry, often considering it "3D," which stands for "Dirty,

Dangerous, Difficult" (Shah *et al.*, 2021). This indirectly contributes to the high number of unemployed graduates in the country. Graduates need to adopt a more open-minded approach when seeking employment to reduce unemployment rates.

The influx of illegal immigrants in our beloved country, particularly in Sabah and Sarawak, is not a new issue for Malaysians. This issue has been ongoing for quite some time and has had various negative effects on our society. The arrival of illegal immigrants is also a significant factor contributing to the graduate unemployment issue in Malaysia. Employers often prefer to hire them because they accept lower wages compared to locals. This is due to the low cost of living in their home countries, making them willing to work for lower wages in Malaysia. Additionally, the higher exchange rate of the Malaysian Ringgit compared to their home currencies makes the salaries they receive appear substantial. The government must take steps to curb the entry of illegal immigrants to ensure that graduates from public universities in Malaysia can find employment opportunities within the country.

Entrepreneurship is an avenue that can be explored by both employed and unemployed individuals. This field is renowned for lifting families from poverty to a more comfortable status. Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are critical in this regard, as they provide opportunities for young entrepreneurs to thrive. SMEs have indirectly helped reduce graduate unemployment by offering job opportunities to graduates. Government initiatives aimed at supporting small entrepreneurs have had a significant impact on Malaysians, especially graduates. They can now work for small enterprises and generate their income.

In conclusion, addressing graduate unemployment and the development of public universities is a complex challenge, but it is not insurmountable. The government must make efforts to stabilize the country's somewhat shaky economy. The fluctuations in the value of the Malaysian Ringgit compared to the US Dollar have also been a concern (Abdullah & Majid, 2022). To tackle this issue, the government should promote Malaysia, with its rich biodiversity, to the world. This could boost the tourism sector, and, in turn, help improve the nation's economy. By promoting Malaysia to the world, the country can attract more tourists, creating jobs for graduates and addressing unemployment. Graduates should also seek opportunities to generate income rather than sitting idle at home after graduating. Mastering valuable skills can make it easier for graduates to find employment and meet the requirements of employers.

## **Conclusion: Recommendations and Directions**

### **Issue 1: Implementation of Sustainable Rural Development Networks in the Application of Generic Skills and Cognitive Skills among Graduates**

The application of generic and cognitive skills is of paramount importance for graduates before entering the workforce. Efforts should be intensified and enhanced to yield optimal and beneficial results for the future of graduates. One of the initiatives to instill generic skills among students is through the implementation of the human development module via formal teaching and learning activities (PdP). Under this implementation, students are offered specific subjects tailored to help them master these skills. The subjects typically encompass general university courses, entrepreneurship courses, the English language, public speaking, and others (Abdul Malik *et al.*, 2022). Proficiency in the mother tongue, serving as the medium of communication in Malaysian institutions of higher education, is a focal point for Malaysia, a multicultural nation (Yusoff *et al.*, 2021a). This implementation should offer students the opportunity to acquire skills with integrated knowledge. In general, academic staff responsible for the human development module in PdP activities should incorporate clear

learning objectives. The module's implementation can be carried out through various activities like Q&A sessions between lecturers and students, classroom discussions, presentations, field visits, self-study, and more. Given the developments in the contemporary world, the development of human capital is crucial for students to produce well-rounded individuals.

Human capital development also inculcates ethical values that serve as a measure of human conduct and morality (Mat Lazim & Yusof, 2012). Trustworthiness, ethics, and professional morals are crucial for upholding integrity in students. Integrity is essential as it has a significant impact on individuals, particularly those who enter the workforce. Therefore, students should cultivate an appreciation for pure values, affirm their true identities, and contribute to creating an ethically upright society. Simultaneously, entrepreneurial skills should be embraced by students, not just for personal gain but also as a foundation for community economic development. Entrepreneurship has played a vital role in generating job opportunities and various product innovations through the creativity and innovation of entrepreneurs, thereby improving community economic standards. Entrepreneurial skills encompass the development of entrepreneurial mindset and skills, which relate to thinking that influences students' entrepreneurial behavior, encouraging innovation, identifying opportunities, and inventing new creations (Othman *et al.*, 2021e).

