

# A Framework on Sustainable Development Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth of Malaysian Youth

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## ABSTRACT

One of the major aims of sustainable development goal is mitigating the unemployment rate especially for the youth Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) population focusing the youth on Malaysia. The common misconception is that the youth is having attitude problems or unprofessional behaviour. This misconception root needs to be mitigated by looking into this issue deeper. Thus, we are proposing a framework to enhance the youth sustainable employability management. This framework is a way of investigating the concept of economic stress and individual resilience which allows problems to be explored and solved. The research methodology to be employed will consists of both quantitative and qualitative approaches among the youth NEET population in Malaysia. The designs of study will include descriptive analysis and experimental design. We strongly believe that the introduction of the sustainable employability management will help to develop, refine, and cultivate our youth employability management which is currently lacking in today's scenario. The output of this research is directly aligned with Malaysia Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 (SPV2030) for labour market, Malaysian Key Economic Growth Activities (KEGA), and United Nation (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 agenda

**Keywords:** Sustainable Development Goal 8; SDG8; Decent Work; Sustainability; NEET

## INTRODUCTION

Sustainability come in with great risks and it is threatening us as we go through the wave. Sustainability has capture the world attention since the early 2000s. Sustainability has a huge component – attitude, behavior, and practices. If we put in efforts especially in sustainability, we need to manage it carefully. By managing sustainability it would be very difficult and challenging time. It is like asking people to change the way they live.

The trend of sustainability has been expanded into sustainability management. There is a growing awareness that we need to do our job more effective and efficient. Sustainability management require a major focus in the key role people; economy, social, and environment, in order to make the sustainability happen. Hanging the behavior of the organization, demand a strong leadership quality. Leaders need to be equipped with solid knowledge base, effective communication skills, decision making or judgement.

The United Nation had voted to formally adopt SDGs with 17 goals and 169 sub-target on 25th September 2015 as a guide and inform global policy-making until 2030 (Rai, Brown, and Ruwanpura 2019). In this current study, the researcher will focus at SDG 8 which specifically promoting economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all (Forum et al. 2019). Under this theme, it captures on economic growth and decent work. There are 12 targets listed under SDG8, that include seven percent gross domestic product growth per annum for developed countries, diversification, technological upgrading and innovation, growth of micro enterprises, small enterprises, and medium enterprises however United Nation had forecasted that Target 8.6 that focus on reducing the proportion of youth not in employment, education and training (NEET) should be achieved by 2020 (Forum et al. 2019). Globally, SDG8 has a positive progress; increase in labour productivity and employment opportunities, decrease in informal employment

and labour market inequality, improving financial services access and promote safe and secure working environments to ensure economic growth and sustainability (Forum et al. 2019). Though SDG8 highlighting the importance of labour rights especially for NEET youth, it give some problematic to achieve as argued by Rai, Brown, and Ruwanpura (2019) that decent work and economic is inadequate especially when the target is set to be steadily achieve by 2030.

## 1.1 Issues

Unfortunately 4th quarter 2019, the world had been hit by the pandemic of COVID-19. The emergence of the COVID-19 has led to unprecedented changes to everyone, with profound consequences for physical and mental well-being (Varma et al. 2021). Thus in the beginning of the year 2020, most part of the world are experiencing stress and anxiety due to stay-at-home orders, quarantining, and especially financial distress with almost zero economy activity due to COVID-19 (Varma et al. 2021). These restrictions is to curb the virus from spreading rapidly. It is also have impacted our personal, social and occupational functioning. Almost all industry were severely affected by the pandemic. The world began to learn about the virus and businesses started to forecast and re-strategizing back their business model. In order to survive, there were companies started to do retrenchment, layoff, declare bankruptcy, and reducing their companies' sizes; closing down several outlets, close some of their subsidiaries.

