

Will I Get a Job after Graduation?

Jin Kuan Kok and Jiunn Han Tan

Abstract—The role of the university in helping students to meet the employment needs has been taken into scrutiny in the present study. Cross-sectional design survey approach was used to examine students' perception on this critical question. Participants included 482 university students from several states of Malaysia. The findings showed that generally students had a positive perception towards the roles of university and most of them were satisfied with the positive learning experience at their respective universities and hence, they were confident in securing a job after completion of education. Although the outcomes obtained from this findings were positive, several reflective and important questions were raised and discussed against the backdrop of Malaysian context. Suggestions for further studies were given.

Index Terms—Component; role of the universities, students' perception on the role of university, universities in Malaysia, the third role of university

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Roles of The Universities

Since the beginning of Greek philosophy that emphasized on critical thinking, initiated by Socrates, whose inspiration was taken by his student Plato to establish the first institution of higher learning in the Western world, knowledge across several subjects such as critical thinking, logic, mathematics and philosophy have been emphasized and contributed enormously to both science and arts in the civilizations and modernization of our world.

In 19th century, the discourse of knowledge concerning the roles of university was very much inspired by Humbolt and Newman's concepts. The roles of higher education in the European tradition identified by Humboldt [1] focuses on research and teaching which Markwell [2] elaborated that research is for the furtherance or enhancement of knowledge, teaching for the transference of knowledge.

Newman [3] wrote and advocated about the idea of a university and elaborated on its role that encourages openness, flexibility, and adaptability. Thus, it was described as a collision of mind with mind, knowledge with knowledge where it is a place for great minds to think alike as well as to contradict each other among the intellectuals. As highlighted, university is a place for interaction or learning from each others, free expression of ideas, embracing diversity, and for experimentation; hence, it is a place for the discovery of new knowledge through trial and error.

Today universities worldwide have come under great stress to terms with the rapid changes in an industrialized modern society in terms of social, economical, technological, cultural, and political forces.

The historical role of universities during its early formation stage which concerned about the acquisition of knowledge has now gone through tremendous changes as a result of constant expansion and increased recruitment of students. According to Bartell[4] the demands of a globalized job market replace the ideas of cultural formation and searching for truth. As a result the role of universities emphasizes more on preparing and equipping students with necessary knowledge and skills for the job market.

Furthermore, the concept of innovation has been added whereby universities are encouraged to exploit the "knowledge triangle of research, education and innovation" [1]. Innovation played important roles in industrial revolution and influenced universities to formulate direct contributions on a social and economic level [5]. Breznitz and Feldman [5] commented that due to the new focus of universities on the extent of measurable contributions to their local economies, the main roles of the universities (teaching, research, knowledge discoveries and conservation institution) are much neglected.

As the contributions of universities are now being evaluated based on the extent they are able to patent and license technology focused on their research and also how much they are able to boost the economies. Somehow, Florida and colleagues [6] labelled the "3Ts"—technology, talent, and tolerance; as the role of the university in the creative economy. In addition, Uyerra [7] postulated that tolerance refers to a society which could tolerate and accept diversity and differences among people as well as their ideas. Uyerra [7] further commented that universities are bound to the innovation potential of a nation, establishing a more tolerant society should be considered as one of the many roles of university.

In short, due to the revolution of industry, economy as well as regional innovation lead to the emergence of a third role or the third mission [8,9] of universities. The main role of universities has changed from the generation and conservation of knowledge to a corporate entity that produces workforce if not talents, to meet the economic demands as well as promote a civilized society.

The social structures, cultural backgrounds, and political ideation between the western and eastern nations are basically different, and thus contribute to the different meanings of what it meant to be a civilized society. A definition based on western values by Kaviraj [10] elaborated on the extent of freedom of speech and expression of different perspectives and he concluded that there should be tolerance towards diversity in a civilized society. Whilst,

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Malaysia as a developing country in South East Asia, certainly students from this part of the world will present different perspectives on how a civilized society should be and for that, students may have different ideas towards the roles of the university. And they have different conceptualization on what they wish to achieve from the education they received and the process of interaction during their university lives.

