

Embedding Gig Economy in Malaysia Higher Education: The Case of Universiti Teknologi MARA

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Abstract: The workforce of today and tomorrow, particularly graduates are likely to experience more challenges as the availability of permanent jobs are getting sparse. This is partly due to automatisation as well as technological development. However, with automatisation and technological development, new types of occupations have emerged, mainly related to freelance, short term contracts and part time. These kinds of employment are known as Gig Economy, a term made popular during the 2008 – 2009 economic crisis. To prepare undergraduates for their future occupations, it is vital to embed the aspects of gig economy in the syllabus. Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), an entity that has been entrusted to train bumiputera undergraduates and graduates have taken some notions of gig economy, theoretical as well as practice in the teaching and learning process. Nonetheless, more is still needed to strengthen the implementation of gig economy in higher institutions to align it with the nation's Shared Prosperity Vision 2030.

Keywords: Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Gig Economy, Bumiputera, Automatisasi, Technology

1. Introduction

For many undergraduates in higher education, life revolves around going to class, doing assignments, using technology, being with friends and perhaps only a few would have thought of what the future lie for them. This future is highly volatile, and the nation's economic situation will normally have an impact on it. In this current economy where permanent occupation is hard to get by, understanding of Gig Economy is highly recommended. This term is popularized during the 2008 – 2009 height of economic crisis. It puts forward the idea that works could be based on project and they are temporary in nature. Gig economy is seen as a catalyst in addressing the issue of unemployment among Malaysian undergraduates. Thus, this paper discusses the connection between Shared Prosperity and gig Economy

and their impact on the teaching and learning of undergraduates in Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM).

2. The Milieu

Rancangan Malaysia (RMK or Malaysia Plan [MP]) which started with RMK 1 in 1966 to 1970 and continued to the present Eleventh Malaysia Plan (RMK 11) was devised to look into the enhancement of economic, education and employment delivery to the Malaysian population at all levels, be it of bumiputera and non-bumiputera. Almost at the same time to RMK 2 (1970 -1975), Dasar Economy Baru (DEB or New Economic Policy [NEP]) was launched in the 1970 to be carried through the next twenty years. This took place as it was realised that the Malays were lagging behind. The Malays only accounted for about 2.4 percent of economic wealth, while the non-Malays dominated 34.3 percent, and foreigners dominated 63.3 percent. The goals at the end of that twenty years was to the ratio of 30:40:30 among the three entities. However, the Malays only reached to twenty percent at the end of the twenty years (1990). The policy was continued with Dasar Pembangunan Negara (DPN) which was non-stipulated in term of time. Both of these policy – DEB and DPN are mostly known as “Dasar Bumiputera”. 2018 opened up a new era for Malaysia under the new PH government. A new policy is introduced – the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 (SPV2030). Officially, SPV2030 is defined as "a commitment to make Malaysia a nation that achieves sustainable growth along with fair and equitable distribution, across income groups, ethnicities, regions and supply chains. The commitment is aimed at strengthening political stability, enhancing the nation's prosperity and ensuring that the rakyat is united whilst celebrating ethnic and cultural diversity as the foundation of the nation-state". SPV2030 is prepared for the rakyat with some consideration on the issue of "bumiputera outcome" (*keberhasilan bumiputera*). Chapter 9 of SPV2010 is dedicated to the issue. It is said that "Bumiputera outcome needs to be given priority (*keutamaan*) and systematically embedded in every strategic thrust and enabler to achieve SPV2030's goals." However, "The bumiputera community will have to take the initiative to drastically change their mindset and attitudes while displaying a commitment towards bumiputera productivity". The mindset and attitude change among the bumiputera have to take place immediately if bridging the economic gap goals is to be achieved in the soonest possible time.