As reported in Department of Statistics Malaysia, there were a dropped of employment in private sector from 236,000 to 8.38 million in second quarter of 2020 (Statistics 2020). With the current situation of the pandemic COVID-19, it is impossible to achieve SDG8 under theme 8.6 to help the youth in NEET population. With the gap of this situation, and business starting to close down, this has give some limitation to reduce the unemployment rate especially in Malaysia. Therefore, this study aim to close the gap to ensure that the situation is not worsen. We need to wake up and realise that with the pandemic, we need to move rapid and robust so we can bridge sustainability to our business model. While some studies have explored youth employment and economic growth in Malaysia, a comprehensive framework tailored specifically to Malaysian youth, in the context of SDG 8, appears to be lacking. This paper aims to bridge this gap by presenting a comprehensive framework, educational initiatives, and employmentstrategies, drawing upon the unique challenges and opportunities faced by Malaysian youth.

In this current study, the research has come up with four research objectives:-

- a) To investigate the determinants of SDG8 on decent work and economic growth of Malaysian Youth during the pandemic of COVID-19

In this current study, the researcher has come up with four research questions:-

- a) How will the Malaysian Youth handling with the SDG8 on decent work and economic growth during the pandemic of COVID-19?

## 1.2 Sustainable Employability

The Confederation of British Industry defined employability as the possession of qualities and competencies by a person whom are highly demanded by employers and customers and by this means support to realize the person desires and potential in work (Abbas and Sagsan 2019). As suggested by (Abbas and Sagsan 2019) in order to sustain employment and efficiently perform in the industry, they concentrate on four dimensions; knowledge, skills, abilities and professional attitude.

### 1.2.1 Knowledge

In Sustainable employability, the first dimension is knowledge. Knowledge is intangible and inimitable asset. Knowledge is used as a competitive instrument by companies that can fully utilize it (Abbas and Sagsan 2019). In this dimension, knowledge has divided into two categories: explicit and tacit knowledge.

### 1.2.2 Skills

## **Hard Skills & Soft Skills**

Skills encompass a spectrum from hard skills, which are technical and job-specific, to soft skills, which are interpersonal and communicative proficiencies.

### **1.2.3 Abilities**

#### **Intellectual Abilities & Physical Abilities**

A person's employability is further influenced by their intellectual and physical abilities. Intellectual abilities encompass cognitive capacities, while physical abilities refer to the physical attributes that contribute to job performance.

### **1.2.4 Professional Attitude**

#### **Reliability, Interpersonal Behavior, Emotional Stability, Ethics and Values, General Attitude**

A professional attitude constitutes a crucial component of employability, encompassing factors such as reliability, interpersonal behavior, emotional stability, ethical values, and general demeanor.

## **1.3 Economic Stress**

Previously, the economic stress had been measured by different scale. As for the current study, the researcher want to look into two dimensions; fear of the economic crisis and perceived non-employability (Giorgi et al. 2020).

### **1.3.1 Fear of Economic Crisis**

### **1.3.2 Perceived of Non-employability**

The assessment of economic stress employed a subjective economic stress scale, embedded within a validated stress questionnaire developed in Italy [20]. Comprising two dimensions—(a) fear of economic crisis, pertaining to employees' perception of the organization's vulnerability to economic downturns, and (b) non-employability, concerning employees' confidence in their competencies for securing alternative employment—the scale employs a 5-point Likert scale for five items per dimension. Recent studies have reported Cronbach's alphas between 0.72 and 0.77 [8,32]. Both dimensions were amalgamated into a single economic stress measure, its mean score indicating perceptions of the severity of economic crisis implications (i.e., higher scores reflecting heightened economic stress).

