

# A survey on staff's perceptions of the issues and challenges faced by private higher education institutions (PHEIs) in Malaysia

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11477622>

Published Date: 04-June-2024

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study was to examine staff's perceptions of the issues and challenges faced by private higher education institutions (PHEIs) in Malaysia. The sample consisted of 54 lecturers recruited from five PHEIs in Sabah and Sarawak who completed a questionnaire online. Responses were automatically transferred onto a spreadsheet and SPSS 26.0 was subsequently used to test for significant differences as well as calculate the percentages of agreement. Mann-Whitney U test revealed that there were no significant gender differences in lecturers' perceptions of the issues and challenges faced by Malaysian PHEIs while Kurskal-Wallis H test indicated no significant differences in relation to age and job experience. Findings implied that Malaysian PHEIs tend to experience several issues and challenges. To overcome them, the management of PHEIs needs to take several measures to increase their sustainability. In light of the findings, some recommendations were made on how PHEIs could overcome various issues and challenges to remain sustainable.

**Keywords:** challenges, Malaysia, private higher education institutions.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Private higher education institutions (PHEIs) comprise 42 percent of the tertiary education sector in Malaysia. In 2015, 524,350 students were enrolled in Malaysian PHEIs and this figure has continued to increase, making private higher education a vibrant industry. Ever since the 1998 financial crisis, an increasing number of PHEIs has been established in Malaysia to reduce the outflow of funds to other countries. PHEIs are reflective of the expansion of transnational education (TNE) that allows them to offer academic qualifications to international students, usually delivered through distance learning, teaching partnerships and off-shore campuses. With almost all TNE students enrolled in its PHEIs, Malaysia is now the largest TNE country for United Kingdom (UK) universities, surpassing China, Singapore and Hong Kong. It is the top host country for overseas offshore provision and partnerships delivery for UK universities. The Malaysian government has been actively pushing for the nation to become an international education hub, with three Australian university branch campuses, five from the UK and one from China. Since 2016, Malaysia is home to almost 500 PHEIs, including 386 colleges, 25 university colleges and 71 universities. It has also, via the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), developed an elaborate accreditation and regulatory framework for all PHEIs (Teng, 2016).

Zhao and Cheah (2023) reiterated that, in an increasingly globalized world, many PHEIs are finding themselves positioned in an increasingly competitive environment, which subsequently has caused unprecedented changes that bring even stiffer competition. Therefore, Malaysian PHEIs need to confront multiple issues and challenges, not just to compete in the global market, but also in terms of innovative teaching and learning. It is compelling for PHEIs to know the factors that can give

them an edge over their competitors and know how well they are performing. On the other hand, Palan (2023) postulated that PHEIs have the nimbleness to continue to be at the forefront of challenging the educational paradigm in Malaysia. From pioneering more than 30 collaborations with international institutions, to driving a focus on employability, from capturing international markets to introducing technology-driven program delivery, PHEIs have played a key role in turning Malaysia into a prominent exporter of higher education since the 1990s.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Virdee (2011), the Malaysian Quality Evaluation Scheme (MyQuest), which audited around 50 percent of the nation's 403 PHEIs, found that only 60 percent could be ranked as satisfactory, indicating that many PHEIs were unable to provide quality education. Additionally, figures showed that only 20 colleges were rated excellent, 60 very good, 55 good and 35 satisfactory, with the rest described as poor. Between 2009 and 2010, the Ministry of Education (MoE) had cancelled the setting up of 59 private colleges and deregistered 28 others over quality issues. In the first half of 2011, 47 institutions were fined for such offences as unauthorized relocation of premises, hiring academics without a permit and conducting courses before obtaining approval. Under the Private Institution of Higher Learning Act, sterner penalties have been meted out to those that fail to meet the requirements. The legislation is part of the government's attempt to eliminate sub-standard or fraudulent private providers to ensure that PHEIs meet the quality criteria and that their proposed programs are geared towards the areas needed by the nation.

