

Attaining a new skill can help those entering the job market navigate these challenging times

SEVEN to eight out of every 10 employed graduates aged 24 and below were working in the semi-skilled and low-skilled occupation categories in 2020, resulting in lower mean monthly salaries and wages received.

The **Department of Statistics of Malaysia** says in 2020, the rate of skill-related underemployment for this group went up to 78.6% as compared to 55.1% in 2019. Overall, skill-related underemployment increased to 31.2% in 2020 from 26.7% in 2019 as a result of the health crisis and its ensuing consequence on the economy.

Skill-related underemployment refers to a mismatch between occupation and qualification.

“However, the rate of skill-related underemployment was getting lower along with the age increases, reflecting longer working experiences and better working conditions as well as job opportunities,” says the DOSM, noting that there is a significant increase of skill-related underemployment in 2020 following the health crisis and subsequent economic woes.

Concurring, Malaysian Employers Federation(MEF) president Datuk Dr Syed Hussain Syed Husman notes that the Covid-19 pandemic had pushed many companies, especially the micro-small and medium enterprises, into severe financial constraints and put employers on survival mode.

He says many employers encouraged their employees to upskill and reskill themselves to enable them to be multi-skilled to enhance performance and productivity. By ups-killing and reskilling, employees can ensure that their skills remain relevant to the employers need, he says.

“With digitalisation now in full throttle, it has become necessary for jobseekers to be highly skilled, adaptive and resilient, with a good command of English. Technological advancements in areas like robotics and artificial intelligence are likely to continue replacing functions which have traditionally been performed by humans and will do so in increasingly sophisticated ways.”

Besides hard technical skills, employers will also focus more on soft skills such as emotional intelligence, analytical thinking, creativity and effective communication abilities, he adds. Syed Hussain advises new graduates entering the job market to equip themselves with the relevant skills including digital skills to be marketable in a post-pandemic market.

“They need to be agile and adaptable in order to weather the ever-changing working conditions brought by uncertainties and disruptions. They need to acquire skills such as digital literacy, collaboration, agility, creativity, problem- solving and data analysis to make themselves more marketable,” he says.

He adds that there are many online courses at various platforms and some of which are free.

“The workplace environment is changing to more remote working and new graduates need to equip themselves with those skills to remain employable,” he says.

Bank Islam chief economist Dr Mohd Afzanizam Abdul Rashid also believes that venturing into a new skill would help graduates navigate these challenging times.

He adds, graduates may also need to be nimble as well as agile and should not be too fixated to work in areas that they are only familiar with.

“For instance, sales jobs may be deemed not so preferable because of their nature of remuneration, which relies heavily on commission.

“However, if a person can do it right, they can excel and be able to earn a high income while at the same time establish a good network with customers that may open up new opportunities in the future. One would need to move away from their comfort zone,” he says.

For those who are questioning the value of their tertiary education and qualification, he says we will need to understand the role of education and the purpose of their knowledge.

“Every discipline like engineering, architecture, accounting, business, economics or even literature and linguistics will teach us about being critical in things that we do. And venturing into a new skill is certainly the right thing to do in order to navigate their lives during these challenging times,” he notes.

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