

GRADUATE UNEMPLOYMENT: THE AWARENESS AND PERCEPTION OF GRADUATES TOWARDS GOVERNMENT'S INITIATIVES

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this paper is to investigate the level of awareness and perception of Universiti Tenaga Nasional's (UNITEN) final year students towards the government initiatives to mitigate graduate unemployment. The total population for this study was 1,055. Data were collected through questionnaires with sample of 491 students. Since the data are not normally distributed, the study employed Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis Test to find out differences between the variables selected. Spearman correlation coefficient was used to find out the relationship among the variables. The study found that the majority of graduates did not aware of the government initiatives or programs, such as Skim Latihan 1 Malaysia (SLIM), to mitigate graduate unemployment in Malaysia. Nevertheless, majority of these graduates had good perception on the government initiatives or programs since they indicated high intention to join such programs. Furthermore, the results revealed that there is a significant relationship exists between the level of awareness and attitude as well as skills of respondents. Significant relationship also exists between the level of awareness and promotional activities carried out by government. As for perception, significant relationship exists with the training modules. These findings, however, should be interpreted with caution as the respondents were only gathered from UNITEN, thus suggesting further research can be carried out to wider samples involving other institutions of higher learning.

Keywords: SLIM, UNITEN, Graduate Unemployment, Malaysia.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the issue of high unemployment rate among the Malaysian graduates has been a growing concern among the public. Every year, Malaysian universities, public or private higher institutions produced a large numbers of graduates but the percentages of the graduates acquire a job at the end of the day is surprisingly low (The New Straits Times, 2013). The issue has been debated and discussed at many seminars, forums and other platforms by many parties such as the academics, government agencies, employment agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and others. This matter is a grave concern as it affects the image of educational system in Malaysia as well as may impede Malaysia's aspiration to become a developed economy by the end of this decade.

Upon realizing the seriousness of the problem, the government took several initiatives to reduce or mitigate the issue. For example, the Prime Minister had identified 'Strengthening Education and Training' as one of the key focus area during his 2013 Budget speech that was delivered on 28 September 2012 (2013 Budget Commentary & Tax Information, 2012). One of the efforts to reduce the unemployment among the graduates is through the implementation of the 1 Malaysia Training Scheme or known as Skim Latihan 1 Malaysia (SLIM). The implementation of the SLIM program is now in the third year since it was first launched in 1 June 2011. However, the latest statistics indicate that the level of unemployment among graduates is increasing at the rate 2.4 percent from December 2012 to January 2013 (Labour Force Statistics Malaysia, 2013). The high level of unemployment among the graduates gives an indication of a low participation from graduates towards the SLIM.

The lukewarm response from graduates towards government initiatives and SLIM in particular, may be due to many reasons. There are possibilities that the graduates are not aware of such programs or perhaps they just could be bothered. Some of the graduates may have other plans or preferences upon their graduation. This study, therefore, attempts to find out the reasons for the low participation of graduates towards government initiatives or programs. The study is looking into the awareness and perception (intention) of the graduates and their potential participation towards the government's programs such as SLIM. The study focuses on the students in final year (bachelor) at the Universiti Tenaga Nasional (UNITEN), one of the private universities in Malaysia.

This paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the definitions and conceptualization of unemployment and graduate unemployment. It also discusses the importance of graduate employment in contributing to the Malaysian economy that aspired to become a developed nation by the end of this decade. This is followed by the research methodology used in assessing the level of awareness and perception of graduates towards government initiatives. It also discusses the correlational factors that contribute to the graduate unemployment. Section 4 provides the results and discussions. The conclusion, recommendation and limitations are provided in Section 5.

UNEMPLOYMENT, EMPLOYABILITY AND GRADUATE UNEMPLOYMENT

Unemployment refers to condition of being unemployed or the number of unemployed people in the working population while unemployment graduate is defined as a graduate who is unemployed if he or she is looking for work and willing to work at the prevailing wage but is unable to find a job (Baharudin, 2003). Unemployed people can be categorized into those who have never worked after graduation from the university and those who have lost their jobs thereby seeking re-entry into labor market (Fajana, 2000; Standing, 1983). Meanwhile, employability refers to success or failure of graduate to get a job within six month after graduating. According to Warraich (2008), graduates employability depends on many factors such as academic performance and communication skills. He further asserts that graduates will have to develop market oriented skills to meet the challenges as well as the changing needs of employers (Warraich, 2008). Other researcher such as Gurcharan Singh & Garib Singh (2008) blames the graduates for not being prepared to enter the working world.