Sharma (2019) noted that, since the last few years, many PHEIs have been trying to battle market headwinds, lagging domestic demand, intense competition and escalating maintenance costs. Many have been wrestling to balance between business sustainability and reputation building, which is the primary issues faced by PHEIs in Malaysia and beyond. The optimism of the first half of this decade that was followed by investments in the tertiary sector has given way to realism and in some cases, scepticism. Three factors and their interplay have contributed to the current state of affairs. First, the previous few years have seen the Malaysian economy lagging behind other ASEAN countries. This together with the tightening of student financing, has created a tougher domestic demand environment. International student growth has continued, but many PHEIs have not been able to capitalize on this opportunity as it requires a more sophisticated multi-country recruitment network. Second, PHEIs often experience growth in competitive intensity; for example, students will flock to the new campus until it becomes older and the next new campus appears. This issue has been compounded by a slowdown in growth trajectory, exerting pressure on existing PHEIs. Third, many PHEIs still employ promoters to oversee their diversified business interests, without a professional high-quality management team. Consequently, many have not been able to respond with agility in a capitalistic environment to realize their full potential (Sharma, 2019).

As a consequence, current PHEIs need to adapt to the new normal and find ways to become more competitive and sustainable. However, this endeavour will require innovative programs, modality, market positioning and deeper engagement with industry. Moreover, understanding and satisfying the needs of different student segments is crucial; students have become savvier and are likely to choose PHEIs that offer discipline speciality, quality student experience and strong employability outcomes. While international student enrolment is promising with the continued socioeconomic growth in ASEAN markets, the Malaysian tertiary sector is highly fragmented. Therefore, PHEIs need to create value by building an acquisitive platform managed by a professional management team that can employ the right mechanisms (Sharma, 2019).

According to Aiman (2021), some PHEIs face accreditation problems due to poor management and financial strain. While regularly introducing new courses to attract more students, some PHEIs heavily promote their offerings even before they are fully accredited by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA). For example, in 2021, about 800 students at a private university were left in the lurch when it could not get accreditation for several of its courses. Moreover, while its new courses were highly specialized and required specialists to teach, the faculty members were also overwhelmed by the large class sizes and some resign due to unfavourable pay and stressful working conditions. Further, some PHEIs, that are motivated by profits, tend to cut corners to cope with the high cost of providing quality education. They also lack upfront capital to invest in a proper campus, thus renting cramped shop buildings instead. Lastly, some PHEIs do not provide adequate training to staff, resulting in human capital issues and poor-quality courses that ultimately lead MQA to reject their application for accreditation.

According to Tan (2020), private higher education in Malaysia today is highly fragmented and is therefore poised for consolidation. Prospective Malaysian students tend to prioritize academic reputation, employment prospects and cost as primary criteria when selecting a tertiary institution. Additionally, PHEIs that offer courses with international partner universities are more highly sought after, as the accreditation from international universities is perceived to increase the marketability and employment prospects. Strategic partnerships and clear brand positioning are needed to further drive success among PHEIs, including clear communication of strengths and value proposition of the institution to establish branding. PHEIs need to leverage global trends to unlock value within the higher education segment by reinventing themselves through innovation and reform to develop workforce-ready graduates with relevant skill sets and generic attributes. Given the fragmentation in private higher education, consolidation will be largely driven by major players within the top to mid-tier market segments. To succeed, PHEIs need to offer a clear value proposition and strategy to increase their student base. With the need to stay ahead of the curve, they also need to recalibrate and strategize to create sustained value for stakeholders and investors.

Palan (2023) summarized that many PHEIs lack the financial infrastructure to survive challenging times. While they have opened doors for many to get a tertiary education, some PHEIs have suffered due to economic downturns and a mismatch between supply and demand of human resources. Some of them have been making losses for years and are therefore unable to raise capital. Those that do not adapt to changes will face the usual challenges that can occur in any industry. The pandemic had been a serious crisis for PHEIs; it had tapered off international student enrolment due to the travel restrictions, while social distancing had affected the way classes were conducted. Currently, many PHEIs need funding to manage short-term cash flows to save academic quality, jobs and future talent pipelines for the country. While the government has repeatedly emphasized that staff will not be retrenched or forced to take annual leave, some PHEIs operating on tight budgets, rely entirely on student fees desperately for financial support; these PHEIs need to re-structure funding requirements and channel organizational responses that can adequately address the challenges that have emerged from the pandemic.

