



## GRADUATE UNEMPLOYMENT DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN MALAYSIA

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### ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 epidemic has had a negative impact on many sectors, particularly the Malaysian economy. To prevent the spread of this illness, the government has taken extraordinary steps, issuing Movement Control Orders (MCO) throughout the nation. The consequence of this MCO prevents the firm from working regularly and creates losses to the point where the company must lay off some of its workers to fund the company's operating expenses. This has resulted in a rise in unemployment, as well as making it harder for graduates to join the labour market today. As a result, a research was done to identify the reasons that made it difficult for potential graduates to access the labour market during the COVID-19 epidemic, as well as solutions to this issue. Due to the Movement Control Order, a total of 200 respondents completed a questionnaire created using the Google Form platform and disseminated online (MCO). According to the conclusions of this research, the primary element that makes it difficult for graduates is due to factors of the economic slowdown, particularly during current pandemic, which generates heightened rivalry between graduates and retrenched workers to access the labour market. The study's findings are likely to make prospective graduates more aware of the problems that await them after graduation.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The world is now battling a COVID-19 viral pandemic, prompting most governments to take extraordinary measures such as imposing travel or movement restrictions (lockdown) to prevent the virus from spreading. Not to be outdone, Malaysia is likewise striving to combat the spread of the COVID-19 virus, with the government emphasising that people's health and safety must always be ensured and prioritised. To combat the epidemic, the Malaysian government enacted the Movement Control Order (MCO) on March 18, 2020, as well as a thorough healthcare procedure.

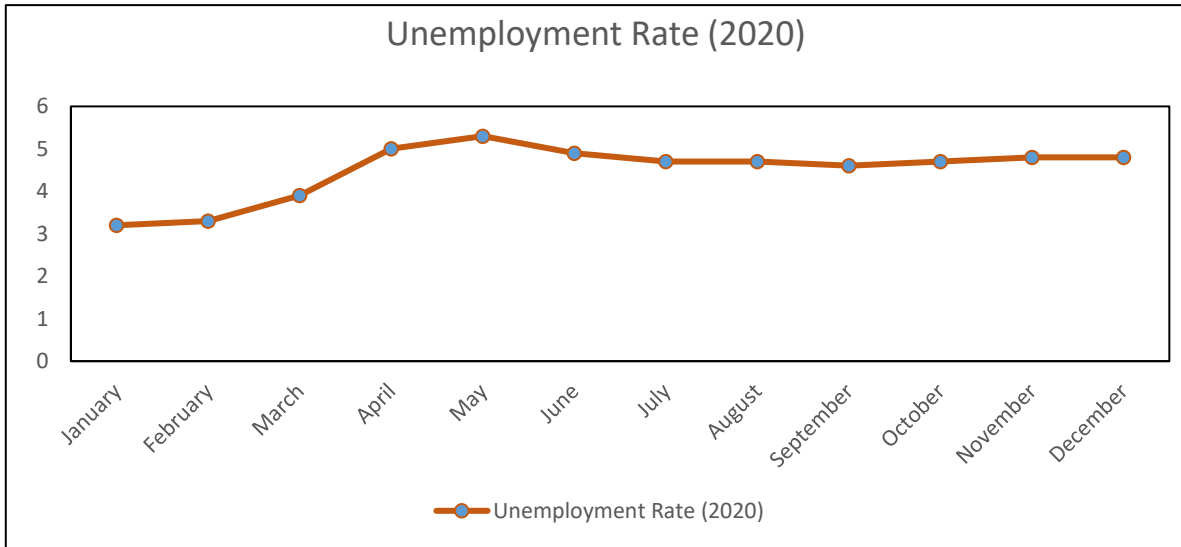
As we all know, the Movement Control Order (MCO) has a wide range of negative consequences for all groups as a result of the closure of numerous sectors, including the commercial and educational sectors. Because of the collapse of these economic sectors, most firms or organisations have suffered large losses, forcing them to lay off some workers and no longer accept new personnel, particularly graduates with no experience in the field. As a result, the number of jobless Malaysians has increased, with some of them being graduates.

Today, the problem of graduate unemployment is not limited to Malaysia; it affects people all around the globe (Hanapi & Nordin, 2014). Unemployment among these graduates is defined as students who have acquired a degree certificate but are still jobless. As a result, unemployment among these graduates is defined as a sort of frictional unemployment since it entails a length of time spent looking for and obtaining a job. To further deepen the meaning of unemployment, various definitions can be obtained, including the situation where a person belongs to a job seeker who wants to get a job but has not yet obtained it, causing it to be one of the macroeconomic problems that directly affect humans and is a hotly debated issue today (Zata et al., 2019). According to Gordon (2000), the jobless are persons who match the labour market's qualifications but are not already working. According to the Malaysian Department of Statistics (2021), unemployment is defined as a person who does not have a job yet want to work.