From the national and economic point of view, higher education has been widely recognized as one of the major forces to achieve sustainable economic growth. In the midst of the economic rapid growth, the concern of unemployed graduates is gaining momentum in Malaysia (Bagayah & Smith, 2005; Lim 2005). In Malaysia, the number of unemployment among graduates is considered high that is about 444,500 in January 2013 and the rate is increasing at 2.4 percent from December 2012 to January 2013 (Labour Force Statistics Malaysia, 2013). There are many factors that lead to the unemployment among the graduates a highlighted in the survey conducted by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) in 2011. The results from the survey indicated that 69.5 percent (30,600) of the respondents said that they are still looking for job (Afterschool, Higher Education Advisor, 2012).

The survey also indicated the situation in which 'the supply exceed the demand' in terms of job vacancies. According to the survey, the percentage of graduates still unemployed was 21% from public institutions of higher learning, 27% from private institutions, 28% from polytechnics and 35% from community college (The Star Online, 2012).

Even though the employment market is still very much 'unsatisfied' and vacancies are not filled, universities and colleges at the same time are aggressively continuing their pursuit of increasing the number of students on the basis of offering quality education (Woo, 2006). Woo (2006) argued that the triangulated and uncorrelated relations between the offering of quality education, the high unemployment rate of graduates, and the complaints by the employers, create a nagging need to study the input-output process of higher education, in particular, and the loosely used term 'quality'.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES TO STRENGTHENING EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Cognizant of education being the cornerstone of the nations' prosperity, the Government has allocated a large amount of money to cater for the betterment of people via education and training programs. Under the 2013 budget, a sum of RM 38.7 billion is allocated to the Ministry of Education (MOE) for operating and development expenditure. Government also allocated RM49.7 billion for development expenditure in order to improve the level of education and skills of the citizen (Ministry of Finance, 2012). There were many initiatives taken by Government in order to realize the objectives.

At the end of 2012, government has launched a 'Graduate Employability Blueprint'. Among the purpose of the Blueprint is to enhance the skills of unemployed 'human capital' that will help in meeting the challenges of the working world. This kind of training among the unemployed graduates will give exposure to more creative thinking, self-sufficient and produce new ideas to meet the demands of the industry.

In addition, the government also implements 1Malaysia Training Scheme Program which is known as Skim Latihan 1 Malaysia (SLIM). This program aims to increase the employability of graduates through soft skills training and on the job training. Under the soft skills training, fresh graduates will be train in five categories which are communication, creative and analytical thinking, organizational adaptability, value driven professional and grooming and etiquette. While on the job training, fresh graduate will be train to face the real situation of working. The minimum training time is six months and the maximum time is 10 months. Besides that, during this program, they also will be provided an allowance amounted RM1000 per month. It is envisaged that by joining this SLIM program, it will increase employability among graduates and at the same time reduce unemployment rate.

FACTORS OF GRADUATE UNEMPLOYMENT

The general consensus among the employers indicates that Malaysian graduates are well trained in their areas of specialization but unfortunately they lack the soft skills (Nurita, Shaharudin & Ainon, 2004). In Malaysia, more employers are searching for graduates who are balanced, with good academic, achievement and possessing soft skills such as communication skills, problem solving skills, interpersonal skills and the ability to be flexible (Nurita et al., 2004). These soft skills (known as employability skills) are foundation skills that apply across the board, no matter what job employee is performing (Lawrence, 2002).

The Higher Education Ministry, in its "Graduate Tracer Study Executive Report 2010", published on February 11, 2011, shows that of the 174,464 graduates that responded to the ministry's survey, 24.6 per cent of them have not found a job after six months of graduating (The New Straits Times, 2013). Accordingly, there were several deficiencies found during the interview process of candidates. They include 1) lack of core knowledge and competency in the job they applied for; 2) lack of communication skills and language proficiency; and 3) lack of general knowledge.

