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(AIJBES)www.aijbess.com**BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN GRADUATE EXPECTATIONS
AND WORKPLACE REALITIES:
FOR FUTURE HUMAN RESOURCE INTERVENTIONS**

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Abstract:

The conversion from academia to the professional workforce often exposes a significant gap between the expectations of graduates and the realities of the workplace. This study scrutinizes the transition from academic environments to professional settings often presents challenges for graduates, primarily due to their expectation in future career. In addition, the graduates have higher expectations for their first career after graduating with bachelor's degree level. However, recent studies revealed that unrealistic expectations among graduates are primary contributor to their early job dissatisfaction. This review paper discusses the gap between the graduates' expectations and the reality of workplace setting. Moreover, this study explores the multifaced impact on this bridge within the graduates. Furthermore, this study provides actionable insights for Human Resource (HR) professionals to design strategies that enhance graduate employment in today's workplace. By aligning academic preparation with industry demands, the workplace realities will be reflect the graduate expectation. Thus, the study underscores the importance of aligning academic preparation with industry demands to reduce expectation-reality mismatches and create a more organized and positive workforce.

**Keywords:**

Graduate Expectations, Workplace Realities Adjustment, Workplace Settings, Future Career, Human Resource Intervention

Introduction

In Malaysia, graduate unemployment and underemployment endure significant concerns. There are 3.4% rate with 167,300 graduates unemployed in year 2023 based on statistic from Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM). Besides, underemployment, particularly skill-related underemployment, is also notable. This is because of the increasing skill-related underemployment rate from 62.3% in 2022 to 67.0% in 2023 based on DOSM reports. This percentage reflects the ongoing mismatches between Programme Educational Objectives (PEO) serves by the higher education institution and job market demands. Hence, graduate unemployment and skill-related underemployment in Malaysia remain a critical issue as for those who still in “job hunting” purpose.

Graduate life is a unique transition from structured academic settings to the complexities of professional and career growth (Kvaskova et. al., 2023). The transition remains a critical and challenging phase for graduates, especially in today’s workforce scenery. According to Carrera (2024), the higher education institutions aim to equip the graduates with knowledge (K), skills (S), abilities (A), and others characteristic (O) for the labor market. However, the graduates experience a disengage between their expectations and workplace realities. Thus, lack of KSAO among the graduates builds frustration among the employers who hired the fresh graduate in their organization.

The transition from the university environments to the professional settings in the workplace often present challenges for graduates due to discrepancies between their expectations and actual working life (Fayard, 2022). Some graduates experience unrealistic job previews during their study life. For instance, the examples provided by the lecturer during the teaching and learning session remain unclear to students, primarily because the students lack practical experience within their respective fields of study. Hence, bridging the gap between graduate expectation and professional experience is essential and as graduates often encounter difficulties during that transition period from academic life to the workplace setting.

Literature Review***Graduate Expectations***

Graduates have their own expectation regarding the real working life which is set by their academic experiences and personal aspirations on certain career. Graduates’ expectations upon transition significantly influence their early experiences and job satisfaction (Jackson et. al., 2024). Most of them expected stability financially and non-financially career growth. However, reality often presents challenges that require adaptability and resilience. Furthermore, the transition from student life to the professional world can be unpredictable and it requires adaptation from the graduates. Hence, such expectations reflect a broader generational shift towards seeking career paths that provide economic stability, personal fulfillment and work-life balance (Mpangeva & De Braine, 2024).

Workplace Reality Adjustment

Workplace reality adjustment is a multifaceted process influenced by individual adaptability and job design in the real workplace arrangement (Chandler, 2024). Employers can ease this adjustment by promoting an adaptive working environment by supporting the employees with a better work design. However, this application is not easily adapted to all organizations. Moreover, the adjustment also can create a “workplace reality shock” for the graduates especially as a new hired. According to Vitturi et. al. (2023), this kind of experience can build both constructive and destructive thinking for the graduates about the real working setting. In addition, this situation refers to the experience that graduates face when they realize the discrepancies between their expectations and the actual conditions in their professional environment. Hence, identifying and addressing this issue proactively through educational preparation, realistic job previews, and organizational support can knowingly reduce the severity of reality shock experienced by graduates.

Workplace Setting

The concept of workplace setting encompasses various elements that shape employee KSAO and overall organizational effectiveness. According to Musemeche (2023), this arrangement will directly design the norm and culture of the organization which should be adapted by the graduates. Furthermore, the graduates are unfamiliar with this workplace setting until they start to work. For instance, the graduates master in the teaching and learning setting because that was their experience during their study. In addition, there are many types of workplaces such as physical workplace, organizational culture, psychological workplace environment and workspace design (Sabbir & Taufique, 2022). Hence, this workplace setting covered both physical and psychological setting which creates a norm of an organization.

