

Students' Perspective of Factors Influencing University Graduate Unemployment: A Case Study of Vietnam

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Abstract: Vietnamese higher education has enlarged number of university graduates to achieve the national education development goals, as well as adapting with various student family expectations. However, there was an issue that emerged with much controversial when the unemployed university graduates' rate has been remarkably increasing which negatively impacts several fields. Previous studies indicated some causes of this problem, however, lack of studies involve the complex relationship of factors influencing unemployed graduates in Vietnam. This study fills this gap by building and testing model. A quantitative design employs to reach the research objectives. A framework was developed and an adapted online questionnaire with 32 items, which was first piloted to 30 respondents for items validity, then used to collect the data digitally from 384 randomly selected respondents who are currently studying at different zones in Vietnam. The data were analyzed with the assistance of Smart PLS software. The analysis revealed that "job mismatch and graduate outcomes" significantly influencing in the mediating factor of "inequality of recruitment" which was highly influencing in "graduated unemployment". Besides, "employability skills" were directly influencing the "graduated unemployment". Notably, factor of "graduate attributes" was poorly correlated with "graduated unemployment", it means that new Vietnamese graduated are ready to accept any job provided to avoid unemployment which reflects the high competence in labor market. The study recommends that higher education professionals should develop an advanced entrepreneurs' program to improving of job mismatch and graduate outcomes and innovation and make a policy to reduce inequality of recruitment in Vietnam.

Keywords: graduated unemployment, job mismatch, graduate outcomes, employ skills, inequality of recruitment.

1. Introduction

Unemployment is a significant social development issue impacting youth development and contributing to stagnation in national economic growth worldwide. According to UNESCO (2012), the global unemployment rate rose notably from 5.6% in 2007 to 6.2% in 2010, increasing competition in the job market for individuals aged 15 to 24. In Vietnam, approximately 200,000 recent graduates were unemployed as of 2019 (MOE, 2019), with around 60% of them working in fields unrelated to

their studies or without the necessary degrees. In 2019, fresh graduates constituted about 12% of the total 1,059,000 unemployed individuals, reflecting a significant portion of the national unemployment rate (VN Ministry of Labor, War Invalids, and Social Affairs, 2019).

Unemployment is a global issue, and in Vietnam, it has become a pressing concern that has garnered attention from stakeholders and researchers seeking solutions. This paper examines students' perspectives on factors influencing graduate unemployment, considering national context, strategic policies, the higher education system, graduate outcomes, the labor market, and local culture. The findings aim to foster insightful discussions among stakeholders to sustainably reduce graduate unemployment in Vietnam. Higher education institutions are crucial for supplying human resources to the national labor market and contributing to sustainable socio-economic development. Consequently, graduate unemployment significantly impacts stakeholders. For instance, unemployed graduates experience increased anxiety and stress, wasting valuable time and money invested in their education (Hoang Bach, 2019; Kreishan, 2011; Extremera, 2016; Paul & Moser, 2009). Additionally, high unemployment rates undermine national economic conditions, rendering skilled labor resources ineffective (Knabe & Rätzl, 2011; Ismail, 2011; Omar et al., 2012; Shamsuddin et al., 2013). Moreover, elevated unemployment rates diminish current university students' motivation and effort, leading to a decline in teaching and learning quality (Rae, 2010; Mason, Williams & Cranmer, 2009; Nguyen Phuong, 2019; Wu, 2011).

What are the reasons behind Vietnam's high rate of unemployment among graduates has been brought up?

With much concern from reviews and stakeholders, the issue of graduate unemployment was discussed in Vietnam in several formal and informal platforms. Especially, this boiling trouble has been lively discussed in national parliament meeting with much debate and contrariety. According to a report, some people blamed of the low quality in graduate outcomes is the main cause of unemployment, while others think that the changing labor market of job mismatch was another reason. For example, in the national parliament meeting in 2019, Ms. Mai argued that students who lack of passion, professional skills, and weak communication skills, they hardly meet the employers' requirements (Mai T., 2019); another idea is imbalances in the of number students' training in university, college and vocational. Most of secondary student's pursuit to study in universities while small number of them choose the vocational schools for their career development (Thanh, 2019); the extending number of universities in Vietnam that has leading to the poor performance of student enrollment and higher education system in Vietnam still low ranking in ASEAN and the worldwide and graduate outcomes unmatched with labor market (Phuong N., 2019).

