

## **Career Perspectives of BA German Graduates In Malaysia: A Case Study OfThe 2009-2011 Graduates From Universiti Putra Malaysia**

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**ABSTRACT:**Since its introduction in 2001, 164 Malaysian undergraduates have completed the BA German programme at Universiti Putra Malaysia(UPM), a combination of German language instruction, philological subjects and market-oriented courses. A survey into the professional development of BA German students since their graduation revealed that the majority of graduates had no problems in finding employment in the corporate or education sector shortly after finishing their studies. Many have changed their career paths several times since securing their first employment in order to gain higher incomes, face greater challenges and enjoy better career opportunities. Some graduates became teachers of German or other languages (Malay language, English, and Mandarin) as well as for science subjects at primary and residential schools, colleges and universities. Furthermore, several opted for Master's degrees and PhD's. A tracer study project aimed to provide comprehensive data on the professional and personal development of BA German graduates from UPM. The 2009, 2010 and 2011 graduates were chosen to provide data via in-depth interviews, questionnaires and social media groups, which allowed the conclusion that studying BA German at UPM combined with a business-related minor subject is a proven formula for a successful and quick entry into the Malaysian job market.

**Keywords:***BA German curriculum, human resource development, Malaysia job market, professional development of UPM Graduates, tracer study, UPM*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Malaysian companies as well as foreign companies operating in Malaysia seek intelligent and independent graduates who offer more than just a university or college degree. Academic excellence based solely on Cumulative Grade Point Average does not guarantee employment for Malaysia's university graduates. Employers look for practical skills and, above all, for an enthusiastic and proactive attitude to work. Important generic skills most sought-after by employers include analytical thinking, computer literacy, interpersonal skills, oral and written communication skills and language competency. ("Challenges of Malaysian Labour Market," 2008;Ismail, 2011; Wei, 2011)

While the rate of unemployment in Malaysia decreased over the years, the number of unemployed local university graduates in Malaysia increased (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2011). Lim (2005) stated that the rate of graduate unemployment posed "a serious problem" to Malaysia "because it reflected a waste of the nation's valuable resources and also implies a poor return on huge investment incurred by the government on public universities" (p. 184). The Graduate Tracer Study by the Ministry of Human Resource reported in 2006 that 30.7% of university graduates remained unemployed six months after convocation. In 2010, a statistic, published by the newspaper *The Sun*, claimed (without revealing the methodology or the participants of the survey) that the unemployment rate of graduates of public universities had reached a staggering 70%, whereas the private institutions of higher learning had recorded less than 30% unemployed graduates ("High Rate of Unemploymentamong Graduates in Malaysia," 2010).

Corporate sector managers and human resource experts identifiedthe low quality of the graduates in the aspects of technical skills and knowledge, insufficient English language proficiency, poorly developed problem-solving and communication skills, the lack of management skills,leadership skills, creativity, critical thinking and pro-activeness, combined with unrealistic expectations of the young graduates towards the job market, an unreasonable demand of high salaries, the preference for jobs closely located to home, low self-confidence and interaction skillsas well as poor character and attitude as important factors contributing to the unemployment problem among the Malaysian graduates (Hairi, Ahmad Toee&Razzaly,2011; Hanapi&Nordin, 2014;Lim, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2011; Mohamad Idham, Asliza, Wan, Wan &Adi, 2014;Rahmah, Ishak& Lai, 2011; Ramlee, Faridah, Ruhizan, Norzaini, Hamidah, Abdul Wahab&Sobri, 2008; Wei, 2011).

The highest number of unemployed according to several studies (Lim, 2010, MohamadIdham et al., 2014) were graduates from UniversitiTeknologi Mara (16.2%), Universiti Utara Malaysia (7.6%),

Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (5.7%), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (4.8%), and Universiti Putra Malaysia (4.5%) especially in the fields of Computer Science, Business Administration and Management, Accounting, Engineering, Literature and Social Studies. This gave rise to the question: Did the graduates from the Bachelor of Arts in Foreign Languages (German)-programme at UPM also contribute to the high number of unemployed or unemployable degree holders?

#### ***A Tracer study – objectives and relevance***

A tracer study into the professional development of graduates of the Bachelor of Arts in Foreign Languages (German)-programme– supported by Universiti Putra Malaysia Grant GP/2013/9421500 – was initiated in January 2014 and concluded in December 2015. Objectives of the tracer study were:

- to identify comprehensive data on the professional whereabouts of BA German graduates from UPM (2004-2015) in industry and academia, and
- to verify and to evaluate the aspects of the BA German curriculum at UPM that contributed most to the graduate's professional or academic career.

Thus, this study attempts to answer questions such as: Was the BA German curriculum “in accordance with the requirements of the current job market”, as the UPM website claims, and did BA German graduates have the sought after competences, the required generic skills, the drive and enthusiasm to succeed in the professional world? How do BA German graduates evaluate the link between the contents of their studies at UPM (major and minor subjects) and the expectations and challenges of a changing labour market in Malaysia?

From results such as in which areas of the corporate or education sector the majority of BA German graduates found employment as well as their job descriptions, the authors might be able to suggest a more market-oriented direction of the existing BA German study programme at UPM. A curriculum, which takes the challenges of human resource development in Malaysia with regard to a globalized market as well as to all the established “shortcomings” of Malaysian graduates (Mohamad Idhamet al., 2014) into consideration, would certainly contribute to the training of much sought after experts in their respective fields and further improve the employability of BA German graduates. The study focused on fields of employment, job opportunities, income development (also related to postgraduate degrees), and on the relevance and usability of the German language in professional settings.

