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## A THEORETICAL REVIEW OF WORK READINESS MALAYSIA

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### ABSTRACT

This paper provides a theoretical review of work readiness among graduates in Malaysia, with a particular focus on emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, work ethics, and psychological capital. Despite the Malaysian government's substantial investments in education and talent development, there remains a significant gap between employer expectations and the actual skills possessed by graduates. This gap, a pressing issue, challenges graduates' employability and long-term career success. While technical skills are adequately addressed, there is a notable deficiency in critical areas such as emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and work ethics. The review emphasises the importance of psychological capital, which includes self-efficacy and resilience, as vital components for enhancing work readiness. The paper suggests a more holistic approach to education, incorporating technical and emotional skill development, is essential for aligning graduate capabilities with industry needs. Addressing these educational shortcomings is crucial for Malaysia's goal of sustaining economic growth and achieving high-income nation status.

**Keywords:** work readiness, emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, work ethics, psychological capital, employability, Malaysia

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The contribution of college and university graduates towards the economic development of a nation is a widely acknowledged fact. The Government of Malaysia, in recognition of this, has made commendable and unwavering efforts to invest in the country's talent pool. The primary aim of the government is to empower graduates with the necessary skills to tackle future challenges and drive the country towards high-income status by 2020 (Azman et al., 2016). This steadfast commitment by the government is a testament to its dedication towards promoting the progress and prosperity of the country. The Malaysian government has consistently demonstrated its commitment to the development of young talents, with a particular focus on equipping them to contribute to the ongoing economic growth of the region. As a result of this sustained investment, Malaysia has not just achieved but surpassed expectations in producing innovative and highly skilled professionals, particularly in the critical fields of science and technology. This outstanding achievement, which we can all be proud of, has positioned Malaysia as a leader in talent development, instilling confidence in the country's potential and its ability to drive forward its continued success.

However, despite these commendable efforts, the available literature suggests that the Malaysian government's policies have not fully met the expectations of relevant stakeholders. (Mahmoud & Othman, 2021). Furthermore, many businesses have realised that fresh graduates lack crucial soft skills that could be deemed assets or serve as a means to secure their present employment for an extended duration. Some graduates exhibit undesirable traits such as low work ethics, deficient enthusiasm, lack of resilience, or even dishonesty during their tenure (Hassan et al., 2022). The issue mentioned above has highlighted the inadequacy of graduates' work readiness and their insufficiency in crucial skills (Zuber et al., 2020). The graduate-level education system in Malaysia differs significantly from the technical and professional systems. While there is greater emphasis on hands-on learning, there is a noticeable lack of emphasis on soft skill development during the analysis process. This is due to low employability skills among graduates, especially first-time graduate students at Public Higher Education Institutions. Consequently, they may face difficulties filling job vacancies (Ilhaamie & Rosmawarni, 2020). All parties involved in this intricate situation must take the necessary steps to resolve it, as it is vital for the country's economy to remain competitive. Employers operating in the manufacturing industry searching for a workforce with a diverse skill set comprising prior work experience, practical skills, a robust educational background, personal attributes, and previous training will find that their requirements are fulfilled (Hirudayaraj et al., 2021).

Many studies investigate the facilitation of skills development skills, such as access to schools and investment for educational purposes (Prianto et al., 2020). While the implementation of a supply policy to enhance education is crucial, the more complex dimensions of demand, such as macroeconomic conditions, incentivise remuneration and employment opportunities that constitute the individual's decision to invest in acquiring knowledge and skills, leading

to increased work efficiency (Baharin & Hanafi, 2020; Prasetyo & Kistanti, 2020). The issue of human capital frequently incorporates deliberations regarding the quality of products and their associated factors.