Further, PHEIs need to respond to various issues and challenges in an innovative way. First, they need to improve employment outcomes. There is a need for a hybridization of vocational and higher education to ensure proper employability outcomes. PHEIs need to ensure proper human resource planning by scrutinizing both the demand and supply side of the equation. They also need to address and mitigate the expanding landscape of socioeconomic inequities, which can only be achieved with industry partnerships. Second, PHEIs with serious funding constraints need to find additional sources of income from complementary education, such as executive education. Lastly, while being a business-oriented organization gives most PHEIs particular appreciation for market needs, they still need time to champion the development of innovative, market-centric programs that are closely developed with industry players to raise graduate employability (Palan, 2023).

### A. Gap and Significance of the Study

A review of the literature revealed a research gap with regards to the challenges and issues faced by Malaysian PHEIs, which have been mostly highlighted in newspapers based on public opinions and without any empirical data. Further, studies on PHEIs have been primarily conducted in Peninsular Malaysia, but none has addressed the specific problems faced by PHEIs in the two Bornean states of Sabah and Sarawak. This study was among the few in Malaysia that attempted to investigate lecturers' perceptions of the topic, which is pertinent because many lecturers possess first-hand knowledge on, and awareness of, the issues and challenges faced by PHEIs. Additionally, no relevant questionnaire that measures PHEI issues and challenges was readily available; therefore, this study will narrow the research gap by introducing a pilot-tested questionnaire that has reasonably high validity and reliability.

The primary purpose of this study was to examine lecturers' perceptions of the challenges and issues confronting PHEIs in East Malaysia. Although many PHEI studies have been conducted in the Malaysian context, there is still a lack of empirical research with regards to their issues and challenges (Ghasemy et al., 2023). PHEIs are mushrooming all over Malaysia; however, quantitative information on their issues and challenges is still scarce, particular in Sabah, due to the lack of funding, opportunities for publication and resources for research. This study will not only increase awareness on the issues and challenges faced by PHEIs, but will also yield feasible suggestions to help prevent any possible collapse within the private higher education sector that can potentially close doors, leaving only those with strong financial support and high student

**International Journal of Novel Research in Interdisciplinary Studies**

Vol. 11, Issue 3, pp: (33-42), Month: May – June 2024, Available at: [www.noveltyjournals.com](http://www.noveltyjournals.com)

numbers. Further, by providing deeper insight into the potential issues and challenges, this study will encourage more effective management and policies to sustain the current PHEIs with appropriate strategies that can mitigate problems before they escalate.

Moreover, many PHEIs are currently experiencing unprecedented challenges due to the shifts in both government and society's expectations of their roles as education providers. The current study can contribute to a framework for new models and practices that PHEIs can adopt to become more entrepreneurial in terms of business diversification, capacity building, lifelong education and nation-building. Additionally, this study will provide pragmatic information and insight for PHEIs to meet the teaching and learning demands of the 21st century, besides addressing reduced funding, limited resources and declining student enrolments.

This study can encourage PHEIs to address the socioeconomic needs and competitive market demands by seizing opportunities and exploring global and regional dynamics that can enhance their resource base through alliances or acquisitions. They can use the findings to determine the ways and means to remain resilient, recession-proof and accessible to investors based on present trends and future projections. Besides market demands, this study can also encourage PHEIs to improve student management, which is a highly complex process that occurs over a long period. Further, it can reinforce the concept that stakeholders play an important role in helping PHEIs attain the triple bottom line (profit, people and planet); they significantly contribute to profitability, corporate social responsibility and environmental sustainability as parents, entrepreneurs and investors. Lastly, findings can help promote the use of digital technology and business intelligence whereby PHEIs are encouraged to address high investment costs by collaborating with technological giants to increase their capacity and maintain their state-of-the-art infrastructure and facilities. PHEIs are also encouraged to offer a borderless and innovative education that occurs beyond classrooms and textbooks, including cloud computing, artificial intelligence and big data, cybersecurity and the Internet of things to help graduates meet the demands of the digital era.

**A. Research questions**

After reviewing the literature, two research questions were formulated to establish a framework for the study:

- Were there any significant differences in staff's perceptions of the issues and challenges faced by PHEIs in relation to gender, age and job experience?
- What were the percentages of agreement on the questionnaire items and their implications?