The issue of unemployment and difficulties in obtaining work among these graduates is not new. The COVID-19 pandemic, in fact, exacerbated the source of this disease. One of the major constraints and challenges is closing the education sector physically and only doing online learning when the Movement Control Order (MCO) is implemented, as most students are unable to familiarise themselves with online learning due to poor internet access and the management of unstable emotions. This makes it difficult to produce competent and high-quality academic graduates to join the Malaysian labour market. This is also one among the factors contributing to the greater graduate unemployment rate during the Covid-19 epidemic compared to before the pandemic. According to the Graduate Tracer Study, Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), in 2021, stated that for recent graduates, they face a greater challenge in the competition to find work because this group of graduates has no work experience until encouraging them to participate in Malaysian unemployment (Muhammad, 2022).

According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2020), Malaysia had the largest rise in unemployment rate in May 2020, at 5.3%, with around 861,100 total jobless. Figure 1 clearly shows that the government's decision to impose a Movement Control Order (PKP) by closing economic sectors can have a negative impact on the Malaysian labour market, causing the unemployment rate to rise and begin to exceed the full employment level of 4% from April 2020 to the present. Not only that, but the graduate jobless rate increased to 4.3% in 2020, while Malaysia is dealing with the COVID-19 epidemic, compared to merely 3.9% in 2019.

As a result, in order to find solutions to each of these issues, this research was done to examine the reasons and challenges of prospective graduates' difficulty in finding work during the Covid-19 epidemic in Malaysia. Following that, this research examined the methods that each party may take to solve the problem of unemployment among new graduates during Covid-19. If this issue is not addressed immediately, it may have a detrimental influence on Malaysia's economic development.



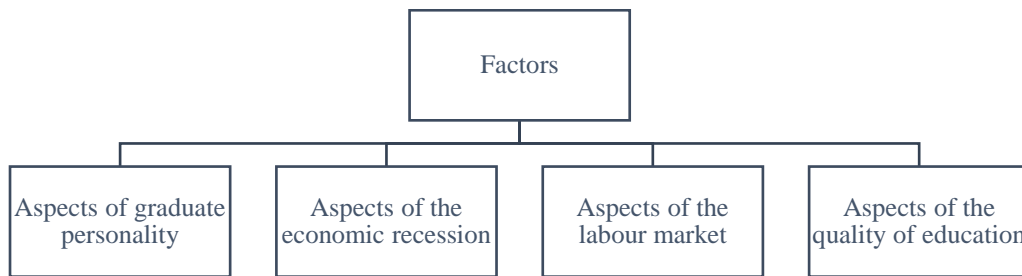
**Figure 1: Unemployment rate trends in Malaysia throughout 2020.**

Adapted from: Department of Statistics Malaysia

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Factors of difficulty for new graduates to enter the job market.

Prospective graduates are finding it tough to join the labour market these days owing to a variety of circumstances. Thus, this research examines these issues by categorising them as features of graduate personality, aspects of economic crisis, market characteristics, and aspects of educational quality. These criteria have also been examined in previous studies conducted by a number of other scholars.



**Figure 2: Factors of difficulty for new graduates to get a job in the COVID-19 pandemic.**

#### 2.1.1 Aspects of graduate personality

Before a job is provided to a graduate, their personality might convey a first impression to potential employers about their attitude or ability. Graduates are sometimes characterised as young individuals who lack the abilities and experience that they possess (Alkatheri et al., 2019). This research found that age is adversely connected to unemployment, with each increase in age projected to lower unemployment by one unit. This clearly demonstrates that young people, particularly graduates, contribute to global unemployment. According to Nadzri et al. (2015), there are also graduates who refuse to leave their hometown and tend to over-choose a location of employment, while others

over-expect big income. Candidates ask for exorbitant pay or perks without disclosing their experience or character, as well as their negative attitude and demeanour.

According to Hanapi and Nordin (2014), certain companies in the business make critical remarks about graduates, claiming that graduates lack the necessary skills and credentials to satisfy the industry's demands today. Graduates lack technical skills, problem-solving abilities, and communication abilities, particularly in English. This is corroborated by studies performed by Ibrahim & Mahbob (2021), Krish et al. (2014), and Nadzri et al. (2015), who said that the fall in English proficiency as a key weakness among graduates today is a reason of difficulty for them to acquire a job offer after graduation. One of the causes leading to graduates' increased unemployment today is a lack of marketability skills and employability to join the labour market (Maharam Mamat et al., 2019). This also leads to a mismatch between the quality of graduates and the labour market's demands, particularly in terms of the skills and knowledge acquired by graduates in the nation, resulting in employment mismatch (Nooriah Yusof et al., 2013). This clearly illustrates that in order to prevent employment mismatches, graduates must now discover the proper employability skills as the times adapt to this Industry 4.0 transformation.

According to Nadzri et al. (2015), selecting the wrong subject of study would also make it harder to find work and even receive study loans or scholarships when pursuing a higher education. Graduates will be unable to successfully express their talents to employers due to their failure to comprehend the theory and their lack of expertise or information about the work. This issue happens regularly throughout the age and growth of students, when students do not get appropriate exposure and knowledge about career prospects and job kinds that they might pursue, leaving graduates unaware of the presence of many work options accessible in Malaysia.