B. The Educational Development in Malaysia

The Malaysian higher education system processes an enormous capacity to provide a mass production of university graduates. And the institutions of higher learning in Malaysia are ambitious to use higher education as a tool to transform the nation to drive the economic development. The Malaysian National Higher Education Strategic Plan (2007-2010) aimed to produce 21, 000 Ph. D holders in a year and 100, 000 Ph. D holders in 15 years in a diversity of areas such as science, technology, and medicine, humanities and other professional fields. The role of higher education in Malaysia is to supply “human capital” for the country [11]. With the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) watching over massive amount of both public and privates higher education institution like university, colleges, polytechnics, as well as branches of foreign universities in Malaysia. The policy of the Malaysian Association of Private Colleges and Universities strives to offer affordable higher education in Malaysia as well as to assists government to decrease outflow of funds for education to overseas [12]. The emergence of branches of foreign universities and provision of foreign both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees by many local higher institutions prove that much effort has been made on a strategic level to ensure that universities do not only meet the market demands but also contribute to the nation’s economy.

MOHE hence oversees and utilizes the third role of university to process a vast capacity for mass production of university graduates. In other words, the ministry has to keep up with the changes of the society to produce graduates relevant to the needs of workforce. It is no doubt that the target of producing mass numbers of university graduates could be achieved easily, however, the unemployment amongst the graduates persists since two decades ago [13]. As economy is still the driving force for the country and as a result, the education system becomes a tool for economic growth. The question then lies on whether the mass produced graduates have the necessary skills and knowledge to contribute to the ever-growing and ever-changing industries.

The Prime Minister acknowledged and identified the key to beat poverty and establish stronger economy for the nation is through education and entrepreneurship as it depends upon improving knowledge and abilities of the people to realize Malaysian Vision 2020 [14].

Apparently, universities play its third role in a crucial way in providing a community of experimentation and innovation by equipping students with skills and knowledge as well as by providing a platform for research to meet the innovation needs for boosting country’s economy [15].

It seems some parts of the model of the new roles of the university proposed by Breznitz and Feldman [15] are somewhat similar to what the Prime Minister has stressed on

in the New Economic Model (NEM). Breznitz and Feldman’s model [15] depicts universities have taken on economic initiatives which includes workplace development, partnership development, community development and real estate development. Entrepreneurship and necessary professional skills appear to be essential in all the economic initiatives and eventually economic development mentioned in the NEM.

Other than entrepreneurship, substantial effort has been focused on the development of scientists and technologist in Malaysian education system. Strategies are in place to increase the enrolment of science and technology courses in order to reach the level of more than 60 percent in those fields.

In the field of entrepreneurship, can the university education be reliable to provide the knowledge and skills transferable in a real working world? Can our graduates acquire entrepreneurial qualities and able to cope with the challenges in an increasingly competitive world as a result of a globalized economies? For the fact that the Malaysian government needed to allocate 150 M to retrain the massive unemployed graduates, the answer to the above mentioned questions is obvious. Besides the highlighted entrepreneurial skills, Sulaiman and Burke [12], after studying the unemployed graduates in Malaysia have identified many other soft skills which are desperately lacking in our graduates. They assert that as well as knowledge “good soft skills, problem-solving skills and employable value added skills” are essential for Malaysian graduates to secure good jobs.

The investment and development of the people has become increasing important as a response to the country’s development needs. Thus to prepare graduates to meet the needs of future employment, especially in equipping them with soft skills is a critical concern.

Under the enormous force of economy and the urge to fulfill the vision of the country, mass production of university graduates leads to several questions: what are the students’ perceptions towards their university roles based on their experience? With plentiful of both public and private universities in Malaysia, what is the quality of education the students received from their learning experience in those universities? Are they well-equipped for a job in their chosen field of studies?