Meanwhile, entrepreneurship skills include attributes like entrepreneurial experience, identifying entrepreneurial opportunities, risk tolerance, internal control locus, achievement and resilience, and financial management. Students should engage in entrepreneurial programs that are experiential rather than theoretical, enabling them to apply entrepreneurship in a real-life context. This approach cultivates high levels of innovation and active involvement in addressing challenges and seizing opportunities. Skills such as these are valuable for students as they navigate life before landing suitable employment. Developing students' character is the primary goal of higher education. In the modern context, it values individuals with qualities and skills such as flexibility, stress tolerance, relationship-building abilities, adaptability, learning new professional knowledge, and self-excellence (Zakaria & Daud, 2021).

The communicative approach involves authentic communication features in foreign language learning processes such as English. It's based on real communication models to empower students with language skills and abilities to use dialogue units gathered based on communicative intentions, including agreements, disagreements, invitations, requests, advice, criticism, and more. The learner-centered approach, using productive teaching methods in foreign language learning, allows students to become subjects in the education process, while enabling teachers to assess their knowledge and skills, define individual goals, lessons, and character-building activities, and direct and correct the entire educational process for better character development and student competence. Therefore, the goals, tasks, methods, and teaching strategies must align with the personal goals of teaching subjects. In learning a foreign language, this approach encourages youth to explore their surroundings with the aid of a foreign language, adapt to new situations, and embody socio-cultural features of modern society, both in their home country and in the countries of the language being learned.



Table 1

*Implementation of Sustainable Rural Development Networks in the Application of Generic Skills and Cognitive Skills Among Graduates*

Themes	Importance and Significance	Contribution of the Research
<b>Implementation of Human Development Module (PdP)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Paramount importance of generic and cognitive skills for graduates entering the workforce.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Proposes intensified and enhanced efforts in implementing the human development module to instill generic skills through formal teaching and learning activities.</li> <li>- Recommends specific subjects within the module, including general university courses, entrepreneurship courses, English language proficiency, public speaking, and others.</li> <li>- Advocates for clear learning objectives and various teaching methods to facilitate skill acquisition and integrated knowledge.</li> </ul>
<b>Development of Human Capital and Ethical Values</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emphasizes the role of human capital development in cultivating ethical values for measuring human conduct and morality.</li> <li>- Underscores the importance of integrity, trustworthiness, ethics, and professional morals for individuals entering the workforce.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Highlights the need for students to appreciate pure values, affirm their true identities, and contribute to an ethically upright society.</li> <li>- Positions human capital development as crucial for producing well-rounded individuals capable of upholding integrity.</li> <li>- Advocates for the incorporation of entrepreneurial skills to promote personal and community economic development.</li> <li>- Emphasizes the significance of entrepreneurship in generating job opportunities and enhancing community economic standards.</li> <li>- Specifies attributes of entrepreneurship skills and recommends experiential programs for skill application in real-life contexts.</li> </ul>
<b>Character Development in Higher Education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identifies character development as the primary goal of higher education in the modern context.</li> <li>- Values qualities and skills such as flexibility, stress tolerance,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Stresses the importance of developing students' character through higher education.</li> <li>- Emphasizes the significance of qualities and skills valued in the modern context, including flexibility,</li> </ul>

Themes	Importance and Significance	Contribution of the Research
	relationship-building abilities, adaptability, learning new professional knowledge, and self-excellence.	stress tolerance, adaptability, and continuous learning.
<b>Communicative Approach in Foreign Language Learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Describes the communicative approach in foreign language learning, incorporating authentic communication features and learner-centered methods.</li> <li>- Highlights the role of foreign language learning in fostering socio-cultural understanding and adaptability.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recommends the incorporation of authentic communication features in foreign language learning processes.</li> <li>- Advocates for a learner-centered approach, allowing students to become subjects in the education process, fostering character development, and assessing individual goals.</li> <li>- Emphasizes the role of foreign language learning in promoting socio-cultural understanding and adaptability in various societal contexts.</li> </ul>

The summary of the research findings encompasses the importance and significance of the study, emphasizing the research's contribution. This underscores the impact of the research in both theoretical and contextual dimensions.