A country's industrialisation is intrinsically linked to developing a well-trained and highly skilled workforce. Creating and nurturing such a workforce requires a comprehensive training program that enhances the efficiency and productivity of employees. This, in turn, significantly improves the competitiveness of companies operating within the country (Esmaeel et al., 2018). In order to achieve sustainable economic growth, a robust government policy is imperative that encompasses the creation of human capital, social capital, institutional development and entrepreneurship (Prasetyo & Kistanti, 2020). Implementing a policy has demonstrated significant success in mitigating the challenges associated with economic growth, unemployment, poverty, and income inequality (Prasetyo & Kistanti, 2020).

## 2. WORK READINESS

Work readiness, also known as work competency, pertains to an individual's aptitude, expertise, and mindset regarding their occupation based on established benchmarks (ACT, 2013). According to ACT (2013), work readiness abilities encompass diverse skills, including critical thinking, problem-solving, information retrieval, cognitive and non-cognitive thinking abilities, practical calculation, and soft skills. These abilities are considered individual factors and behavioural skills that augment an individual's relationships work quality, and employment opportunities. Talents refer to personal attributes and behavioural competencies that enrich an individual's life (A. August2020). Various factors can influence the readiness of a worker for the workplace. These may include possessing traits such as adaptability, integrity, interpersonal skills, and a strong work ethic. The level of work readiness an individual exhibits is influenced by various factors, including career planning, cultural background, self-efficacy, resiliency, social skills, entrepreneurial orientation, proactive outlook, and emotional intelligence. (D. A. Parker et al., 2009; Miners et al., 2018). The following sequence presents the eight elements: career planning, culture, self-efficacy, resilience, social skills, and entrepreneurial orientation. (Audibert et al., 2020). Upon evaluating an individual's aptitude for work, it becomes evident that many factors are interrelated.

Notably, self-efficacy is a vital determinant of an individual's readiness for employment. According to Bandura (1997), Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to organise and execute a series of tasks necessary to achieve a specific goal. Self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to succeed and achieve desired outcomes. Students must develop and enhance their self-efficacy to make independent decisions about their future careers or educational vocations. It pertains to the extent to which a student exhibits self-confidence in their abilities and aptitudes and is cognizant of the types of work that align with their capabilities based on their field of study (Nur Fitriyana et al., 2021).

The possession of work readiness skills is imperative for individuals to confront obstacles and vie with others in the professional arena. The development of work readiness skills is a critical aspect that necessitates attention, as it is one of the key factors considered in assessing the ability of graduates to fulfil the demands of potential employers. (Siddique et al., 2022). Several graduates believed they possessed the essential personal characteristics and attributes employers seek, such as job readiness, effective communication skills, and collaboration. (Sugiyanto, 2019) Numerous business owners have observed that many recent college graduates lack the fundamental job skills essential for maintaining a successful professional career. (Atan, 2018). In the twenty-first century, the demand for adaptable, knowledgeable, qualified, and employable individuals is expected to rise to meet the changing requirements of the job market. As such, there is a need to generate personalities that possess these traits to effectively gather the needs of new employment opportunities. (Borg & Scott-Young, 2020)The provision of work readiness opportunities enables individuals to use their affective abilities effectively, exhibit emotional intelligence, demonstrate common qualities, and harness career-specific intellectual talents. (McGunagle & Zizka, 2020). Multiple factors contribute to an individual's employability, augmenting their prospects of securing employment and rendering them more appealing as potential candidates in the job market.

"work readiness" denotes the degree of competence and expertise an individual must possess to perform effectively in a professional setting. It encompasses a range of knowledge, skills, and abilities essential for workplace success. (Akbar et al., 2021). An individual's readiness for employment is determined by their ability to successfully adjust to the cultural and professional demands of the workplace. Furthermore, work readiness can also be defined as the degree to which a person possesses the necessary mentality, skills, and knowledge to excel in their employment. (USAID, 2020) In the current scenario, work readiness programs aim to bridge the gap between work-oriented learning and the essential skills required to secure employment.