#### ***Studying the German language in Malaysia***

The report “Future Direction of Language Education in Malaysia”, (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010) stated that the study of languages, literature and linguistics played an important role in the education system of Malaysia since language skills have been recognized as a “national issue in several respects” – not only as an academic subject but also as a major contributor to Malaysia's economy and to the development of science and technology, as well as a vital factor for the nation's identity-building. Departments of Malay Language, English Language and for foreign or third languages were set up at public and private institutions of higher learning throughout the country. A number of Asian and European languages such as Arabic, Burmese, Japanese, Korean, Thai, Turkish, Vietnamese, Italian, French, Russian, Spanish and also German were introduced in these institutes to supply employers with “work ready” graduates who can communicate effectively in an additional language and to enable young Malaysians to compete on a global scale.

A Language Section was established at UPM in 1971 when the institution was known as Kolej Pertanian Malaya (Agricultural College of Malaya). In 1995, the section was upgraded to the Language Department and later to the Faculty of Modern Language Studies. It is currently known as the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication (Abbreviation in Malay: FBMK).

Language education in Malaysia is divided into three categories: a) language proficiency courses - to equip students with the necessary language skills for social, academic and occupational purposes, b) language degree programmes in Linguistics, Literature and Language, and c) programmes for teaching languages. UPM through FBMK offers several proficiency courses (e.g. in German) as well as Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) programmes with specialisations in Malay Language and Linguistics, English Language, Malay Literature, English Literature, and Foreign Languages (Arabic, Chinese, French and German). The same study programmes are offered at the postgraduate level except for German and French.

According to the study *Deutsch als Fremdspracheweltweit. Datenerhebung 2015* (German as a Foreign Language worldwide. Data collection 2015), published by the German Foreign Office in 2015, the number of German language learners in Malaysia has increased by 77% compared to 2005. Due to a continuing interest in the German higher education system, especially in engineering subjects and supported by a positive image of the Federal Republic of Germany, approximately 8,500 Malaysians studied the German language at the following institutions in Malaysia: Goethe-Institut Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur (770 students), German-Malaysian-Society in Penang (230 students), 30 secondary schools (3,600 students) and 17 public and private universities (3,900 students).

Most language programmes at schools and tertiary institutions offer the German language at the A1/A2: Beginner/Elementary levels (definition by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment – CEFR). The A-Level-German programmes at International Education College (INTEC) and the German-Malaysian-Institute (GMI) as well as the South Australian Matriculation programme at First City University College (formerly known as KBU International College), however, prepare their students to pass the DSH exam (Deutsche Sprachprüfung für den Hochschulzugang / German language examination for university entrance) or TestDaF exam (Test Deutsch als Fremdsprache / Test German as a Foreign Language) at B2/C1: Upper Intermediate/Advanced levels (CEFR), which are requirements for entering any study programme in Germany, in which the language of instruction is German.

Aside from elective proficiency courses which are open to learners from all faculties, Universiti Malaya (UM) and UPM have been offering Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree programmes with German as the major subject since 1998 and 2001 respectively. UM offers two BA programmes: 1) “Bachelor of Languages and Linguistics (German Language)” and 2) “Bachelor of Languages and Linguistics (German with Education)”; UPM offers one BA programme: “Bachelor of Arts in Foreign Languages (German)”.

### ***The Bachelor of Arts in foreign languages (German)-programme at UPM***

Initially designed as a four-year Bachelor’s programme, the Bachelor of Arts in Foreign Languages (German)-programme (BA German) at UPM was introduced in the academic year 2000/2001. However, due to revised regulations on Bachelor’s programmes in general, it has been conducted as a three-year programme since its inauguration and extended to 3 ½ years since 2014. 164 Malaysian students have thus far studied the BA German curriculum (122 credits) - a combination of required university courses (24 credits), major courses (68 credits) and minor courses (30 credits). The major courses consist of traditional philological subjects, German language study subjects and a few market-oriented courses: German Language I-III, Communication Skills I-II, Writing in German, German for Specific Purposes: Tourism / Commerce / Science and Technology, Historical Survey of Germany, Introduction to German Literature, Introduction to German Linguistics, Introduction to German Culture, German 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art, Translation of Text, Research Methodology in German, and Teaching German as a Foreign Language. Several courses such as Historical Survey of Germany, Introduction to German Linguistics and German 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art are taught bilingually – in German and English.

In contrast to BA German students at UM, UPM-students are required to take up a minor course as well. The minors offered by the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication were Malay Literature, Communication, Arabic Language, English Literature, Chinese Literature, Translation and Interpretation, while courses offered by other faculties were Business Management, Resource Management, Hotel Management, Business Administration and Hospitality & Recreation just to name a few.

After six (now seven) academic semesters, the students reached the B1 level (Intermediate, CEFR) in German in writing, reading, speaking, and listening comprehension. For most of them German was their third (L3) or fourth language (L4) after Bahasa Malaysia, English, Chinese dialects or Tamil. To graduate from the BA German programme (until 2014) neither comprehensive final exams were required nor did the students have to complete a final year research project. The students were also not given the opportunity to gain work experiences in an internship.

In 2014, the BA German programme experienced several substantial changes such as the introduction of a Final Year Research Project in the form of an academic paper/research report to emphasise research in language and linguistics; an eight-week Industrial Training to expose the students to the business world before actually embarking on their preferred career, as well as an additional seventh semester.