## Issue 2: The Implementation of Mqa in Higher Education

The issue of programs in higher education not being recognized under the MQA agency can be addressed through collaborative efforts led by the Chief Executive Officer of MQA, involving MQA and the Council of Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) to implement a rating and accreditation process among Malaysian students at universities in the United States (Bajunid, 2011). Furthermore, MQA's cooperation with foreign agencies is crucial and takes the form of information sharing, expertise exchange, training collaboration, and alignment of two systems, as demonstrated by MQA's collaboration with accreditation bodies from other countries. MQA is also actively involved in international networks, including those in Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific region, to enable foreign entities to understand and appreciate the accreditation system in Malaysia, thus facilitating the mobility of Malaysian graduates across borders. In conclusion, Malaysian students seeking to pursue studies abroad should refer to the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) through scholarship sponsors such as the Public Service Department (JPA), Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA), or through Education Malaysia. Additionally, the Malaysian government should explicitly recognize the need for robust and effective oversight of private higher education in Malaysia. This change is linked to the government's key policy initiatives aimed at transforming the Malaysian economy and society.

The roles of two apex bodies in private higher education are also recognized in their cooperation with the government on various quality initiatives. According to sources, to address the issues of programs in private universities recognized by MQA, private institutions

must implement various initiatives that can be facilitated by the Malaysian government to attract foreign students to study in Malaysia, making Malaysia a center of excellence in higher education in Southeast Asia, which, in turn, stimulates more business interest in the private higher education sector (Othman *et al.*, 2017a). Private HEIs can attract foreign students to pursue education in Malaysia by offering programs with English as the medium of instruction, which presents a limited opportunity to foreign students and can attract the international higher education market. Consequently, private HEIs in Malaysia complement their roles as their public counterparts in delivering higher education. From another perspective, to gain benefits for universities from foreign students, private higher education institutions must implement international quality standards for education and internationalize Malaysia's higher education institutions through accreditation from the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) (Ong & De Lara, 2014).

As a result, MQA can assist in promoting and marketing higher education programs aggressively to increase student enrollment and maintain profitability for universities. In essence, MQA can monitor compliance with higher education institutions in Malaysia and provide accreditation to qualified academic members offering programs at institutions to establish standards with strict control and supervision by MQA. Programs accredited by MQA receive more benefits in terms of recognition from quality assurance bodies or foreign ministries confident in the quality of programs offered by local public and private higher education institutions. However, this is subject to the preferences and requirements of foreign entities according to their goals and needs. For example, foreign authorities are more likely to send sponsored students to institutions with university status offering postgraduate programs. The accreditation issued by MQA is limited to domestic institutions registered under the Private Higher Education Institutions Act (Act 555), the Universities and University Colleges Act (AUKU), the Education Act (Act 550), and other public training institutions under various ministries (Abdul Aziz & Hairi, 2016).

Generally, foreign HEIs have gone through a quality assurance or accreditation process by their authorities, but if a foreign HEI is interested in obtaining MQA accreditation status, an application can be submitted to MQA for further evaluation. Each HEI undergoes the same evaluation process, and accreditation is not obtained automatically but must go through a defined assessment process. Therefore, every program awarded MQA accreditation must comply with the quality assurance criteria and standards established. In conclusion, MQA must collaborate with private higher education to implement the higher education quality assurance system in terms of quality and the national qualification framework to ensure that every certificate, diploma, or degree to be received by future students is recognized and accepted by both government and private parties. In recent decades, we have witnessed a growing emphasis on the quality of education in the field of education. This is because our country aims to produce highly qualified graduates after completing their higher education.