Jobstreet.com (2011), an employment agency, discovered the top 5 reasons of unemployment among fresh graduate in Malaysia; 1) Candidates are asking for unrealistic salary or benefits; 2) Candidates' bad character, attitude and personality; 3) Poor command of English language; 4) Poor communication skills; and 5) Candidates tend to be too choosy about the job or company they wish to work for.

The results from the two surveys show some similarities in terms of the factors that cause graduate unemployment in Malaysia. Basically, the graduates were lacking in the interpersonal and communication skills as well as the poor knowledge and attitudes towards works.

Review of literatures revealed that among the basic explanatory reasons for the graduate unemployment are the lack of necessary skills, knowledge and attitude of the graduates. Mismatching with the industry requirements is another factor that contributes to high graduate unemployment. Due to these reasons or factors, Federal Government is taking various initiatives, such as introducing SLIM and others, in order to mitigate the high graduate unemployment GU in Malaysia. The level of awareness and perception among the students may be determined by the promotional activities as well as the modules offered in the SLIM program. Students' demographic profiles also may contribute to the program's awareness and perception and that later on may influence their decision or intention to join the SLIM program or vice versa. Based on these reasons, student demographic profile and Government initiatives makes up the independent variables that influence the level of awareness and perception among the students.

Based on the literature, the relationship between the level of awareness and perception among the students towards Government initiatives is also contingent upon various unemployment factors. This research goes into another level in which the various factors are considered that may influence the level of awareness and perception among the students towards Government initiatives. Hence, the dependent variable of this study is the level of awareness and perception of graduates on Government initiatives to mitigate graduate unemployment. The conceptual framework for this research depicts the relationship between the three independent variables and a dependent variable.

HYPOTHESIS

Hypothesis is that specific predictions that can be tested. It is based on the relationship between two or more variables and normally is a connection between the independent and dependent variables. The conceptual framework in this study emphasises on the relationship between the level of awareness and perception among the students towards Government initiatives in mitigating graduate unemployment in Malaysia. In this study, the following hypotheses were developed:

H1 = There is a significant difference on the level of awareness and perception on Government initiatives to mitigate graduate unemployment across different promotional activities by Government.

H2 = There is a significant difference on the level of awareness and perception on Government initiatives to mitigate graduate unemployment across different training modules offered.

H3 = There is a significant difference on the level of awareness and perception on Government initiatives to mitigate graduate unemployment across the different factors of graduate unemployment.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN AND SAMPLING

The data for the study were derived from questionnaire survey. The questionnaire is adapted from the previous study on graduate unemployment carried out by Mohamad (2004). Appropriate modifications were made in order to achieve the research objectives. A questionnaire was designed to elicit responses from the respondents regarding their views on the government's initiatives to mitigate unemployment among the Malaysian graduates. Questionnaire is used to collect data because it is the most commonly used method for collecting information quickly and cheaply (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010).

The questionnaire was designed such that the statements were not too long and contained simple words to enhance response rate. The questionnaire was divided into three parts. Part A is about students' demographic profile. Part B is about student's awareness on government initiatives to mitigate unemployment. Also, the question focuses on the students' perception (and hence their intention) towards SLIM program module, one of the Government's initiatives to mitigate graduate unemployment. The question is using measurement of four scales; 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree. This study employs four measurement scales in order to avoid the non-partisan (neither agree nor disagree) decision by respondents (Shamsuddin, 2003).

Part C is about the factors that influence graduate unemployment. The purpose of these questions is to find out the factors that influence graduates in their job application decisions in the near future. The four factors which were derived from the previous research such as The News Straits Times (2013); Ismail (2011) are the students' attitude, skills, knowledge, and industry requirement. The questions in this part are also using measurement of four scales.

Before the questionnaire is finalised, a pilot study was carried out to pre-test the appropriateness of the content, wording and layout of the questionnaire. Cooper, Donald & Pamela (2006) posit that a pilot test is necessary to be conducted to spot any weaknesses in design and instrumentation of the questionnaires.