A concerning issue is the gap between education and practice: Educational programs often fail to keep up with the evolving needs of the labor market. As a result, students may lack practical skills and real-world experience, making it challenging for them to secure employment. In some fields, the supply of graduates exceeds the demand for their skills, leading to an oversaturation of the job market. This can make certain fields less attractive to employers. Moreover, graduates frequently lack essential soft skills—such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving—that employers increasingly value alongside professional knowledge. These soft skills are crucial for navigating the complexities of

today’s demanding work environment. Many companies now require candidates to have prior work experience, which poses a barrier for new graduates. The push to recruit “top talent” can also disadvantage new graduates, as it often involves significant time and effort to develop skilled workers. Students may struggle with understanding the labor market and identifying suitable job opportunities, particularly as technology, especially artificial intelligence, rapidly transforms job landscapes and makes some skills obsolete. In Vietnam, the quality of university education can be subpar, exacerbated by the rapid establishment of numerous local universities to improve literacy. This expansion has not always been accompanied by updates to training programs or improvements in teaching staff and facilities. Consequently, many graduates have high salary and position expectations that do not align with job requirements demanding extensive experience and practical skills.

While the debate is still growing in the Vietnamese society and Government parliaments’ space, however, lack of studies examine the relationship of factors influencing in graduate unemployment in the highly competitive labor market in Vietnam from student perspectives. This study aims to develop framework and test model related to above discussing factors.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Unemployment Rate in Vietnam.

The graph, which displayed Vietnam's unemployment rate from 1999 to 2020, shows that it peaked in 2001, then fell for ten years to a rate of about 1.1%, then skyrocketed to about 2.1% in 2015 and is still there today at 2.02%.

Although Vietnam's unemployment rate is not very high, over two thirds of the unemployed are young people. Interestingly, many university graduates are forced to work in manual labor positions where their degree is not required. It will therefore be much harder for those without a formal education to get employment (Asia Society, 2017).

Vietnam: Unemployment rate from 1999 to 2020



Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/444617/unemployment-rate-in-vietnam/>

2.2 Education in Vietnam and Challenges from External Assessment

World Bank (2014) states that Vietnam's education system has made significant progress in the last 20 years, particularly in terms of student achievement, completion, and attendance.

The globe was taken aback by Vietnamese students' 2012 PISA scores in mathematics, which rose to the 17th rank out of 65 countries. When compared to others, they are recognized for having good literacy and numeracy skills (OECD, 2014).

Vietnam's education systems have been facing numerous challenges that may have contributed to the rise in the unemployment rate, despite the country having started an outward orientation to keep the system evolving. For instance, some private universities have implemented innovative curricula aimed at high-performing countries like Korea and Singapore, or they have started a movement of innovative teaching. For instance, 1) the conviction that hard work and a well-rounded education are the keys to success, with the result that children are essentially always forced to attend extracurricular activities or school, lack physical activity, and have limited real-world application (UNESCO, 2015); 2) the recognition that sound fundamental numeracy and literacy skills are no longer sufficient in an evolving economy, where the need for highly skilled entrepreneurs in the labor market is growing (Worldbank,2014);

3) One-way lecturing is still used in Vietnamese classrooms, primarily emphasizing theory and relying heavily on textbooks. This has the unintended consequence of encouraging researchers, lecturers, teachers, and students to share similar viewpoints when explaining the gaps in the diversity of opinions (UNESCO, 2015). The materials for educators present another set of difficulties. The results of university graduates may be impacted by these difficulties (Asia Society, 2017).