Not only that, but Malaysians are increasingly talking about the gig economy, particularly during the COVID-19 outbreak. This is because the majority of the people who were laid off as a consequence of the company's collapse during the MCO were forced to work in the gig economy to supplement their income. According to Abd Rahman et al. (2020), some graduates' lack of initiative in increasing their skills and knowledge in the gig economy contributes to the current surge in graduate unemployment in Malaysia. This in-depth understanding of the gig economy enables graduates to build their own professional prospects while the economy is volatile during this epidemic.

### ***2.1.2 Aspect of the economic recession***

The economic state of a nation is also an essential determinant in determining the current amount of unemployment. Malaysia's unemployment rate increased as a result of the country's economic crisis during the COVID-19 epidemic. According to Siti Hajar and Zaini (1989), Malaysia's economic crisis in the mid-1980s hampered the role and function of the public sector as the country's principal "employer," as constrained expenditure resulted in delayed employment growth and lowered new recruitment compared to what was done in 1983. This clearly demonstrates that when a nation has an economic downturn, it reduces labour demand, making it harder for graduates to find jobs when they finish their education.

According to Nadzri et al. (2015), economic factors motivate an individual to choose their job, and choosing a career path in a stable government institution even during an economic downturn is one of the things that arouses high interest among individuals because the profession is in a government body and the probability of losing jobs is lower compared to other professions in private institutions. This makes graduates even more

focused on seeking work with government agencies to protect their careers during the epidemic, since the availability of employment possibilities with government agencies is limited during the economic downturn. As a consequence, graduate joblessness is on the increase. According to Jasbir (1985) and Isahak et al. (1978), graduates should not limit themselves to working in the government sector; instead, they should take the risk of working in the private sector, as most employers in the private sector prefer professional and technical graduates because they are said to be able to perform tasks more effectively.

Furthermore, according to Mansor et al. (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic has generated a crisis not only in public health but also in the economy and labour market as a whole, adding responsibilities and problems to workers, employers, and the government. Not to be outdone, this epidemic is also one of the most difficult problems for fresh graduates entering the Malaysian labour market today. Furthermore, the adoption of social incarceration measures and mobility restriction orders affects the majority of employment, particularly those that require physical touch with customers. This will contribute indirectly to the rise in unemployment during the epidemic.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 epidemic that happened in our country has had a significant influence on the economic sector and national growth, with the employment sector hit by a 3.9 percent rise in unemployment in the first quarter compared to 3.3 percent in 2019. (Abdul Aziz, 2020). The majority of workers are unemployed as a result of the employment sectors affected by the Movement Control Order (MCO), which include tourism, aviation, business, creative industries, housing, manufacturing, business, human resources, private medicine, professional services, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) sectors, agriculture, and plantations (Mohd Zaky Zainudin, 2020). It is obvious that the closing of these industries would make it harder for new graduates to enter the employment market today.

### ***2.1.3 Aspects of the labour market***

Concerning the labour market, many parties, particularly those in this set of graduates, are concerned that the imbalance between demand and supply in Malaysia's labour market may result in more university graduates struggling to find work possibilities (Chong Seng, 2018). This is because the labour market's supply does not now match the rise in the number of university graduates (Alkatheri et al., 2019). Indirectly, the increased number of graduates will boost competition for job opportunities, resulting in a rise in graduate unemployment in Malaysia.

According to Alkatheri et al. (2019), inadequate labour market information systems, such as ineffective career advising and counselling services at a university, make it difficult for graduates to know what jobs are available, leading to unemployment issues.

Graduates are not sufficiently exposed to labor-market knowledge, therefore they are uninformed of the right fields for their career plans. As a result, graduates are less aware of the availability of many relevant work options, which contributes to the rise in graduate unemployment in Malaysia. This will also have an impact on businesses since there will be a shortage of suitable applicants to fill opportunities available in the Malaysian labour market (Hanapi & Nordin, 2014).

Furthermore, according to Nadzri et al. (2015), most companies consider job experience to be one of the most important recruiting criteria for fresh graduates. This clearly demonstrates that graduates are having significant challenges since they lack the necessary experience, resulting in a surge in unemployment among these graduates. Students who lack experience may make less acceptable and incorrect profession choices

as a result of this phenomena. Inadequate job selection will promote tension among students and will have a detrimental influence on their life in the future, particularly for new graduates with little work experience (Azizi Yahaya, 2004). Staff recruitment and selection, particularly for high-level roles, must be done swiftly and effectively since the procedure will result in considerable expense to the industry, either directly or indirectly (Zafir Mohd Makhbul et al., 2015).

#### 2.1.4 Aspects of the quality of education

By exposing graduates to theoretical issues in linked disciplines, the education sector plays a vital role in moulding a graduate's future profession. However, this industry may be one of the causes leading to the current growth in graduate unemployment in Malaysia. Students should prioritise picking a good subject of study that is in great demand in the market before continuing their education. This is due to the fact that choosing a field of study that is in low demand by the labour market will make it difficult for students to find jobs after graduation, resulting in the existence of a labour skills gap when the education sector produces new workforce skills that do not match the needs of the industry (Rahim Anuar et al., 2016).