**III. METHODOLOGY****A. Instrument**

A questionnaire was designed to assess the issues and challenges faced by PHEIs in Malaysia (Yong, 2024). It consists of 43 Likert-scale items ranging from Strongly agree (5) to Strongly disagree (1). It was pilot tested on a sample of 25 local lecturers. SPSS 26.0 was used to calculate Cronbach's alpha as a reliability coefficient, with the data being normally distributed and linear. Cronbach's alpha was calculated by taking a score from each item and correlating it with the total score for each observation. The resulting correlations were then compared with the variance for all individual item scores. The pilot study yielded a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.88, indicating that the questionnaire has good reliability.

**B. Sample**

The sample consisted of 54 lecturers recruited from five PHEIs in Sabah and Sarawak. They came from culturally diverse communities comprising Chinese, Malays, Ibans and Kadazandusuns. According to Parnell (2023), the rule of thumb for sample size is a minimum of 30 data points for analyzing continuous data. The sample size of the current study might appear small, but 54 respondents should provide sufficient information to make a statistically sound conclusion about the lecturer population in Sabah. The 54 data points could yield meaningful insight into the issues and challenges faced by PHEIs in Sabah. Moreover, the central limit theorem states that a sample size of  $n \geq 30$  is sufficiently large to yield valid and reliable data for a basic descriptive study. The demographic information of the sample is shown in Table 1.

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**Table 1: Demographic information**

Age (years)	25-35	36-45	46-55	56-60	61 & above
	10 (18.5 %)	15 (27.78%)	15 (27.78%)	14 (25.93%)	0 (0.00%)
Gender	Male	Female			
	15 (27.78%)	39 (72.22%)			
Job experience (years)	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21 & above
	7 (12.96%)	5 (9.26%)	8 (14.81%)	16 (29.63%)	17 (33.33%)
Qualification	Diploma	Bachelors	Masters	PhD	
	1 (1.85%)	11 (20.37%)	14 (25.93%)	28 (51.85%)	

**C. Data collection and analysis**

Data were collected by administering the questionnaire online. Lecturers were told that they would not experience any risks because they could withdraw from the study any time. Moreover, the questionnaire only solicits general information and confidentiality is strictly maintained. Participating in this study may provide them with intrinsic motivation for being able to contribute to the enhancement of tertiary education in Malaysia. After publication of this study, they could also gain some insight into the issues and challenges listed in the questionnaire that might have an impact on their profession.

Responses were automatically transferred onto a spreadsheet and SPSS 26.0 was subsequently used to test for significant differences as well as calculate the percentages of agreement. First, Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to determine if there were any significant gender differences, while Kurskal-Wallis H test was conducted to determine if there were any significant differences in relation to age and job experience. Lastly, percentages of agreement were calculated for each item to gain an overall impression of lecturers’ perceptions of the issues and challenges faced by Malaysian PHEIs.

**D. Findings**

First, Mann-Whitney U test revealed that there were no significant gender differences in lecturers’ perceptions of the issues and challenges faced by Malaysian PHEIs, while Kurskal-Wallis H test indicated no significant differences in relation to age and job experience (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Results of Kruskal-Wallis H and Mann-Whitney U tests**

Fixed variables	Non-parametric test	p-value
Age	Kruskal-Wallis H test	0.641
Gender	Mann-Whitney U test	0.322
Job experience	Kruskal-Wallis H test	0.531

Percentages of agreement showed that 81.5 to 88.9 percent of the lecturers perceived that PHEIs (1) should seek a wider range of students from local and abroad to compete and survive in the digital era, (2) should invest a lot on staff development, empowerment and expertise, (3) were severely affected by the pandemic that had caused a drastic drop in new enrolments, (4) tended to incur high expenditure in implementing aggressive strategies to promote their brand, (5) must satisfy MQA requirements to provide training and education that enable individuals to advance their careers, professional practices and employment prospects, (6) could be affected by unfair practices, (7) tended to experience high staff turnover, (8) tended to have a heavy workload and (9) tended to incur high job stress (see Tables 2 & 3).