2.3 Factors affecting unemployment among graduates

Previous studies show that many variables that contribute to unemployment among recent graduates in Vietnam and other nations. First of all, lack of strong entrepreneurial skills is cited as one contributing factor to graduate unemployment (Hanapi and Nordin, 2013). Such as, responsibility, honesty, knowledge, wisdom, leadership (Sheikh Abdul Munir, 2008); creativity, hard work, dedication, self-belief, independence, critical thinking, drive for achievement (Abdullah, Danila, & Ibrahim, 2014). Besides that, in the UK, unemployment among engineering graduates is attributed to various factors including policy, social economy, training, and the global labor market (Atkinson & Pennington, 2012). In China, the expansion of higher education between 2000 and 2005 increased the likelihood of high school graduates attending college, which contributed to unemployment among college graduates (Li, Whalley, and Xing, 2014). This summary highlights the complexity of graduate unemployment, showing that it's influenced by multiple factors including individual skills, economic conditions, educational policies, and global market trends across different countries.

Theoretical Framework

As previous review show that, entrepreneurial skills are designed to enhance graduates' employability by making them more attractive to employers. Matching theory explains "failures" in the graduate labor market (unemployment or skill underutilization) as mismatches between employers and graduates, which can occur for various reasons, such as, incomplete information leading to costly

searches (Coles and Smith, 1998); "Stock-flow matching" approach where agents may wait for better matches to enter the market; Labor market and institutional inflexibilities, e.g., higher skill underutilization among recent graduates working part-time while caring for children (Green, McIntosh and Vignoles, 2002). No doubt, graduates are affected by both individual characteristics and external market changes, include of job search is influenced by uncertainty and associated costs b. Market conditions impact job opportunities; and the policy changes and economic downturns increase uncertainty. National economic conditions cause fluctuations in employment, unemployment, and non-participation rates (Krof et al., 2016). Based on the dynamic nature of the economy and environment in Vietnam is suggested as a possible explanation for rising unemployment rates as following:

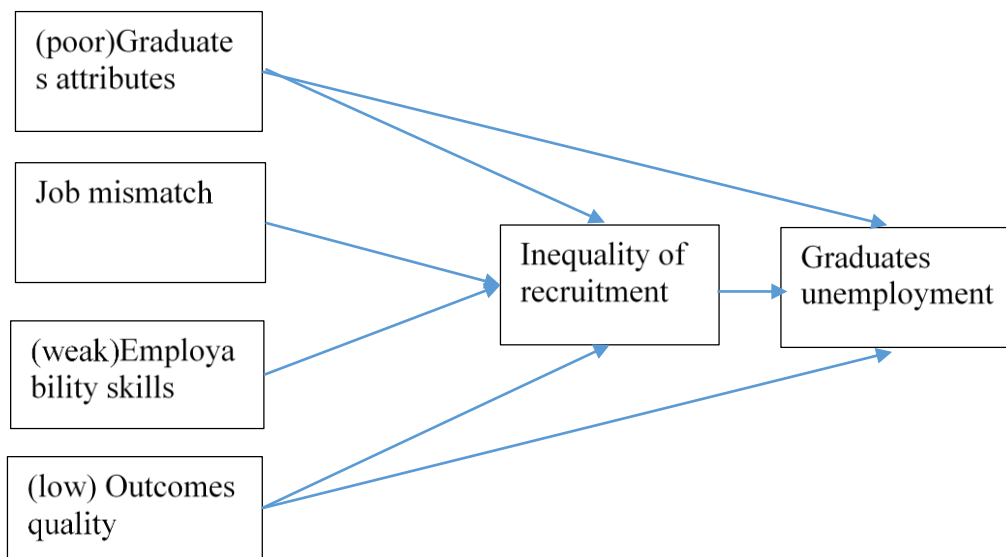


Figure1 Framework of factors influencing Graduate Unemployment in Vietnam

A framework was developed with dependent variable of four sub-factors of graduate attributes, employability skills, graduate outcomes, job mismatch; the mediating variable of inequality of job recruitment; and the independent variable of graduate unemployment. There were total 09 relationships will be tested based on data analysis through following hypothesizes:

- H1: Is there relationship between graduate attributes and inequality recruitment?
- H2: Is there relationship between job mismatch and inequality recruitment?
- H3: Is there relationship between employability skills and inequality recruitment?
- H4: Is there relationship between job mismatch and inequality recruitment

3. Methodology

The study used a quantitative approach to look at Vietnamese students' perceptions of the variables impacting unemployment among university graduates. There is an online survey with 32 items as part of the quantitative data collection approach. The survey's five potential causes of unemployment for graduates was skillfully designed to capture Vietnamese students' perspectives accurately.