According to Hanapi and Nordin (2014), a graduate should be aware of their career area of study as well as market demands connected to their education. This is because failing to do so will result in a skills mismatch in one market and a scarcity of trained labour in others. The absence of a needed skill will have an influence on the labour market's skill mismatch issue. When there is a mismatch between the demands of the business and the subject of study of these graduates, it may also contribute to a rise in graduate unemployment owing to challenges the graduates themselves have in being accepted to work by the industry.

Furthermore, we might find educational institutions failing to guarantee that the syllabus or curriculum of education is in accordance with what is necessary in Malaysia's labour market. This is because the university's role in supplying curriculum and components of the area of education is not in line with the abilities necessary in the job (Hanapi & Nordin, 2014). Most of the university's courses are also useless and do not satisfy the demands of today's employment market. According to Bidin Yatim et al. (2011), educational institutions' area of study has an unduly high academic concentration, and the quality of graduates is exclusively determined via academic assessments. Meanwhile, the focus on theoretical components of university education is overshadowed by technical and practical features, making it difficult for students to adjust to the sector of work.

#### 2.2 Steps that can be taken by each party to address this issue

Every problem must have a solution, including the problem of graduate unemployment in Malaysia. This research also covers the measures that may be taken from the standpoint of a graduate, an educational institution, an employer, or the government.

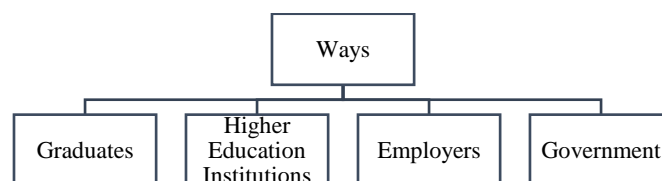


Figure 3: Steps that can be taken by each party to address this issue.

### **2.2.1 Graduates**

The graduates themselves must take the initial move toward resolving this issue. Graduates must identify the elements or circumstances that make entering the labour market challenging. As a result, people may make improvements to their own flaws in order to solve this problem. Graduates, according to Zulkifli et al. (2016), must adjust their personal perspectives. In reality, a graduate must also develop communication abilities, particularly English proficiency, as well as a variety of other soft skills. This is possible if a graduate takes the effort to master numerous soft skills that are not explicitly taught throughout their education. Graduates should have strong soft skills that match the qualities needed by the business, such as communication skills, intelligent thoughts, wide knowledge, and the bravery to express their viewpoints in any scenario (Ibrahim & Mahbob, 2021). A person's personality may be shown via excellent and successful communication. It was discovered that the graduate's most valuable asset is his personality, attitude, and character in terms of maturity in thinking, analysis, and problem solving, as well as his capacity to employ his soft skills in every setting.

According to Hanapi and Nordin (2014), graduates should have a strong command of employability and technical abilities. This is in keeping with the developments in the world of development during this technological age, where it emphasises each graduate's mastery of technical skills (hard skills) and employability abilities (employability). Research abilities are one of the employability skills that should be highlighted. A graduate should enhance their research skills since they are vital in the profession and allow them to know what databases and other resources to access, how to gather relevant data, organise and analyse data, and produce suggestions (Krish et al., 2014).

### **2.2.2 Higher education institutions**

Universities are venues where graduates may learn about their chosen area and develop theoretical knowledge. However, exposure to this part of theory is insufficient to prepare graduates for the reality of the workplace in the future. According to Alkatheri et al. (2019), university courses should be more practical in order to help graduates find jobs and make the transition from study to work simpler. To do this, the government, via the appropriate ministry, the Ministry of Higher Education, must give career guidance to every student who has just joined the educational institution in order to bridge the gap between the abilities gained and those needed.

According to Hanapi and Nordin (2014), the curriculum in higher education institutions has to be changed since many graduates do not acquire a suitable level of job competence. To guarantee that the course is recognised by all parties, the subject of study provided by educational and training institutions must satisfy the present demands of businesses or the labour market. In response to changing circumstances, universities may give a new curriculum framework that incorporates practical courses relevant to gig economy, as well as increase the quality of training and entrepreneurial education programmes provided by public higher education institutions across Malaysia (Abdullah et al., 2011). The educational institution may also redesign each student's final year project, increasing engagement with industry and exposing them to the reality of work.

Furthermore, university administration, through Student Affairs or the Career Development Unit, may organise Career Fairs or joint seminars in collaboration with ministries or government agencies, as well as prospective employers, to inform graduates about available government initiatives or programmes, as well as job opportunities in the market (Shamsuddin et al., 2013).