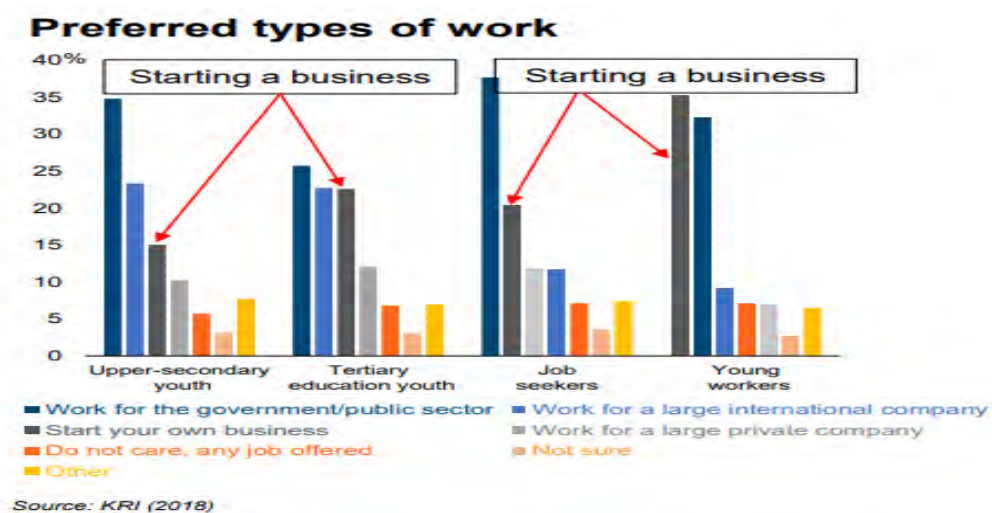


Fig 1 The School-to-Work Transition of Young Malaysians: Preferred Types of Work (Source: Khazanah Research Institute, 2018)

Figure 1 shows data published by Khazanah Research Institute on The School-to-Work Transition of Young Malaysians (Dec 2018) shows that the preferred types of work among 19 to 29 years old is in the government and public sector as well as work for a large international company. These are presumably sparked by the notion of job security, good promotion opportunities and appropriate pay according to their level of education.

These trends on getting employment from the public sector and multinationals are, however, getting very scarce. With the advancement of technology and the embodiment of Industrial Revolution 4.0, some existing employment are diminishing, and others are emerging. Newcomers to the employment world have to be ready with additional skills and knowledge (Figure 2).

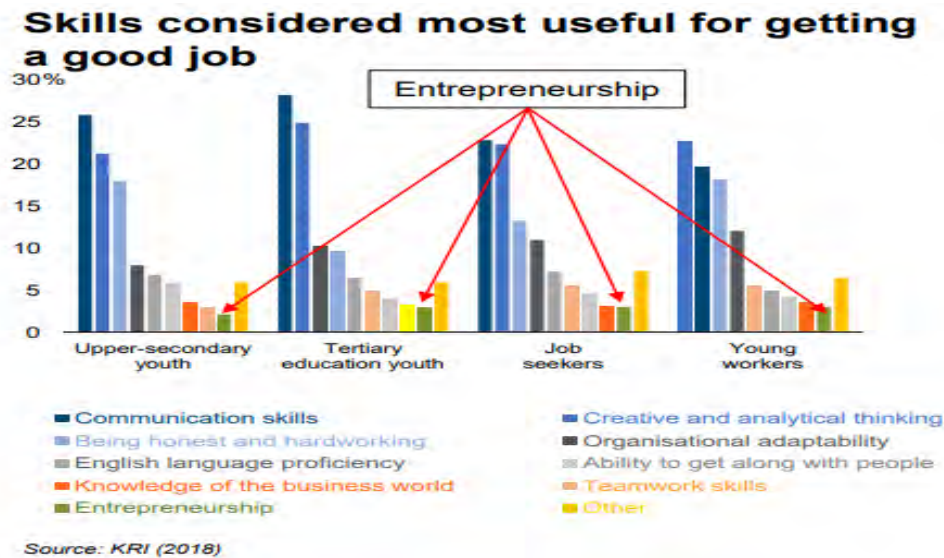


Fig. 2 The School-to-Work Transition of Young Malaysians: Skills considered most useful for getting a good job (Source: Khazanah Research Institute)

To a certain extent, this is where higher education should play their dues. “While many agreed that universities will have to respond more quickly to the dynamic shifts of the workforce, the solution was not just to keep up with the pace. Universities would most likely continue to be the trusted providers of education” (QS Asia News Network, August 7, 2019). As the biggest public university in Malaysia, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) has always been at the forefront in preparing the future workforce, particularly Bumiputera in Malaysia. The preparation is threefold – the field content, skills and attributes. The field content is mainly to provide the context on which skills and attributes could be developed and enhanced. The nature of field content is such that they evolve overtime, thus skills and attributes have to be flexibly adopted and adapted accordingly.

According to John Boudreau (2016), the world of work is changing and there are five fundamental forces that drive the change. These five forces are possible tools in instilling skills and attributes among the bumiputera graduates in UiTM. The first force is the social and organizational reconfiguration. Networking and collaborating should be the keys in all sphere of the change. Meanwhile, leaderships at the university are to be more horizontal, shared and collective, and less of top down or hierarchical. The second force is all-inclusive global talent market. It has been the general practise in Malaysia and in UiTM that gender is a non-issue in the intake to the university. UiTM has always considered that talent majority showed supremacy among the female undergraduates and this is shown in the population of the university (Table 1).