During their studies, learners had and have the opportunity to study for one or two semesters in Germany through mobility programmes. As of 2015, five students who graduated with a BA degree in German were enrolled in a Master’s (MA) degree programme at UPM (e.g. Literary and Cultural Studies, Applied Comparative Linguistics, Discourse Analysis,).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Language programmes and career perspectives in Malaysia**

Thus far, only selective research has been carried out to investigate the professional development of BA German students and of other graduates of language programmes from UPM after their graduation.

The report “Future Direction of Language Education in Malaysia” (2010) prepared by a study committee from ten Malaysian universities headed by Prof. DatinDr.Hajibah Osman (Dean of the UiTM Language Academy) on behalf of the Ministry of Higher Education examined the Language-, Linguistics- and Literature-programmes offered at all academic institutions in Malaysia. This “first study ever” aimed to provide the ministry and the public with an overview and a comprehensive database of the subjects encompassing Malay (as the national language), English (as the second language), as well as third and foreign languages. The study’s

objectives were to review the status of language programmes offered at Malaysian higher education institutions, to analyse the similarities and differences in these programmes to identify areas that are missing, to benchmark these programmes with successful programmes in foreign universities and to explore future directions for these programmes. One of the specific objectives was to trace the success of these programmes of all languages offered at the Bachelor's degree level in terms of demands and employability. The data of unpublished tracer studies from UM and UPM were analysed to examine the "employability" and "work readiness" of language graduates.

The tracer study of 107 graduates (2007/2008) from the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics (UM) reported that 52.3% of the total number of graduates found employment either in permanent positions or on temporary or contract basis within four months of graduation. The employment rate of the students who majored in Chinese, Malay, Tamil, Spanish and Japanese was more than 50%, while the employment rate for graduates who majored in other foreign languages was considerably lower – English 44%, Arabic 38%, French 38% and German only 32%. Graduates of Languages from UM worked typically in teaching positions (56.1%), and in sales and marketing as customer service and sales assistants (14.04%). About 12 % were employed in administrative and executive positions in the corporate sector, and 7% worked in editorial fields as news writers, website editors or publishing editors. UPM reported "a high percentage of employment rate" in its 2008-survey: 88.7% of graduates of Malay Language, 93% of graduates of English Language, 81.8% of graduates of English Literature and 95% of graduates of foreign languages secured employment in less than three months after graduation. It was pointed out that graduates with UPM-language majors found jobs in similar sectors as the UM-graduates. The report concluded that there was a great need for graduates of languages in the Malaysian job market especially in fields such public relations, publishing, writing and editing as well as in teaching.

Schaar, Selke, Ogasa and Ang (2015) conducted a survey into the professional whereabouts of the 2008 BA German graduates. The data showed the following (rather positive) tendencies: Despite a slightly negative perception of the BA German curriculum in retrospect and their perception that it is incompatible with the demands of the Malaysian job market, all 2008 BA German graduates (fourteen students, cohort 4, 2005-2008) have found employment in industry, finance or the education sector without great difficulties shortly after graduation (and before convocation). Therefore, BA German graduates have not contributed to the high numbers of unemployed local university graduates reported in Malaysian publications in previous years (Hairi et al., 2011; Lim, 2010; Mohamad Idham et al., 2014).

Almost 50% of the 2008 graduates have become educators of young Malaysians (preferably at primary schools) themselves; others work in responsible positions in financial institutions or industrial companies. Two have founded their own businesses. 77% have obtained additional academic degrees – Master's degrees, second Bachelor's degrees, Diplomas – or underwent vocational training courses to further their careers or face greater responsibilities in their positions. Their income steadily improved, the majority earned between RM 3.000 – RM 4.000; some enjoyed even higher salaries and comprehensive benefits. Among the 2008 graduates, the German language however, only played a marginal role in professional settings. The study did not reveal unemployment and professional issues among BA German graduates. There was however a need to further investigate the professional development of at least 60-70% of the BA German graduates in order to gain a comprehensive insight.

## METHODOLOGY

The tracer study was conducted in several stages using mixed methods, qualitative and quantitative: Survey questions were developed based on the structure and methodology of similar tracer studies carried out in social science programmes in Germany (Briedis, Fabian, Kerst, Schaeper, 2008; Kräuter, Oberlander, Wießner 2009; Schomburg 2009) as well as on publications on human resource development, labor market challenges, job opportunities, and statistics of university graduates in Malaysia (Hooi, 2003, 2007, 2008; Lim, 2010).

First of all, a focus group, consisting of 5 graduates from different cohorts (2004, 2006, 2008, and 2012) who were employed in a variety of fields – teaching, finance, marketing, and sales – was set up. This group discussion provided in-depth understanding into the strength and shortcomings of the UPM study programme, the job application process, the demands, challenges and difficulties faced by the graduates in the labour market, the work-related role of German language, and the income development. The results of the focus group discussion were analysed, the above mentioned survey questions were revised, and a questionnaire based on tracer studies conducted at German universities (see Appendix 1) to obtain statistical data and Likert scale based assessments was designed. The research team then established contacts to more than 80% of the 164 BA German graduates from UPM by applying the so called snowball-effect and sent out the questionnaire to the graduates via Facebook (friends, groups) and email. The electronic survey in which 73% of all BA German graduates participated provided the necessary data to answer the research questions. From these survey respondents, 30 in-depth interview participants were selected based on purposive sampling method. The in-depth

interviews which focused on the BA German curriculum, the job application process and the German language in professional settings gave the authors the opportunity for clarification. In line with the qualitative research methodology, data analysis was undertaken simultaneously during the data collection process.