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Respondents

The targeted respondents of this study were 482 students who volunteered to participate in the survey. Among the samples, there were different ethnicities which included Chinese, Malay and Indian. The ages of students were from 19 to 22 years old. There were a total of 480 undergraduate students pursuing their degree, only 5 students were doing a masters programme. Besides, there were consists of female (54.84%, $n=266$) and male (45.16, $n=219$). The three tables below show the different faculties from both the public and private universities.

TABLE I: RESPONDENTS GENDER

Type of university	Frequency	Percentage
Public Universities	M 75	40.54%
	F 110	59.46%
Private Universities	M 144	48.48%
	F 153	51.52%

TABLE II: FREQUENCY OF RESPONDENTS FROM PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES DIVIDED ACCORDING TO FACULTIES

Faculty	Frequency	Percentage
Business & Finance*	51	27.57%
Science	37	20.00%
SocialScience (Humanities)	12	6.49%
School of Medicine**	8	4.32%
Engineering & Technology***	54	21.19%
Others****	23	12.43%
Total	185	100%

TABLE III: FREQUENCY OF RESPONDENTS FROM PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES DIVIDED ACCORDING TO FACULTIES

Faculty	Frequency	Percentage
Business & Finance*	37	12.46%
Science	30	10.10%
SocialScience (Humanities)	107	36.03%
School of Medicine**	59	19.86%
Engineering & Technology***	5	1.68%
Creative Arts	59	19.86%
Total	297	100%

Note: * Including Marketing, Accounting and Economics
 ** Including Medicine, Dentistry and Pharmacy
 *** Including Faculty of ICT
 **** Including Education, Environment science and Industrial Statistics

B. Procedure and apparatus

A cross-sectional survey approach was adopted in this study to examine the roles of universities in Malaysia through student’s perception. Survey was carried out in 10 universities in Malaysia which located in six different states—Kedah, Penang, Perak, Kuala Lumpur, Johor, and Sabah. Questionnaires were distributed to the students in those universities visited.

The questionnaire was adopted from Galbraith et al (2010). It consists of two parts which covers the participants’ demography (gender, age, academic year, faculty, and whether it was their interest to be in the course of study) and also items related to roles and quality of the universities. At the top of the questionnaires, there was a short introduction which described the nature of study and brief information about confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents’ identity.

There were a total of 11 items related to the research questions of this study. The 11 items posted to the participants as question format aimed to investigate on their

perspectives about the roles of university and to uncover their university experience.

These items required the respondents to answer them in a likert-scale of strongly agree (1), agree (2), neutral (3), disagree (4), and strongly disagree (5) to examine to what extent they agree with the statements. Items were analyzed one by one as scores for items in each dimension were not summed up.

III. RESULTS

The findings of all the items are displayed in the following tables with some description.

TABLE IV: ITEM 1—I THINK THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITY IS TO DO RESEARCH

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree or agree	177	36.9
Neutral or disagree or strongly disagree	303	63.1
Total	480	100%

*excluded the 2 missing data

There were 63.1% of students (n=303) either have a neutral perception or disagree or strongly disagree that the role of university is to do research compared to only 36.9% of students (n=177) thought that university is a place for research.

TABLE V: ITEM 2—I THINK UNIVERSITY IS A PLACE TO DEVELOP CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree or agree	366	76.1
Neutral or disagree or strongly disagree	115	23.9
Total	481	100%

*excluded the 1 missing data

There were 76.1% of students (n=366) thought that university is a place for critical thinking skills development compared to only 23.9% of students (n=115) either have a neutral perception or disagree or strongly disagree with the statement.

TABLE VI: ITEM 3—I THINK UNIVERSITY IS A PLACE FOR ME TO CONNECT TO OTHERS

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree or agree	361	75.5
Neutral or disagree or strongly disagree	117	24.3
Total	478	100%

*excluded the 4 missing data

There were 75.5% of students (n=361) thought that university is a place for networking and get to know new people compared to only 24.3% of students (n=117) either have a neutral perception or disagree or strongly disagree with the statement.

