

# Addressing Issues of Unemployment in Brunei: The Mismatch Between Employers Expectations and Employees Aspirations

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the issue of youth unemployment in Brunei by exploring the occupational aspirations of youth, the expectations of employers towards their employees, and the current policy initiatives of the government. The aspirations of youth were explored by conducting a series of focus groups among youths of different age groups and educational levels. The findings indicated that youths in Brunei preferred jobs that are prestigious, highly paid, stable, and are less likely to take risks. The expectations of employers, on the other hand, entailed a semi-structured interview to assess the employers' expectations for their current and/or prospective employees. The findings revealed that youths lack awareness on important employability skills that are critical for their entrance into and performance into the labour market. A majority of the employers attribute the lack of drive, entrepreneurial spirit, and awareness of the importance of leadership from an early age for employability and a need to strengthen collaborative development amongst the relevant agencies.

## KEYWORDS

Employability, Labour Market, National Policy, Occupational Aspirations, Rentier Economy, Rentier Mentality, Risk-Aversion Culture, Youth Unemployment

## INTRODUCTION

Brunei's long-term development plan, *Brunei Vision 2035*, aims to make Brunei, by 2035, a nation widely recognized for a world class education and skilled workforce, a high quality of life, and a dynamic and sustainable economy. It also aspires to raise the country into the rank of top ten nations in terms of quality of life and per capita gross domestic product (GDP) (BEDB, 2011). However, in order to achieve these goals, there are a few issues that needs to be addressed and one them is the issue of increasing youth unemployment. The *Brunei Vision 2035* document acknowledges that the economy suffers from the increasing number of unemployed youths that has kept GDP below its potential level. More specifically, the document attributed this problem due to "the widening gap between the expectations and capabilities of the nation's youth and the employment opportunities being created" (BEDB, 2011).

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In order to address this issue and also provide a holistic view on the issue of youth unemployment in Brunei, this paper aims to explore the demand side and supply side of the labour market as well as the policy environment by exploring three variables namely the aspirations of the young people in Brunei, the expectations of the employers in the labour market and analyzing the existing government policy initiatives to curb youth unemployment in Brunei.

## BACKGROUND

Youth unemployment has been on the agenda of International Labour Organization (ILO) since 1935 and one of the Sustainable Development Goals' targets is to "promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all" (United Nations, 2018). According to the ILO, young people under the age of 25 are less likely to find work than adults. The global youth unemployment rate stands at 13%, which is three times higher than the figure for adults. The focus on youth unemployment is driven by the fact that young people are the biggest cohort of new job seekers and are therefore the most vulnerable group with regards to unemployment. Young adults are more likely to be looking for work because they have just graduated from a learning institution and entered the labour market, or because they are changing jobs, being more mobile at the early stages of their work life.

Youths of today face increasing uncertainty in their hopes of undergoing a smooth transition in the labour market, and this ambiguity and disenchantment can, in turn, have harmful effects on individuals, communities, economies and society at large. Unemployed or underemployed youth are less able to contribute effectively to national development and have fewer opportunities to exercise their rights as citizens. They have less to spend as consumers, less to invest as savers and often have no "voice" to bring about change in their lives and communities. Prevalent youth unemployment also inhibits companies and countries from innovating and developing competitive advantages based on human capital investment, thus undermining future prospects.

Much research (ILO, 2013; Bell & Blanchflower, 2011) has shown the negative personal impacts of youth unemployment notably feelings of worthlessness and potential idleness that may lead to increased crime rates, mental health problems, violence, conflicts and drug taking (ILO, 2010). The combined effect of an increasing youth population and high and increasing levels of youth unemployment are often associated with insecurity, urban social unrest and political instability. For example, countries in Africa refer to the problem of youth unemployment as a matter of national security, which could be a threat to a country's stability if it remains unresolved (Lintelo, 2011). Therefore, youth unemployment is a deeply-rooted and highly detrimental problem for the economy – one that will linger regardless of how buoyant the economy become. The problem is not exclusively cyclical: it also has deep structural reasons.