## **1.4 Individual Resilience**

The concept of individual resilience is explored in alignment with Visser's (2020) work. Individual resilience refers to an individual's capacity to adapt, recover, and thrive in the face of adversity, challenges, and stressors. It reflects the ability to maintain psychological well-being, effectively manage stress, and navigate through life's uncertainties (Fletcher and Sarkar, 2013). Individual resilience, encompassing the interplay of neuroticism, self-efficacy, dispositional mindfulness, and coping strategies, represents a critical factor in one's ability to navigate the complexities of life, including economic stress and employability challenges. As individuals cultivate these attributes and strategies, they enhance their capacity to withstand adversity, adapt to changing circumstances, and emerge stronger from challenges—ultimately contributing to their overall well-being and success.

### **1.4.1 Neuroticism**

Neuroticism is a personality trait characterized by heightened emotional reactivity, anxiety, and a tendency to experience negative emotions more intensely (Costa and McCrae, 1980). In the context of individual resilience, lower levels of neuroticism are associated with better coping mechanisms and adaptability.

Individuals with lower neuroticism scores tend to handle stressors with greater emotional stability, leading to more constructive responses and increased resilience.

### 1.4.2 Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to successfully perform tasks, accomplish goals, and overcome challenges (Bandura, 1997). High self-efficacy individuals are more likely to approach difficulties with a proactive attitude, viewing setbacks as opportunities for growth. This self-belief fosters perseverance, motivation, and a willingness to seek solutions, contributing significantly to an individual's resilience in the face of adversity.

### 1.4.3 Dispositional Mindfulness

Dispositional mindfulness pertains to an individual's inherent inclination to engage in present-moment awareness and non-judgmental acceptance of their experiences (Brown and Ryan, 2003). Mindfulness enables individuals to regulate their emotions and reduce reactivity to stressors. By cultivating an awareness of their thoughts and feelings, individuals can approach challenges with greater equanimity, reducing the negative impact of stress on their overall well-being and enhancing resilience.

### 1.4.4 Coping

Coping encompasses the cognitive and behavioral strategies individuals employ to manage and mitigate stressors (Folkman and Lazarus, 1988). Effective coping strategies can include problem-solving, seeking social support, positive reframing, and engaging in leisure activities. Adaptive coping strategies bolster resilience by helping individuals navigate stressors and maintain psychological equilibrium. In contrast, maladaptive coping strategies, such as avoidance or substance abuse, can hinder resilience and exacerbate stress-related outcomes.