Human Resource Intervention

The future-orientation of Human Resource (HR) interventions should be adopted comprehensively about graduate's transition. The gap between graduates' expectations and the real workforce arises when the graduates are underemployed by the organization (Solatni et. al., 2024). Moreover, HR intervention represents structured actions aimed at improving organizational effectiveness through enhancing employee performance and job satisfaction. In addition, these HR interventions can broadly be categorized into training and development, career development, performance management, employee wellness programs, and organizational development. Comprising responsible HR behavior, policies, and practices, this aims to create values for organization by enhancing the awareness of the influence of business on people both inside and outside (Razali, 2024). Thus, future HR interventions should strategically align with organizational goals and achieve competitive advantage in the marketplace.

Expectancy Theory

Expectancy Theory is one of motivational theory initially proposed to explain about the expectation of an individual based on the specific components (Vroom & Lawler, 2015). It explains how individuals make decisions regarding behavioral alternatives, primarily focusing on motivation and effort allocation based on anticipated outcomes. This theory suggests that individuals form expectations prior to an experience and their satisfaction or dissatisfaction consequences from comparing these expectations to actual experiences. There are three components of this theory such as expectancy, instrumentality, and valence. The expectancy component stated that Individuals are motivated only if they believe that effort put into tasks will lead to successful performance (Min et. al., 2020). Next, the instrumentality component

highlighted motivation depends on how clearly employees perceive that their successful performance will lead to valuable outcomes. Lastly, valence component defined that motivation increases when outcomes are personally significant and desirable to the individual. Hence, by tackling these components, organizations can better align graduate expectations with workplace experiences, enhancing satisfaction and retention.

Methodology

This study consists of reviews of articles and journals on the gap between graduates' expectation and workplace reality for future Human Resource (HR) Interventions. The researcher evaluates the literature, draws the findings and discusses comprehensively. Moreover, this study followed a systematic process to conduct literature reviews. Hence, the major academic databases indexed journals were identified and searched to collect the comprehensive literature review on the topic of study. Furthermore, in developing the inclusion criteria, this study has gone through the initial screening and detailed review to ensure that the literature review is aligned with the topic and theme. Table 1.0 above shows some of the articles reviewed for this study.

Table 1: Review Paper of Graduates' Expectations and Workplace Reality for Future HR Interventions

Title, Author, & Methodology	Issues / Gaps	Findings
Shifting Work Competencies in an Emerging Economy: A Comparison of Accounting Students' Perceptions of Demand and Supply (Chandler, 2024)	The work competency gap affects the employability of graduates and their perception on real life working environment. Moreover, the gap is not only for the graduate but also the cost of training and staff turnover for employers. Thus, the organization will take consideration when hiring the employees and chances for graduates are limited. By doing so, graduates can be better equipped with an essential capability for them to survive in industry.	This study provides empirical insights into the workforce competencies. The work competences found confirm existing studies that knowledge, skills, and personal traits need to be considered rather than a single matter. In addition, organizations and institutions must acknowledge and incorporate holistically to make sure that the graduates successfully survive in real working conditions.
Rethinking Accounting Education for a Sustainable Future: Charting a Course for Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (Othman & Ameer, 2024)	The accounting scholars are urged to re-invigorate the contribution of accounting to the sustainable development of the graduates. The lack of knowledge and skills from graduates leads to the lack of performance from them especially in achieving the SDGs for the organization.	This study contributes to literature in two ways: The graduates' experience offers additional evidence that technical skills continue to be crucial in the New Zealand workplace. Graduates underscored the importance of acquiring knowledge about diverse

businesses across various sectors.

Retention of Newcomers and Factors Influencing Turnover Intentions and Behavior: A review of the Literature (Van et. al., 2025)

The gaps for this study are the early turnover from both newly hired employees and graduate employees. These issues make significant contributions for both the individual, in terms of financial insecurity and psychological stress of the organization. This study addresses these gaps effectively for both individual and organization well-being and enhancing overall organizational performance and sustainability.

This study was to gain a deeper thoughtful of the factors affecting the turnover intentions and behaviors among the newly hired employees including the graduate employees. Some key factors that contribute to the retention of new employees are pre-joining expectations, person-environment fitness, role of the supervisor, and HR practices which play a role in influencing newcomers' turnover. Thus, each of these elements plays a significant role in shaping newcomers' experience and decision to leave.