Brunei is no exception to this issue. In fact, the figure for youth unemployment has been the highest it has ever recorded in 26 years (ILO, 2017). A report released by the ILO in 2017 notes that unemployment, youth total (% of total labor force ages 15-24) (modeled ILO estimate) in Brunei was 23.40 as of 2017. Its highest value over the past 26 years was 24.50 in 2015, while its lowest value was 14.10 in 1991. Brunei is among the world's most dependent economies on oil and gas accounting for around half of GDP and 90% of export revenues (BEDB, 2011). It is also the fourth-largest oil producer in South-East Asia and the ninth-largest exporter of gas in the world (BEDB, 2011). In 2017, GDP in Brunei was US\$11.40 billion (Brunei Government, 2017). For some countries, plentiful oil and gas earnings have discouraged wider growth and this phenomenon is called 'resource curse' and is a common feature of oil-rich countries. It involves slow growth in non-oil sectors with and overvalued currency, wage distortions, short-term rent-seeking activities, and neglect of other primary and secondary sectors (Corden, 1984).

Some of the common characteristics of labour markets in small oil rich countries are that they have a low participation rate among the indigenous population, high dependence on foreign workers

and differentiation in wages between indigenous and foreign labour (Siddiqui, et.al, 2012). In Brunei, employment in the government sector attracts high incomes and is a major vehicle for redistributing the rents from oil revenue. The government sector in Brunei employs 40% of the country's total labour force and the share of indigenous labour is 70%. However, the oil price drop from a peak of US\$115/barrel in June 2014 to US\$33 in February 2016 had a severe impact on Brunei's economy where government revenues fell by 70% in 2014/2015 compared to 2012/2013 (Shahminan & Thein, 2016). The combination of falling oil prices and falling government revenue meant that there was limited room for the government to create jobs.

The unemployment problem is such that it has a young employable population and yet according to the 2015 census, there were as many as 71,000 or 27% temporary residents who are migrant workers. Table 1 shows that in 2015, out of the 14,600 local people unemployed, 72% are youths between 18 to 35 years and 90% are drop-outs from primary or secondary schools. These job-seekers have difficulties securing employment due to their education level, inexperience and job-hopping attitudes (Hong-Huat, 2009).

Another crucial finding of Cheong and Lawrey (2009) is that the problem of unemployment is more likely to be one of finding employment for the job seeker's aspirations. There appears to be a significant mismatch of career expectations and available employment. When asked why they had not been successful in finding a job, 21% of respondents strongly agreed that they did not like the job they were offered, reinforcing the view that aspirations play a critical role. Some of the common characteristics of the majority of the sample of job seekers are that they comprise of young people who do not possess adequate vocational skills and are only interested in taking clerical and lower white collar office jobs, preferably in the public sector; they are not interested in taking jobs in the manual, skilled and semi-skilled sectors such as agriculture, technical and the trades, where there are vacancies. Unemployment is therefore a problem, created both by social attitudes and by the lack of drive in exploring other possibilities outside their domains (Cheong & Lawrey, 2009).

**Table 1. Profile of the local unemployed people in Brunei in 2015**

Category	Total in Person	Percentage (%)
1. Total number of unemployed	14, 641	100
2. Gender		
Male	6, 437	44
Female	8, 204	56
3. Age		
18-19	580	4
20-24	4, 651	31.8
25-29	2, 153	21.6
30-34	1, 565	14.7
35-39	1, 643	10.7
40-44	1, 149	7.8
45-49	720	4.9
50 above	667	4.5
4. Education level		
Primary	1,658	11.4
Secondary	10, 565	72.1
Technical and vocational	870	5.9
Pre-university	756	5.2
University	631	4.3
Not stated	161	1.1

Source: (Brunei Government, 2016)

Therefore, one of the objectives of this paper is to explore the occupational aspirations of youth who are the future labour force of the economy. It is important to understand aspirations because studies revealed that aspiration forms the foundation of young people's behaviour and determines the person that they become (Finlay et al., 2015). Similarly, research has revealed that aspirations are one of the psychological factors that influence young people's career decisions (Gutman and Akerman, 2008; Andres et al., 1999; Furlong and Cartmel, 1994). Furlong and Cartmel (1994) and Keys (2006) observe that educational aspirations, the level of education attainment and occupational aspirations, the occupation of interest, and the socioeconomic status of a career one hopes to attain, are all highly correlated.