Table 1. UiTM Students’ Population According to Gender (2019)

This second force also emphasises on the idea of multigenerational workforces, which is largely due to age longevity. UiTM’s Accreditation Based on Prior Learning Experience (Akreditasi Berdasarkan Pembelajaran Pengalaman Terdahulu [APEL]) provides the route in enhancing the skills and aptitude of these workers. The third force is a truly connected world where work is primarily virtual and can take place almost anywhere and anytime. The infrastructure and infostructure in UiTM is adequate in addressing this force as bumiputera undergraduates are to put their knowledge into practices. The fourth is exponential technology change that put forward the idea that engaging with automation like autonomous vehicle, internet of things and robots, is vital. Embedding these in the teaching and learning in UiTM are present but there are still rooms for enhancement. The fifth and final drive is human-automation collaboration. The interface of human and automation needs to be optimised. This optimisation is to create new type of work and workforces. UiTM rate of adoption and implementation has to be made more prompt.

In the context of recent time, UiTM is not only preparing future employees but more of future entrepreneurs and employers. In an effort to achieve this, UiTM bumiputera undergraduates’ approach to working life have to be more relevant to the happenings of today, especially in the economic sphere. Bumiputera graduates have to open up to the prospect of market challenge that needs not only creativity but curiosity, and more of project based rather than permanent arrangement. This kind of work environment is known as Gig Economy. The Prime Minister, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad stated that the committee who is responsible in drafting the 12th Malaysia Plan should pay closer attention to and include gig economy as a new, sustainable and inclusive source of economic growth (New Sarawak Tribune, 2019). This is important as gig economy provide an avenue for Malaysians to improve their income as well as standard of living and unemployed populations to earn an honest living.

3. Gig Economy

The One possible way to understand the meaning of gig economy is to look at how it is defined internationally and nationally. Forbes (2019, n.p.) stated that “The concept of creating an income from short-term tasks has been around for a long time. The gig economy is very broad and encompasses workers who are full-time independent contractors (consultants, for example) to people who moonlight by driving for Uber or Lyft several hours a week.” Along the same line, Investopedia (2019, n.p.) asserts that “In a gig economy, temporary, flexible jobs are commonplace, and companies tend toward hiring independent contractors and freelancers instead of full-time employees.” Similarly, techtarget (2019, n.p.) asserts “a gig economy is a free market system in which temporary positions are common and organizations contract with independent workers for short-term engagements.” Jobstreet (2019, n.p.) asserts that “Gig economy is simply, a big group of part-timers and freelancers working on contractual or ad-hoc basis” while Metro (UK) newspaper posits that “The gig economy means an economy where organisations and businesses rely more on freelancers and independent workers, contracted on a short-term basis, than they do on permanent staff.” Intuit (2019, p. 5), a business and software company based in America states that “work shifts from full-time to free agent employment. Traditional employment will no longer be the norm, replaced by contingent workers such as freelancers and part-time workers.”

These international statements of gig economy’s nature are not so different on how the concept is defined in the local economy. The Star newspaper on 4 Nov 2019 reported that “the gig economy is a labour market characterised by the prevalence of short-term contracts or freelance work done by individuals.” At the ministry level, the undersecretary of the policy division, Ministry of Human Resources defines gig economy as to ‘require a high degree of autonomy, payment by task, assignments

or sales, short-term relationship between worker and clients.” New Sarawak Tribune online “The gig economy is an economic activity conducted by individuals without an employer by providing their services to other people on a full-time or part-time basis.”

Table 2 Gig Economy Definitions by Different Entities

Company	Forbes	Investopedia	techtarget	Jobstreet	Intuit	The Star	Ministry of Human Resources	New Sarawak tribune
Key words	broad	Temporary	free market system	big group	free agent employment	short-term contracts	autonomy	individuals without an employer
	Short term task	flexible jobs	temporary positions	part-timers	contingent workers	freelance work	payment by task, assignments or sales	providing their services to other people on a full-time
	full-time independent contractors	independent contractors	independent workers	freelancers	freelancers		short-term relationship between worker and clients	providing their services to other people on part-time basis
	moonlight	freelancers	short-term engagement	Contractual ad-hoc basis	part-time workers			

The commonality of the different definitions are summarised in Table 2. It is then deduced that Gig Economy covers a broad area and a big group of people. Among them are people who are given short or long term engagement, as a part time or a full time and they are free agent employment. The most important elements are that this gig economy players should apply flexibility and autonomy in their work engagement. Figure 3 depicts the definition, top skills and regions related to gig economy.