A Quantitative Study on Graduate Employability: Insights from Sultan Idris Education University, Malaysia (Razalli et. al., 2025)

Based on this study, graduates are only academically capable and do not meet the expectation from the employers. Furthermore, a lack of graduate knowledge and skills meets the challenges of an increasingly competitive and dynamic job market. Consequently, graduates frequently encounter difficulties adapting to the complexities and demands of a competitive advantage in the marketplace.

The findings emphasize the pivotal role of employability skills such as communication, teamwork, and technological proficiency within the education sector. Furthermore, the findings highlight the multifaceted nature of employability and the importance of various factors that contribute to graduates' readiness for the modern workforce.

Navigating Career Anxiety in the Modern Age: Understanding Its Roots and Remedies (Chakraborty, 2024)

This research embarks on a journey to unravel the intricacies of this phenomenon, delving deep into its roots, and potential remedies. In addition, career anxiety can impact individuals both professionally and personally. Behavioral issues may include avoidance of challenging tasks, and difficulty concentrating on career.

This study explored the roots of career anxiety such as societal expectations, economic uncertainties, and technological advancements.

Workplace Ideologies, Employability, and the Ideal Graduate Identities (Soltani et. al., 2024)	This study discusses the ability of graduates to develop skills, competencies or capabilities. Furthermore, there are also debates about what contributes to graduate employability and lack of skills among graduates. Hence, the critical discussion needed for these issues.	The analysis revealed the factors that need to be considered by the employers while doing the recruitment process. Both factors visible and invisible were categorized into three main themes such as socio-cultural fitness, constructing career-ready, and displaying positive psychological qualities.
Career Readiness in Chinese Universities: Challenges and Opportunities in Career Guidance Education (Xiaoqing & Noordin, 2024)	The issue arises when there is a growing concern about the employability of graduates has not always matched the needs of China's changing labor market, skills mismatch, and underemployment among graduates.	The technological integration in career services, and opportunities for enhancing career readiness are the findings drawn from this study. The challenges of resource allocation can be mitigated by leveraging new technologies. Furthermore, the mismatch between student expectations and the realities of career opportunities can be addressed through strengthened partnerships with industry. Hence, the graduates still can shine in their career by having a good match between their academic and career.
How Thai Universities Can Better Prepare Graduates for the Workplace (Carrera, 2024)	This study discussion on the discrepancy between graduates and jobs exists worldwide and needs attention. for instance, the university graduates must be more suited for workplaces and relevant to the companies. Hence, preparation of graduates for future career milestones is a must.	Mentoring, active academic counselling, and regular career guidance workshops need to be an integral part of the curriculum. That contributes to the preparation of the graduate to meet real working life. Thus, the graduates were exposed earlier before they join the industry.
Enhancing Alumni Employability: Aligning Higher Education Quality with Workforce	This study is crucial to investigating the employability skills of graduates by both young and senior professionals. Young professionals provide valuable	To meet the evolving demands of employers, graduates must develop market-relevant skills, such as good communication skills, strong

Expectations (Utkirov, 2024) insights into the immediate challenges and expectations graduates face upon entering the industry. By integrating these complementary viewpoints, the study identifies specific skills gaps, inform curriculum development, and recommendation on HR intervention aimed at enhancing graduate employability. presentation skills, innovation in problem-solving, and good IT proficiency. Thus, the graduates must make sure they had all this before starting their career.

A Longitudinal Study of Relationships between Vocational Graduates' Career Adaptability, Career Decision-making Self-Efficacy, Vocational Identity Clarity, and Life Satisfaction (Kvaskoya et. al., 2023) This study was conducted within the sport management field, prompted by a lack of consistent literature relating to the job classifications and standards of associated role functions, knowledge related to employer, and recognition of graduate employability. Increasing graduate competition for employment has heightened demand for practical experience opportunities and employer expectations.

Based on the table above, the transition from academic institutions to the professional world continues to pose challenges for graduates and employers alike. A consistent theme across the literature reviewed is the misalignment between graduate expectations and workplace realities, often subsequent in job dissatisfaction, underemployment, and high turnover. Moreover, each study contributes unique insights into this critical issue, revealing the multifaceted nature of graduate employability and the necessary interventions to bridge existing gaps. Hence, the literature review highlighted the transition from two different fields which might be faced by the graduates in future. Thus, these studies highlight the urgent need to redefine graduate employability as a dynamic interplay in various skills.

Result and Discussion

According to Kvaskova et. al. (2023), the transition of graduates from higher education to the professional workforce brings a new challenge to the graduates, especially to survive in working conditions. The findings of this study provide compelling evidence for a significant gap between graduate expectations and workplace realities among the graduates. Both responsibility from higher education level and employers' level to ensure the graduates prepared well themselves before joining the industry as an employee (Mpangeva & De Braine, 2024). For instance, the moderating role of HR interventions suggests that targeted strategies can significantly improve the transition process and lead to higher overall job satisfaction in organization. Thus, the graduates must understand the needs of industry and prepare well for that.