The Malaysian government is endeavouring to encourage participation in apprenticeships and a job guarantee program by providing financial support to training providers and young individuals and offering financial incentives to businesses. (Perkeso, 2020). Although training programmes, job volunteering, and work experience provide valuable opportunities for preparing young people for their profession, government policy seems to give less attention to these avenues. Programs that offer youngsters a chance to acquire industry-specific training and gain first-hand experience are of considerable importance. (Muhd Akhir et al., 2021). Various job-readiness programmes cater to the specific needs of individuals seeking employment. These programmes are customised to suit the requirements of the members and are aimed at equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge to excel in their respective fields. The main objective of such programmes is to enhance the members' employability and prepare them for the challenges and opportunities that come with their desired roles. The customisation of these programmes involves thoroughly assessing the members' skills, interests, experiences, and career goals, followed by developing a tailored curriculum to address their specific needs. This approach ensures that the members receive comprehensive and personalised training that aligns with their unique skillsets and career aspirations, making them more competitive and desirable in the job market.

According to MOF (2022), through PERKESO, The Malaysian government has implemented several initiatives to enhance employment opportunities. One such effort, implemented by SOCSO, aims to provide one thousand employment opportunities for young people post-COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the Malaysia Short-term Work Program (MySTEP) offers a job guarantee and eighty thousand employment opportunities in the public sector, government-linked companies (GLCs), and trade alliances. Furthermore, to augment the skill level of young talent, the government offers a training and skill improvement program (Upskill Malaysia) managed by HRD Corporation. This initiative offers skills training to job seekers to enhance their employability. The programme ensures job placements for a target of two hundred and twenty thousand trainees. (MOF, 2022).

A student's success can be evaluated from three perspectives: academic performance, ability to build strong social relationships, and readiness for a career. (Han et al., 2022).. The aforementioned statement infers that graduates who meet these standards are more likely to succeed in their future employment opportunities. A commendable Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA), a well-established network, and a methodical approach towards career planning can be advantageous for students in their professional endeavours. (Misni et al., 2020). Higher education is an academic institution that aims to produce graduates with a well-rounded education, advanced skills, commendable character, and the capacity to integrate into the workforce. By the field of study, students are equipped with diverse knowledge and competencies through classroom and extracurricular activities. Universities provide graduates with the knowledge and skills necessary to thrive in their future endeavours. (Lee et al., 2021).

As young adults move into the early phases of adulthood, college students are anticipated to pursue opportunities to augment their cognitive and practical capacities and personal attributes to achieve greater independence. (Atan, 2018)At this stage, students must acquire a wide-ranging and in-depth comprehension of knowledge and competencies to attain educational excellence and ensure they are well-equipped to join the workforce. (Siddique et al., 2022)Higher education institutions establish a desired graduate outcome encompassing individual proficiency and academic and professional achievement. This individual proficiency also encompasses the ability to acclimate, cultivate, and implement spiritual knowledge, technology, art, and other pertinent information. (Calvo & García, 2020). Acquiring the necessary skills to thrive in today's globalised world is complex and challenging. The constantly evolving landscape of globalisation significantly impacts individuals, making their lives more intricate and multifaceted. As a result, people need to develop a range of skills to navigate this complex social and economic environment effectively. However, achieving these skills may require significant time and effort, as individuals must adapt to a rapidly changing and increasingly interconnected world. (Atan, 2018).

As previously stated, tertiary education students have many prospects to cultivate the dispositions essential in a professional setting. (Lau et al., 2020)Factors both within and outside the classroom can influence the cultivation of a positive attitude towards work. Classroom engagement and participation in campus-wide student group activities can aid in developing such an attitude. These experiences can help students acquire the necessary skills and approaches to succeed in their future workplace. (USAID, 2020).