Not to be outdone, graduates may get education and training in areas such as creating resumes, attending job interviews, and so on. According to Zulkifli et al. (2016), educational institutions must raise student knowledge of professional options via two means: physical and online (media) exposure. Physically, the institution may offer more career and industry-related presentations. Meanwhile, the university may use the media to advertise, distribute career-related information, and so on.

### **2.2.3 Employers**

The sector also plays a part in alleviating the problem of graduate unemployment in Malaysia through different efforts that might be undertaken. Employers should support genuine industry cooperation in education and training, according to Dian Hikmah and Zaidi Mahyuddin (2016), since it is critical to establishing and fostering a thriving worker community that fulfils current and future business demands. Employers must establish a relationship with educational institutions from the industry's perspective in order to provide information related to the world of work in various ways, such as providing advice on curriculum quality and delivery, contributing business perspectives in career clinics to help prepare students for their futures, and many more (Chong Seng, 2018). The sector should also offer appropriate work placements and job-related projects to meet the growth in graduates in order to prevent a mismatch between demand and supply in Malaysia's labour market. Graduates will be exposed to more information about the professions and professional routes they will pursue in the future as a result of this.

### **2.2.4 Government**

Not to mention the government's responsibility in addressing the issue of unemployment, particularly among recent graduates. Education and training, according to Alkatheri et al. (2019), are among the most essential and costly expenditures that the government can make to alleviate the unemployment issue of these graduates. One of the actions that the government may do is to provide enough entrepreneurial training as a long-term solution, where students must be taught how to exploit the surroundings to earn money (Abdullah et al., 2013). The government should also give additional industrial training opportunities at government institutions so that they are not left behind in terms of acquiring skills and putting their university education to use (Alkatheri et al., 2019). The government must always try to expand the gig economy so that more possibilities are available to graduates (Abd Rahman et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the government might evaluate current government programmes to address the issue of graduate unemployment. According to Chong Seng (2018), government policy may be improved by introducing specific funds for graduates to start entrepreneurial activities, standardising procedures for placement and work experience, positioning marketability skills as a driver of quality, and many other initiatives. Meanwhile, Dian Hikmah and Zaidi Mahyuddin (2016) argue that the government's strategy to combat young unemployment should be reassessed on a regular basis. Policymaking must be fluid and adaptable in order to respond to the future's rapidly expanding employment markets. These include policies and programmes to encourage a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation in particular, to promote lifelong learning, and to boost the workforce's flexibility to shifting industrial currents.

Maintain the execution of the 1 Malaysia Training Scheme (SL1M), which seeks to improve graduates' marketability via soft skills training and on-the-job training (Shamsuddin et al., 2013). New graduates will get soft skills training in five areas:



communication, creative and analytical thinking, organisational adaptation, value-driven professionals, and ethics. New graduates will be prepared to cope with real-world circumstances throughout their work training. The government announced the "Graduate Employability Action Plan" in 2012. One of the goals of the action plan is to assist jobless people enhance their "human capital" abilities, which will help them tackle the obstacles of the labour market. This training for jobless graduates will expose them to more creative thinking and self-sufficiency, as well as produce fresh ideas that fit industrial expectations.

According to Mansor et al. (2020), training programmes and improving job marketability for youth can also provide many benefits, particularly to new graduates, by increasing knowledge about the real world of work as well as specific skills about a type of job based on qualifications, such as Training Scheme Program 1 Malaysia (SL1M), which has been implemented since 2011. The SL1M programme, on the other hand, has been relaunched as "Professional Training and Education for Growing Enterprises" (PROTEGE), with an emphasis on entrepreneurial growth and the production of more viable entrepreneurs. PROTEGE, like the SL1M programme, seeks to help graduates with job training and industry placement. We can see that the SL1M programme is only accessible to recent graduates, but PROTEGE is open to all ages and is only available to low-income individuals.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

This section discusses the approaches and procedures utilised to investigate the research issues raised. The goal of this technique is to assist comprehend the method's applicability more widely or in more depth by providing a description of the research process (Abdullah et al., 2011).

This research relied on primary data and a quantitative technique. The distribution of questionnaires as an instrument was utilised as the data gathering approach in this research. Google Forms was used to construct questionnaire forms, which were then disseminated through social media platforms such as Whatsapp, Telegram, and Instagram. Because of the mobility restrictions imposed by the Movement Control Order, the questionnaire was distributed online (MCO). The questionnaire is divided into three sections: the demographics of the respondents; the factors that make it difficult for new graduates to find work during the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia; and the steps that each party can take to address the issue of unemployment among new graduates during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The researcher gathered a sample of potential graduates from several Malaysian institutions, both public and private, to serve as responders. To guarantee that the study's goals were satisfied, the sample was chosen from potential graduates. This research was carried out to explore the variables that make it difficult for prospective graduates to join the labour market in Malaysia during the COVID-19 epidemic, as well as strategies to guarantee that prospective graduates are adequately equipped before confronting problems in their job search.