TABLE VII: ITEM 4—I THINK UNIVERSITY HAS THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROMOTE A BETTER SOCIETY

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree or agree	380	79.2
Neutral or disagree or strongly disagree	100	20.8
Total	480	100%

*excluded the 2 missing data

There were 79.2% of students ($n=380$) thought that university is responsible to promote a better society compared to only 20.8% of students ($n=100$) either have a neutral perception or disagree or strongly disagree with the statement.

TABLE VIII: ITEM 5—I FEEL THE UNIVERSITY MEETS MY EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree or agree	270	56.3
Neutral or disagree or strongly disagree	210	43.8
Total	480	100%

*excluded the 2 missing data

There were 56.3% of students ($n=270$) felt that university meets their educational needs compared to 43.8% of students ($n=210$) either have a neutral perception or disagree or strongly disagree with the statement.

There was a possibility that the university meets students' educational needs could relate to the reasons they took up their subjects or course. Therefore, *chi-square test for independence* was run and the result showed that there was a significant association between the agreements with university meeting students' educational needs (Strongly agree or agree vs. Neutral or disagree or strongly disagree) and the reason they are taking their respective courses (Personal interest vs. Parents' decision), $X^2(1, n=480) = 13.82, p=.001$. There were more students who joined the course due to their personal interests felt that the university meets their educational needs than those who joined because of their parents' decision (59.6% vs 51.2%), whereas there were more students who joined in due to their parents' decision did not feel that the university meets their educational needs than those joined with personal interests (48.8% vs. 40.4%).

TABLE IX: ITEM 6—I AM CONFIDENT THAT I WILL BE ABLE TO FIND A JOB IN MY FIELD AFTER I COMPLETE MY EDUCATION

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree or agree	319	66.6
Neutral or disagree or strongly disagree	160	33.4
Total	479	100%

*excluded the 3 missing data

There were 66.6% of students ($n=319$) felt confident that they will secure a job after the completion of their studies compared to 33.4% of students ($n=160$) felt otherwise.

Due to a necessity to explore further on this item, the faculties/courses were further divided into science and non-science group to find out the relationship between the two items and the courses the students study.

Chi-square test for independence was run and the result showed that there was a significant association between the confidence of securing a job (Strongly agree or agree vs. Neutral or disagree or strongly disagree) and the faculty/courses (Science vs. Non-science), $X^2(1, n=479) = 12.342, p=.001$. There were more science students felt confident about securing a job after graduation than non-science students (75.8% vs 60.4%, whereas there were more non-science students did not felt confident than science students (39.6% vs. 24.2%).

TABLE X: ITEM 7—I FEEL THE LECTURERS/PROFESSORS HELP ME TO REACH MY POTENTIAL AS A STUDENT

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree or agree	277	57.7
Neutral or disagree or strongly disagree	203	42.1
Total	480	100%

*excluded the 2 missing data

There were 57.7% of students ($n=277$) felt that their lecturers and professors have guided them well in reaching their potential as a student compared to 42.1% of students ($n=203$) felt otherwise.

The author scrutinized the possible way to further explore this dimension and questioned that whether students who enrolled into a university courses due to their personal interests or parents' decision would achieve more positive qualities throughout their learning experience in the university.

Therefore, *chi-square test for independence* was run and the result showed that there was a significant association between the opinion that their lecturers or professors have guided them well to reach their potential as a student (Strongly agree or agree vs. Neutral or disagree or strongly disagree) and the reason they are taking their respective courses (Personal interest vs. Parents' decision), $X^2(1, n=480) = 7.022, p=.03$. There were more students who joined the course due to their personal interests felt that their potential as a student is reached with the help of their lecturers and professors (60.2% vs 53.7%), whereas there were more students who joined in due to their parents' decision did not feel that way than those joined with personal interests (46.3% vs. 39.8%).

TABLE XI: ITEM 8—I FEEL ACADEMICALLY CHALLENGED BY MY EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree or agree	332	69.3
Neutral or disagree or strongly disagree	147	30.5
Total	479	100%

*excluded the 3 missing data

There were 69.3% of students ($n=332$) felt that their universities set high academic standards on them and they are challenged by that standards compared to 30.5% of students ($n=147$) felt otherwise.