Percentages of agreement also showed that 90.7 to 96.3 percent of the lecturers perceived that PHEIs should (1) be sensitive with the current demand for English proficiency, (2) formulate innovative courses that could prepare students for the ever-changing future, (3) become more aware of student diversity to adequately meet varied learning needs, (4) engage the industry and community to expose students to field experience and work-based training, (5) find ways to innovate by collaborating with industry practitioners, (6) invest heavily on digital devices with enhanced capabilities for instruction and administration, (7) practise entrepreneurial leadership and business intelligence to overcome various challenges, (8) employ committed staff with diverse skill sets to thrive, (9) offer niche programs that are aligned with local national plans, (9) invest heavily on the important dimensions of service quality, (10) excel in terms of quality assessment practices to become world

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Vol. 11, Issue 3, pp: (33-42), Month: May – June 2024, Available at: [www.noveltyjournals.com](http://www.noveltyjournals.com)

class educational providers, (11) invest heavily in learning management systems (LMS) that enable both academics and students to become fully seamless. (12) address technological problems, connection issues and poor digital literacy among students when implementing e-learning and (13) upgrade their digital infrastructure and facilities to create an effective teaching and learning environment (see Tables 2 & 3).

**Table 3: Percentages of agreement on staff’s perceptions of the issues and challenges faced by PHEIs**

Items	1	2	3	4	5
PHEIs need to seek a wider range of students from local and abroad to compete and survive in the digital era	0.00%	1.85%	9.26%	37.04%	51.85%
Academics who graduated from public local universities need to be sensitive with the current demand for English proficiency at PHEIs	1.85%	1.85%	5.56%	35.19%	55.56%
Academics who perceive that university-industry partnership is still rudimentary lack the motivation for research and development	3.70%	5.56%	24.07%	46.30%	20.37%
PHEIs have to invest a lot of money on monitoring, teaching and delivering programs	0.00%	5.56%	18.52%	42.59%	33.33%
PHEIs have to invest a lot of money on research initiatives	1.85%	3.70%	22.22%	46.30%	25.93%
PHEIs have to invest a lot on staff development, empowerment and expertise	1.85%	1.85%	9.26%	51.85%	35.19%
PHEIs have to invest a lot on performing department and faculty routines	3.70%	5.56%	25.93%	46.30%	18.52%
PHEIs have to invest a lot on achieving goals, KPIs and standards	1.85%	3.70%	22.22%	50.00%	22.22%
PHEIs have to invest a lot on staff affairs management	1.85%	5.56%	27.78%	44.44%	20.37%
Some PHEIs have been making losses and therefore are facing massive financial stress	0.00%	7.41%	31.48%	46.30%	14.81%
Some PHEIs have been struggling to pay their bills, being technically insolvent with insufficient current assets	0.00%	9.26%	33.33%	48.15%	9.26%
Some PHEIs have too few assets to cover their debt levels and are therefore in some form of debt distress	1.85%	5.56%	35.19%	48.15%	9.26%
PHEIs are vulnerable to small changes in revenue caused by fluctuating market conditions	1.85%	7.41%	24.07%	57.41%	9.26%
In 2020, many PHEIs were severely affected by the pandemic that had caused a drastic drop in new enrolments for the upcoming sessions	3.70%	0.00%	7.41%	59.26%	29.63%
PHEIs must formulate innovative courses that can prepare students for the ever-changing future	0.00%	0.00%	7.41%	51.85%	40.74%
PHEIs must become more aware of student diversity to adequately meet varied learning needs	0.00%	0.00%	5.56%	50.00%	44.44%
PHEIs must engage the industry and community to expose students to field experience and work-based training	0.00%	0.00%	7.41%	48.15%	44.44%
In response to change, PHEIs must find ways to innovate by collaborating with industry practitioners	0.00%	0.00%	3.70%	55.56%	40.74%
Some PHEIs have experienced difficulties in getting courses promptly accredited by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA)	0.00%	0.00%	20.37%	53.70%	25.93%

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Some PHEIs only have 200 registered students on their campuses	0.00%	3.70%	53.70%	27.78%	14.81%
PHEIs need to invest heavily on digital devices with enhanced capabilities for instruction and administration	0.00%	0.00%	5.56%	59.26%	35.19%
PHEIs require entrepreneurial leadership and business intelligence to overcome various challenges along the way	0.00%	0.00%	5.56%	62.96%	31.48%
PHEIs need committed staff with diverse skill sets to thrive	0.00%	0.00%	3.70%	53.70%	42.59%
PHEIs need to offer the niche programs that are aligned with local national plans	0.00%	1.85%	12.96%	53.70%	31.48%

