

Enhancing Malaysian Human Capital Through Holistic Education Approach: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper examine the extent literature on the policy and progress of holistic education approach on human capital in Malaysia. It also identifies various issues and challenges faces by human capital development in Malaysia.

Design/methodology/approach: This paper is a descriptive research paper which contains a length of policies discussed to show the concerted effort by authorized agencies to finally reveal the holistic education to enhance human capital. Information for this research obtained from existing documents in various journals and other printed material which related to the dynamics of the policies in Malaysian education system such as holistic education policy in Malaysia, Human Capital development and National Education Policy In Malaysia.

Research limitations/implications: This paper only limited to literature review discussion. Future studies shall be conducted on empirical aspect such as to ascertain the relationship between holistic education and human capital.

Practical implications: This paper could explore on how holistic education could be improvised in order to enhance Malaysia human capital.

Originality/value: This research provide an understanding on holistic education plan implemented in enhancing human capital in Malaysia. Besides, challenges for future work and strategies undertaken to improve graduate employability are also being discussed.

Keywords: Human Capital, Holistic Education, Employability.

Introduction

Human capital has become an important component of the modern economy (Sodirjonov, 2020). Knowledge and confidence equipped with values such as innovative, disciplined, enthusiastic, patriotic, tenacious and competitive are important characteristics of human capital. These are important traits needed today by employers as to reflect the present day needs in an organization. These excellent qualities are essential as reflected in the current working environment which are sophisticated, dynamic and creativity in nature. History have shown how excellent human capital have impacted nations such as South Korea, Japan and Taiwan especially with the advancement of technology. These Asian nations have exemplified appropriate planning and development have produced excellent human capital who have turned these nations into developed industrialized nation (World Bank, 2016). Today, in the era of automation and digital, transformation of occupations and job profiles and changes of employment forms have occurred (Sima, Gheorge, Subic & Nancu, 2020). Thus, it is imperative for a developing nation like Malaysia to revamp its strategies in the implementation of human capital planning suitable with the industrial revolution which have changed the world significantly. The overall human capital planning need to be adjusted accordingly from all angles such as education, training, technical and vocational programs which is essential in the development of a holistic human capital that is able to fulfill of the needs of present work culture suitable with the present Industrial Revolution 4.0 era.

In the contemporary global landscape, the importance of education in enhancing human capital and employability cannot be overstated. Particularly in the context of Malaysia, a rapidly developing nation with a dynamic labor market, the role of education in equipping graduates with the necessary skills and knowledge to meet the demands of the job market is paramount. Past studies pointed out that the significance and relevance of human capital development in the achievement of meaningful and sustainable economic growth and development which have been widely acknowledged in various studies as mentioned by Anaduaka (2014). Thus, employees are expected to be equipped with various qualities which would be an essential factor in the employability of an employee. Thus, education at various levels plays important role in the development of excellent human capital. In the long run, this would have a major impact on the economic growth of the nation.

This paper examine the extent literature on the policy and progress of holistic education approach on human capital in Malaysia. It also identifies various issues and challenges faces by human capital development in Malaysia.

Literature Review

Human Capital

Human development refers to a person's education, skill level and ability to be a productive worker in the 21st century economy (Hershberg, 1996). It is also the third component in knowledge-based economic development (Rahim & Khadijah, 2007) as cited in Zulkifli, Mustafar and Ridzuan (2022). Improving the education system is one of the measures focused by the government to enhance national development, in line with the goal of a high-income country. Human capital refers to individuals who are knowledgeable, confident, and have noble values, innovative, disciplined, enthusiastic, patriotic, resilient and competitive. Shultz (1993), defines human capital as the process associated with training, education, and professional initiatives to enhance the knowledge, skills, capabilities, values and social assets owned by an employee that will increase employee satisfaction and achievement in the company they work

for. Human capital according to the Islamic perspective, is also a personality superiority possessed by humans such as mastery of knowledge, high skills and noble morals in the context of carrying out tasks and joint responsibilities entrusted to increase prosperity for humans and nature as a whole (Idris et al., 2019). In addition, according to Rahman et al. (2021), cited in Abdullah & Majid (2022), human capital is the labor force in an organization and a country that contributes to economic benefits and value. Humans are the most valuable capital because they have wisdom, ideas and expertise in solving problems. The educational process carried out in an orderly manner will produce excellent people, which in turn will become a useful capital for the development and prosperity of the country.

Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, in his speech on 1 May 2006 stated that quality human capital is a must not a luxury, the government and the people must jointly have responsibilities that must be implemented with full commitment. Continuing quality education and skills training will also ensure that the country's human capital remains relevant to the current needs of the industry and market and is able to face the challenges and atmosphere of increasing international competition. The concept of Civil Society introduced by the 10th Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim refers to the empowerment of the nation based on values, ethics and morals. This concept is an effort to map the country's administrative strategy effectively, emphasizing economic and cultural empowerment, which is based on values, ethics or morals. The civil framework policy Agenda not only focuses on solving problems and meeting the needs of the country, but also touches on shaping the future and fulfilling the potential of the people and the country (Prime Minister Office Portal, 2023). The importance of human capital development is focused on the development of students and community development, increase in economic growth and poverty reduction. According to Hamat & Nordin (2012), human capital components include education, skills, knowledge, experience and health. While from an Islamic perspective, human capital includes thoughts or intellect, will or impulse, emotions or feelings, physical as well as spiritual (Idris et al., 2019).

Holistic Education in Malaysia

Holistic education is an educational approach that recognizes the need to develop individuals in a comprehensive and balanced manner, encompassing not only academic knowledge but also social, emotional, physical, and moral aspects. It emphasizes the importance of nurturing well-rounded individuals who are not only academically competent but also equipped with life skills, critical thinking abilities, and emotional intelligence. Holistic education in Malaysia is influenced by various factors, including cultural values, the demands of a rapidly evolving job market, and the government's commitment to producing capable and well-rounded citizens. According to Hussein (2016), Malaysia's diverse cultural and ethnic landscape plays a significant role in shaping holistic education. The country's cultural values, such as respect for tradition, community, and a harmonious society, are integrated into the educational system. This cultural aspect emphasizes character development, moral education, and respect for diversity as integral components of holistic education.

Under government initiatives, Malaysia education policies, has shown a commitment to holistic education. The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, for example, emphasizes the importance of producing well-rounded, balanced individuals capable of contributing to society and the economy. It promotes character education, critical thinking, and the development of soft skills to prepare students for a rapidly changing world (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Balancing Academic and Non-Academic Development is also one of the holistic education component. This approach includes co-curricular activities, community service, and character-building programs alongside traditional classroom learning.

Students are encouraged to participate in sports, arts, and other extracurricular activities to foster a more comprehensive development (Teo & Ho, 2015). In response to the demands of the job market, holistic education in Malaysia emphasizes the development of skills and competencies that go beyond academic qualifications. This includes communication skills, critical thinking, problem-solving, and digital literacy, which are considered essential for employability in the modern economy (Shah et al., 2020). In conclusion, holistic education in Malaysia is a multifaceted approach that seeks to develop individuals who are not only academically proficient but also socially, emotionally, and morally competent. It is influenced by cultural values, government initiatives, and a commitment to equipping students with the skills and competencies needed in a rapidly changing world. By emphasizing character development and non-academic skills, holistic education in Malaysia aims to prepare students to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Malaysia Strategies in Strengthening Human Capital

i) Malaysia Plan and Human Capital Development in Malaysia

According to Zulkifli, Mustafar & Ridzuan (2022), in order to enhance Malaysia education system, government allocated a total of RM33.4 billion or 21% of the 2007 budget to manage education and training in Malaysia. While in the 10th Malaysia Plan (2011-2015), human capital development includes technical education as a measure to improve the labor market and transforming the education system. Under 11th Malaysia Plan (2016-2020), Malaysia focus on human capital empowerment that strengthens the capacity and stability of workers. Furthermore, human capital development in the 12th Malaysia Plan (12MP) 2021-2025, which was unveiled by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob on September 27th 2021 will covers four key areas of human capital development for the education sector:

- Realigning the labour market for inclusive and sustainable growth
- Developing future-ready talent
- Enhancing lifelong learning opportunities
- Strengthening social protection

The 12MP will also allocate RM400 billion for ongoing and new projects under various sectors, including education (12th Malaysia Plan, 2021).

In budget 2023, a total of RM55.2 billion was approved for infrastructure development, national education standards and the welfare of teachers and students while an allocation of RM15.3 billion was allocated to the Ministry of Higher Education to improve the quality of higher education in the country (The Malaysian Reserve, 2023).