Mar'Atus Sholikah and Muhyadi (2021) mention that adaptability is a theoretical construct encompassing an inclination to engage in activities and modify one's position. It is indicative of an individual's preparedness and maturity for work-related tasks.(Prianto et al., 2020; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012)Individual career transitions indicate a greater inclination towards skill development. Adopting a constructive outlook and a proactive approach is imperative to becoming job-ready and adaptable. (Lau et al., 2020). Prior research has identified several indicators and

modifications that indicate an individual's readiness for employment, including self-esteem, the Big Five personality traits, and a proactive personality. These factors have been shown to significantly impact an individual's ability to succeed in a work environment. Organisations must consider these factors when assessing potential employees and designing training programs to enhance work readiness. By understanding the role of these markers and changes, organisations can better equip their employees to succeed and thrive in the workplace. (Aroyewun & Eke, 2019). Various social factors, including parents' economic status and psychological factors, such as the individual's locus of control, also play a significant role. The framework known as "Ready-for-Work" was introduced in the United Kingdom and delineates young individuals' employment and job-oriented results. (Cake et al., 2022). The results have been classified into six discrete groups, considering traits associated with employability, such as self-awareness and resilience. Predicted actions have been categorised based on the stage of intervention at which they are expected to arise. (Sartika et al., 2022).

The acceptance of personal responsibility demonstrate the attribute of self-control, adult communication with others, an ability to understand and communicate one's strengths and weaknesses, avoidance of passing off responsibility, demonstration of accountability, setting of targets, recognition of one's limitations, and an ability to regulate one's emotions and impulses when confronted with challenging situations. Self-awareness is a critical component of self-control. Self-aware individuals take ownership of themselves and maturely interact with others. However, due to the inherently ambiguous nature of both self and consciousness, it is not uncommon to encounter uncertainty and a lack of clarity when considering the entire construct, as the precise nature of the self and awareness remains shrouded in mystery. (Carden et al., 2022). Growing self-awareness as a practice aims to help individuals have a comprehensive understanding and knowledge of themselves, including their personality and feelings, so that they can decipher why they behave and feel in a particular way.

The desirable qualities related to receptivity include an individual's willingness to learn, possession of an open mind, display of patience, demonstration of flexibility, openness to the possibility of travel or relocation, manifestation of humility, exhibition of respect for others, appreciation of diverse perspectives, ability to work effectively with others, and understanding the significance of compromise. (Mabe et al., 2022). This state of equilibrium enables learners to identify reliable sources of knowledge, engage in indirect interactions, acquire knowledge from various individuals and locations, acknowledge their weaknesses, exhibit an openness towards new methodologies, and demonstrate a willingness to receive constructive criticism and recommendations. (Karges et al., 2022). The receptive aspect of language acquisition pertains to the process of actively listening to comprehend a wider range of the language's constituents, such as phonemes, lexicon, intonation, and discourse markers. (Karges et al., 2022; Nuraeningsih, 2020).

The personality traits of being focused, diligent, hard-working, caring, and conscientious in one's job are all examples of what we mean when we talk about driven people. This value encompasses behaviours such as exhibiting a positive attitude, being eager and enthusiastic for all duties, being energised, trustworthy, showing themselves instantly, collaborating skilfully, undertaking actual research, going the extra mile, being well-coordinated, enduring, and being dependable by applying oneself constantly and being in the right place at the right time. (Misni et al., 2020). Furthermore, the word "driven" connotes an individual's ability to consistently exert effort towards becoming more proactive. This attribute enhances an individual's employability by enabling them to equip themselves for job opportunities better.

Individuals who possess self-assurance exhibit a tranquil sense of confidence, possess unwavering trust in their abilities, maintain a high level of self-esteem, possess an inner conviction that they can successfully attain their objectives, and actively shape their future and destiny. They are independent thinkers and demonstrate confident body language by making eye contact, standing upright, and offering a firm handshake. Moreover, they trust others, are willing to ask questions, seek additional information, and can work autonomously. Developing self-assurance is a vital aspect of enhancing a graduate's job readiness. (Bhatti, 2022).