*1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Uncertain, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree*

**Table 4: Percentages of agreement on staff’s perceptions of the issues and challenges faced by PHEIs**

Items	1	2	3	4	5
PHEIs incur high expenditure in implementing aggressive strategies to promote their brand	0.00%	3.70%	11.11%	57.41%	27.78%
PHEIs must practise open communication with students, staff and other stakeholders	0.00%	0.00%	3.70%	59.26%	37.04%
PHEIs need to invest heavily on the important dimensions of service quality	0.00%	0.00%	12.96%	51.85%	35.19%
To become world class educational providers, PHEIs need to excel in terms of quality assessment practices	0.00%	1.85%	3.70%	59.26%	35.19%
PHEIs must invest heavily in learning management systems (LMS) that enable both academics and students to become fully seamless	0.00%	0.00%	7.41%	61.11%	31.48%
PHEIs must satisfy MQA requirements to provide training and education that enable individuals to advance their careers, professional practices and employment prospects	0.00%	1.85%	9.26%	55.56%	33.33%
When implementing e-learning, PHEIs must address technological problems, connection issues and poor digital literacy among students	0.00%	1.85%	7.41%	53.70%	37.04%
Lack of knowledge about Covid-19 and its rapid spread had created an unprecedented situation among PHEIs	0.00%	5.56%	25.93%	42.59%	25.93%
PHEIs need to upgrade their digital infrastructure and facilities to create an effective teaching and learning environment	0.00%	0.00%	5.56%	57.41%	37.04%
PHEIs can be affected by competency requirements	0.00%	1.85%	11.11%	55.56%	31.48%
PHEIs can be affected by unfair practices	0.00%	0.00%	14.81%	44.44%	40.74%
PHEIs can be affected by global rankings	0.00%	1.85%	27.78%	44.44%	25.93%
PHEIs must effectively deal with criminal student activities to avoid negative public opinion and rigorous government investigations	0.00%	1.85%	12.96%	51.85%	33.33%
Some PHEIs experience high staff turnover	0.00%	0.00%	14.81%	55.56%	29.63%
PHEI staff have a heavy workload	1.85%	0.00%	14.81%	33.33%	50.00%
Many PHEI staff experience high job stress	1.85%	3.70%	12.96%	40.74%	40.74%

*1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Uncertain, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree*

#### IV. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings implied that some Malaysian PHEIs tend to experience several issues and challenges that have been highlighted in the literature. To overcome them, management of PHEIs need to take several measures to increase their sustainability. According to Mardhiah (2022), 72.1 percent of the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia candidates in 2019 indicated no interest in pursuing higher education, but planned to become social media influencers, e-hailing car drivers or food delivery riders. This trend has led many PHEIs to aggressively market themselves by offering soft courses that are not only attractive to the younger generation, but can also guarantee excellent results and fulfil industry needs. To ensure long-term employability and future-proof careers for graduates, PHEIs need to offer innovative ideas, intellectual growth, social, sporting and cultural activities, new adventures and the building of lifelong friendships. They need to nurture school leavers into professionals with enduring skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, effective collaboration and communication, together with technical skills to meet the digital future.

Additionally, PHEIs need to produce a future-proof global workforce, where graduates will be industry-ready and capable to remain competitive locally and globally, by offering programs with technology as the core in most areas. Through diverse industry-related programs, PHEIs can prepare graduates for such rewarding careers as computing and technology, multimedia and games development, financial technology (fintech), cybersecurity, digital marketing, industrial design, business management and e-business. The programs can be designed to elevate entrepreneurial acumen and inculcate skills that reinforce Malaysian graduates' capabilities to procure gainful employment across a range of industries (Mardhiah, 2022).