To provide a holistic perspective on unemployment in Brunei, this paper also aims to understand employers' expectations specifically their attitudes and behaviour in hiring decisions. For this reason, in-depth interviews were conducted with 33 employers or organisational leaders across Brunei – asking them a series of questions related to their expectations of employees, youth unemployment and employment services. In addition to youth's aspirations and employers' expectations, this study also looks at the current policy initiatives in Brunei. Largely, studies on Brunei's unemployment highlighted the critical role government will play in pushing this important agenda forward. Hence, it is critical to have a closer look into relevant policy information to ascertain the challenges and opportunities experience by youth.

## METHODOLOGY

This research has employed two methods of data collections namely focus groups to capture the occupational aspirations of youth and semi-structured interviews to examine the expectations of employers. The first part of the methodology section will describe the rationale and the steps taken in conducting the focus groups. The next section discusses the rationale for the adoption of the semi-structured interview method and also provides an overview of the data collection methods used for this research, as well as the means used to analyse the data.

The study conducted 10 focus groups of between 5 to 7 people each, totalling 64 young people. They varied in age, between 15 to 30 years old. The key questions are the aspirations that young people have, the person who had the most influence on their aspirations, and how their aspirations have changed overtime. There are five categories of participants for young people:

1. Upper secondary school students aged 15-17;
2. Pre-university students aged 17-19;
3. Technical and Vocational students aged 17-25;
4. University students aged 19-25;
5. Unemployed youth who have not completed high-school aged 18-30.

Students from all categories are selected from government schools because most young people attend government schools in Brunei. Further, there is no evidence showing differences in the delivery of programmes among government schools in terms of regions, rural or urban (Hamid, 2000). All government schools follow a common curriculum and take the same examinations. In 2015, there are 255 government and private schools in Brunei, out of which 172 are government institutions which consist of 121 primary schools, 38 secondary schools, 4 state universities and 9 technical or vocational schools and colleges Overall, there are 113,675 students from pre-school to university level and Table 2 shows the break down in each category.

For data collection purposes, each category requires 14 participants and they are then divided into two focus groups. Participants from the secondary school ranged from 15 to 17 years old and those in Years 7 and 8 were purposively selected because starting from the age of 14 years old, young people begin to differentiate between idealistic aspirations and realistic aspirations (Gottfredson, 2002).

**Table 2. Number of students in different level of education institutions in Brunei**

Educational Institution	Students (Persons)
Pre-school	13, 053
Primary	43, 769
Secondary	40, 334
Pre-University	5, 576
Technical/Vocational	4, 006
University	6, 937
Total	113, 675

Source: (Brunei Government, 2016)

The second part of the research entails a semi-structured interview to assess the employers' expectations for their current and/or prospective employees. As well as their experiences of what factors enables or inhibits the employability of prospective employees. In this study, the interview topics were made available to the participants in advanced, along with an overview of the intentions of the study.

All the interviewees were occupying either senior or middle-level positions in their respective organisations. Table 3 shows a brief profile of the participants that were interviewed. The primary intention was to choose formally designated organisational leaders by referrals specifically organisational leaders of various roles and positions. The careful selection of these organisational leaders was made based on the focus groups' findings that indicated what type of employers the youth would like to work for. The majority have indicated their strong interest of working for prominent organisational leaders. To ensure anonymity, we have removed their role or job description and gave pseudonyms to all the 33 organisational leaders interviewed.

Upon completion of the interview stage, the next focus was to analyse the focus group and interview data. Qualitative approaches are incredibly diverse, complex and nuanced (Holloway & Todres, 2003), and thematic analysis should be seen as a foundational method for qualitative analysis. Thematic analysis is historically a conventional practice in qualitative research which involves searching through data to identify recurrent issues and patterns of living and/or behaviour of people (Creswell, 2003). Thematic analysis is commonly used by researchers and in particular is suitable

**Table 3. Profile of the thirty-three organisational leaders interviewed**

Category	Total in Person
Total number of interviewees	33
Gender	
Male	20
Female	13
Level in Organisational Hierarchy	
Minister	3
Deputy Minister	4
Permanent Secretary	6
Deputy Permanent Secretary	6
Director	6
Deputy Director	4
Senior Government Officers	4

for analysing and reporting personal qualitative interview data (Mutch, 2005). According to Patton (2002), using a thematic analysis method results in a more complete understanding of the ideas of the research participants whereas Pope et al. (2007) stated that one of the advantages of thematic analysis is that it provides a means of organising and summarising the findings from a large, diverse body of research. Working from the detailed notes, each of the lengthy focus groups and interviews were analysed and are presented below.