TABLE XII: ITEM 9—I FEEL MY UNIVERSITY EDUCATION HELP ME TO UNDERSTAND MORE ABOUT HUMAN RELATIONSHIP.

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree or agree	303	63.3
Neutral or disagree or strongly disagree	176	36.7
Total	479	100%

*excluded the 3 missing data

There were 63.3% of students ($n=303$) felt that their university education assist them to understand more about interpersonal relationship compared to 36.7% of students ($n=176$) felt otherwise.

TABLE XIII: ITEM 10—I FEEL MY UNIVERSITY EDUCATION WILL HELP ME TO UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF THING

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree or agree	262	54.6
Neutral or disagree or strongly disagree	218	45.4
Total	480	100%

*excluded the 2 missing data

There were 54.6% of students ($n=262$) felt that their university education assist them to understand the nature of thing compared to 45.4% of students ($n=218$) felt otherwise.

TABLE XIV: ITEM 11—I BELIEVE I AM RESPONSIBLE FOR EDUCATING MYSELF AT UNIVERSITY

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree or agree	405	84.6
Neutral or disagree or strongly disagree	74	15.4
Total	479	100%

*excluded the 2 missing data

There were a large amount of students which was 84.6% of them ($n=405$) believe that it is their own responsibility to educate themselves at university compared to only 15.4% of students ($n=74$) believe it otherwise.

IV. DISCUSSION

Since the emergence of the third role of universities following the rapidly changing industrial society, people questioned about the roles of university. Today the universities do not only play the main two roles of teaching and research, but also mass producing graduates to meet the market demands. Obviously, knowledge transferences, discoveries, conservation of ideas and knowledge are inadequate to fulfill the increasing needs of the regional economy. Equipping students with skills especially being innovative, risk taking, developing of soft skills such as problem solving skills, and entrepreneurial qualities are of utmost importance in building up Malaysia economy. This study was carried to examine the student's perception towards the roles of university, the education experience they have received, and whether they are confident about securing a job after completion of studies in a forever changing environment when the nation is working hard to establish itself in this new economy.

The findings showed that most of the respondents did not

think that research is the role of university which contradicts with many others' findings as mentioned in the literature review earlier. Malaysian universities portrayed somewhat a different picture to Malaysian students. Perhaps, there are many higher institutions do not appear to be a research oriented institution. Hence, the students were not fully exposed to higher level of functioning of university education especially in the area of research which normally involves enthusiastic and talented academicians. This has resulted many students were simply too pragmatic in just getting a degree which can secure them a job without a notion of wanting to continue studying and researching.

Besides, it is found that while the students thought that university is a place for networking; connecting them to others which seems to be a platform of learning and opportunities; a large percentage of respondents thought that university is responsible to promote a better society. However, it is unclear on how exactly what need to be done to promote a better society. It could be achieved through the sharing of knowledge and experience that would increase their conscientiousness. Perhaps the skills learnt in connecting with others and the entrepreneurship could hopefully elevate the economical force in Malaysia.

In order to be more adept with soft skills and to be successful in any areas of industrial, no-one can deny that critical thinking skill is one of the many important skills needed from the bottom to the top of the managerial or organizational hierarchy. Hence, a massive portion of the students advocated that university is the venue to develop critical thinking skills. Although students might have low motivation and exposure to research, the teaching style adopted in university must have been positively different from their learning experience in their secondary schools. According to Ghafar and associates [15], typical schools in Malaysia adopt a passive one-way teaching style might encourage the students to have low initiative in learning, and that may hinder the development of critical thinking skills.