## RESULTS

### *The 2009 - 2011 graduates*

Cohort 5 (graduation in 2009) consisted of 10 students: 8 Chinese Females (CF), 1 Malay Female (MF) and 1 Chinese Male (CM). 9 out of 10 (90%) participated in the study. Cohort 6 (graduation in 2010) consisted of 22 students: 18 CF, 2 CM, 1 Indian Female (IF) and 1 Other Female (OF). 18 out of 22 (82%) participated in the study. Cohort 7 (graduation in 2011) consisted of 11 students: 10 CF and 1 CM. 10 out of 11 (91%) responded.

Forty three students of the cohorts 5,6 and 7 successfully graduated from the BA German programme at UPM. 37 graduates (86%) contributed data to the tracer study.

With a ratio of 91% females (39) and 9% males (4), the groups represented the typical gender distribution of BA German classes. From the 2001 to the 2011 intake, Chinese females clearly dominated the ethnic compositions of the classes.

### *Professional development*

The 2009-2011 graduates enrolled in the BA German programme in the years 2006 to 2008. For 24% (9 of the 37 respondents) German language was their first choice study-subject. 76% applied for other subjects such as Business Management / Administration: 38% (14), Hospitality & Tourism: 11% (4), Foreign Languages: 8% (3) – French (1), Korean (1), other (1) - , 5% Mass Communication: (2), Accounting: (1), Education (1), English Literature: (1), Psychology: (1) and Translation (1). Despite being absolute beginners - no student had any previous knowledge of German - the students (more or less successfully) studied the German language and other required subjects to level A2/B1 (Elementary / Intermediate – CEFR) and achieved Cumulative Grade Point Averages between 3.8 (highest) and 2.7 (lowest).

In 2009, 2010 and 2011, the 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> BA German-cohorts graduated from UPM and joined the Malaysian job market. Twenty three graduates (62%) out of 37 (100%) found employment within one month of graduation or joined full time Master's programmes respectively (4 students, 11%) 12 graduates (32.5%) started their professional career in less than three months and 2 (5.5%) needed about 6 months to secure employment.

Fifty seven percent (21 graduates) found their first jobs in administrative positions - Sales, Purchasing, Marketing, Customer Service, Public Relations, Human Resources – in industry, finance and in the service sector. Nineteen percent (7 graduates) became educators / education advisors (in comparison: 28% of the 2008 graduates began a career in education), 11% (4 graduates) pursued postgraduate programmes at UPM and Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang whereas 13.5% (5 graduates) worked in other professions.

Appendix 2 displays the CGPAs and minor-subjects, the obtained academic degree(s), the graduates' first (in some cases second, third) and current jobs since graduation and the income development.

While conducting the tracer study in 2014, 10 BA German graduates (27%) worked as teachers/tutors of German or other languages (Bahasa Malaysia, English, and Mandarin) as well as for science subjects at primary and residential schools and universities or as education advisors. 5 graduates (13.5% - MF09-1, CF11-3, 6, 7 & 8 – see Appendix 2) were still pursuing a postgraduate degree – Master's/PhD full time. 21 graduates (57%) were employed in administrative positions as Executives or Assistant Managers in the corporate sector.

Many former BA German students have been promoted since their first employment. Twenty one graduates (57%) have changed their job titles, their companies, schools, institutions or professions altogether in order to gain a higher income, face greater challenges, enjoy better career opportunities or escape conflicts with superiors or colleagues. Others have remained in their companies/schools since the beginning of their professional career due to a positive working environment and good career opportunities.

While the majority of the 2009-2011 respondents still held the Bachelor of Arts as their highest academic degree, 20.5% (8 graduates) pursued postgraduate degrees since graduation or were still in the process of completion. MF09-1 has completed a Master's degree in Comparative Linguistics from UPM and is currently preparing a proposal for a PhD-study. CF10-5, CF11-3, 5 and 7 have already obtained Master's degrees (MBA at UPM, Translation at USM Penang), while CF11-6, 8 and 9 were still pursuing a Master's degree (Comparative Linguistics at UPM, German as a Foreign Language at University Freiburg, Germany). CF11-3 and 7 were full time PhD students (Business at UPM, Translation at USM Penang). CF09-4,-5, CF10-2,-4,-11,-15 studied education and teaching related Diploma courses in order to qualify as teachers.

The German language played only a marginal role in the everyday professional routine. Eleven graduates (30%) applied German language in their jobs: MF09-1, CF11-8 and 9 were (part time) teachers for German language at FBMK/UPM and the German-Malaysian-Institute (A1/Beginner level), CF10-3 greeted German passengers who were using the airline she worked for, others wrote business letters or translated

business correspondence and manuals. The majority however, used mostly English and Mandarin / Cantonese in their professional settings.