## FINDINGS

The findings section is divided into the findings on the aspirations of youths' followed by the findings on the employers' expectation and finally on the government's current policy initiatives to address the issue of youth unemployment.

### Aspirations of Youths

The main findings from the focus groups conducted with young people are that the majority aspire towards prestigious jobs and there seems to be a risk-aversion attitude among the youths. Most of the young people aspire to jobs that are in the professional, managerial or technical sector, and they have less preference for manual jobs. High income, job security and prestige are the most common characteristics of jobs aspired to by the young people in Brunei. This is a reflection of the social and cultural norms of a rentier state whereby a job of high income and prestige is preferred over a job that can lead to personal and career development and progression. Further, most aspired towards government jobs, and are not keen to work in the private sector, due to better privileges and security. This is typical of a rentier state whereby the government redistributes the rent from oil in the form of providing more sought-after jobs with high incomes and benefits. This attitude of relying on the government for jobs and welfare partly shapes the occupational aspirations of young people creating a lower preference for jobs in the private sector and other sectors, such as construction and farming, which are considered demeaning and usually done by foreign workers. This is affirmed by other studies that have shown rentier states can lead to a "rentier mentality" that implies "a break in the work-reward causation whereby reward [and] income or wealth is not related to work and risk bearing, rather to chance or situation" (Belbawi, 1990). Further, a rentier mentality has profound consequences on productivity:

*Contracts are given as an expression of gratitude rather than as a reflection of economic rationale; civil servants see their principal duty as being available in the offices during working hours; businessmen abandon industry and enter in to real estate speculation or other special situations associated with booming oil-sector; the best and brightest abandon business and seek out government employment; manual labour and other work considered demeaning by the rentier is farmed out to foreign workers, whose remittances flood out of the rentier economy and so on. In extreme cases, income is derived simply from citizenship. (Yates, 1996, p.22)*

Another critical finding from the focus groups showed that the youths has a culture of risk aversion towards employability. Most of the young people prefer to get a job with stable monthly income rather than be enterprising. In the focus groups conducted with young people, more than half of them voiced out their insecurities of doing business full time. Having a secured and well-paid job is still a necessity and the business would only be done part time. A study by Low et al. (2013) investigated the attitudes of young Bruneians towards entrepreneurship. In a survey of 1,051 youths, only 19% want to become an entrepreneur whereas 67% preferred to work as government employees. Low et al. (2013) emphasized that the challenge for Brunei is to promote a passion for enterprise amongst the younger generation and improving the business environment. The youths are not risk takers can

be related to one of the cultural values put forward by Hofstede (2001) whereby Malays have high uncertainty avoidance. This refers to the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations (Hofstede, 2001). This view is further reinforced by Hayton et al. (2002) who argues that cultures that encourage entrepreneurship are those that have a low uncertainty avoidance, high individualism, low power distance and high in masculinity. Based on these cultural values, Brunei has a culture that has a weak entrepreneurship culture. This can also be attributed to family background where parents are not business oriented. Indeed, most came from a family who worked for the government thus reinforcing the need to work and earn a stable monthly income.

## **Expectations of Employers**

A high proportion of employers stated that they had difficulties with recruitment due to the shortage of candidates with the right skills and the shortage of skillful employees in a given field. Problem solving and practical skills were the greatest scope for improvement as far as the employers in this research are concerned. Employers also note that most Bruneian graduates educated overseas possess highly specialised qualifications such as aeronautical engineering yet there are no available posts that could benefit from this expertise. As a result, the highly skilled graduates are forced to resort to posts that do not allow them to practice or execute their knowledge on. Hence, there is a mismatch between the skills required in the job market. However, it is important to note that employers also burden fresh graduates with the expectations of requiring at least 3 years work experience. At present, employers are focused predominantly on hiring potential employees with work experience which puts fresh graduates at a disadvantage.