Haji [17] reported that the mismatch and lacking of skills are the two main problems faced by current university students. Our findings seem to be able to provide a possible linkage to these problems. More of those students who enrolled into their respective courses driven by their personal interests have their educational needs met compared to those enrolled due to their parents' decision. Firstly, skills mismatch could be due to the syllabus created by the institution which is highly inappropriate. It shows a lack of communication between the potential employers in the job market and academic staff who design those courses in the universities. Secondly, mismatched of interests (when it is parents' decision) lead to mismatch of skills which will lead to unmet educational needs. Thirdly, lacking of skills could be the results of learning attitude, motivation, and style. Personal interests serve as an intrinsic motivation to venture into an area of study. Moreover, students who feel autonomous in their goal-pursuing (not being forced and have freedom and in control of the process) are more motivated and most importantly perform better academically [18]. Many studies have shown intrinsic motivation associated with better academic performance, reviewed by Hayenga and Corpus [19].

Besides, the results of the present study showed that more people driven by personal interests thought that their professors and lecturers helped them to reach their potential compared to those who was driven by parents' decision. In one way, this portrayed teaching is pretty much the main role of university as the knowledge transferred from the lecturers and facilitators have exert the students' potential; with this the third role of university seems to have fulfilled. This group of students will serve as a force to boost the country economy. In another way, it is seen that students with intrinsic and autonomy in goal-pursuit may be more enthusiastic and took more initiatives in approach their professors and most of these students felt challenged academically. Whereas for the students who did not feel challenged does not imply that university standards are low, it could be the influence of their motivation and goals which do not put learning and academic performance as priority.

Brown & Lauder [20] agreed that education has been seen as a means of upward mobility for individuals to upgrade themselves, to get better jobs and to improve their quality of life. The present study showed that Malaysian university students display a very positive perception towards university; indeed the education is a means of upward mobility for individuals to develop themselves. There were more than half of the samples are confident about securing a job after the completion of education. With a further exploration, the result shows that more students from science-related courses were confident to secure a job with the skills acquired compared to non-science course students. The reason for this phenomenon is somehow unclear. Perhaps the job market demands more science-related workforce like engineers, scientists, medical staffs, doctors, and IT-related talents. This remains a question for further investigation in future studies.

Scrutinizing the findings obtained from the present study, there are more questions need to be further explored. First, based on students' perception the universities have a lot to offer to their personal development. Students were positive about their learning journey in their respective universities, and they felt confident in meeting the demands of the job market. However, students' perception appears to be one side of the scenario. The actual contribution of universities to a society should be evaluated using a more empirical method [9] by looking at the linkages between university and the industry. The third role of the university will be seen evidently effective when the graduates from a mass production have the required skills to serve the nation economy in a diversity of industries stretched from arts to science. Application of skills, employment, promotion, and entrepreneurship etc are the aspects yet to be observed. Secondly, it is questionable how a nation can excel in a globalized world that needs enormous innovation and sophisticating political systems which serve as an impetus to a developed nation in 2020, giving the scenario that the strong linkage between higher education and industry is yet to be established. Hence, recruiting and retaining the outflow of talents to overseas, and taking proper measure are important for country development.

How many students nowadays have the genuine enthusiasm towards knowledge attainment if they have the

opportunity to choose? A lot of them are of no choice but to take up a degree course in order to get a qualification for job. This is purely sprung from a functional and pragmatic dimension. However, if the link between the industry and education is not established, it is unsure that the graduates will be able to get employment, not to mention to become a public asset or to contribute to the wealth of the country.

To realize the vision 2020, Malaysia must gear up to establish world class universities to ensure younger generations are provided with opportunities to learning, to interact, to evolve, to transfer, and to conserve discoveries of knowledge through research and teaching. Most importantly, the higher education institutes have to answer the question "Will I get a job after my graduation" which was asked by many university students. By that, the third role of the university will be able to contribute to the country's development.

V. CONCLUSION

The roles of university remain as a place for research, knowledge conservation and transference, and a place for personal growth. Due to the demand of the industry, the role of university has to be adept to include the industrial dimension to make contributions towards nation development. This study reveals the perceptions of Malaysian students towards the roles of university, and meeting the job market demands has been highlighted. It is essential for the society to realize the current trend in order to be prepared of the upcoming changes. Several important questions sparked and it is hoped that questions raised to be taken into consideration in the future studies.

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