

# **Can Online Learning Tools Better Engender Graduate Work Readiness? Perspective of Malaysian Undergraduate Students**

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Online and distance learning were traditionally delivered for students seeking flexibility while pursuing academic or professional qualifications. In Malaysia, a handful of higher education providers offered this mode of delivery to cater for part-time students, while others specialised in fully immersive e-learning modules. As internet connectivity and learning technology improved, the opportunity to harness technology to better prepare graduates for the future workplace has been increasingly used across tertiary education providers, a trend which gathered momentum because of the global pandemic. The transition towards almost exclusive online learning in Malaysia was a steep learning curve, presenting several challenges for the education sector. The Movement Control Orders (MCO), effectively locked down most of the society and many businesses, with the education sector having to run classes remotely for circa 18 months. Although there have been short interludes over this period where education providers have been permitted to have blended learning, classes have been essentially online with learners and the facilitators operating from home. For education providers there was little choice, to fulfil their learning commitments in the face of a lock-down, staff and students had to transition to a curriculum delivered online within a very short time frame. It has been argued that education providers were already well prepared for such an eventuality and that 'Generation Z' students were ready for education provided primarily online, but there is debate that digital literacy has perhaps been underestimated, with the development of the employability skills, particularly those softer skills, more challenging to cultivate online when compared to face-to-face. The transition to online learning was considered a more appropriate platform to encourage deep learning and better prepare graduates for the workplace, a scenario considered essential given the rather disruptive labour market graduates were entering. This research will consolidate existing research in the areas of online learning and Graduate Work Readiness (GWR) and takes research forward in digital learning and spaces. Using a student-led survey among final year students across disciplines and from public and private universities in Malaysia, the research will examine the effectiveness of online learning in preparing the graduate for the labour market, proposing approaches to facilitate a better learning experience and the development of employment skills. Providing the perspectives of soon to graduate students ensures respondents had experience tertiary education both in the traditional context and online and

are arguably well placed to provide insight into evaluating their graduate capabilities given their proximity to the labour market. The findings of this research will prove beneficial to several identified stakeholders, namely, education providers, employers, policy makers and students, providing insight into the implications of online learning on GWR.

***Keywords:*** *Employability Skills, Graduate Work Readiness, Malaysia Students, Online Learning, Tertiary Education*