In the administration and development of Malaysia, education is a valuable resource for acquiring knowledge, as without knowledge, society will lag in various areas of life. Education is a lifelong human development process encompassing intellectual knowledge across multiple disciplines, the development of manipulative and vocational skills, social life skills, language and communication skills, morality and spirituality development, the cultivation of good human instincts, and wisdom building in life, institutionally, and through a process. Education should be advanced, especially when recognized under MQA, to avoid students receiving subpar education that offers a poor systemic perspective, which defines the system as a function or activity in an organization aimed at achieving organizational goals.

This happens because education in Malaysia is relevant to the needs of knowledge, technology, thinking, economy, and socio-cultural development, focusing on program implementation and student assessment in achieving established competencies.

Administration is an important concept in the management of public affairs in civil society. In general, in terms of decision-making, administration refers to the formulation and implementation of policies regarding various public affairs. As a process, administration includes planning, organization, direction, finance, human resources, and job quality evaluation. Therefore, institutions should ensure that the programs they run meet the criteria and standards established before a relevant accreditation can be awarded to the relevant program. The accreditation programs given by MQA obtain benefits from the recognition of quality assurance bodies or foreign ministries confident in the quality of programs offered by local public and private higher education institutions. In this regard, it is subject to the preferences and requirements of foreign entities according to their goals and needs. For example, foreign authorities are more likely to send sponsored students to institutions with university status offering postgraduate programs. The accreditation issued by MQA is limited to domestic institutions registered under the Private Higher Education Institutions Act (Act 555), the Universities and University Colleges Act (AUKU), the Education Act (Act 550), and other public training institutions under various ministries (Abdul Aziz & Hairi, 2016).

In general practice, foreign higher education institutions (IPT) have undergone a quality assurance or accreditation process by the authorities in their respective countries. However, if a foreign IPT is interested in obtaining MQA (Malaysian Qualifications Agency) accreditation status, an application can be submitted to MQA for further evaluation. Each IPT will go through the same assessment process, and Accreditation Certification is not automatically obtained but rather must go through a defined assessment process. Therefore, any program that is awarded Accreditation Certification must comply with the set quality assurance criteria and standards. In conclusion, MQA should cooperate with private higher education institutions to implement a quality assurance framework for higher education in terms of quality, reference criteria, and national qualification standards, ensuring that every certificate, diploma, or degree that students will receive in the future is recognized and accepted by both the government and the private sector. In recent decades, we have witnessed that education quality has become a hotly debated topic and a primary goal for educators, the public, and authorities alike. This is because our nation aspires to produce high-quality graduates after completing higher education.

In the administration and development of Malaysia, education is a vital source of knowledge acquisition, as without knowledge, society will lag in various aspects of life. Education is a lifelong human development process that encompasses intellectual learning across various disciplines, the development of manipulative and vocational skills, the acquisition of social and life skills, language and communication skills, moral and spiritual development, the cultivation of good human nature, and the cultivation of wisdom to navigate life institutionally and procedurally. Education should be advanced, especially when recognized under MQA, to avoid students receiving subpar education, which results in an inferior system perspective, where a system is defined as a function or activity within an organization that aims to achieve the organization's goals. This happens because education in Malaysia is relevant to the requirements of intellectual, technological, economic, and socio-cultural development and focuses on the implementation of programs and student assessments to achieve the competencies set in a study program.

Administration is a critical concept in public affairs management in civil society. In general terms, in terms of decision-making, administration means policy formulation and the implementation of policies on various public affairs. As a process, administration involves planning, organization, leadership, finances, human resources, and work quality assessment. Therefore, institutions must ensure that the programs they offer achieve and meet the defined criteria and standards before accreditation can be awarded to the relevant program. As a result, programs awarded accreditation certification benefit from the recognition of a quality assurance body that is confident in the quality of the programs offered by public and private higher education institutions (HEIs). In conclusion, this education should be subject to quality assurance under the MQA agency for learning at all institutions in our country to prevent a shortage of less intellectual graduates upon completion of their studies.