### **The BA German programme at UPM in retrospective**

During the electronic survey, the former students were asked to fill in a 31 statements-survey, in order to assess positive or negative aspects of the study programme at UPM in retrospect by applying the five-point Likert-Scale - 5 (*I strongly agree*), 4 (*I agree*), 3 (*undecided*), 2 (*I disagree*), 1 (*I strongly disagree*). The 2009-2011 graduates agreed that studying the BA German programme at UPM was an overall positive experience (M=4.37). The assessment, whether the BA German programme adequately prepared the graduates for entering the Malaysian job market only scored a mean of 3.17(undecided).The justifications given for the assessment in interviews/online chats were:

- a) The curriculum offered insufficient credit hours for learning the language properly.
- b) The BA German programme consisted of too many subjects which lead to only superficial knowledge in each of the subjects e.g. in history, arts, literature.
- c) No practical application of acquired knowledge and language skills in form of an internship was part of the curriculum.
- d) No final thesis which would enable students to research, discuss, apply problem-solving skills and write a scientific text had to be written.
- e) The graduates perceived a job mismatch determined by the study contents of the BA German curriculum and the availability of related jobs. (M=4.29: I agree)

The contribution of the minor subject was regarded as slightly higher (M=3.59: I agree). The statement *I can use the knowledge I have acquired in the BA German programme for my job* scored undecided (M=3.05) whereas *I can use the knowledge I have acquired in the minor subject for my job* scored slightly higher but still remained undecided (M=3.44).

Learning “generic skills”, however, was regarded as the “strength” of the BA German programme. The participants stated that studying BA German enabled them to effectively communicate (M=4.2: I agree), to develop “team spirit” (M=3.67: I agree) and gave them the ability to assess/judge and deal with different personalities (M=4.08: I agree). They claimed to have learned how to work under pressure (M=3.68: I agree), how to find and process information (M=3.99: I agree), and how to develop organizational skills (M=3.77: I agree). A repeated complaint, however, voiced by several graduates was the neglect of problem-solving skills in the curriculum and in the teaching practice.

All cohorts agreed that the BA German programme was in need of substantial changes (M=3.7). Those suggested improvements varied from student to student based on their personal interests, subject preferences, professional career and work experiences. The “substantial changes” refers *tomore credit hours* for either market-oriented or philological subjects. It was stated that the programme might benefit from a future dual focus on Translation of Text (M=4.52: I strongly agree), Teaching German as a Foreign Language (M=4.38: I agree), Introduction to German Linguistics (M=3.87: I agree), Introduction to German Culture (M=4.11: I agree) on the one hand (preferred by educators), and German for Specific Purposes (GSP): Commerce (M=3.86: I agree), GSP: Tourism (M=4.0: I agree), GSP: Science and Technology (M=3.43: undecided) on the other hand – preferred by those employed in the corporate sector.

The graduates strongly agreed that an industrial training (internship) in schools, companies, hotels etc. would prepare future BA German graduates better for the challenges of Malaysia’s globalised job market (M=4.61:) and that a positive effect was to be expected from writing a research-based Final Year Research Project too (M=3.97: I agree). The 2009-2011 graduates agreed (as did the 2008 graduates) that the combination of a major in German and any minor subject – business related or a language study – was a successful combination for entering the Malaysian job market (M=4.26). Therefore, they recommended this study programme (M=4.22: I agree) to future students.

## **CONCLUSION**

HanapiandNordin (2014) pointed out, that in the era of globalization and k-economy, human capital resources, which are competitive and full of potential, contribute to the increase of the country’s economic productivity and can initiate new initiatives in socioeconomic activities, determine the performance of a company, an organization or a country. Creating comprehensive human capital resources is a challenge to Malaysia. Surveys, regularly conducted by Jobstreet.com, a Malaysian employment agency, showed the main problems faced by employers in hiring fresh graduates were irrelevant degree or job mismatch, no suitable job opportunities, the average standard of fresh graduates, questionable attitudes and communication skills, a rather poor command of English, fresh graduates asking for unrealistic salaries and benefits as well as university curricula which are

irrelevant to industry and finance (MohamadIdhamet al., 2014). Therefore, the high rate of unemployed graduates of Malaysian public universities has been a persistent issue for more than a decade.

Although the graduates of the BA German programme at UPM have faced the same challenges like their fellow graduates from other subjects – a lack of proficiency in English, teacher-centred, exam-oriented and theory based university courses which were not tailored towards industry demand and did not produce “work ready” graduates, a lack of internship courses which could have enhanced students' academic performance and develop interpersonal skills and leadership skills, as well as a lack of proper career guidance and lack of information on demand and supply of language-programme graduates – the tracer study into the professional whereabouts of the 2009-2011 BA German graduates (UPM) supported earlier findings that all former students have found employment in industry, finance or the education sector without difficulties already shortly after graduation. Despite all perceived shortcomings and weaknesses of the BA German curriculum, BA German graduates from UPM did not contribute to the high numbers of unemployed local university graduates.

It can therefore be concluded that studying BA German at UPM in combination with minor subjects (business related subject or social sciences related) ensured a quick entry into the Malaysian job market although not always immediately into the preferred career path.

A newly designed BA German curriculum (126 credits), which will be implemented in 2016/2017, will bring substantial changes to the programme – the minor courses (30 credits) will be replaced by elective courses (30 credits), the credits for university courses will increase from 24 to 26 credits, the credits for major courses will increase from 68 to 70. More business oriented or language focused courses such as German Event Management, German Entrepreneurship, Network Public Oration (in German), Creative Talent Expression (in German), German Grammar, and Reading in German will be introduced. Whether these changes towards a major-only study programme – combined with the Final Year Research Project and the Industrial Training – will improve the work-readiness and employability of future BA German cohorts - the majority of the BA German graduates claimed to have secured employment due to the major-minor combination of study subjects - needs to be investigated in due time.