From the employers' perspective, the youth seeking employment lack the wisdom, self-awareness and the passion towards improving their leadership capacity. Self-awareness entails an understanding of one's strengths, weaknesses, and limitations, of how they gather and process information, of how they handle ambiguous and stressful situations, and of how they are perceived by and interact with others. Employers in this research notes self-awareness is an important asset they seek in their prospective or current employees. The semi structured interviews findings indicate that while youths in general might be aware of the general employability skills, they may not be aware of the most important employability skills that are critical for their entrance into and performance in the labour market. A majority of the employers attributes the lack of drive and awareness of the importance of leadership from an early age as an inhibiting factor for employability. Employers in this research hope to see a paradigm shift towards a greater focus on developing true leaders across all levels of their organisation. Specifically, developing prospective employees that have high endurance and positive work ethics. The perceptions among some companies towards local jobseekers is that these fresh graduates have a lack of preparedness and endurance, with issues such as quitting without notice, absenteeism and other disciplinary problems.

The employers in this research also notes that risk aversion runs deep in the psyche of Bruneians. Almost all the employers assert that culture matters because it affects the innovation process. There is clear evidence of the relationship between innovation culture and one's performance or success. Hence, one's employability is greatly impacted by one's will to challenge themselves and take risk with decisions they make for their career. Many employers in this research feel that lack of accountability encourages complacency. The unwillingness to be held accountable stems from fear of taking risks. They further added that the least employable youth were risk-averse and lack the entrepreneurial spirit. The risk-aversion ultimately came from the influence of their parents or peers. Favouring safe government jobs was also highlighted by the Monarch emphasizing that the job market was already saturated and that there was a need to inculcate a culture of independence and entrepreneurship among youth; "Whether seeking employment in the private sector, or setting up businesses such as farming or fishing, if it is done with patience and perseverance the blessings will be great" (Hj Abu Bakar, 2018). He also urged youth to be more open to working in the private sector, saying it would be the main driver of economic growth.

## Current Policy Initiatives

The Manpower Policy and Planning Unit (MMPU) of the Energy and Industry Department at the Ministry of Energy, Manpower and Industry (MEMI) found that at least 50% of job offerings in Brunei required a minimum 3 years working experience. This was frequently expressed by youths in this study and the challenge it poses for policymakers and relevant agencies. As a response to this challenge, in 2017, the Monarch announced the establishment of an apprenticeship programme – i-Ready – that specifically focuses on increasing employability of unemployed graduates so as to be ready for the industry (Wong, 2017).

Major efforts to collaborate with relevant agencies have been made by the MEMI to address the current issue of unemployment. One notable collaboration effort is the Industry Competency Framework (ICF) programme, a collaborative effort programme between the Energy and Industry Department and the Ministry of Education (MoE) in consultation with the industry to produce skilled workers according to industry requirements.

Another collaboration is the establishment of the Centre for Capacity Building (PPK) in September 2017 which aimed at reskilling and up-skilling of local jobseekers in accordance with industry requirements and recognised by industries in various occupations in the private sector, including foreign direct investment companies. This has greatly helped decrease the number of local jobseekers with qualifications of lower secondary and below (Norjidi, 2018). Ideally, the MEMI must continue to work with the MoE through the Higher Education Institutions Action Group to create matching of demand and supplies among graduates and researching re-education curriculum so that it is according to industry needs. In addition, the Ministry of Home Affairs have launched their job portal for private sector jobs. This portal allows registered employers to post vacancies and seek potential employees.

Another important challenge for policymakers is encouraging youth to develop a stronger entrepreneurial spirit. Entrepreneurship plays a vital role in creating employment opportunities for the public and to further inculcate the spirit of self-sufficiency and not depending on the government. Policymakers in this study acknowledged that this entrepreneurial spirit needs to be developed and nurtured at various levels by involving key players including educational institutions, DARE (Darussalam Enterprise), and the private sector.

One of the initiatives is by introducing entrepreneurship as a curriculum in schools. For example, the Entrepreneurship Village at Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD) aims to equip primary school children with the skills or tools required to become entrepreneurs whereas for secondary and university students, it guides them on how to start and grow a business. It also hopes to help existing youth entrepreneurs sustain and make their businesses globally competitive. Fostering this entrepreneurial spirit can help youth understand the causal link between work and reward. Policymakers in this study also acknowledged financial difficulties as an important challenge for youths to cultivate their entrepreneurial spirit. In financing enterprises, DARE has introduced a Microcredit Financing Scheme which offers a financing of up to \$15,000 Brunei dollars. DARE also works closely with the newly established Bank Usahawan, where businesses can obtain financing of up to \$750,000 (Darussalam Enterprise, 2018).