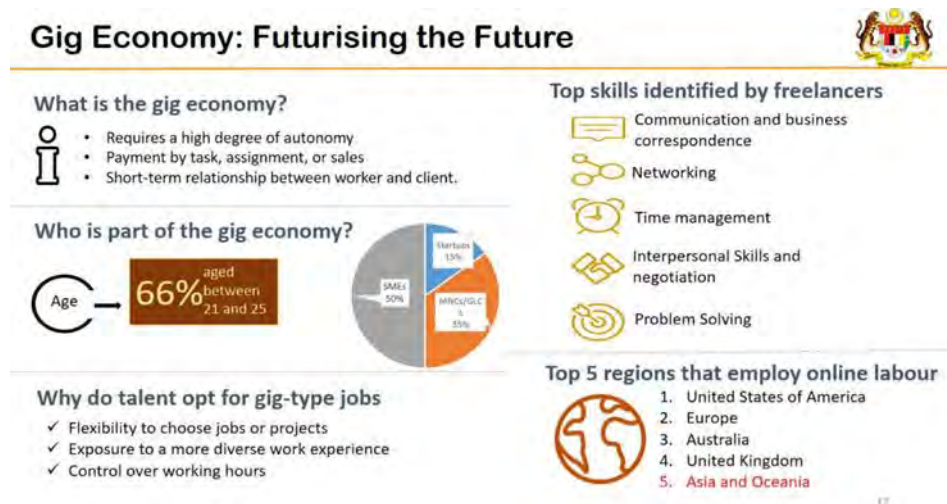


Figure 3 Gig Economy. (Source: Under Secretary, Policy Division, Ministry of Human Resources, Malaysia, 23rd April 2019)

The Edge newspaper on November 13, 2017 published a comprehensive infographic on gig economy in Malaysia (Figure 4). The infographic depicts the needed information for a better

understanding on Malaysian's situation of the gig economy. One of the most important information is of the first career choice among the respondents. 68% of the participants chose freelancing as their first choice in starting their career. Furthermore, the number of self employed is growing at a significant rate by more than three times for the age range of 25 to 29 (from 2010 to 2016).