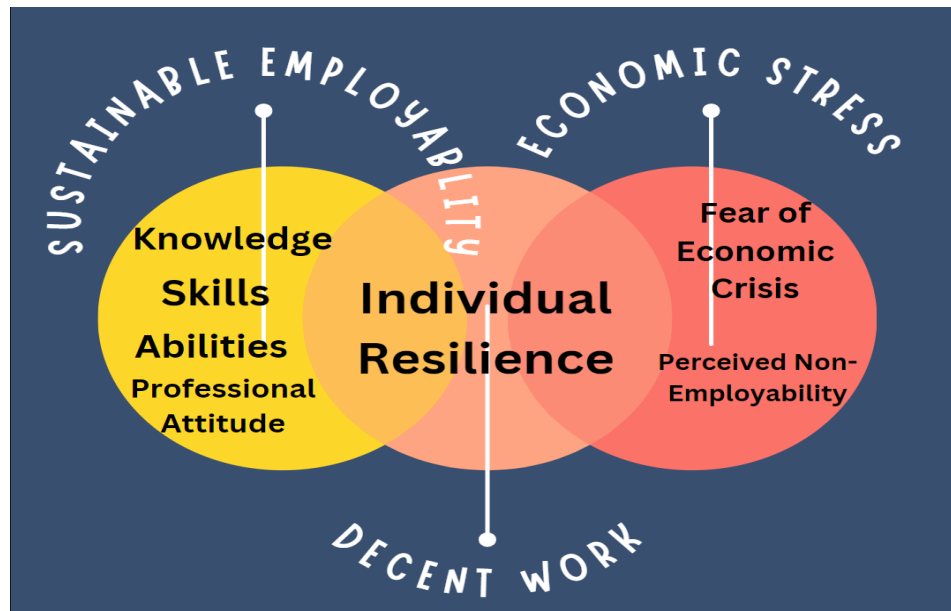


Figure 1: NAM Framework 2023

## METHODOLOGY

The bibliometric analysis conducted using VOSviewer provided a comprehensive visualization of the research landscape in decent work (Figure 2). By mapping the relationships between various research topics, keywords, authors, and publications, valuable insights were gained into the prevailing trends, influential authors, and emerging research themes. The VOSviewer map revealed a network of closely related research topics within the analyzed literature. Clusters of keywords and topics emerged, highlighting areas of

significant research interest. Prominent research themes included skills, ability, attitude, economic crisis, and young unemployment rate.