Resilience has been identified as a significant determinant of work readiness, which refers to an individual's preparedness for the demands and challenges of the workplace. (Ryan et al., 2019). Individuals who possess resilience can cope with rejection and setbacks, do not interpret criticism in a literal sense, learn from their failures, remain calm in challenging situations, adapt to new or difficult circumstances, are receptive to feedback, demonstrate the capacity to recover from adversity, maintain a positive outlook, surmount obstacles, manage uncertainty, persevere despite hardships, possess emotional fortitude, and exhibit grit. (Akbar et al., 2021). Resilient individuals exhibit various characteristics, such as adaptability, perseverance, optimism, and self-efficacy. Additionally, resilient individuals demonstrate emotional strength and display grit, which enables them to overcome obstacles and setbacks (Russell et al., 2020).

According to Russel (2020), Operational resilience encompasses multiple dimensions and can be broken down into two distinct elements: disruption absorption and recoverability. These two elements are conceptually separate but critical in ensuring an organisation can withstand and recover from disruptions promptly and efficiently. This notion has a distinctive impact on operational efficiency in diverse scenarios, including operational disruption. A model of operational resilience, which encompasses the two dimensions of disturbance absorption and recovery, can be instrumental in promoting operational resilience. (Essuman et al., 2020).

The aspect of being informed pertains to possessing a thorough comprehension of the prevailing job market, being cognizant of the available choices, having the capacity to identify potential avenues for employment, engaging in direct communication with organisations, being proficient in searching for job vacancies, and acquiring relevant background knowledge regarding industries, companies, and job roles. (Huckfeldt, 2022) Such knowledge does not curtail one's ability to engage with job centres or recruitment agencies. Moreover, it entails demonstrating punctuality, professionalism, and sound familiarity with workplace protocols. The individual in question must possess a comprehensive understanding of their circumstances and be able to articulate their accomplishments effectively. They should also seek the guidance of those already employed and be aware of the impact of their education and training on their employability prospects. (van Hooft et al., 2021).

According to Mora et al. (2020), work readiness' refers to an individual's ability to respond to a pre-determined set of conditions. The concept of job readiness encompasses three key aspects: physical, mental, and emotional health. The second aspect pertains to the prerequisites, which should be followed by evaluating one's proficiencies and educational background. (Oakman et al., 2020) Experience contributes to a candidate's job preparedness and the three aforementioned attributes. (Akbar et al., 2021).

According to Baiti et al. (2017), the correlation between an individual's competence and proficiency in skill, quality, and performance within the workplace has been established during this time. Based on the explanations provided by experts, it can be inferred that a person's readiness for the workplace is influenced by their knowledge, maturity, and attitude.

According to (Sartika & Nengsi, 2022), Work readiness can be described by four key aspects. The first aspect pertains to individual qualities, which are personal attributes that determine an individual's resilience, adaptability to the work environment, and self-development efforts. These characteristics include personal capacity, self-direction, self-identification, and adaptability. The second aspect is organisational acumen, which refers to an individual's inclination to work for a particular organisation or institution, awareness of the organisation in their chosen workplace, personal growth within the firm, and positive or negative attitudes towards work. (Lau et al., 2020). This factor encompasses various domains, namely job ethics, professionalism, social responsibility, and general knowledge. The third aspect, i.e., working proficiency, pertains to job-specific technical skills, high motivation for task completion, and effective problem-solving abilities. This component also reflects an individual's ability to organise work, engage in critical thinking, exhibit creative problem-solving, and demonstrate inventiveness. The final aspect, namely social intelligence, encompasses interpersonal orientation, teamwork, cooperative behaviour, social and interpersonal skills, and effective communication abilities (Rios et al., 2020). The aforementioned traits are instrumental in comprehending several aspects of readiness for employment. (Kolmos et al., 2020) As an illustration, it is plausible that individuals can attain success in a particular domain while exhibiting lesser proficiency in another.