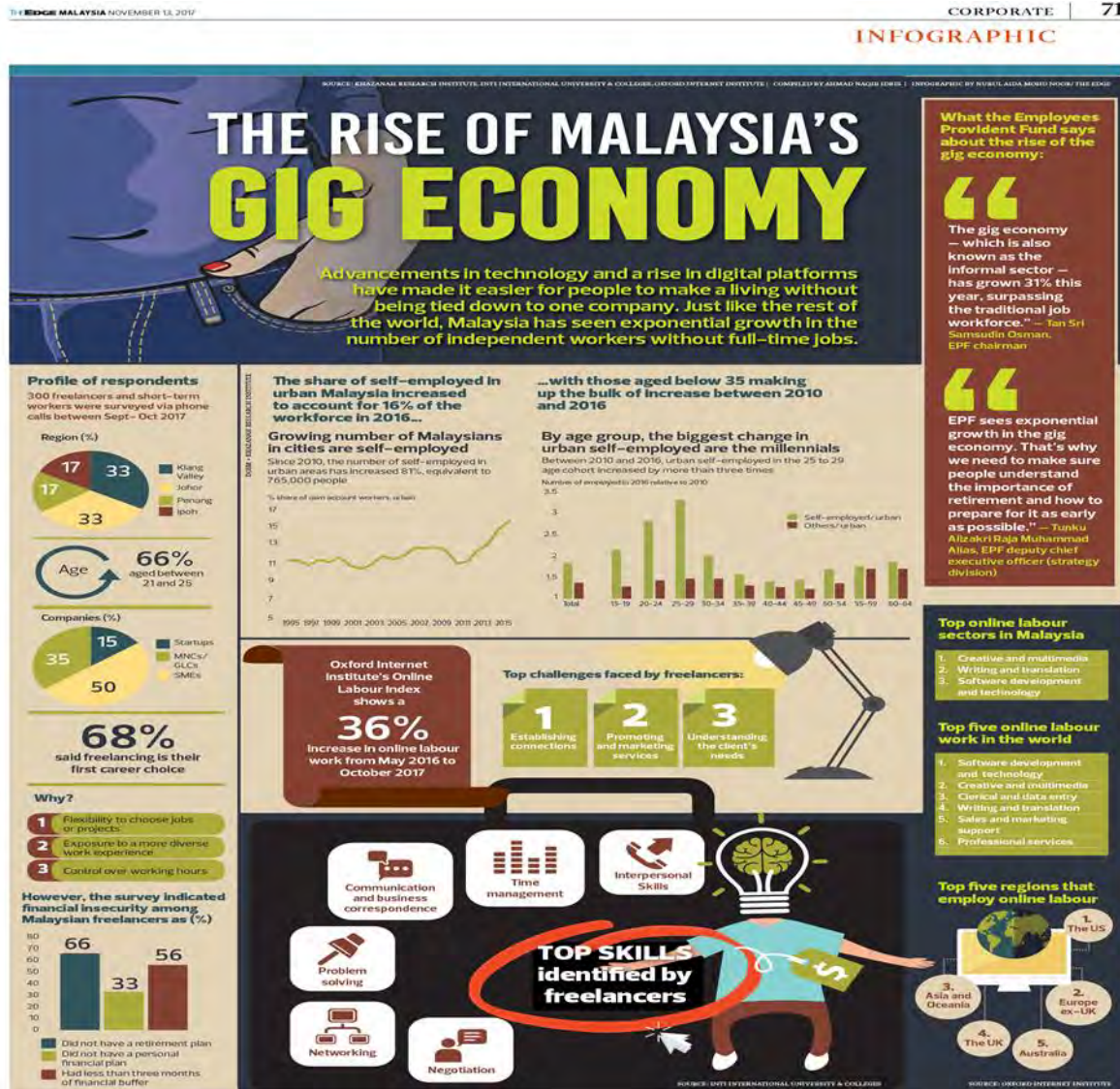


Figure 4 Gig Economy in Malaysia (Source The Edge Malaysia Nov 13, 2017)

UiTM has to a certain extent embed these elements of gig economy in the process of teaching and learning. Nonetheless, more emphasis is needed to make students not only understand what gig economy is all about but to embrace and practise it in their everyday life. With this, the bumiputera graduates are then ready to face what may come upon their graduation. The more important issue here is of the approach to teaching and learning of gig economy. Van Ton-Quinlivan (2018, n.p.) posed that gig economy has brought about at least two concerns that higher education needs to ponder. The first is related to the “change [of] the point of entry into full-time work ... it seemed possible that in the future, graduates would freelance and do gig work before gaining full-time employment”. The second is “the gig economy held different hiring norms than the traditional workplace”. The likelihood of graduates to compete merely based on their degree is slowly weakening to the rise of online reputations,

competency-based credentials, and work portfolios. With that in mind, the redesigning and redefining of undergraduates' education should include two main components – the technical and the business, regardless of the field specific of study. California Community Colleges provides an example. In their project on self employment pathways in the gig economy, there are three components of importance (Table 3).

Table 3. An example of Program closely related to Gig Economy
(Source: California Community Colleges)

1.	basics	Business or Entrepreneurship	taxes, quarterly estimated income tax requirements, insurance, intellectual property concepts, and other topics that freelancers would need to know since they are technically in business for themselves.
2.	related to how to participate in the gig economy	various online platforms	Loconomics, PeoplePerHour.
3.	learning or work-study course	practise	their business.

The example shows that the content of the project adheres to the need of the present and future of gig economy and/or any other kind of economy. In addition to the example, there are other considerations too. These include the following five elements as suggested by Bonnie Lathram (2016):

1. Undergraduates are not only to be encouraged to learn of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) but also Social, Emotional and Language (SEL).
2. Creativity is vital.
3. Adaptable and resilient attitude are pertinent.
4. Jobs will not be about “doing” things, they will be about managing them
5. The need for deeper learning outcome

The elements listed are not totally new and have been embedded in UiTM's teaching and learning. Nonetheless, there is still room for improvement. Curiosity among undergraduates is yet another skill useful for the gig economy. Curiosity would help to develop innovative thinking among the undergraduates. In addressing the integration of gig economy in higher institutions, UiTM could use the following questions to map their strategy and work (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2016: backpage cover):

- What will define strategic success and stakeholder value?
 - What strategic positioning must we define, execute and protect?
 - What vital resources must we acquire, leverage, nurture and protect?
 - What are the pivotal organisation structures, networks and relationships, jobs and talent pools where improvement or change will make the biggest impact?
 - How must our approaches to work, culture, engagement, and human resource management evolve?
- Addressing these questions could prove helpful in channelling the next step of incorporating and integrating the components of gig economy in the teaching and learning of not just the Bumiputera undergraduates but of the postgraduates as well.

4. Conclusion

Gig economy is flourishing. All graduates and undergraduates have to equip themselves with the skills and knowledge and should be willing players in this gig economy. Educational entity, not just the higher institutions like UiTM, but other educational entities have to embark on exposing and encouraging the adoption of gig economy in their teaching and learning. This, indirectly, will contribute to the realisation of our nation's SPV2030.

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