Graduates Expectation and Workplace Realities

Based on the review, this study highlights the substantial gap between graduates' expectations and the realities encountered in professional workplaces. The graduates lack knowledge about

the real work because they have not experienced it before. As the initiative from the higher educational institution, students must be exposed to the real work environment based on the assessment per course. Graduates typically enter the workforce with idealized perceptions formed primarily by theoretical knowledge and limited practical exposure, leading to heightened expectations regarding career opportunities, job responsibilities, organizational culture, and work-life balance (Jackson et. al., 2024). Hence, the results reinforce existing literature emphasizing the frequent misalignment between academic preparation and practical employment experiences.

Moreover, this study focuses on the critical role of organizational interventions, particularly those led by Human Resource departments, in mitigating the adverse effects of expectation-reality gaps (Chakraborty, 2024). For instance, bridging the gap between graduates' expectations and workplace realities requires a complicated approach involving educational institutions, employers, and HR professionals. Based on Xiaoqing and Noordin (2024), these stakeholders must collaboratively design and implement proactive strategies encompassing practical training, intensive class, comprehensive onboarding processes, effective mentorship programs, constructive internship program and continuous employee development to enhance graduate readiness and long-term career success. Hence, this transition must be prepared from the institution before their graduation.

Another key consideration commencing from the findings is the growing importance of experiential learning during university education. Graduates with exposure to practical work experiences through internships or work-integrated learning (WIL) were better prepared to manage workplace challenges. This supporting by the recommendations for embedding experiential learning within academic curricula.

Relationship between Expectancy Theory and Graduates Expectation Pre and Post Workplace Realities

This theory suggests that an individual's motivation to engage in specific behaviours depends on the expected and perceived desirability outcomes. It is particularly related in understanding graduates' expectations before entering the workplace. The graduates often hold specific expectations regarding job roles, career advancement, and workplace norm. Moreover, graduates are motivated by anticipated both financial and non-financial rewards, including professional career growth, which influence their career choices and initial workplace engagement (Min wt. al., 2020). When these expectations align with actual workplace experiences, graduates typically exhibit increased motivation to perform in their organization. Hence, the graduates will experience job satisfaction toward their career especially related to their field of study.

However, disagreements between graduates' expectations and workplace realities can negatively affect their motivational levels. It happens when the graduates put it high expectation in the beginning. The frustration will be the consequences, and the graduates will experience a reality shock. This is unexpected situation happen with the limited support, and unmet career aspirations (Musemeche, 2023). However, graduates facing unmet expectations may experience reduced valence toward their roles, questioning whether their efforts lead to desired performance outcomes. Therefore, organizations must strategically manage graduate expectations through transparent communication, realistic job previews, and effective socialization practices to maintain alignment between anticipated rewards and actual workplace outcomes, thus ensuring sustained motivation and employee retention.

Contributions

This study proposes numerous valuable practical contributions aimed at developing graduate employability and workplace integration. Both academic and industry field will benefit from this study especially in preparing an excellent worker in future. Firstly, it highlights the need for higher education institutions to incorporate experiential learning such as internships, work-integrated learning (WIL), and real-world projects into academic curricula. These could help the lecturers to construct a comprehensive task for students which related to the working environment. For instance, hands-on experiences help students build realistic expectations and develop the practical skills necessary to navigate workplace challenges effectively. Thus, preparing a market workforce must be from the higher education institutions.

Secondly, the findings emphasize the critical role of Human Resource (HR) professionals in easing the transition from higher education institutions to workplace. The importance of collaboration between educational institutions and industry stakeholders is a must for current workplace setting. In addition, working together help to design and implement career readiness programs for both sectors which can contribute to producing graduates who are not only academically qualified but also practically prepared and psychologically resilient for the modern workforce. Hence, the practical contribution highlighted as an important factor in preparing a human resources in organizations.

Conclusion

As conclusion, this study highlights the substantial gap between graduates' expectations and the realities encountered in professional workplaces. The results reinforce existing literature emphasizing the frequent misalignment between academic preparation and practical employment experiences. Graduates typically enter the workforce with idealized perceptions formed primarily by theoretical knowledge and limited practical exposure, leading to heightened expectations regarding career opportunities, job responsibilities, organizational culture, and work-life balance. Moreover, the theoretical is not align with the real experience. Most of student relies on the academic literally rather than on the soft skills. Hence, they are missing out the practicality parts when they started working.

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