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**Appendix A Questionnaire**



A Tracer Study into the Professional and Personal Development of BA German Graduates (UPM)

*Dr. Torsten Schaar / Dr. Nicole Ogasa / Dr. Ang Lay Hoon*

Dear BA German graduates from UPM. It has been 10 years since the first batch graduated and we hope that you have enjoyed a successful personal and professional career since. UPM/FBMK is conducting tracer studies into the whereabouts of its graduates in order to evaluate and adapt the language programmes offered. Your support is highly appreciated. Please take a few moments of your time and reflect upon your professional and personal achievements and please share these information with us. Your data will be handled with utmost care to protect your privacy. No third party will have access to your information. Read Carefully! Please be truthful!

Thank you very much! Danke schön!

**Personal Information / Contact Information**

a) Name: \_\_\_\_\_

b) E-Mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

c) Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

d) Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

e) Your Marital Status?   
 Single  Married    
 Divorced

f) Ethnic Background:   
 Malay Female  Malay Male    
 Chinese Female  Chinese Male    
 Indian Female  Indian Male    
 Other Female  Other Male

g) Where did you grow up? (Hometown) \_\_\_\_\_

h) Where do you live now? \_\_\_\_\_

i) Do you have children?   
 Yes  No    
 how many? \_\_\_\_\_

**Your Assessment of The BA German Program at UPM**

a) After finishing high school when you applied for a study program, which subject was your first choice? \_\_\_\_\_

b) Was studying German language among your study preferences?   
 Yes  No

c) How was your initial reaction, when you realized that you will study BA German? \_\_\_\_\_

d) Did you learn German before entering the BA German program?   
 Yes  No

e) In your opinion: (please tick!)

		I totally agree			I totally disagree	
		5	4	3	2	1
1	Studying at UPM was a positive experience.					
2	The BA German program adequately prepared me for entering the Malaysian job market.					
3	The minor subject contributed to prepare me for entering the Malaysian job market.					
4	I can use the knowledge I have acquired in the BA German program for my job.					
5	I can use the knowledge I have acquired in the minor subject for my job.					
6	At UPM, I learned how to find and process information.					
7	At UPM, I developed organizational skills.					
8	At UPM, I learned problem-solving skills.					



*Career Perspectives Of BA German Graduates In Malaysia: A Case Study Of*

9	At UPM, I learned analytical skills.					
10	At UPM, I learned how to work under pressure.					
11	At UPM, I developed "team spirit".					
12	At UPM, I learned how to deal with people.					
13	The BA German program needs changes.					
14	The credit hours of major subjects should be increased to improve the students' proficiency in German.					
15	The BA German program needs a stronger focus on Business German.					
16	The BA German program needs a stronger focus on German for Tourism.					
17	The BA German program needs a stronger focus on German for Science and Technology.					
18	The BA German program needs a stronger focus on Literature.					
19	The BA German program needs a stronger focus on Linguistics.					
20	The BA German program needs a stronger focus on German culture.					
21	The BA German program needs a stronger focus on learning how to teach German as a foreign language.					
22	The BA German program needs a stronger focus on Translation.					
23	The BA German program needs a stronger focus on German History.					
24	The BA German program needs a stronger focus on German Arts.					
25	An internship in schools/companies/hotels etc. (beginning in 2014) will prepare BA German students better for the challenges of Malaysia's job market.					
26	A Bachelor Thesis (beginning in 2014) will prepare BA German students better for the challenges of Malaysia's job market.					
27	The combination of major in German and a business related minor subjects is a good combination for entering the job market.					
28	The combination of major in German and other minor subjects (English, Malay etc.) is a good combination for entering the job market.					
29	UPM should offer more choices for Minor subjects.					
30	I would recommend others to study BA German.					
		5	4	3	2	1

**Academic Background**

a) Which year did you graduate from UPM? (Please circle)

2004 / 2006 / 2007 / 2008 / 2009 / 2010 / 2011 / 2012 / 2013

b) Minor subject:

c) Your UPM Grade Point Average:

d) What is your highest academic degree?

Bachelor  Subject: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Master  Subject: \_\_\_\_\_  
 When? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Where? \_\_\_\_\_  
 PhD  Subject: \_\_\_\_\_  
 When? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Where? \_\_\_\_\_

In case of Master/PhD:  
 I studied:

Full time  Part time

e) Are you currently pursuing an academic degree?

Where do you pursue the academic degree?

Yes  No   
 Bachelor  Subject: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Master  Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

PhD  Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

f) Did you obtain any other academic degrees since graduation?

Yes  No

2<sup>nd</sup> Bachelor degree  Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

Diploma  Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

Other  Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

g) Did you undergo a vocational training course?

Yes  No

h) Do you plan to pursue another academic degree in the near future?

Yes  No  I am not sure

2<sup>nd</sup> Bachelor  Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

Master  Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

PhD  Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Connection To Germany / The German Language

a) Have you been to Germany?

Yes  No

If Yes: What was the purpose of your visit?

(You can tick more than one, in case of combined activities)

Tourism

Language Course

Business Trip

Conference / Seminar

Training Course work-related

Sports Event

Studying

Married in Germany

b) Do you use German language in your job?

Yes  No  Sometimes

c) Do you use German language outside your job?

Yes  No  Sometimes

d) Do you read articles, newspapers, journals, magazines, and books in German?

Yes  No  Sometimes

e) Do you watch German movies?

Yes  No  Sometimes

f) Do you listen to German music?

Yes  No  Sometimes

Where did you obtain the other academic degrees?

When did you obtain the other academic degree?

If Yes, which field?