Frequency and percentage analysis, as well as mean analysis, were used and tabulated. This descriptive analysis approach is used in every study and is a way for researchers to regulate and display the data they collect (Abdullah et al., 2011). Each data analysis is performed in order to provide the data in a more intelligible format, and the manner in which the data is presented demonstrates that the researcher analysed the data acquired methodically and effectively. The data has also been neatly organised according to the

group designated by the researcher to be studied, and the findings will be presented in the form of tables and descriptions.

#### 4. FINDINGS

**Table 4.1: Respondents' knowledge about unemployment issues in Malaysia.**

Unemployment issue	Respondent's choice	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Do you know about the issue of graduate unemployment that occurs in Malaysia?	Yes	195	97.5
	No	5	2.5
Do you feel there was an increase in graduate unemployment during the COVID-19 pandemic?	Yes	184	92.0
	No	3	1.5
	Not sure	13	6.5

Table 1 investigates respondents' understanding of Malaysian unemployment difficulties, particularly among graduates. In summary, it can be shown that the majority of respondents, 195 persons (97.5%), are aware of the problem of graduate unemployment in Malaysia. This is because the respondents in this survey are all students, thus they are concerned about the issue. Meanwhile, just 5 (2.5% of respondents) said no, indicating that they are unaware of the problem of graduate unemployment. Furthermore, 184 individuals (92.0%) believed that graduate unemployment increased during the COVID-19 epidemic, whereas the remaining 3 people (1.5%) and 13 people (6.5%) replied "no" and "not sure."

**Table 2: Main factors influencing graduate unemployment during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

Factors of graduate unemployment	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Aspects of graduate's personality	20	10.0
Aspects of the economic recession	112	56.0
Aspects of the labour market	62	31.0
Aspects of the quality of education	6	3.0

According to Table 2, more than half of the respondents (56.0%) believed that the economic recession was the primary cause of the increase in graduate unemployment in Malaysia during the COVID-19 pandemic, while the rest answered aspects of the graduate's personality by 10.0%, aspects of the labour market by 31.0%, and aspects of educational quality by 3.0%. This is consistent with a study undertaken by Bidin Yatim et al. (2011), who indicated that a nation's economic slump leads the government to be unable to supply graduates with employment that suit their credentials. We can observe that the worsening economic condition in Malaysia during the COVID-19 epidemic at this time has lowered market demand for labour, producing a rise in unemployment, particularly among graduates.

**Table 3: Ways that graduates can take to address this issue.**

Ways	Frequency
Improve communication skills especially fluency in English	114
Learn employability skills and technical skills on their own initiative	146
Make changes in self-personality attitudes	80
Be proactive in finding career-related information	120
Exploring the field of entrepreneurship knowledge	44
Improve knowledge of gig economics	107

Table 3 explores the approaches that graduates might take to solve this problem. Learning employability skills and technical abilities on their own initiative is one of the most common metrics and is commonly picked by responders (146 times). This is due to the fact that there are several techniques that may be employed for free or for a cost in order for potential graduates to obtain the skills required to join the Malaysian employment market. Learning digital skills such as programming principles to analyse data utilising software often used by businesses such as Python, R, JavaScript, STATA, and so on, for example, where some of this computer software may be taught for free on the Google website, According to Kadir and Rahman (2021), there is a need for the development of skills and training in this digital industry, particularly among graduates, especially at a time when most organisations are worried about digital skills to speed up firm operations.

Furthermore, respondents chose the second highest frequency of 120 times where prospective graduates believe that a graduate should always be proactive in seeking career-related information. This is consistent with the findings of a study conducted by Dian Hikmah and Zaidi Mahyuddin (2016), who stated that a lack of experience and insufficient knowledge of the labour market make it difficult for them to obtain employment opportunities, resulting in an increase in graduate unemployment in Malaysia. As a result, prospective graduates should constantly investigate themselves to obtain knowledge about the area of work they are interested in, so that they are well equipped to be accepted to work in the field when they graduate.

**Table 4: Ways that can be taken by educational institutions to address this issue.**

Ways	Frequency
University courses should be more practical to assist graduates in the job market	148
Lecturers in institutions of higher learning need to be given intensive training and consistent courses to improve their skills or competencies in line with new technologies and information.	49

*LBIBf 20(2), pp. 16-33.*

Lecturers should integrate the characteristics of skilled graduates into the curriculum	33
Raise awareness of career paths among students	63
Restructure the final year project for each student which further increases collaboration with the industry	81
Organize seminars or career exhibitions with the involvement of the industry and government agencies	53
Provide education and training for graduates in terms of job applications such as writing resumes, attending job interviews, and others.	120
Restructure the study curriculum to meet the needs of the industry	52
Improving the quality of training and entrepreneurship education programs at the university level	32

Table 4 depicts the approaches that educational institutions might use to address the problem of graduate unemployment during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the study's results, university courses should be more practical in order to help graduates get jobs, as shown by the greatest total frequency of 148 times picked by respondents. This is because, according to Ibrahim and Mahbob (2021), the emphasis on theoretical aspects in university education as opposed to technical and practical aspects makes it difficult for students to adapt to the current field of work, and the quality of graduates is only measured through academic examinations to assess a graduate's skill level and quality.