Table 2  
*The Implementation of MQA in Higher Education*

Themes	Importance and Significance	Contribution of the Research
<b>Collaborative Efforts for MQA Recognition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Addresses the issue of programs in higher education lacking MQA recognition.</li> <li>- Proposes collaborative efforts involving MQA, Chief Executive Officer of MQA, and Council of Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).</li> <li>- Recommends a rating and accreditation process for Malaysian students in the United States.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Advocates for collaborative initiatives to rectify MQA recognition issues in higher education programs.</li> <li>- Proposes a specific approach involving MQA, CHEA, and the Chief Executive Officer for addressing the challenges faced by Malaysian students abroad.</li> <li>- Recommends a strategic rating and accreditation process to enhance program recognition and address accreditation gaps.</li> </ul>
<b>International Cooperation and Collaboration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emphasizes the crucial role of MQA's cooperation with foreign agencies.</li> <li>- Describes collaboration through information sharing, expertise exchange, and training collaboration.</li> <li>- Highlights MQA's involvement in international networks in Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific region.</li> <li>- Stresses the importance of facilitating the mobility of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Underscores the significance of international cooperation for MQA and its role in fostering information sharing, expertise exchange, and training collaboration.</li> <li>- Highlights MQA's contribution to international networks, promoting cross-border mobility for Malaysian graduates.</li> <li>- Positions MQA as a key player in facilitating understanding and appreciation of the Malaysian accreditation system globally.</li> </ul>

Themes	Importance and Significance	Contribution of the Research
	Malaysian graduates across borders.	
<b>Private Higher Education and MQA Accreditation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recognizes the roles of private higher education institutions (HEIs) in quality initiatives.</li> <li>- Proposes initiatives to attract foreign students, emphasizing programs with English as the medium of instruction.</li> <li>- Advocates for international quality standards and MQA accreditation for private HEIs.</li> <li>- Highlights the potential benefits for universities in terms of increased student enrollment and profitability.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Acknowledges the importance of private HEIs in quality initiatives and their collaboration with the government.</li> <li>- Recommends specific initiatives for private HEIs to attract foreign students and stimulate interest in the private higher education sector.</li> <li>- Advocates for adherence to international quality standards and MQA accreditation to enhance the competitiveness of private HEIs.</li> <li>- Emphasizes the role of MQA in promoting and marketing higher education programs globally.</li> </ul>
<b>MQA Accreditation and Program Benefits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Highlights MQA's role in monitoring compliance and providing accreditation to higher education institutions.</li> <li>- Describes the benefits of MQA accreditation, including recognition from quality assurance bodies and foreign ministries.</li> <li>- Specifies the limited scope of MQA accreditation to domestic institutions.</li> <li>- Discusses the evaluation process for foreign HEIs seeking MQA accreditation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emphasizes the critical role of MQA in ensuring compliance and providing accreditation to higher education institutions.</li> <li>- Discusses the benefits of MQA accreditation, emphasizing recognition from quality assurance bodies and foreign ministries.</li> <li>- Specifies the scope of MQA accreditation and its applicability to domestic institutions.</li> <li>- Highlights the evaluation process for foreign HEIs seeking MQA accreditation.</li> <li>- Positions MQA as a key player in shaping the quality assurance framework for higher education.</li> </ul>
<b>Quality Assurance and Education Administration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emphasizes the importance of MQA in implementing a quality assurance framework for higher education.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Underscores the role of MQA in establishing a quality assurance framework for higher education.</li> </ul>

Themes	Importance and Significance	Contribution of the Research
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Discusses the criteria and standards for accreditation.</li> <li>- Stresses the need for collaboration between MQA and private higher education institutions.</li> <li>- Highlights the growing emphasis on education quality in recent decades.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Discusses the criteria and standards set for accreditation, emphasizing compliance for program recognition.</li> <li>- Advocates for collaboration between MQA and private HEIs to ensure quality in education.</li> <li>- Highlights the broader societal importance of education quality in the administration and development of Malaysia.</li> </ul>

The summary of the research findings encapsulates the study's importance and significance, giving emphasis to the research's contribution. This highlights the research's impact in both theoretical and contextual dimensions.