Where do you plan to pursue another academic degree in the near future?

g) Do you have German friends?

Yes  No

h) How would you assess your current level of German language proficiency?

All gone

Beginner's level

Advanced Beginner level

Intermediate level

Upper intermediate level

Native speaker level

i) When you were at UPM, did you receive any scholarship from UPM or DAAD to study in Germany or take a language course?

Yes  No

How do you communicate?

i) Did you take any German language courses since graduation from UPM?

Yes  No

If Yes - please specify: - Which level?

- Where?

If Yes - please specify: Who provided the scholarship?

For which purpose?

Where did you study?

For how long?

When?

Your Work History

(If you are a full time Master's / PhD student with no previous working experience, only answer the last question! If you have worked before, please answer all questions!)

a) When you started your professional career after graduating from UPM, for which job(s) did you apply?

b) How long did it take you to find your first job?

within 1 month of application

1-3 months

3-6 months

6-10 months

a year

more than a year

c) How many job positions did you apply for to get your first job?

d) How many job interviews did you have before you got your first job?

e) In your opinion, which one of your qualifications did your future employer value most?

my BA in German

my Minor

j) Does your company have business relations to Germany?

(not for those in the education sector)

Yes  No  Sometimes

k) For which preschool / school / college / university do you work?

(only for those in the education sector)

l) Which subjects do you teach?

(only for those in the education sector)

m) How do you assess your job satisfaction? income/colleagues/atmosphere

very satisfied

satisfied

it is alright

dissatisfied

I hate it

very good

good

limited

no perspectives

n) How do you assess your career perspectives in your current job?

I am self-employed

I am a business owner

the combination of both my personality in general, my language skills, other qualifications

f) How many jobs have you worked since you have graduated from UPM? (please circle)  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

g) What is your current job title?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

h) For which company do you work? (not for those in the education sector)  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

i) What kind of company is it? (not for those in the education sector)  
 a Malaysian company   
 a German company   
 a foreign company

q) Please tell us your job history:

Time frame: 1 2 3  
 from – to

Company/  
 Institution:  
 I work(ed) at...  
 The company does... / produces...

Position:  
 I work(ed) as...

Job description / responsibilities:  
 I do/did ...

I receive(d) the following benefits:  
 holidays/EPF/  
 health insurance/  
 allowances ...

My monthly salary after tax was:  
 (This is voluntary information!)  
 But really necessary

I am a civil servant

o) Do you plan to change your job or your company/education institution in the near future?  
 Yes  No

(ii) If Yes – please choose:  
 (You can tick more than one answer!)  
 I plan to change:  
 my job   
 the company / institution   
 because:  
 I want a higher income   
 I want better career perspectives   
 I want greater responsibilities /greater challenges   
 I am bored with my job   
 there are work-related issues   
 the pressure is too high   
 my boss does not respect me   
 I dislike my colleagues   
 personal reasons (family related)   
 p) Where do you see yourself in 10 years?  
 Which goals would you like to achieve professionally?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix 2 The professional development of the 2009-2011 graduates

(09=2009 graduate, 10=2010 graduate, 11=2011 graduate, ndp=no data provided. CM09-1, CF10-17,-18, CM10-1,-2 and CF11-10 did not participate in the study)

Student (CGPA)	University Degree (Minor)	First Job Following Job(s) Current Job/Position	Income in Ringgit Malaysia
CF09-1 (ndp)	BA (Hospitality and Tourism)	Shipping Officer, Furniture Factory Production Control Officer, Vitally Marketing Shipping Executive, Furniture Factory	RM 1500 RM 1600 RM 2400
CF09-2 (3.2)	BA (Hospitality and Tourism)	Customer Service Officer, Celcom Business Development Assistant Manager, Synergy House Furniture SdnBhd	RM 2000 RM 3800
CF09-3 (3.5)	BA (Hospitality and Tourism)	Public Relation Officer, Magazine Company Branding Development Consultant, PR Agency Advertisement & Promotion Assistant Manager, F&B	RM 1800 RM 2800 RM 4200
CF09-4 (3.7)	BA (Business)	Accounting Assistant, ndp Supervisor, 3Q MRC Centre	RM 1200 RM 1800