Higher education institutions should develop a new curriculum that includes a variety of programmes and material that may expose students to the world of work today. According to Mansor et al. (2021), institutions of higher learning can organise various programmes for prospective graduates to expose them to the job market today, such as creating an online support system as a platform for prospective graduates to obtain information, apply for jobs, and participate in employment training programmes provided by existing public and private companies (a one-stop centre), in line with prospective graduates' reliance on the internet. Prospective grads are finding it difficult to obtain job in the present state of MCO enforcement. The portal serves as a virtual one-stop shop for all relevant information on career possibilities, including marketability training.

Furthermore, offering education and training for potential graduates in terms of job applications such as drafting resumes, attending job interviews, and so on is a measure that was chosen 120 times by respondents for this survey. According to Rahim Anuar et al. (2016), the present generation of youngsters is lacking in general skills, which reduces their prospects of finding work. Many graduates lack the attributes that employers need, such as communication skills, knowledge and information, and self-confidence. As a result, by hosting programmes and training for potential graduates in terms of job applications, we are able to better prepare them to confront the reality of the workplace after they finish their studies.

**Table 2: Ways that can be taken by employers to address this issue.**

Ways	Frequency
Increase the number of industrial training placement quotas in companies so that students can acquire industry-related skills and experience	170
Provide advice on curriculum quality and delivery	37
Contribute a business perspective in a career clinic	44
Collaborate with educational institutions in providing relevant information to the world of work	139
Encourage meaningful industry collaboration in education and training	94
Provide more work-related programs to new graduates	120

According to Table 5, the most often chosen approach (picked 170 times) by respondents for ways that businesses may address this problem is to expand the number of industrial training placement quotas in firms so that students can get industry-related skills and experience. Graduates are only placed focus on academic components of university education rather than technical and practical aspects, making it difficult for students to adjust in the sphere of work (Ibrahim & Mahbob, 2021). As a result of the increase of this quota, prospective graduates will have an easier time finding and obtaining a space to complete industrial training in order to guarantee that they are also able to study practical parts of the industry.

The second most popular strategy is to cooperate with educational institutions to provide relevant job knowledge. According to Alkatheri et al. (2019), poor labour market information systems, such as the ineffectiveness of career advising and counselling services in a higher education institution, lead graduates to be unaware of potential jobs and so contribute to the issue of unemployment. As a result, the sector may work with educational institutions to develop an online platform in accordance with the government's direction to limit physical activity in order to avert the COVID-19 pandemic. The platform should provide a variety of information about the workplace as well as training modules that potential graduates may utilise to supplement their present abilities depending on industry need.

**Table 3: Ways that can be taken by the government to address this issue.**

Ways	Frequency
Introduce in depth to the graduates related to gig economics	133
Make investments in the field of education to provide appropriate training to graduates	94

*LBIBf 20(2), pp. 16-33.*

Launch certain funding to be used as capital to start entrepreneurial activities	63
Maintain the implementation of the 1 Malaysia Training Scheme (SL1M) in the future	75
Promote government initiatives or programs more aggressively through various communication mediums	105
Conducively promote an environment for entrepreneurial development among graduates	38
Review policies to address youth unemployment over time	109

Table 6 analyses the steps that the government may take to remedy this problem. Respondents picked to completely expose graduates to the gig economy the most often (133 times). According to Abd Rahman et al. (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic has increased interest in the gig economy. The gig site, which links freelancers and employers all around the globe, has thousands of jobs available. As a result, the government has developed a number of programmes to encourage the economic development of this job. However, there are still graduates who are ignorant of the economic potential available in this occupation, particularly during the COVID-19 epidemic. As a result, different ways for revealing more about the gig economy, such as the Ministry of Higher Education, should establish a new curriculum framework that incorporates practical courses relevant to the gig economy, so that potential graduates may further strengthen their talents in this sector. Furthermore, the second most often selected method by respondents (109 times) is to reassess the policy to address young unemployment over time. According to Dian Hikmah and Zaidi Mahyuddin (2016), policymakers today must be fluid and agile in order to respond to the rapidly expanding employment market. These include policies and programmes to encourage a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation in particular, to promote lifelong learning, and to boost the workforce's flexibility to shifting industrial trends in Malaysia during pandemics.

