

## Aspirations, Concerns and Psychology of University Students after Graduating Bachelor's Degree

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### Abstract

**Background:** Students after receiving a Bachelor's degree have myriad aspirations. Additionally the most frequent aspirations are further education, full-time employment and part-time employment while studying. Reasons and concerns to achieve these goals differ from student to student.

**Aim of the study:** To investigate the most to least common aspiration among the four aspirations being studied, which are further education, full-time employment, part-time employment while studying, travelling and their reasons and concerns of choosing their aspiration? Firstly, the study aims to find out the most prevailing and least common aspiration within each faculty, and within Malaysians and non-Malaysians. Secondly, discovering whether private or government industries are more favored among the students coupled with their reason is an objective of the study. Further the study is aspiring on unearthing whether students prefer to sustain studies until Master degree or PhD.

**Method:** A cross-sectional study was carried out on Bachelor's degree students in their last two years of study from Malaysia and abroad.

**Results:** Most prevalent aspiration among both Malaysians and non-Malaysians was full-time employment, followed by further education, part-time employment while working and traveling. It was observed that full-time employment along with the scope of further enhancement was the most universal aspiration among all the faculties except arts, social sciences and healthcare. On the other hand, students preferred to work in private industry rather than the government industry as it yields an agile carrier growth. Bountiful students desired to work full-time to cultivate work experience but at the same time were concerned about getting a good job. Most students wanted further education to increase their opportunities in the future, but were concerned about the course fees.

**Conclusion:** The most to least common aspiration chosen by the students fluctuates from faculty to faculty. The most to least common aspirations as stated before were the same for both Malaysians and non-Malaysians. Not to mention, both Malaysians and non-Malaysians choose private over government industry for work and elected to study only until Master degree.

**Keywords:** Aspiration; Employment; Higher education; Faculties; Faculty; Bachelor's degree

### Introduction

University graduates with a bachelor's degree have a variety of aspirations. Some like to start employment right away while others like to study further or go off travelling [1]. In this study, I will find out the different aspirations of bachelor's degree students and the most common aspiration among all along with the concerns they may encounter.

Every student has their own particular reason for choosing an aspiration. However, at the same time, they would have their concerns regarding that particular aspiration. For example, if someone chooses further studies after getting their bachelor's degree, it would be easy for them to get jobs in the future, however at the same time; they may have financial concerns [2].

For those that choose to start working after they graduate, they would either choose to work in the government or a private company. This study would also find out whether working for the government or private companies is more common and their reasons for selecting that particular institution.

Some people do not choose to study or work after they graduate. There are many people who like to go travelling to different countries and experience different cultures before they start working or studying. Moreover, there are others who like to work and study at the same time.

Those people who choose this particular pathway will get to experience, student life, family life, and working life at the same time. Having goals in your life is very important and almost everyone has goals that they want to achieve. However, with goals come the barriers that prevent you from reaching that target and so when choosing a goal, it is important to think deeply about all aspects of life in order to choose the best path to follow.

### Literature Review

A bachelor's degree is an undergraduate degree awarded by a university after the completion of a 3 or 4 year course. This degree includes courses that teach liberal arts such as communication, music, and theoretical knowledge such as engineering and information technology. Today, a bachelors' degree is essential for any carrier

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advancement [3,4]. The reason for attending university is to acquire the educational background that is required to meet their goals in life. After university, the graduates may either want to study further, work part time while studying, get a job or go on travelling [1]. However, the graduates have a lot of concerns that hinder them from achieving their goals.

To find out the most common aspiration of university graduates, 11421 questioners were sent via email to May 2014 graduates of University Registrar, USA on two occasions, once following graduation and then again 3 months later. Only 3682 answers were feasible. The survey showed that 68% of the students wanted to find work, 24% to obtain further studies and 8% chose other. Moreover, the employment of the graduates showed that 58% were working full time, while 42% were still seeking an employment.

Under others, there were the options of choosing to travel, choosing to spend time supporting other people, or working as an intern [5]. Most common aspiration shown by many studies is full-time employment followed by further studies [6]. This is true for Malaysians as well, Proven by the 2015 "Graduate tracer study", which showed that 53% with undergraduate degrees wanted to start working, while 18% wanted to peruse further education. It also showed that 24% were still unemployed six months after graduation [7].

Among aspirations, the most common are full time employment, further studying, part-time employment and travelling as shown by many studies.

The aspiration chosen by students depends on which subject the student is studying and hence, differs by faculties. The "Destinations of leavers of higher education survey", carried out six months after graduation with 248,525 respondents, provided information on what UK 2015/1016 graduates wanted to do after graduation. For fine arts, 38.3% wanted to work full time, 26.4% wanted to work part-time, 14.9% wanted to study further, and 5.7% wanted to work while studying.

The other percentages are for working overseas and unemployment [8]. When it comes to architecture and building, 70.8% of the students wanted to work full-time, 7.5% wanted to study further, 6.3% wanted to work part-time, and 4.7% wanted to work while studying. The results for engineering students were similar [8]. 59.4% of students studying finance and accountancy, a part of business course wanted to work full time, 11% wanted to work while studying, 8.7% wanted to work part-time and 8.6% wanted to further study [8]. Most of the hospitality, leisure and tourism students, wanted to work full time with 62.9% selecting this option, 12.5% wanted to work part-time, 7.2% wanted to study further, and 3.1% wanted to work and study [8].

A study carried out among 500 undergraduate medical students of JLN Medical College, Ajmer, India during November 2015 showed that 88% of the students wanted to peruse post-graduate studies [9]. Some graduates, right after university decides to take up further education without any delay. Further education is the most common aspiration among university graduates second to employment [5].