	Management )	<b>Teacher</b> , Chinese Primary School	RM 2400
CF09-5 (3.3)	BA Diploma (Hospitality and Tourism)	<i>Language Tutor</i> , Little Bean Reading Centre <b>Marketing Executive</b> in Sushi Kin SdnBhd <b>Project Administrator</b> , EV-Dynamic SdnBhd	RM 1650 RM 2500 ndp
CF09-6 (3.6)	BA (Tourism Management )	<i>Customer Service Representative</i> , JF Apex Securities <b>Human Resource Admin Assistant</b> , AE Technology <b>Administration Assistant</b> , Elabram System Berhad	ndp ndp <RM2000
CF09-7 (3.3)	BA (Tourism Management )	<i>Administration Executive</i> , AgensiPekerjaan Great Resources <b>Material Planner Executive</b> , Finisar Malaysia SdnBhd	RM 1800 RM 2000- RM3000
CF09-8 (2.8)	BA (Business)	<i>Purchase Assistant</i> , Dye Knitting Fabric Factory- <b>Foreign Sales Assistant</b> , Termah Sewing Machine	<RM 1500- RM 1500+
MF09-1 (3.2)	BA <b>Master</b> (English)	<i>Marketing Executive</i> , Bank <b>Tutor for German</b> , UPM <b>PhD Student</b>	RM 1700- RM 2983 scholarship
CF10-1 (2.7)	BA (Economy)	<b>Customer Service Officer</b> , Mega Labels & Sticker S/B	RM 2000
CF10-2 (3.05)	BA (Hospitality and Tourism)	<i>Receptionist</i> , Neway Karaoke Box <b>Tutor</b> , Nanny in Child Care Centre <b>Substitute Teacher</b> , Primary Chinese School <b>Teacher</b> , Primary Chinese School	RM 1800 RM 1800 RM 45 per day RM 2600
CF10-3 (3.2)	BA (Hospitality and Recreation)	<b>Cabin Crew</b> , Singapore Airlines	ndp
CF10-4 (2.8)	BA (Hospitality and Recreation)	<b>Teacher</b> , Chinese Primary School	RM 2700
CF10-5 (3.5)	BA <b>Master</b> (Economy)	Master Student <b>Assistant Manager</b> , CIMB Principal Asset Management	RM 4000- RM 5000
CF10-6 (3.3)	BA (Hospitality and Recreation)	<i>Human Resources Executive</i> , Cheng YeapSdn. Bhd <b>Sales Coordinator</b> , Wansern Technology Sdn. Bhd.	ndp ndp
CF10-7 (3.5)	BA (Management)	<b>Marketing Executive</b> , AXA Insurance Company	RM3000+

CF10-8 (3.6)	BA (Hospitality and Recreation)	<b>Sales Person</b> , Inbound Tour Company	RM 2300
CF10-9 (3.6)	BA (Mass Communicatio n)	<i>Customer Care Consultant</i> , Customer Service Centre Marketing Executive, Furniture Exporter company <b>Marketing Analyst</b> , Jebsen& Jessen Chemicals (M)	RM2000 RM3500 RM4500
CF10-10 (3.3)	BA (Management)	<i>Teacher</i> , Chinese Primary School <b>Hawker</b> , Family Business	RM2500+ ndp
CF10-11 (3.5)	BA (Management)	<i>Marketing Executive</i> , Chemical Company <b>Teacher</b>	ndp ndp
CF10-12 (2.7)	BA (Management)	<i>HR Officer</i> , Engineering Consultant Company Sales <b>Assistant Manager</b> , MOL AccessportalSdn. Bhd	ndp ndp
CF10-13 (3.1)	BA (Economy)	<b>Marketing Executive</b> , Textile Manufacturer	ndp
CF10-14 (3.5)	BA (Hospitality and Tourism)	<i>Web Content Reviewer</i> , IT Company <b>Education Advisor</b> , Education Specialist	RM 3300 RM 2700
CF10-15 (3.7)	BA (Hospitality and Tourism)	<i>Event Coordinator</i> , Mines Exhibition Convention Centre <b>Teacher</b> , Chinese Primary School	RM 1900 RM 2400
CF10-16 (3.3)	BA (Mass Communicatio n)	<i>Underwriting Executive</i> , Insurance Company Operation Executive, Gintell (Healthcare) Product Executive, Digital Paper Sdn. Bhd. Sales Support Officer, Commercial Developer <b>Sales Admin Executive</b> , Commercial Developer	RM 1700 RM 2500 RM 2200 RM 2600 RM 2800
IF10-1 (3.4)	BA (English)	<i>Sales Executive</i> , Salmat Salesforce (M) Sdn. Bhd <b>Team Leader</b> , American Express (M) Sdn. Bhd.	RM 2500 RM 5911
OF10-1 (3.8)	BA (English)	<i>Draughtperson</i> , Tradisi Dungun Sdn. Study Counsellor, DAAD <b>Administrative Executive</b> , Luther Corporate Service (German Law Firm)	RM 2835 RM 3238 ndp
CF11-1 (3.4)	BA (Management)	<b>Purchasing executive</b> , Jabil Circuit	RM 2600
CF11-2 (3.5)	BA (Business)	<b>Education Advisor</b> , Study International Education Consultant SdnBhd	ndp
CF11-3 (3.4)	BA <b>Master</b> (Management)	Master student (MBA, UPM) Full Time <b>PhD student</b> (Business, UPM)	-
CF11-4 (3.5)	BA (Management)	<b>Teacher</b> (Mandarin, English), Chinese Primary School	RM 2300

CF11-5 (3.4)	BA <b>Master</b> (Management)	Master Student (MBA, UPM) <b>Human Resource Executive</b> , Merison Marketing SdnBhd	RM 2500
CF11-6 (3.6)	BA (Hospitality And Recreation)	Chinese Language Teacher, Full Time <b>Master student</b> (German as a Foreign Language) University of Freiburg/Germany	-
CF11-7 (3.8)	BA <b>Master</b> (Communicati on)	Master student (Translation, USM Penang) Full Time <b>PhD student</b> (Translation, USM Penang)	-
CF11-8 (3.5)	BA (Economics)	Kindergarten Teacher, Pusat Jagaan Pucuk Harapan <b>Master student</b> , Graduate Research Fellowship, UPM Part Time <b>German Teacher</b> , UPM & GMI	- RM 1500 RM130/hour
CF11-9 (3.5)	BA (Business Management)	<b>Master student</b> , UPM Part Time <b>German Teacher</b> , GMI	RM 50/hour
CM11-1 (3.2)	BA (Management)	<b>Marketing Executive</b> , Harta Packaging	RM 2200

*Table 1: Professional development of the 2009, 2010 and 2011 graduates*