### Issue 3: Universities Implementing Platforms with High Graduate Employability Abroad

Establishing a diverse society necessitates various processes within a community's life, serving as the primary medium for a nation's development and progress. Creating multiple platforms and institutions to enhance public knowledge and thinking is pivotal for driving the nation's development in the future. Several suggestions and directions can be implemented to address the issue of unemployment and graduate employability in the country. One possible action is providing substantial financial assistance to stimulate rapid economic growth. This financial aid should be substantial, involving billions of Ringgits, to simultaneously execute numerous development projects. With the simultaneous implementation of multiple development projects, a considerable workforce will be required, providing employment opportunities for many individuals. The government should wisely manage this financial package through the selection of economic projects that can generate supplementary economic activities, such as technology-based and high-level research-oriented initiatives. The nation's economy will advance rapidly if the government provides a substantial financial aid package to create job opportunities and further enhance the employability of graduates from various universities and colleges.

Furthermore, efforts to promote the nation's higher education system should be intensified by the government through exhibitions and economic delegation visits to foreign countries. One actionable recommendation is to provide financial assistance and scholarship offers to foreign students, stimulating international student mobility to Malaysia. Attracting more foreign investment into the country can undoubtedly generate more economic activities, complementing the economic packages previously offered by the government to address economic challenges and promote sector-related developments in Malaysia. This approach will, in turn, increase job opportunities for the Malaysian population and boost graduate employability.

Additionally, the government should undertake various programs to empower young individuals, such as organizing English language programs and establishing skill institutes in collaboration with foreign countries like Germany. These programs are critical as they help enhance generic skills or soft skills among graduates. Such skills are essential because they

aid in improving the image and identity of graduates after their studies, making it easier for employers to hire them due to their existing skills.

Moreover, considering the COVID-19 pandemic, future graduates need to be prepared to face the challenges it has posed and utilize their creativity to engage in entrepreneurial activities. Graduates who have not secured employment need to adapt to the current situation and identify new skills required by industries. They should seek opportunities to upgrade their skills to align with current demands. Graduates should highlight their expertise in their respective fields as an added value for potential employers. Additionally, graduates should take advantage of online training programs to enrich their knowledge. They can obtain skills certificates through online learning programs offered by both local and international organizations. The recent development due to the COVID-19 outbreak has led to a shift in work management practices, with most industries and companies operating online. This transformation has reshaped the job landscape and work methods. Digital skills have become highly valuable in today's job market. Therefore, graduates must possess basic software skills to perform daily tasks online, including conducting meetings, discussions, and analyses.

There are various systems and software programs available to streamline work processes, reduce costs, and save time. Furthermore, addressing the growing unemployment issue in the country requires the government to focus on recruiting local graduates who are professionals in various fields instead of relying heavily on foreign professionals. It is suggested that the government should prioritize local graduates for job positions that match their expertise. By providing such opportunities, graduates can demonstrate their abilities and skills in their respective fields, even more so with the advancement of the country in international competition.

To conclude, the government must diversify the country's economic sectors to create more job opportunities. Relying on a few major economic sectors is not sustainable because these sectors may become vulnerable or lose relevance. After the COVID-19 pandemic, the country's primary economic sector, tourism, suffered a severe downturn. To safeguard public safety, the government had to close its borders and restrict foreign tourists from entering the country. These necessary measures were effective in curbing the spread of the virus but had detrimental economic consequences since tourism is one of the nation's primary economic contributors. The government needs to seek ways to diversify the country's existing economic sectors to strengthen the national economy and prevent its citizens from suffering economic burdens.