The questionnaire was distributed to the final year (bachelor) students at UNITEN. Based on the data provided by the Academics, Enrolment & Student Affairs Unit, the total number of final year bachelor students for the current year (2013) is 1055 (population). By using personal administration method, the researchers managed to collect 491 completed questionnaires. The sample size of 491 is far exceeded the suggested numbers (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970).

RELIABILITY AND NORMALITY ASSESSMENT

The reliability of response received is an important aspect in questionnaire design. The reliability analysis of a measurement instrument determines the consistency with which the instrument is measuring the concept (Nunnally, 1980; Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). In this study, reliability was tested on the SLIM Modules that consist of three questions (part B) as well as the factors that influence graduate unemployment (part C). The results of the reliability test are shown in Table 1 below. As the values of Cronbach's Alpha are above the accepted threshold level, that is exceeded Nunnally's (1980) reliability guideline (0.7 above); therefore, no item was eliminated and hence can be further analysed.

Table 1: Reliability Test based on the Cronbach Alpha

		Cronbach's Alpha	Results (<i>Based on George and Mallery, 2003</i>)
Module (Part B)	Module A	0.892	Good
	Module B	0.790	Acceptable
	Module C	0.805	Good
Factors (Part C)	Total Attitude	0.822	Good
	Total Skills	0.834	Good
	Total Knowledge	0.818	Good
	Total Industry Requirement	0.875	Good

This study employed normality statistics in order to determine whether the distribution of the data is normal or not. This was conducted for parts B and C of the independent variables. The results showed that the p-values of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistics were found to be less than 0.05 for all the data set. Hence, normality is not assumed and non-parametric statistics are more appropriate for any inferential analysis on awareness and perception of the respondents on graduate unemployment.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Results on normality test indicated that data are not normally distributed. Therefore, non-parametric statistical tests were considered appropriate to analyse the data for this study. Mann-Whitney U test was used to test for differences between two independent groups of a continuous measure. To measure three or more independent groups of a continuous variable, this study employed Kruskal-Wallis test. This study employed Spearman's rho to find correlation among the variables. Correlation is used to measure the relationship between two or more variables that were stated in the hypothesis and which also describe the degree of the relationship between variables (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). It is to be noted that the respondents' perception on government initiatives to mitigate graduate unemployment was measured or analysed based on their intention.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESPONDENTS' AWARENESS AND PERCEPTION TOWARDS GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

Part B of the questionnaire was to find out the students' awareness and perception towards Government initiatives, such as SLIM Program, to mitigate graduate unemployment. Respondents' awareness was derived from the direct 'Yes/No' question while perception was implied via respondents' intention to join the SLIM program initiated by Government. In addition, the respondents' awareness and perception was also tested through promotional activities or channels used by government in promoting their initiatives of programs. The results of the respondents' awareness and perception towards government initiatives to mitigate graduate unemployment are shown in Table 2 below.

As shown in Table 2, 60.7% respondents were not aware of the government programs, for example the SLIM Program. This perhaps could be explained by the highest responses (57.6 per cent) on the 'no answer' with respect to the government promotional activities. It might be implied that the government did not aggressively promote their initiatives to the intended audiences (students). On the other hand, it might also indicate that respondents or students were only busy with their own life such as study, social and many more without bothering about government initiatives on this matter. These kinds of behavior make respondents less aware about government initiatives in helping them getting their employment in the future.

Most respondents (15.5 per cent) were aware of the government programs through promotion mediums such as radio, news/TV, and newspapers. 10 per cent of respondents indicated that they knew about the program via other channels or sources. However, they did not indicate what were the other channels or resources. It was surprising to find out that only 0.8 per cent of respondents

indicated that they knew about the government initiatives or programs through internet or social media. This was not in line with the current trend in which Generation Y was more exposed to internet or social media such as Facebook, Twitter and others. Perhaps, the government may start thinking of using the latest technology and gadgets in promoting their initiatives or programs especially involving the younger generations.