Furthermore, in an increasingly complex environment, there is a growing need for graduates to be multitaskers who are able to strategize, solve problems and interpret data and situations to derive innovative solutions to solve interdisciplinary problems. Employers are not just seeking graduates with qualifications, but those who have the experience and ability to contribute effectively to the workplace with industry-relevant skills. To turn school leavers into professionals with high employability track records, PHEIs should be tech-heavy to produce graduates who are well equipped with practical skills and knowledge for the industry, which is very much sought-after these days. Digital technology plays an even more important role in this post-pandemic era with new waves of technological disruptions and emergent technologies that will replace routine and mundane jobs (Mardhiah, 2022).

Due to increased mobility, changing demographics and economic growth in other regions outside Malaysia, PHEIs also need to address a range of global challenges in such areas as technological mobility, health, fake information and cybersecurity. The expansion and growth of digitalization, increasing internationalization and the introduction of new technologies have all affected global markets, public expenditure and research and development (R&D). To stay relevant, PHEIs need to develop innovative programs, ranging from foundation to the doctorate level that are recognized by the MQA and other professional bodies (Mardhiah, 2022).

In addition, PHEIs can prioritize collaboration and establish a range of partnerships in various areas that allow them to offer expertise to governments and companies and arrange funding for projects and work with international organizations. They need to actively participate in various projects and networks around the region with various institutions that have excellent records; it allows them to capitalize on joint complementary strengths in providing innovative education to students. They can also prioritize continuing education and professional studies for working adults who need to upgrade their qualifications (Mardhiah, 2022).

PHEIs need to also focus on cultivating future-proof talents in the more traditional education sector, by training students' ability to think outside the box and be solution-oriented. In this era where transformation is key, soft skills training is important because it helps foster relationships and solve problems to make positive contributions in any situation. These 21st-century skills include creativity, communication, critical thinking and collaboration. It is equally crucial for PHEIs to offer and promote cohesive soft programs to nurture future talents. PHEIs need to instil the spirit to look beyond the structure with these skills to help students overcome obstacles and adapt to unprecedented situations. Rather than focusing on theories, they can offer programs that are practical with hands-on experiences to inculcate divergent thinking and critical problem-solving skills (Mardhiah, 2022).



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According to Metalex Commodities Inc. (2023), organizations need to use the triple bottom line approach to create sustainable value and make a positive impact on society and the environment. PHEIs can adopt sustainable practices that minimize negative environmental impacts in their decision-making processes; for example, they can reduce resource consumption, minimize waste generation and contribute to the preservation of natural ecosystems. They can also emphasize corporate social responsibility by fostering a positive relationship with staff, students, suppliers and communities. PHEIs that prioritize social responsibility can create inclusive work environments, support local communities and strive for fair labour practices, diversity and inclusion. Additionally, they can focus on long-term value creation by considering social and environmental factors in their decision-making to navigate risks, adapt to changing market demands and adopt resilient and sustainable business models. Overall, by embracing the triple bottom line approach, PHEIs can enhance their reputation, attract socially conscious investors and gain a competitive edge in the market.

Ibrahim, et al. (2023) postulated that educational facilities should apply the triple bottom line by emphasizing green buildings and sustainable design. Malaysian PHEIs can incorporate the function of space, definition of performance and value management to their existing buildings to increase their economic and environmental values through three approaches. First, they need to protect the planet by using recycled materials to reduce carbon emissions and environmental pollution. Second, they need to consider profit together with cost-saving sustainable designs by adopting energy- and water-saving equipment in the buildings. Third, they need to consider people or the target audience, including staff, parents and students; they can adopt biophilic designs that reduce heat and humidity, noise and air pollution. They should also consider biodiversity level, accessible green space and indoor plant size and density to augment the interrelationships among the economy, people and the environment. PHEIs not only need to increase their financial fitness, but also strengthen the social and natural benefits of their undertakings. Overall, they can focus on people's wellbeing by introducing biophilic designs that offer indoor and outdoor healthy spaces, while protecting the planet by reducing carbon emissions and recycling content to avoid resource depletion.

As a final thought, to improve generalizability of findings, future studies can examine the issues and challenges of PHEIs in relation to job satisfaction, staff motivation and turnover, collegiality and other psychosocial variables. They should also adopt larger, random samples drawn from different locations in relation to various demographic variables.

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**International Journal of Novel Research in Interdisciplinary Studies**Vol. 11, Issue 3, pp: (33-42), Month: May – June 2024, Available at: [www.noveltyjournals.com](http://www.noveltyjournals.com)

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