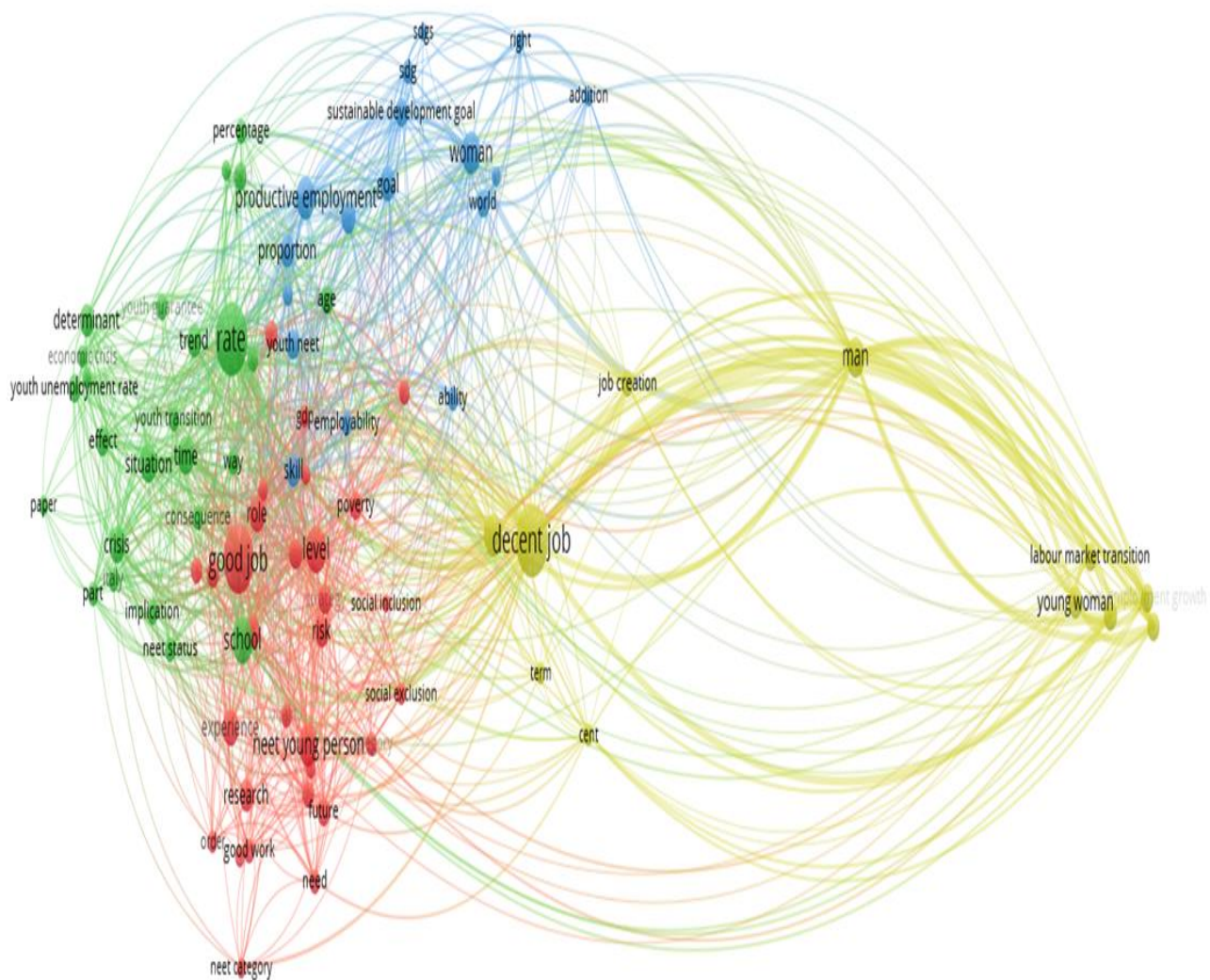


Figure 2: Research Landscape in Decent Work

In this study, we employed bibliometric analysis to investigate the research landscape surrounding Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG8) and 'decent work'. The primary aim was to map and analyze the scope and trends within the existing body of literature in this domain, focusing on the social pillar of sustainability. Bibliometric analysis provides a quantitative approach to understanding the dynamics and impact of scholarly work, enabling us to discern patterns and themes in research related to SDG8 and decent work.

We utilized Harzing's Publish or Perish software, a comprehensive tool for retrieving academic publications from multiple databases. The keywords "SDG8" and "decent work" were used as search parameters to ensure the relevance of the articles to our study objectives. The decision to limit our search results to the first 1,000 papers was strategic, aimed at capturing the most cited and influential papers while maintaining a manageable dataset for in-depth analysis. This limitation helps focus the study on the most relevant and potentially impactful literature, thereby enhancing the quality and specificity of the analysis. The collection process involved meticulous planning to ensure that the dataset was representative of the vast body of literature while aligning with our research focus. We programmed the software to retrieve articles published in English, as this is the predominant language for scholarly communication globally. This approach allowed us to gather a broad spectrum of perspectives on SDG8 and decent work, ensuring a diverse and comprehensive corpus for analysis.

Once the data was collected, we proceeded with its analysis using VOSviewer software, which specializes in constructing and visualizing bibliometric maps. These maps are instrumental in identifying the most prominent and recurring themes within the literature, facilitating an understanding of the evolution of research focus over time. VOSviewer offers various visualization options, including network maps, density maps, and overlay visualizations, each providing different insights into the data. Our initial step in data analysis was to clean and preprocess the dataset. This involved removing irrelevant or overly general keywords that could skew the focus away from the social aspects of SDG8. The exclusion criteria were carefully set to omit common scientific terminologies that did not directly contribute to our research queries. This process was crucial for refining the data and ensuring that subsequent analyses were both relevant and focused on the social sustainability aspects of decent work and economic growth. Further, we standardized the terminology used in the dataset to avoid redundancies and inconsistencies, which are common in large bibliometric datasets. For example, variations of the term "employment" such as "jobs" and "work" were consolidated under a single preferred term. This standardization is essential for accurate mapping and analysis, as it prevents the fragmentation of key concepts and ensures that all relevant articles contribute to the same thematic clusters in the visualization.

Following data cleaning, we used VOSviewer to map the relationships between the keywords. This step is pivotal as it visually represents how various research topics within the field are interconnected. The software's ability to create clusters of related terms helped us identify the central themes that dominate the literature on SDG8 and decent work. Each cluster represented a different facet of the research area, highlighting areas of high activity and emerging trends.

The visualization process also involved adjusting parameters such as the strength of links between keywords, which helped to emphasize more significant relationships and downplay weaker or less relevant connections. The final bibliometric map served not only as a visual summary of the existing research landscape but also as a strategic tool for identifying gaps in the literature. By analyzing the density and centrality of different clusters, we could pinpoint under-researched areas that might offer opportunities for novel research contributions. Through this detailed methodological approach, our study was able to systematically gather, clean, analyze, and visualize a large dataset of literature related to SDG8 and decent work. The bibliometric analysis, facilitated by advanced software tools, provided a structured and comprehensive overview of the field. This approach not only highlighted the evolution of research themes but also identified core areas that warrant further investigation, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities within the realm of sustainable economic growth and decent work.