Table 2: Results of Respondents' Awareness and Perception on Government Initiatives based on Promotion

Factors	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Awareness	Yes	193	39.3
	No	298	60.7
	TOTAL	491	100.0
Promotion	No answer	283	57.6
	Friends/family members	25	5.1
	Radio, news/TV, newspaper, Poster/leaflets	76	15.5
	Internet/social media	32	6.5
	Former graduates	4	0.8
	Trainers/teachers of the training institution	12	2.4
	Others	10	2.0
	TOTAL	491	100.0
Intention	Yes	298	60.7
	No	193	39.3
	TOTAL	491	100.0
Reason Yes	No answer	188	38.3
	Gain knowledge	95	19.3
	Increase soft skills	110	22.4
	Get on the job training	90	18.3
	Others	8	1.6
	TOTAL	491	100.0
Reason No	No answer	281	57.2
	Offered another job	32	6.5
	Not interested in SLIM program	57	11.6
	Open own business	20	4.1
	Further study	68	13.8
	Others	33	6.7
	TOTAL	491	100.0

In term of perception, which was measured based on respondents' intention to join the government programs; it was ironic to discover that 60.7 per cent of respondents have intention to join the SLIM program after they graduates from UNITEN even though majority of them (60.7 per cent) did not aware about such program. The reasons that respondents had indicated their intention to join government initiatives were mainly to increase their soft skills (22.4 per cent), gain knowledge (19.3 per cent), and get on the job training (18.3 per cent).

Meanwhile, the remaining respondents (39.3 per cent) responded that they did not have intention to join government programs after they graduate in the future. The main reasons given were that because they want to further their study (13.8 per cent) and not interested in government (SLIM) program (11.6 per cent).

RESPONDENTS' AWARENESS AND PERCEPTION BASED ON MODULE OFFERED

Respondents' awareness and perception on government initiatives to mitigate graduate unemployment was also found out through the module offered in the training programs such as SLIM. Table 3 showed the results of the respondents' response based on the module offered. There are three main modules in the SLIM program which are to enhance professionalism, physical, spiritual and moral value (Module A); offer more job placement (Module B) and increase soft skills training (Module C).

Table 3: Respondents' Awareness and Perception based on Module Offered

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
moduleA	491	1	4	3.02	.721
moduleB	491	1	4	3.05	.677
moduleC	491	1	4	3.10	.680
Valid N (listwise)	491				

The mean scores from Table 3 indicated that majority of students “agree” about all the modules offered in the SLIM program. The highest score was recorded for the Module C with mean equals to 3.10. This was followed by Module B and A with means scores of 3.05 and 3.02 respectively. Overall, it can be concluded that respondents agreed that the SLIM program would increase their soft skills training, offer more job placement and enhance their professionalism, physical, spiritual, and moral value.

FACTORS INFLUENCING GRADUATE UNEMPLOYMENT

Part C of the questionnaire was to find out the students’ awareness and perception towards Government initiatives by studying the factors that influence graduate unemployment. Based on the conceptual framework and literatures, the factors that influence graduate unemployment are the students’ attitude, skills and knowledge (Vinke, 2002; Bakarman, 2005). In addition, industry requirement is also another factor that may contribute to graduate unemployment (Keynes, 1936; Snowdon and Vane, 2005). The results of descriptive analysis for factors influencing graduate unemployment is shown in Table 4 below:

Table 4: Results of Descriptive Analysis for Factors influencing Graduate Unemployment

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Tattitude	491	3	12	8.71	1.778
Tskills	491	3	12	8.73	1.840
Tknowledge	491	3	12	9.06	1.763
Tindustryrequirement	491	2	12	8.78	1.803
Valid N (listwise)	491				

Results from Table 4 showed that knowledge of students, with the mean score of 9.06, contributed the highest influence on the graduate unemployment. This indicated that the students’ lack of knowledge might cause the employers not to hire them to work. The finding from this study supports the findings made by Carole et al., (2006) and Bakarman, (2005).