Table 3

*Universities Implementing Platforms with High Graduate Employability Abroad*

Themes	Importance and Significance	Contribution of the Research
<b>Financial Assistance for Economic Growth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recognizes the role of diverse platforms and institutions in societal development.</li> <li>- Emphasizes the need for substantial financial assistance for economic growth.</li> <li>- Proposes the simultaneous execution of multiple</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Advocates for substantial financial aid to stimulate economic growth and generate employment opportunities.</li> <li>- Recommends the strategic management of financial packages through technology-based and research-oriented initiatives.</li> </ul>



Themes	Importance and Significance	Contribution of the Research
	development projects to create employment opportunities.	- Positions financial assistance as a catalyst for enhancing graduate employability from various universities and colleges.
<b>Promotion of Higher Education on a Global Scale</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Highlights the importance of promoting the nation's higher education system internationally.</li> <li>- Recommends efforts like exhibitions and economic delegation visits to attract foreign students.</li> <li>- Stresses the potential economic benefits of attracting foreign investment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Advocates for intensified efforts to promote the nation's higher education system globally.</li> <li>- Recommends specific actions, including financial assistance and scholarships, to attract international students.</li> <li>- Positions internationalization as a strategy to boost economic activities and job opportunities, contributing to graduate employability.</li> </ul>
<b>Empowerment Programs for Generic Skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Proposes programs to empower young individuals, such as English language programs and skill institutes.</li> <li>- Emphasizes the significance of generic skills in improving graduates' image and identity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recommends government-led programs to enhance generic skills and soft skills among graduates.</li> <li>- Highlights the critical role of such skills in improving graduates' employability and marketability.</li> <li>- Positions empowerment programs as essential for addressing the employability challenges faced by graduates.</li> </ul>
<b>Adaptation to Post-COVID Job Market Dynamics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Addresses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on future graduates.</li> <li>- Recommends adaptation to new skills required by industries.</li> <li>- Advocates for online training programs and the acquisition of digital skills.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Urges graduates to prepare for post-COVID challenges and engage in entrepreneurial activities.</li> <li>- Recommends continuous skills upgrading to align with industry demands.</li> <li>- Highlights the importance of digital skills in the transformed job market.</li> <li>- Positions online training programs as a valuable resource for knowledge enrichment.</li> </ul>
<b>Local Graduates as Professionals in Various Fields</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Advocates for the government to focus on recruiting local graduates for professional positions.</li> <li>- Suggests prioritizing local graduates based on expertise.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recommends a shift in government focus towards recruiting local graduates for professional positions.</li> <li>- Highlights the potential for local graduates to contribute to the country's advancement in international competition.</li> </ul>

Themes	Importance and Significance	Contribution of the Research
	- Emphasizes the role of local graduates in international competition.	- Positions the prioritization of local graduates as a strategy to showcase their abilities and skills in diverse fields.
<b>Diversification of Economic Sectors</b>	- Stresses the need to diversify the country's economic sectors for sustainable job creation. - Cautions against reliance on a few major economic sectors. - Cites the vulnerability of tourism as a primary economic contributor.	- Advocates for government efforts to diversify economic sectors to create more job opportunities. - Highlights the potential risks of relying on a limited number of economic sectors. - Positions economic diversification as a key strategy to strengthen the national economy and prevent economic burdens on citizens.

The encapsulation of the research findings in the summary underscores the study's importance and significance while placing emphasis on the research's contribution. This serves to highlight the impact of the research in both theoretical and contextual dimensions.

In the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic in Malaysia, both the workforce and university graduates faced significant challenges, prompting the government to implement movement control orders with profound implications for employment. The resulting restrictions led to the suspension of various job sectors, causing substantial workforce reductions in large companies grappling with pandemic-induced losses. Consequently, this upheaval resulted in a scarcity of employment opportunities for university graduates. This study contributes by addressing the ramifications of this scenario and delving into research objectives focused on analyzing trends and proposing preparatory measures for graduates navigating the issue of unemployment. It highlights key areas, including the imperative for graduates to enhance both cognitive knowledge and generic skills, the role of the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) in higher education, the significance of universities as platforms for graduate employability, and government initiatives providing job opportunities. The study underscores the collaborative roles of individuals, universities, and government initiatives in fostering graduates capable of international competition. Future directions suggest further exploration of suggestions and implications related to unemployment, aiming to contribute to the revitalization of public universities and enhance public understanding of these institutions.

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