In the current research, 384 Vietnamese students from different zones, including of northern (144), southern: (120) and central: (120) of Vietnam. All students were studying at least 2 years in Universities. 47% females and 53% males

Instruments and data collection

A five-point Likert-type scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree) was employed in the 32-item survey. It was modified and developed from earlier research conducted by Hossain et al., 2018. to measure students perception of 05 factors of 1) Graduates Attributes (05 items), 2) Employability Skills (05 items), 3) graduate outcome (05 items), 4) Job mismatch (05 items), 5) inequality recruitment (07 items); and the dependent variable is “graduate unemployment in Vietnam (05 items)”.

After reviewing the questionnaire, two experts made particular linguistic adjustments to make it more appropriate for the Vietnamese setting. Subsequently, a pilot research was carried out with 30 participants to ascertain the validity and reliability of the questions. Based on the results, 31 items were chosen for further data collecting.

Table 1 Reliability and validity of instrument through Rasch measurement

No.	Aspect		Graduate attributes	Employability Skills	graduate outcome	Job mismatch	inequality recruitment
1	Cronbach Reliability	Alpha/Test	.75	.80	.70	.77	.85
2	Raw variance explained by measures		46.1%	53.3%	48.2%	51.1%	49.5%
3	Unexplained variance in 1st contrast		9.8%	8.7%	8.8%	8.9%	9.2%
4	Point Correlation	Measurement	.36-.85	.38-.83	.37-.85	.38-.82	.37-.82

Data Analysis

With five sub-factors (sub-constructs) and nine associations (hypotheses), the study was extremely complicated, thus partial least squares (PLS) structural equation modeling using Smart PLS software was used to evaluate the data. The choice of smart PLS software was made because of its increased flexibility and scope, which allow for a more exploratory approach to the study and investigation of big and complicated route models (Ringle et al., 2019). The proposed measurement and structural model can be examined by the researchers thanks to this statistical instrument.

4. Results

Demographic analysis

384 respondents involved this study who come from different zones of north, south and central in Vietnam. The demographic analysis results express below.

Among 384 students, 88.5 % of students are from public universities, and others come from non-public universities; 30% are females and 70% males; 84,3% of the students were in the final years (year 3 &4) and 15,7% students were in the early period of study journey (year 1,2). The respondents in this study cover in different fields of study (social sciences: 40%, Technique & engineering: 33%; Information technology 17%, Management & administration: 10%).

Vietnamese student perspectives of factors influencing university graduate unemployment

Table 2 Descriptive data analysis results

No	Structural Equation Model	Sub-Constructs	Mean	SD	Ranking
1	Factor 1	Graduates attributes	3.37	1.06	4
2	Factor 2	Employability Skills	3.48	0.97	2
3	Factor 3	Outcomes quality	3.38	0.98	3
4	Factor 4	Job Mismatch	3.28	0.94	5
5	Mediating factor	Inequality of recruitment	3.57	0.91	1
6	Consequence	Graduates Unemployment	3.59	0.98	

Table 2. shows a descriptive analysis of the students' perceptions of factors that impact on university graduate unemployment. Surprisingly, the component with the greatest mean (M=3.57) was the one related to recruitment inequality; the factor with the second-highest mean was related to employability skills; the factor with the lowest mean (M=3.28) was related to job mismatch.

The descriptive data analysis shows that most of respondents (63%) feeling of a significant inequality opportunity of employment in Vietnamese. Especially, 69% of respondents agreed with disability group facing many challenges in finding a job, while 73% of respondents approved for the idea that "the talent group still has not found the right job" and most of the good opportunities saving for those who relatives with people working in state jobs (75%). Surprisingly, the data analysis found that 60% respondents disagree with the reason of "fresh graduates usually demand a higher salary or too choosy about the position offered by an organization" was caused of graduate unemployment. However, more than 60% of respondents firmly assumed that graduates lack employability skill, for example lack of problem-solving skills, poor communication skills, and weak confidence in teamwork significantly influence the unemployment rate.