## RESULT

Examining the distribution of publications over time revealed the temporal evolution of research trends. Notably, the map highlighted emerging research topics that gained momentum during the more recent period of analysis. Additionally, some previously prominent topics seemed to have receded in terms of research attention, potentially indicating a shift in focus. The VOSviewer map unveiled interdisciplinary connections between previously disparate research areas. The overlap between distinct clusters suggested the emergence of multidisciplinary research approaches, indicating the integration of knowledge from various domains.

This network map likely represents a bibliometric analysis, concentrating on themes related to employment. At its core, the red cluster suggests a strong focus on youth employment and job quality. Terms such as "good job" and "young person" are quite prominent, indicating significant research interest in the employment status and job satisfaction among younger demographics. The related terms, including "school," "social inclusion," and "poverty," highlight a nexus between educational attainment, societal participation, and economic wellbeing in the context of youth employment.

Adjacent to this is the green cluster, where the term "decent job" stands out. This cluster points towards a discourse on employment standards and job quality, underscoring discussions around the creation of decent work opportunities as a cornerstone of sustainable development. The analysis implies that there is substantial discussion in the literature about job quality not only as an economic matter but also as a societal goal.

Meanwhile, the yellow cluster featuring terms like "man," "young woman," and "labour market transition" indicates that gender dimensions are being closely examined in the literature. This suggests a nuanced look at the labor market, focusing on the differential experiences of employment transitions faced by young men and women.

Interconnecting lines across clusters reveal a rich interplay between these themes, suggesting that discussions in the literature do not exist in silos but are part of an integrated dialogue about employment, encompassing economic, social, and educational dimensions.

The sizes of nodes such as "good job" reflect the frequency of these terms in the literature, marking them as central to the discourse on employment within the body of research analyzed. The interconnectedness, represented by the lines between terms like "youth unemployment rate" and "employability," underscores a significant focus on how young individuals are faring in terms of securing employment and the factors influencing their employability.

Although a static image cannot reveal the evolution of these themes over time, newer, less connected nodes could potentially indicate emerging areas of interest or nascent fields of inquiry. Conversely, highly connected, larger nodes represent well-established areas of research within the field.

In terms of practical implications, the presence of terms related to policy or strategy suggests that the research is intended to transcend academic discussion and influence actual employment practices and labor policies. The literature seems to aim at bridging the gap between theory and practice, with potential applications in shaping employment initiatives and improving labor market outcomes for youth.

In essence, this map encapsulates a comprehensive exploration of employment-related research, highlighting the multidisciplinary nature of this field as it intertwines economic, social, and educational strands to understand and enhance youth employment.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Achieving Sustainable Development Goal 8 requires a targeted and holistic approach that addresses the unique challenges faced by Malaysian youth. By implementing the proposed framework, Malaysia can work towards providing meaningful and sustainable opportunities for its youth population, contributing to both economic growth and social development. The literature review highlights the global significance of SDG 8 in promoting decent work and economic growth, particularly for youth. It underscores the need for tailored approaches that consider the specific socio-economic context of Malaysia. By building upon existing research and initiatives, the proposed framework in this paper seeks to contribute to a holistic understanding of the challenges and potential solutions for achieving SDG 8's objectives in Malaysia, ultimately fostering sustainable development and prosperity for the nation's youth population. The bibliometric analysis conducted using VOSviewer provides a visual representation of the research landscape within the chosen domain. The map reveals prominent research topics, influential authors, collaboration patterns, and temporal trends. By offering a holistic view of the research field, the analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of the existing knowledge base and paves the way for future research directions.

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