In the contemporary era of globalisation, obtaining a college degree no longer ensures one's employment prospects. The inevitable prevalence of intense competition and stringent eligibility criteria to secure a job has made it arduous for individuals to secure employment opportunities. (Zhou et al., 2016) According to research conducted by Gerards and Welters in 2022, a recent surge in the unemployment rate is not unexpected. Securing employment has become increasingly challenging, and the figures continue to rise (Gerards & Welters, 2022). The issue of unemployment is a prevalent and pertinent topic frequently discussed in both print and electronic media.

The final stage of higher education marks a crucial period for students as they prepare for their professional careers. The ability to demonstrate work readiness is determined by various indicators, including the maturity of knowledge acquisition and the development of hard and soft skills essential for supporting one's career growth. (Akbar et al., 2021) In contemporary times, it is becoming increasingly valuable to equip oneself with the skills and knowledge required to be prepared for the workforce. One way to do so is to keep a vigilant eye on the rapidly changing global landscape. As the world community transitions into a new era, also known as Society 5.0, early preparation for work readiness becomes more crucial. (Darsana & Sudjana, 2022). In the present era of rapid and constant change, college graduates must equip themselves with ample supplies, as relying solely on provisions may not suffice to ensure their survival.

Work readiness assessment can be based on various indicators, including the maturity level demonstrated in the information provision. These indicators may encompass hard and soft skills that are advantageous in the workplace. (Ariffin & Ahmad, 2021) To prepare for the future prudently, it is imperative to scrutinise the world's progress closely. For individuals who have completed their education at universities and other institutions of higher learning, the readiness to enter the workforce, also called employability, is a pivotal factor. (Nawanksari et al., 2021) Possessing a college degree can significantly facilitate and expedite obtaining employment. Therefore, it is imperative to possess employment readiness that matches the study area.

### 2.1 Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Work Readiness

For the TVET sector in Malaysia, emotional intelligence is one factor that significantly affects work readiness (Rasiah et al., 2019). Emotional self-awareness, emotional expression, and self-management are emotional intelligence elements. Academia management should consider this factor to develop human capital for the TVET sector in Malaysia. This beneficial emotional intelligence focus might be due to personal characteristics allowing better managing the uncertainties and anxiety connected with working interpersonal connections. This aligns with the researcher (Mashigo, 2014; Masole & van Dyk, 2016) that emotional intelligence affects work readiness for undergraduates and postgraduate students in Uganda and South Africa. Understanding emotional intelligence could be achieved by integrating this element into the learning component in the TVET institution. Emotional intelligence may also be included in the students' learning outcomes during their practical class activities. In addition, the counsellor should play their part in assisting the student in handling their emotional intelligence by conducting a program that could improve their student skill (Prentice et al., 2020).

M. Mohamad and Jais (2016) conducted a study to assess whether teachers' emotional intelligence impacts their professional performance. They study how social ability, self-regulation, self-awareness, self-motivation, and emotional intelligence are connected. Early literature research suggests that EI may be divided into self-regulation, self-awareness, and work performance. They found that EI affects the performance of employees. Therefore, it is highly advised that firms implement training programmes to improve the emotional skills of their managers and employees (Razak et al., 2022).

Furthermore, enterprises must recognise the relevance of emotional intelligence in developing human capital, resulting in highly productive employees. As a result, implementing the EI programme to improve their educational standard must be included in the academic staff's human resources policy and the student's educational curriculum structure. This policy would provide short-term and long-term personal advantages to the teaching staff and students as work readiness could be related to job performance for the individual (Bohórquez et al., 2023; Burke & Cowling, 2020).

Setiawan (2021) asserts that emotional intelligence is one of the most important aspects to consider when attempting to boost the overall performance of a company's personnel. Following the outcomes of his study, he concluded that emotional intelligence has a direct and significant impact on the performance of teams. Leaders must understand and examine the emotions felt by themselves and team members who occupy the same physical environment. Emotionally intelligent team leaders will have invaluable insights on prioritising team members' needs and interests, including instruction on emotion control and regulation to attain peak team performance (Jamshed & Majeed, 2019; Presbitero, 2020). This knowledge is why we must understand how EI prepares individuals for the workforce.