The result also showed that industry requirement was the second important factor that influenced higher graduate unemployment (mean is equal to 8.78). Based on Keynes (1936), in determination to get the job, requirement from industry is one of the factors that enable people to gain employment. This indicates that the industry requirement factor is beyond the control of students, thus there is nothing much they can do about it.

The other two factors, attitude and skills, also contributed to the high graduate unemployment based on their means scores, 8.71 and 8.73 respectively. The results from this study were consistent with the findings from Nurita, et al., (2004) in which employers in Malaysia were searching for graduates who are balanced with good academic achievement and possessing soft skills such as communication skills, problem solving skills and ability to be flexible. Also supported Lawrence (2002) findings in which these soft skills are foundation skills, no matter what job employee is performing.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEVELS OF AWARENESS AND PERCEPTION BASED ON PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES

Hypothesis H1 states that there is a significant difference on the level of awareness and perception on Government initiatives to mitigate graduate unemployment across different promotional activities by Government among the final year (bachelor) students’/respondents’.

Based on the result of Spearman correlation test, the result shows that the p-value for awareness is 0.000 which is less than 0.05 (see Table 5). This implies that there is a significant relationship between the level of awareness and promotional activities. However, the relationship is negative which means that as awareness increased, the promotional activities decreased. Meanwhile, the p-value for perception is 0.268, which is more than 0.05 (see Table 5). This implies that there is no significant relationship between the level of perception and promotional activities Therefore, based on the findings, hypothesis H1 is partly supported.

Table 5: Relationship between levels of awareness and perception of students based on promotional activities

			Awareness	Intention	Total promotion
Awareness	Correlation Coefficient		1.000	.050	-.764**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.	.268	.000
	N		491	491	491
Intention	Correlation Coefficient		.050	1.000	-.071
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.268	.	.115
	N		491	491	491
Total promotion	Correlation Coefficient		-.764**	-.071	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.115	.
	N		491	491	491

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEVELS OF AWARENESS AND PERCEPTION OF STUDENTS BASED ON TRAINING MODULES

Hypothesis H2 states that there is a significant difference on the level of awareness and perception on Government initiatives to mitigate graduate unemployment across different training modules among the final year (bachelor) students'/respondents'.

Table 6: Relationship between levels of awareness and perception of students based on training modules.

			Awareness	Intention	Total module
Spearman's rho	Awareness	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.050	-.050
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.268	.273
		N	491	491	491
Spearman's rho	Intention	Correlation Coefficient	.050	1.000	-.250**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.268	.	.000
		N	491	491	491
Spearman's rho	Total module	Correlation Coefficient	-.050	-.250**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.273	.000	.
		N	491	491	491

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Based on the result of Spearman correlation test, the result shows that the p-value is 0.273 for awareness, which is more than 0.05 (see Table 6). This implies that there is no significant relationship between the level of awareness and training modules. On the other hand, the p-value for perception (intention) is 0.000, which is less than 0.05 (see Table 6). This implies that there is a significant relationship between the level of perception and training modules. However, the relationship is negative which means that as perception increased, the training modules decreased. Therefore, based on the findings, hypothesis H6 is partly accepted.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEVELS OF AWARENESS AND PERCEPTION OF BASED ON THE FACTORS OF GRADUATE UNEMPLOYMENT

Hypothesis H3 states that there is significant difference on the level of awareness and perception on Government initiatives to mitigate graduate unemployment among final year (bachelor) students'/respondents across the different factors of graduate unemployment.

Based on the result of Spearman correlation test, as for awareness, the result shows that the p-values are 0.036 and 0.002 for attitude and skill factors respectively, which are less than 0.05 (see Table 7). This implies that there are significant relationships between the level of awareness and attitude factor as well as skill factor. However, the relationships are negative for both factors which mean that as awareness increased, the attitude and skill factors decreased. Meanwhile, for knowledge and industry factors, the p-values are 0.538 and 0.383 respectively, which is less than 0.05. This indicates that there is no significant relationship between the level of awareness and knowledge and industry factors.

As for perception, the results of Spearman correlation test show that the p-values are 0.607, 0.157, 0.398 and 0.803 for attitude, skills, knowledge and industry requirement factors respectively. The p-values for all the factors are more than 0.05 (see Table 7). This implies that there are no significant relationships between the level of perception and graduate unemployment factors. Hence, from the results, the Hypothesis H3 is partly supported.