According to a report of Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister's Department (2023), human capital development is a critical factor in generating and maintaining the country's economic growth. The availability of a highly skilled workforce is essential to support the transition of all sectors of the economy towards knowledge-intensive, technological and innovation activities.

The main policy is to cover the following 4 areas of focus:

1. Improving the efficiency of the labor market

Among the strategies include improving labour productivity and wages through the transition to high-skilled jobs, improving labour market operations to maximise efficiency and effectiveness and improving the management of foreign workers.

2. Transforming TVET to meet industry demand

This includes strengthening TVET governance for better management, improving the quality and delivery of TVET programs to improve the marketability of graduates as well as improving branding to attract students to TVET.

3. Strengthening lifelong learning for skills

Includes upskilling workers and shaping entrepreneurial excellence and expanding community training for high-income sectors of the economy.

4. Improving the quality of education to improve student outcomes and institutional excellence.

Improving student achievement through improved access and quality, improving governance and stakeholder collaboration to support good schools, improving the quality of graduates and programs as well as strengthening research for innovation, and achieving excellent IPT governance and financial sustainability.

ii) National Education Policy

Malaysia is a country that is committed to enhancing its human capital through education and training. According to the World Bank, human capital is "the knowledge, skills, and health that people accumulate throughout their lives, enabling them to realize their potential as productive members of society". Malaysia recognizes that human capital is a key driver of economic growth, social development, and national unity.

Malaysia has been planning for education in enhancing its human capital since its independence in 1957. It has implemented various policies and programmes to improve the access, quality, and relevance of education at all levels, from preschool to higher education. Some of the major milestones in Malaysia's education planning are:

- The Razak Report (1956) and the Education Ordinance (1957), which established a national education system based on a common curriculum and medium of instruction for all races.
- The Rahman Talib Report (1961) and the Education Act (1961), which introduced free and compulsory primary education for all citizens, as well as secondary and tertiary education opportunities.
- The National Education Philosophy (1988), which articulated the vision and mission of education in Malaysia, based on the principles of Islam, democracy, nationalism, and humanism.
- The National Higher Education Act (1996), which established the legal framework for the governance and management of higher education institutions, as well as the funding mechanisms for students and research.
- The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, which is a comprehensive plan to transform the Malaysian education system by 2025. It has three main objectives: to provide universal access to quality education for all Malaysians, regardless of their

socio-economic background, ethnicity, religion, or location; to raise the standards of student outcomes and teacher quality, and to benchmark them against international best practices; and to foster greater unity and national identity among students, and to prepare them for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 outlines 11 strategic and operational shifts that are needed to achieve these objectives, such as:

- Providing equal access to preschool education for all children by 2020
- Implementing a new school curriculum that focuses on higher-order thinking skills and values
- Introducing a new student assessment system that measures both academic and non-academic achievements
- Enhancing the quality and professionalism of teachers and school leaders through rigorous selection, training, and evaluation
- Increasing the autonomy and accountability of schools and districts to tailor their approaches to local needs
- Strengthening the delivery capabilities and capacity of the Ministry of Education at all levels
- Leveraging ICT to scale up quality learning across Malaysia
- Transforming technical and vocational education to meet industry demands and student aspirations
- Empowering state and non-state actors to collaborate in providing education opportunities
- Maximising student outcomes by investing in high-performing schools, turnaround initiatives for low-performing schools, and inclusive education programmes for students with special needs
- Engaging parents, community, and alumni as partners in education

The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 is divided into three waves, each with specific targets and initiatives:

- Wave 1 (2013-2015): To address immediate challenges and lay the foundations for long-term transformation
- Wave 2 (2016-2020): To accelerate system improvement and move towards excellence
- Wave 3 (2021-2025): To move from improvement to innovation and increased operational flexibility

The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 also provides a detailed roadmap for implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the transformation efforts. It identifies key performance indicators, milestones, risks, and mitigation strategies for each shift. It also outlines the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Education, state governments, district offices, schools, teachers, parents, students, civil society organisations, private sector partners, and international agencies (Malaysia Education Blueprint, 2013).

In addition to the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, Malaysia has also launched the Higher Education Blueprint 2015-2025, which aims to create a higher education system that is more competitive, innovative, inclusive, sustainable, globalized, and integrated with industry.