Instructional Framework and Measurement Model—Reliability and Validity

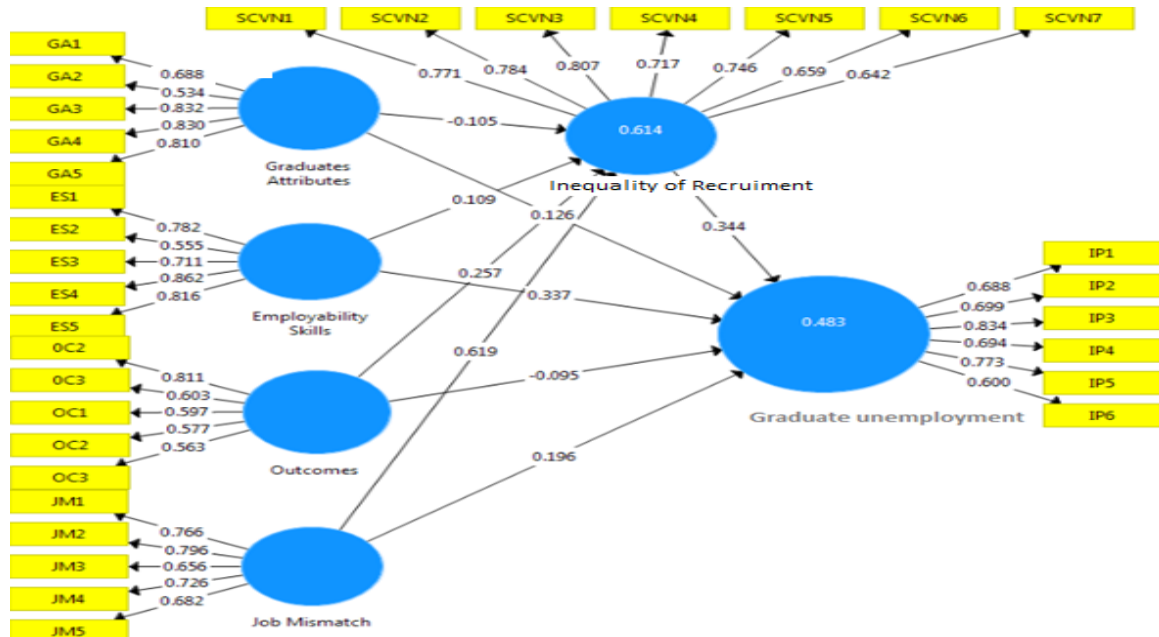


Figure 2 Results of data analysis from Smart PLS SEM for measurement model of factors influencing graduate unemployment.

Table 3 Measurement model values

Construct	Items	Factor loading	CA	CR	AVE
Graduates Attributes	GA1	0.688	0.751	0.847	0.587
	GA2	0.534			
	GA3	0.832			
	GA4	0.830			
	GA5	0.810			
Employability Skills	ES1	0.782	0.802	0.865	0.567
	ES2	0.555			
	ES3	0.711			
	ES4	0.862			
	ES5	0.816			
Graduate Outcomes	OC1	0.597	0.724	0.770	0.506
	OC2	0.811			
	OC3	0.603			

	OC4	0.577			
	OC5	0.563			
Job Mismatch	JM1	0.766			
	JM2	0.796			
	JM3	0.656	0.775	0.848	0.529
	JM4	0.726			
	JM5	0.682			
Inequality of Recruitment	SCVN1	0.771			
	SCVN2	0.784			
	SCVN3	0.807			
	SCVN4	0.717	0.856	0.891	0.539
	SCVN5	0.746			
	SCVN6	0.656			
	SCVN7	0.642			
Graduate Unemployment	IP1	0.688			
	IP2	0.699			
	IP3	0.834			
	IP4	0.694	0.809	0.864	0.516
	IP5	0.773			
	IP6	0.600			

As indicated in Table 3, the average loadings variance extracted (AVE) is evaluated better than 0.5 (from 0.56 to 5.87); the Cronbach Alpha (CA) is greater than 0.7 (from 0.724 to 0.856); and all of the indicator loadings are above 0.5 (ranging from 0.534 to 0.862). As a result, this component is acknowledged in the model (Hair et al., 1998; Ramayah et al., 2018). Thus, all three requirements for the measurement model's reliability and convergent validity are satisfied.