### 2.2 Psychological Capital and Work Readiness

Psychological capital must consider work readiness as an element of the work transition (Sastaviana, 2022). However, not all psychological capital characteristics are related to an individual's transition preparedness (Benati & Fischer, 2021). For the vocational improvement of psychological capital, develop a strong connection with work readiness (Sulistiobudi & Kadiyono, 2023) Therefore, they suggest that employees invest in all aspects of their psychological capital to boost their preparedness for change. Furthermore, psychological capital should increase preparedness for change when all aspects are evaluated simultaneously. Therefore, according to the above rationale, playing roles that need psychological capital is critical to becoming more flexible.

There are two uses for the creation of psychological capital levels. First, it will also prevent and reduce work stress (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). Consequently, it was discovered that a person's hope, optimism, sense of efficacy, and resilience could influence how they perceive and respond to their stressful environment (Dian Harly et al., 2023) As stress in the workplace is unavoidable, organisations can increase their employees' hope, optimism, self-efficacy, and resiliency to reduce work stress, thereby producing good psychological well-being and the capacity to maintain employee integrity (Nur Fitriyana et al., 2021) Preparing for work readiness equips individuals to effectively manage the stress they may encounter in their professional roles.

### 2.3 Work Ethics and Work Readiness

In the context of behaviour and decision-making, the moral code regulates workers' conduct in discerning between right and wrong judgments. (Aydin, 2020) This ethical behaviour applies to the TVET sector that decides on their hands-on activity. On the other hand, a culture that tolerates work ethics in an organisation is likely to result in increased attrition, reduced productivity and, eventually, a weakened reputation and financial performance. For the TVET sector, fundamental work ethics might include punctuality, accountability, focus, initiative, productivity, professionalism, dedication, and personal desire to improve (Japhet, 2021; Nasution & Rafiki, 2020).

Makki et al. (2015) discovered that graduates in Malaysia had great work-ready skills, which include the graduates' talents and quality, as well as excellent technical skills and knowledge. Meanwhile, professional abilities and expertise are just modest. Even if graduates are ready to join the workforce, they must achieve the basic credentials to work in a certain employment sector. Therefore, graduate talents and attributes are one of the work-ready abilities that students need. In addition, an individual's work ethic is one of the most significant qualities employers look for in prospective employees. The abilities and attributes of graduates include a good work ethic, which refers to an employee's sincerity towards work, attendance, punctuality, and strong enthusiasm (University of Glasgow, 2020). In addition, graduates possess a good work ethic, honesty, the ability to work in groups, self-representation, resolve conflicts, and creative thinking (Aflah et al., 2021; Akhmadi et al., 2023).

### 2.4 Self-Efficacy and Work Readiness

Graduates are well-equipped in terms of skills and have a high confidence level while attempting to enter the workforce (Halim & Sahid, 2020). In addition, all variables under self-efficacy strongly impact work readiness skills, except for skill and technical knowledge. This impact may result from demographic, geographical, cultural, and socioeconomic inequalities. In addition, self-efficacy and self-assurance in a graduate's exploratory activities and career greatly impact their ability to get suitable employment.

Graduates may study and develop their self-efficacy in a formal classroom to gain skills besides those who have just finished (Green et al., 2018). Universities may offer various programmes so graduates in subjects other than management can also acquire the right skills (Ford et al., 2021). For instance, organising seminars or courses by important businesses, entrepreneurial carnivals or graduate innovation competitions. In addition, universities may conduct steps to increase the desire of young people, particularly university graduates, to investigate other subjects and a greater range of careers instead of focusing just on one occupation (Chung et al., 2020). Before joining the workforce, universities and lecturers must assist potential graduates in acquiring the skills essential to be productive (Saravanakumar, 2020). Self-efficacy, among other factors, might affect job search activities. Activities and tasks offered to future graduates must include a range of talents, including high-level thinking, communication, and social skills, to develop their work readiness skills (Ford et al., 2021).