The Higher Education Blueprint 2015-2025 has six aspirations: holistic graduates; lifelong learning; quality TVET graduates; financial sustainability; empowered governance; and enhanced ecosystem.

Malaysia's planning for education in enhancing its human capital is a testament to its commitment and vision to create a more prosperous, equitable, and harmonious nation. By investing in its people, Malaysia hopes to achieve its aspiration of becoming a high-income, developed, and inclusive country by 2030.

Challenges of Malaysia Human Capital

As government progress towards high income nation through holistic education, the process have been interfered with different consequences which coming from several uncontrollable factors. Thus, in preparing Malaysia human capital for future work, there are several challenges need to be encountered by Malaysia human capital. The challenges are lacking of student preparation for work, labor market ecosystem and also the influence of media, communication and technological developments and Industrial Revolution 4.0.

Lack of preparation of students to face the nature of work, coupled with experiential learning does not support the production of talented graduates (World Economic Forum, 2020). Employers expect students to have soft skills (50%), work experience (31%) and technical skills (27%). Other skills are in the form of problem-solving skills, self-management, teamwork, use and development of technology (Makhbul & Latif, 2018). According to Dazali & Awang (2014), communication skills are an important element that must be present and mastered by every student, whether to meet their needs during the learning process, preparation for work or in social interaction. The ability to communicate well in English is a huge advantage in the global job market. Students who lack communication skills in English or other languages will face the challenge of finding a job that requires those skills.

Employers assume graduates are still weak in making decisions, less responsible for actions and take decisions that are less skilled in anticipating problems. In addition, employers are also of the opinion that graduates are still lacking in thinking skills, communication and interpersonal skills, as well as ICT skills including data processing such as Microsoft Excel, the ability to search for task-related information via the Internet, presenting information with audio-visual and word processing skills such as Microsoft Word (Mamat et al., 2019). The most significant weaknesses of graduates are English proficiency and soft skills. Employers are faced with the challenge of obtaining quality graduates from the soft skills point of view and even more challenging to obtain graduates who are able to communicate well in English. Fluency in English and the ability to access information globally are seen as important competencies because both skills are indispensable for the development and advancement of a company's competitiveness to meet global challenges. The chances of getting a job become higher when graduates have a lot of skills and knowledge. Soft skills are not formally learned in a lecture hall, but are instead acquired through continuous exposure in volunteer programs and work experience while pursuing industrial training (Mamat et al., 2019).

The labor market ecosystem is a complex system involving multiple elements, including workers, employers, governments, and organizations that influence the way jobs are created, filled, and managed. University-industry cooperation in Malaysia has not yet reached an encouraging level. Difficulties in finding a job and unemployment among undergraduates are closely related to the lack of skills possessed and the employability of graduates when entering the labor market. The Covid 19 pandemic has had a negative impact on the employability of students in the employment sector (Makhbul & Latif, 2020).

Difficulties in obtaining employment and graduate unemployment are said to be closely related to the lack of employability skills and employability of graduates entering the labour market (Yusof, Jamaluddin & Lazim., 2013). According to Ismail (2012), there are five factors that make it difficult for graduates to get a job, namely lack of skills and work experience, mismatch between industry needs and the graduate's field of study, lack of ability to communicate well, especially in English, negative attitude towards certain jobs and lack of awareness of the existence of various job opportunities. The results of this study found that the largest gap was recorded for the characteristics of decision-making and problem solving, while the smallest gap was recorded for the characteristics of ICT (Information Technology).

The advancement of information technology in the era of globalization has made society, especially young people, vulnerable to various social problems that are increasingly prevalent (Rosli, Mahmud, Azni et al., 2022). Dependence on human resources for routine and programmed tasks will significantly decrease in the future. This task will be taken over by automation technology and robots. Job opportunities will focus on the areas of simulation and virtual reality, system integration, internet of things (IOT), cyber security, cloud computing, supply chain, big data analytics and robotics (Makhbul & Latif, 2020).