Table 4: Discriminant Validity

		1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Employability	0.753					
2	Graduate Attributes	0.712	0.766				
3	Graduate Outcomes	0.52	0.445	0.718			
4	Job Mismatch	0.209	0.221	0.504	0.727		

5	Graduate Outcomes	0.696	0.634	0.51	0.485	0.637	
6	Inequality of Recruitment	0.342	0.283	0.586	0.743	0.565	0.734

Finally, the average variance extracted from each construct was calculated to assess discriminant validity; it should be larger than the squares of the correlations between each construct and every other construct (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Crucially, as table 4 illustrates, the correlations between the constructs ought to be less than the square root of the average variance recovered. Similarly, the average variance extracted square root is larger than the construct correlations.

High Order Structural Equation Model Test

Through the use of a 5,000 sample re-sample bootstrapping process, the structural model analysis reported the relevance of the data. By computing standard errors for the estimations, bootstrapping was used to assess the reliability of the structure model and determine whether coefficients such outer weights, out loadings, and path coefficients are significant (Ramayah et al., 2018). In order to determine relevance, the path loadings between the constructs were examined using computed T-statistics.

Table 5 Presents the Path Coefficients and Significance for the Structural Model.

H ₀	Path Coefficients	Standar deviation	Standar error	T-Value	P-Values	Results
H ₁	Employability Skills → Graduate Unemployment	0.325	0.104	3.256	0.001	Significant
H ₂	Employability Skills → Inequality of Recruitment	0.304	0.110	<u>0.743</u>	<u>0.458</u>	<u>Poor</u>
H ₃	Graduates Attributes → Graduate Unemployment	0.138	0.102	1.195	<u>0.233</u>	<u>Poor</u>
H ₄	Graduates Attributes → Inequality of Recruitment	-0.081	0.113	0.706	<u>0.481</u>	<u>Poor</u>
H ₅	Job Mismatch → Graduate Unemployment	0.196	0.124	1.601	<u>0.110</u>	<u>Poor</u>
H ₆	Job Mismatch → Inequality of Recruitment	0.599	0.079	7.838	0.00	Significant
H ₇	Graduate Outcomes → Graduate Unemployment	-0.766	0.134	0.679	<u>0.497</u>	<u>Poor</u>
H ₈	Graduate Outcomes → Inequality of Recruitment	0.265	0.115	2.158	0.031	Significant
H ₉	Inequality of Recruitment → Graduate Unemployment	0.334	0.135	2.520	0.012	Significant

When the t-value is more than 1.96 and the p-value is less than 0.05, the structural model is deemed significant (Hair et al., 2019b; Ramayah et al., 2018).

As shown in Table 5, the factors of “employability skills” and “inequality of recruitment” had directly positive impact on “graduate unemployment” ($t = 3.256; 2.520; p = 0.001; 0.012$, respectively). “Graduate Outcomes” and “Job Mismatch” had significantly impact on “inequality of recruitment” ($t = 2.158, 7.873; p = 0.031, 0.00$; respectively); then indirectly influencing on graduate unemployment.

The factor of “Employability Skills” had not significantly impact on “Social Culture” ($t=0.743 < 1.96$ and $p = 0.458 > 0.05$).

The factors of Job Mismatch and Graduate Attributes had not significant correlation to Graduate Unemployment ($t=1.601; 0.706; p = 0.110, 0.481$, respectively).

In summary, the hypothesis of $H_{1,6,8,9}$ received at positive effect while $H_{2,3,4,5,7}$ exceeded negative consequences.