The lack of entrepreneurial spirit and overdependence on government benefits has resulted in a high dependency on foreign workers especially in sectors such as construction; hospitality and wholesale and retail trade. Efforts to prioritise local jobseekers by reassessing the immigration policy including the planning of replacement of foreign workers for positions at PMETs (Professionals, Managerial, Executives and Technical) levels through the process of foreign workers license screening (LPA) and building talent profiles at the PMETs level. The government's policy of capping the number of foreign workers is not intended to hinder industrial growth and development but rather to create more opportunities for local jobseekers. The policy introduced is aimed primarily at reducing the unused quota of foreign workers. However, the Ministry of Home Affairs will insist that companies make plans within 3 years to gradually replace their foreign staff with locals, maintain the quota,

or increase the number of expatriates as and when their companies’ growth and expansion make it necessary (Zainal, 2015).

The current policy initiatives of “re-skilling” and apprenticeship programmes, such as the i-Ready scheme, have been able to bring down jobseeker numbers by 15% — from 11,292 in April 2017 to 9,509 in February 2018 (Wasli, 2018). This shows that the collaborations initiated are gaining fruitful outcomes. Continued efforts and collaborations alongside more information regarding youths’ aspirations and employers’ expectations will hopefully improve the current policy initiatives.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this research reveal a series of strengths and weaknesses in Brunei’s youth employability that can be used as a basis for discussion and analysis of the development of policies to improve and enhance programme curricula, as well as the relationship between the education sector and the labour market in Brunei. Table 4 summarises the findings of this research and the policy recommendations to address the issue of youth unemployment problem in Brunei.

1. Expose youths’ to the causal link between work and reward through performance.

The occupational aspirations of young people in Brunei can be summarised as the desire to have jobs that are seen as prestigious, highly paid and stable. This is socially constructed, one that is influenced by the socio-economic and political system of the country. In the case of Brunei, oil rents are distributed to the population in terms of welfare and providing government jobs; which are highly paid. However, it is also argued that the rentier mentality may have become a structural problem and this attitude of youths being unproductive should be understood as a posteriori constructs rather than the inherent nature of the society itself (Yamada, 2015). Hence, it is not only about changing the rentier mentality of the youths, but it also involves improving the institutions; which already consider this attitude as normal.

An important policy implication of the rentier mentality is the need for education to expose young people to the causal link between work and reward through performance so that they have realistic expectations. Monetary rewards and privileges need to be more closely aligned to work performance

**Table 4. Summary of findings and recommendations**

Findings	Recommendations
Youths’ aspire towards: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Prestigious and highly paid jobs</li> <li>● Stable jobs and are not risk takers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The need for education to expose young people to the causal link between work and reward through performance so that they have realistic expectations</li> </ul>
Employers expects employees to be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● More aware of employability skills that are critical for their entrance into and performance in the labour market</li> <li>● Preparedness and have high endurance, and not have issues such as quitting without notice, absenteeism and other disciplinary problems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Stronger collaboration between training institutions, employers, incumbent employees and potential employees.</li> </ul>
Current policy initiatives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● I-ready programme- work experience for youths</li> <li>● Innovating the curriculum so that it is according to industry needs</li> <li>● Developing entrepreneurial spirit amongst youths</li> </ul>	Enhance current efforts and strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Energy and Industry Department to continue to work with the Ministry of Education (MoE) through the Higher Education Institutions Action Group</li> <li>● Entrepreneurial spirit needs to be nurtured at various levels by involving several agencies including DARE (Darussalam Enterprise), educational institutions and the private sector.</li> </ul>

across all sectors. This would reduce expectations of high incomes and prestigious jobs and increase the appreciation of earned hard work for the development of their career. One way to achieve this is by introducing internship programmes in different workplaces as part of the curriculum in schools and universities. This can expose young people to a variety of work experiences and create awareness about the diversity and nature of work involved. This also broadens their choices of occupations and not being limited to government sector jobs. In short, to change the rentier mentality, there needs to be a change in the education and labour market policies.