**Table 4: Ways to address the issue of graduate unemployment in Malaysia during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

Item	Mean	Standard deviation
Involvement in the gig economy during the COVID-19 pandemic increased employment opportunities nowadays	4.45	.755
A new curriculum structure that includes practical courses related to gig economics	4.33	.765
Good and effective communication can make a person display their personality and maturity	4.20	.841

*LBIBf 20(2), pp. 16-33.*

Entrepreneurship can be used as an alternative in job search for graduates	3.90	.930
Education and training are among the most important ways and the most expensive investment that the government can make to address the problem of graduate unemployment.	4.40	.633
Industrial training opportunities can make graduates not left behind to acquire skills and apply the knowledge they have learned while at university	4.60	.601
A more practical course of study can make the transition from education to work easier	4.57	.622
The world of development during this technology era emphasizes on the mastery of technical skills (hard skills) and employability skills by each graduate	4.61	.700

The mean analysis of approaches to combat graduate unemployment in Malaysia during the COVID-19 epidemic is shown in Table 7. According to the study's findings, prospective graduates believe that the world of development during this technology period emphasises each graduate's mastery of technical skills (hard skills) and employable abilities (employability), with a mean value of 4.61. This is consistent with the findings of a study conducted by Kadir and Nur (2018), who stated that the world is now entering a new millennium in which current technology is so advanced in line with the 4.0 revolution that many countries are now turning their attention to technology by seizing the opportunity to make the technology industry the engine of the country's economic growth.

Furthermore, the second highest mean score is 4.60, indicating an industrial training opportunity that may assist graduates in avoiding falling behind in gaining skills and applying information gained at university. According to Mohd Yusoff (2021), while the COVID-19 pandemic has hampered the implementation of face-to-face industrial training, institutions of higher learning can develop new alternative methods of industrial training, such as industry-based projects, problem-based projects, topical studies, or research projects related to the industry, so that future graduates can delve into the industry of interest. This alternate technique is comparable to industrial training in that it may expose prospective graduates to the realities of the actual world of work and can help to the development of future human capital that is more creative, critical, inventive, and competitive.

However, we can observe that the majority of respondents do not believe that the area of entrepreneurship may be utilised as an alternative in graduate employment searches during this epidemic. According to Dicky Wiwattan (2021), there is no disputing that the area of entrepreneurship has made some graduates successful and wealthy since it is not like working for an employer or an industry that guarantees a consistent monthly income. However, many business scenarios have changed as a result of this pandemic, with many businesses, such as grocery stores, restaurants, tourist centres, and others, unable to operate as usual and some continuing to close due to a lack of income, making graduates feel insecure about venturing into this field of entrepreneurship.

## **5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

In conclusion, this research met its aims, which were to identify the variables that made it difficult for potential graduates to access the labour market during the COVID-19 epidemic and solutions to solve this issue. In reference to that, a total of 200 respondents were successfully gathered to complete this survey, comprising of potential graduates from different institutions in Malaysia, either in the public or private sector. This research categorises the elements that contribute to the difficulties of prospective graduates joining the labour market into four categories: graduate personality, economic recession, labour market, and educational quality. Meanwhile, efforts to address this problem are being debated from several viewpoints, including those of a potential graduate, educational institutions, companies, and the government.

In brief, it was discovered that the majority of respondents are aware of the current problem of graduate unemployment in Malaysia. This is because the majority of respondents believe that the economic slump, particularly during the COVID-19 epidemic, is the primary reason of the rise in unemployment among these graduates. This epidemic has had several detrimental consequences for Malaysia and the rest of the globe, particularly for the country's economic activity. As we all know, the government has taken efforts to eliminate this epidemic by enforcing Movement Control Orders (MCO) throughout the nation, rendering most industries unable to function and suffering losses to the point of having to lay off people. This has also resulted in increased competition between graduates and individuals laid off during the COVID-19 pandemic to enter the job market, according to a study conducted by Mansor et al. (2020), in which the researcher stated that the total output of graduates in 2020 is estimated at 286,8007 people, coupled with the estimated increase in unemployment during this pandemic, making it a significant challenge for graduates to find jobs.

Although several causes contribute to graduate unemployment, it can be addressed if all parties are dedicated to avoiding this problem from worsening in the future in order to protect our country's economy. This research demonstrates that there are several approaches that may be implemented to reduce graduate unemployment during the COVID-19 epidemic. Respondents for graduates said that a graduate should develop employability and technical skills on his or her own initiative. Respondents on behalf of educational institutions agreed that university courses should be more practical in order to aid graduates in the labour market. Most respondents agreed that employers should expand the number of industrial training placement quotas in businesses so that students may get industry-related skills and experience. Meanwhile, responders for the government stated that offering more in-depth knowledge about the gig economy to graduates would be consistent with current developments in Malaysia during this time.

Overall, most prospective graduates are worried about the issue of graduate unemployment in Malaysia during the epidemic. Prospective graduates are becoming more dissatisfied with the rise in graduate unemployment today, prompting them to be more sensitive and prepare for a variety of problems in finding work after graduation. To solve this problem, all stakeholders must work together, including the graduates themselves, educational institutions, companies, and the government. Graduate unemployment should not be overlooked since it might have a significant influence on a country's economy. As a result, the purpose of this research is to offer more in-depth exposure to this topic, particularly to prospective graduates, so that they are more aware and prepared not to be implicated in the unemployment of these graduates. However, this study is still in its early stages of analysis, and it is hoped that the summary of this study



*LBIBf 20(2), pp. 16-33.*

will assist relevant parties, particularly prospective graduates, educational institutions, employers, and the government, in efforts to further reduce unemployment in Malaysia during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly among graduates.

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