5. Discussion

The analysis revealed that “job mismatch and graduate outcomes” significantly influencing the mediating factor of “inequality of recruitment” which was highly influencing in “graduated unemployment” in the framework.

Besides, “employability skills” was directly significant influenced in “graduated unemployment”. Notably, factor of “graduate attributes” was poor correlation with “graduated unemployment”, it means new Vietnamese graduated ready to accept any job provided to avoid unemployment, this also reflects the high competence in labor market. The deeply discussion as following below.

This study shows that, one reason for graduates’ unemployment in Vietnam is weak in transferable knowledge and skills from graduate outcomes to job requirements, and the reasons explained by syllabus poor connecting with the industries. This finding has witnessed agreement from half of the respondents in this study. This finding has supported the previous studies, such as Omar et al. (2012) who emphasizes that higher education institutions need to adjust or develop curriculums based on Job demand especially at the same time with student graduated. Similarity, Abdullah, Danila & Ibrahim (2014) discussed enhancing entrepreneurial qualities for graduates in the Malaysian public universities for reducing the rate of fresh graduates in this country. This issue raises the questions for higher education management in re-assessment of their syllabus, curriculums, or programs toward connecting with reality

Remarkably, the study found no correlation between unemployment and the reason given by 60% of respondents—that is, “fresh graduates usually demand a higher salary or are too choosy about the position offered by an organization”).

This finding shows a contracted/ opposite result with previous studies; for example, Hossain et al. (2018) and Rae (2010) who found that new graduates usually have day dream of looking for jobs, which is a reason to fail to find a suitable jobs for them. This finding also confirms the Vietnamese youth's characteristics like committed, hard-working and active (Saito & Pham, 2019). This result also reflects the harshness of the labor market in Vietnam. The Vietnamese graduates readily accepted the

challenging context to have a job for surviving and career development, and the trend of the youth in racing to have a high standard of lifestyle regardless of any reason in the present. This finding also raised questions for employment policies makers to think of how to have suitable jobs for young graduates to avoid wasting of high skills labor resources when they must work with low skill job and low salaries.

Further research

Although this study tries to reach out multi factors influencing in graduate unemployment's, however, there are some factors that certainly affect university graduate unemployment that are not considered in this study, such as: (i) the productive structure of Vietnam - for example, the greater presence of hi-tech sectors may require greater qualification of the workforce; and (ii) macroeconomic aspects, since the income-elasticity of employment is certainly quite high. These factors should be appeared in a further research to analysis deeply in detail context.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study attempts to identify variables that affect Vietnamese university graduates' unemployment from the viewpoint of the students. This research has highlighted the factor of inequality of recruitment highly influencing in “graduated unemployment” and job mismatch and graduate outcomes” significantly influencing in the mediating factor of “inequality of recruitment”.

The results of this study have shown that employment for recent graduates in Vietnam was not contingent on having high test scores. Graduates must possess strong soft skills, including digital literacy, leadership, communication, English language proficiency, intelligence, and critical thinking, in order to succeed in the very competitive job market. An additional study conclusion indicated a robust correlation between job mismatch with unemployment and employability abilities. Universities should so encourage innovative teaching methods and teach students how to develop professionally in a sustainable way. Graduates from practical skills training will be knowledgeable and proficient when they join the workforce. Likewise, it will generate graduates who are proactive, have strong work ethics, and can resolve work-related issues.

Furthermore, this study first recorded students' perspectives of the inequality opportunities in job employments in Vietnam's existing and negative impact on youth career development. These evils have also been the causes of incredulous, angry, and pressing psychology in the social community. Therefore, the policies for equality in Vietnamese society among all different background groups in employment are urgently necessary to be established and implemented. The general expectations are to reduce the graduate employment rate to avoid wasting time and money for training and provide high skills human resources for sustainable development of the national economy and society.

Anticipated Outcomes

This study aims to determine the factors that influence Vietnamese university graduates' unemployment from the viewpoint of the students and investigates ways to enhance students' entrepreneurship abilities in Vietnamese universities so that they may participate in reviews and practical applications. Policy makers and other interested parties who are worried about graduate unemployment in Vietnam can also benefit from it.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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