Malaysia Graduate Employability Strategic Plan (GESP)

The Graduate Employability Strategic Plan (GESP) (2021-2025) is a five-year plan by the Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia to produce holistic and employable graduates. It is based on a “quadruple helix” framework involving the graduates and academics, industry experts, government and the community. The plan contains four main strategies, 13 incentives and 31 activities. This policy served as a good concerted effort by the government to address the employability problem. According to Dr. Noraini Ahmad, former Minister of Higher Education Malaysia (2015), strategies and initiatives to improve the employability of graduates are formulated in a comprehensive and holistic manner with the aim of graduates who are future-proof, holistic and balanced with the value of global employability .

Among the GESP's vision and mission is to ensure higher employability of graduates by maintaining the suitability of graduates skills to the needs of the job market and maintaining low levels of unemployment. Among the main components is the coordination of education with the job market: GESP focuses on the coordination of educational curricula with the needs of the job market and industry. Human empowerment such as empowering graduates with generic skills, leadership, innovation, and ethical understanding and vocational and technical education (TVET), in enhancing TVET education to meet the needs of the industry. Entrepreneurship development, where GESP encourages graduates to become entrepreneurs and job creators. Career counseling and guidance services to provide career counseling services to graduates.

Funding and financial support where GESP offers financial assistance to graduates to improve their employability. In addition, Industry Coordination, where GESP emphasizes cooperation between higher education institutions and industry to ensure quality and relevant courses and training. Digital skills development, where GESP provides training and development of digital skills for graduates to respond to challenges in the digital era. Empowerment of female graduates by increasing the participation of female graduates in the job market and maintaining gender equity are being addressed. Overseas opportunities, where GESP supports Malaysian graduates who want to find work or education opportunities abroad. Under measurement and evaluation, its provide periodic assessments to measure the effectiveness of various initiatives and programs in improving the employability of graduates. In coordination with the National Agenda GESP is carried out with reference to the Malaysian

Economic Development Plan and the National Transformation agenda. The GESP (2021-2025) is an important step in enhancing the employability of Malaysian graduates and ensuring they have the skills and knowledge relevant to the needs of the current job market. It also helps to enhance Malaysia's competitiveness in the global economic arena.

The four strategies of Graduate Employability Strategic Plan:

- Reinforcing talent. This strategy aims to enhance the quality and diversity of graduates by providing them with relevant skills, competencies and values. Some of the activities under this strategy include developing a national competency framework, implementing a graduate employability enhancement programme, and promoting lifelong learning opportunities.
- Expanding careers. This strategy aims to increase the employability and mobility of graduates by providing them with various career pathways and options. Some of the activities under this strategy include establishing a national career service centre, implementing a graduate entrepreneurship programme, and facilitating cross-border mobility.
- Enhancing teaching and learning. This strategy aims to improve the delivery and assessment of teaching and learning by incorporating innovation and technology. Some of the activities under this strategy include developing a digital learning platform, implementing a blended learning approach, and enhancing academic-industry collaboration.
- Strengthening industry ties. This strategy aims to foster stronger partnerships between higher education institutions and industry players by aligning their needs and expectations. Some of the activities under this strategy include developing a national industry advisory council, implementing an industry immersion programme, and enhancing industry recognition.

These strategies are expected to help graduates plan and determine the career they want as well as identify the skills they require to succeed. The plan also involves strategic partnerships with various agencies such as Socso, TalentCorp, MDEC and others to provide graduates with access to job-related data, career profiling, job matching and other services. The plan is a continuation of the National GE Blueprint 2017-2021, which was designed to give an immediate solution and guidance to all public and private institutions in producing quality graduates for the job market (Portal Minda NC UiTM, 2021).

According to Abdullah and Majid (2022), the GESP are being implemented to improve the employability of the graduates through collaboration between academia and industry. This strategic framework is a guideline or direction for all parties involved to move in line with the plans that have been set. The targeted objective is that the country can produce holistic human capital with entrepreneurial and balanced characteristics as well as ensuring that the marketability percentage of IPT graduates remains above 80%.

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted Malaysia's holistic education planning for enhancing human capital, which covers the Malaysia Plan for Human Capital Development and the National Education Policy. Challenges faced by human capital, such as lack of preparation for future work, the

labor market ecosystem, and the influence of media, communication, and technological developments in the Industrial Revolution 4.0, were also highlighted. The graduate employability strategies are also being discussed. The paper is only limited to a literature review discussion. Future studies shall be conducted on empirical aspects, such as to ascertain the relationship between holistic education and human capital.

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