## 2. Coordination between various stakeholders.

Employability needs to be recognised as a joint responsibility shared by training institutions, employers, incumbent employees and potential employees. The majority of the interviewees believe that to achieve the goals of improving youth employability, all parties who has anything to do with young people and work, including educational institutions, vocational training centres and business support systems, has to be mobilised. The participation of employers is perhaps the most critical of all, since the access of youth to employment depends on their needs and expectations.

Up-to-date information according to the different sectors is important for keeping up with the needs of the labour market. A prompt response to these needs is possible through the use of a coordination system whereby coordinators and employers of relevant degree courses can connect with the information from different branches of economic activity. Though there exist initiatives gearing towards these positive changes. More needs to be done at a quicker pace to ensure that problems are addressed timely.

In terms of seeking employment, prospective employees come to the labour market with varying knowledge, competencies and abilities – broadly defined as ‘skills’ – combined with the outcome of individuals’ choices in terms of education, training and work experiences (WEF, 2014). There are also differences between the skills and attributes that youths perceive as important versus the ones that have been reported as important by the global labour market. Hence, there is a strong need to manage the difference in expectations through careful initiatives aimed at bridging this gap. The employers in this research suggest that all parties can also serve to stimulate discussion among employers and foster networking between employers’ organisations and other social partners.

## 3. Enhance current efforts and strategies.

To address the issue of unemployment, His Majesty’s government through a special body as well as collaboration between relevant agencies would continue to take necessary steps to equip youths with knowledge and expertise (Hayat, 2013). Tertiary institutions need to equip students for the new careers that may emerge in the future, particularly in robotics, artificial intelligence, quantum computing and Internet of Things whilst remaining realistic that certain specialised qualifications such as Aeronautical Engineering will remain an elusive profession in a country like Brunei. Hence, there needs to be a better approach to address the future of jobs in Brunei. Looking at other countries could benefit policymakers, but the unique socioeconomic environment warrants that specific challenges such as the availability for graduates with specialised qualifications to gain employment in Brunei.

The efforts associated with cultivating these necessary values and spirit involve research and collaboration among relevant stakeholders in order to increase their effectiveness in addressing the issue of unemployment in Brunei. In light of this, the Monarch urged relevant parties to enhance efforts and strategies in the cooperation of capacity-building for youths by providing a conducive environment to raise the effectiveness of tackling unemployment. His Majesty also urged youths to change their mind-set and attitudes on employment so that they would not be too reliant on the government in seeking employment.

## CONCLUSION

This study provides an insight on the issue of unemployment in Brunei by exploring employers' expectations of employees and youths occupational aspirations. In summary the majority of youth in Brunei aspire jobs that are prestigious, well-paid, easy and secure and there is a lower preference for manual jobs. On the other hand, the expectations of employers insightfully allude to the disparity between both labour demand and supply issues. There needs to be a continued dialogue on addressing this mismatch as a positive step forward to alleviating youth unemployment in Brunei. Current collaboration of key agencies has led to the gradual decrease in the number of youth unemployment. Therefore, there is a need to continue to push for a stronger collaborative development amongst the government, employers and the education sector towards addressing the mismatch between employers' expectations and youths' occupational aspirations. Similar to other unemployment studies in other countries, this study is reiterating for expansion of various policies already in place, such as industry collaboration in technical and vocational education and training (TVET), work exposure for university and college students, and programmes cultivating entrepreneurship and innovation.

Finally, the present study has several limitations that should be noted. First, rather than presenting conclusive findings, the study is limited to its exploratory nature. The study only relied on interviews with 33 public sector organisational leaders. It does not claim to achieve representativeness and adequate comparisons both with others and among the interviewed organisational leaders from the private sector. Second, the inability to conduct a longitudinal study of the same groups of young people due to constraints of time and resources. A longitudinal approach is perhaps a more suitable method compared to cross sectional design to explore young people's aspirations. Nevertheless, it can be argued that even though the cross-section study is conducted at one moment in time, it takes in to account youths of different ages which captures reliable data representing the population. The study nonetheless provides current ideas that are equitably congenial with the literature, to offer a basis for stimulating further research.

Future research on Brunei youth unemployment should look into the possible roles of monetary policy and financial regulation alleviating Brunei's labour market problems will offer more insights into the multi-faceted issue of unemployment. This study also encourages future studies to address the future of jobs in Brunei particularly the impact of information technology revolution to the Brunei labour market.

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