Table 7: Relationship between levels of awareness and perception of students based on factors of graduate unemployment.

		Awareness	Intention	Total attitude	Total skills	Total knowledge	Total industry requirement
Awareness	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.050	-.095*	-.137**	-.028	-.039
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.268	.036	.002	.538	.383
	N	491	491	491	491	491	491
Intention	Correlation Coefficient	.050	1.000	-.023	-.064	-.038	-.011
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.268	.	.607	.157	.398	.803
	N	491	491	491	491	491	491
Total attitude	Correlation Coefficient	-.095*	-.023	1.000	.694**	.674**	.444**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.036	.607	.	.000	.000	.000
	N	491	491	491	491	491	491
Total skills	Correlation Coefficient	-.137**	-.064	.694**	1.000	.560**	.465**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.157	.000	.	.000	.000
	N	491	491	491	491	491	491
Total knowledge	Correlation Coefficient	-.028	-.038	.674**	.560**	1.000	.570**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.538	.398	.000	.000	.	.000
	N	491	491	491	491	491	491
Total industry requirement	Correlation Coefficient	-.039	-.011	.444**	.465**	.570**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.383	.803	.000	.000	.000	.
	N	491	491	491	491	491	491

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATION AND LIMITATIONS

The results from the analyses showed that majority of the respondents (60.7 per cent) were not aware about government initiatives, for example SLIM Program, to mitigate graduate unemployment in Malaysia. Despite their unawareness about the initiatives, however, most of them (60.7 per cent) indicated that they had intention to join the programs offered by the government. The findings were further supported in which respondents agreed that the SLIM program would increase their soft skills training, offer more job placement and enhance their professionalism, physical, spiritual, and moral value. The findings also showed that knowledge of students contributed the highest influence on the graduate unemployment. This indicated that the students' lack of knowledge might cause the employers not to hire them to work. The finding from this study supports the findings made by Carole et al. (2006) and Bakarman, (2005). The result also showed that industry requirement was the second important factor that influenced higher graduate unemployment. However, industry requirement factor is beyond the control of students.

In terms of the relationship between respondents' awareness towards government initiatives to mitigate graduate unemployment with respect to the identified independent variables, the results indicated that there is a significant relationship exists between the level of awareness and attitude and skills of respondents (Hypothesis 3). Significant relationship also exists between the level of awareness and promotional activities carried out by government (Hypothesis 1). As for perception, significant relationship exists with the training modules only (Hypothesis 2). Other attributes of independent variables showed no significant relationships for both the level of awareness and perception of respondents.

The findings from the study could be used by relevant authorities or parties to properly plan and take appropriate actions to assist graduates in getting their employment as well as helping government to mitigate graduate unemployment in Malaysia. For example, the authorities such as the university's management through its Student Affairs or Career Development Unit together with Government Ministries or agencies as well as potential employers might jointly organised Career Fairs or seminars to make graduates aware of the government initiatives or programs offered and the job opportunities available in the market. Also education and training could also be conducted for the graduates in terms of job application such as writing of resume, attending a job interview, and others.

Based on the findings also, government agencies need to promote their initiatives or programs more aggressively via a variety of many medium of communication. They should not only use the conventional media such as radio, TV and newspapers but social media such as Facebook, twitter and others would be more welcoming. Besides, their advertisement needs to be more creative in order to capture the graduates' attention.

Despite its contributions, this study also has its limitations. One of the obvious limitations is that the study was conducted on graduates from one private institution only that is UNITEN. The results from the study may not be generalised or applicable to other higher institutions in Malaysia. In addition, the study did not make a comparison between the awareness and perception of graduates from the public and private institutions in Malaysia. There could be some significant differences, depending on the level of their knowledge, exposures and interests. Moreover, comparison could be made between the local graduates and the overseas graduates on the level of awareness and perception regarding the government initiatives to mitigate graduate unemployment in Malaysia. Thus, future researches could be carried out to address these limitations.

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