The skill component of work readiness encompasses not only individual self-efficacy but also technology abilities and knowledge. For instance, technology skills and expertise involve data processing, the ability to search for information online, and the capability to present information using audio-visual aids like spreadsheets, PowerPoint, and word processing. These technological competencies are integral to the preparedness for the modern workplace. (Landor-Ngemi, 2022). As mentioned above, self-efficacy to learn new technology leads to preparing themselves for work readiness. This study supports Zainuddin and Muhammad's (2022) assertion that students' self-efficacy impacts their preparedness for work. (Zainuddin & Muhammad, 2022). They suggest using a questionnaire to collect data to demonstrate both self-efficacy and work readiness.

As a result of the above premise, self-efficacy in the context of this research refers to a person's conviction, based on situational awareness, that he is capable of achieving defined objectives via the execution of certain tasks (Zainuddin & Muhammad, 2022). Furthermore, according to case studies conducted at Christian Vocational School, self-efficacy is a feature that has a strong and beneficial influence on other work readiness traits (Sholikah & Muhyadi, 2021).

Self-confidence is an important factor in the job, particularly when taking on additional obligations, developing new abilities, enhancing productivity, and other related aspects (Tymon et al., 2020). Self-efficacy may be officially defined as a person's conviction in their capacity to execute the actions required to obtain specified performance results (Kyaruzi & Kyaruzi, 2021). Self-efficacy is related to greater levels of both performance and life enjoyment. Employees' confidence level is shown by their conviction to complete tasks, feel motivated, and make choices that will improve their performance. It is a critical state of mind directly related to the quality of work. Self-efficacy tremendously impacts how people feel and perform as it encourages favourable views about themselves and leads to an internal feeling of strength and competence. This competency is one of the primary reasons self-efficacy impacts

people's conduct so powerfully (Nur Fitriyana et al., 2021). Therefore, self-efficacy is required for work readiness before they complete technical education.

The theory that Albert Bandura put forward makes it abundantly clear that this new insight about a mental aspect is the link between one's potential and the way that one's life ultimately turns out. Therefore, to achieve the desired result for this study, work readiness is required.

It is not enough to satisfy people; one must also consider the potential owned. If one does not possess a sufficient amount of self-efficacy, the potential that is owned will not be able to be optimally actualised. Without sufficient self-efficacy, a person's latent potential will remain dormant for the rest of their life (Baharin & Hanafi, 2020).

The self-efficacy theory that was developed by Albert Bandura is readily applicable in various ways to a wide range of domains of life. The creation of this theory in psychology is uncomplicated for the graduates of TVET programmes to put into practice since it is compatible with other theories, and this consistency makes it easy to do so. Self-efficacy plays an enormously significant role in daily life. When a person maintains a healthy sense of self-efficacy, they will be able to perform to the best of their abilities and realise their full potential (Nur Fitriyana et al., 2021). Performance is only one of the many facets of life that may be impacted by an individual's sense of competence.

### 3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, while the Malaysian government's dedication to fostering a robust talent pool is commendable and has yielded significant advancements, particularly in the science and technology sectors, there remains a gap between the expectations of stakeholders and the actual outcomes. The literature suggests that despite the government's efforts, graduates are entering the workforce with a deficit in soft skills, essential for long-term employment and professional success. This discrepancy underscores the need to reevaluate educational strategies to ensure that graduates are not only technically proficient but also equipped with the necessary soft skills to thrive in the modern workplace. The challenge lies in creating a holistic educational environment that balances academic rigour with developing interpersonal skills, work ethics, and resilience. Addressing these concerns is crucial for sustaining economic growth and maintaining Malaysia's competitive edge in the global market. As Malaysia continues to navigate its path towards becoming a high-income nation, the education system must align more closely with industry needs, fostering a generation of graduates who are well-rounded, adaptable, and ready to contribute meaningfully to the nation's prosperity.

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