When it comes to further education, the bachelor degree graduates could either start working right away after graduation, or they could go on to study Master's degree or PhD. Some people take on further studies to increase their opportunities in life or to meet the criteria to work in a specific job. However, there are other reasons as well, like interest in the subject or it may be because of his/her friends taking up this aspiration [10].

The relation between unemployment rate and education was shown

by U.S Labor statistics of 2016. The data showed that as the level of education increase, unemployment rate decrease. The unemployment rate for bachelor's degree is 2.7%, while for masters and doctorial it is 2.4% and 1.6% respectively [11].

Although further education is very beneficial for ones future, they're many reasons why people cannot have this as an option. The barriers of going for further education were shown by a research carried out in Ireland. In this survey, 44% choose not to go university because they wanted a job, while 28% was because of financial constraints and 19% because of lack of interest [12]. If one does not choose to study further, they could go for full time employment. They could either seek employment from the government or a private industry, according to what they believe is the better choice.

In Malaysia, it is believed that the government workers have better working hours as the time is fixed, but private companies require their employees to work for longer hours. Moreover, government offers guaranteed benefits like paid healthcare, scholarships, loans, and higher pay for top-level workers. However, private institutions has a quicker hiring process, allows faster carrier growth, provides a higher starting salary and is overall more satisfactory to work in [13,14].

There are many reasons why people start working after graduation without going for further studies. These could include having no funds to pay for the course, to gain work experience, further education not being necessary for the dream job and having family responsibilities [15].

A nationally representative Pew Research Centre Survey from the U.S. Census Bureau carried out in 2002 on adults showed the importance of work experience when finding jobs. Pew Research asked college graduates whether they could have had better prepared for the type of job they wanted by gaining more experience, studying harder and beginning their search earlier. 50% selected gaining work experience, 38% studying harder, 30% looking for work sooner and 29% choosing a different major [16].

Although one might have their reasons for picking employment over further education, people have a lot of concerns over choosing this pathway. There are a lot of people who find it very hard to get good jobs without further studying and there are people who think that it would be hard for them to get back to studies once they start working.

Some graduates, instead of working full time at a job, prefer to study while working. The department of statistics in Malaysia showed that the education service in 2014 had 89.5% of people working as full time employees and 6.8% working as part-time employees [17].

Some reasons why people like to study while working would be to increase job skills, to pay the course and to enjoy student life while working. However, people have difficulty in fully committing to the course when studying part time. Some people also have less time for family life as a result of working and studying simultaneously [18,19]. Travelling is also a popular aspiration among university graduates. Some people like to travel simply to clear their minds after vigorous studying and to think about what to do next in life. Others like to travel to learn more about other cultures and to improve their resume [20,21].

Despite all the reasons to travel, some people are concerned about travelling due to cost and the delay in starting work and study. Moreover, some are concerned that they will lose momentum in studies [20,22]. There are many routes one can take after getting their bachelor's degree. Nevertheless, each one of those routes has their own advantages and drawbacks.

## Methodology

A cross-sectional study was conducted among bachelor's university students in their last two years from the universities of Malaysia and other countries. The data was collected on the aspirations and concerns of students after acquiring bachelor's degree.

The target population was the students of bachelor's degree in their last two years from Malaysia and abroad. The formulated questionnaire of 23 questions was posted as a Google document and the responses were recorded. Section A consisted of question asking about the reasons and concerns of choosing further education as their aspiration. Section B had questions asking about the reasons and concerns for choosing full time employment. Section C and D was about reasons and concerns of choosing part time work and travelling respectively.

The questionnaire was distributed online through Facebook, WhatsApp.

The participants were informed that this survey was done as part of the research block of Taylors University MBBS program. Furthermore, the participants were ensured that the data collected would be kept confidential. The data collected was used to make Tables, pie, charts and graphs using Microsoft Excel and was analyzed by using SPSS software version 20. Chi-square test was used for data analysis and to relate association of different variables.

## Result and Discussions

The online questionnaire was circulated to 149 students. Out of the responses received, 120 were complete indicating a response rate of 80.5%. The information received was summarized in the form of Tables, graphs and pie charts. The number of students in each faculty of study (Table 1).

The difference in the number of Malaysians (54%) and non-Malaysians (46%) who participated in the study was with the difference being 16 (Table 2).

In every faculty, most of the students selected full time employment as their aspiration except for Faculty of Health/ Medical Sciences in which the most number of students selected further education as their aspiration (40%) with full time employment scored second and Faculty of Arts/Social Sciences in which both full time employment (36%) and further education were equal (36%).

This agrees with the literature review except that for Faculty of Arts/Social Sciences, the number of students who wanted to undergo full time employment was much higher than those who wanted to undergo further education.

Further education came in second for Faculty of Hospitality/ Food/Leisure and Faculty of Business/Law, while part-time work while studying came in second for Faculty of Built Environment/ Engineering/Technology/Design, with further education only coming third.

This does not agree with the research review except for Faculty of Hospitality/Food/Leisure. In Faculty of Business/Law part-time work while studying came in second, and in Faculty of Built Environment/ Engineering/Technology/Design the second and third places were switched.

For Faculty of Arts/Social Sciences, Faculty of Business/Law and Faculty of Health/ Medical Sciences, working part-time while studying came third. For Faculty of Built Environment/Engineering/

Technology/Design, working part-time while studying came second, and no amount of participants in Faculty of Hospitality/Food/Leisure selected this option. This contradicts the literature review except for Faculty of Arts/Social Sciences (Figure 1).

No students in Faculty of Arts/Social Sciences wanted to go travelling; while some students from other faculties did choose this aspiration. The data shows a variation of aspirations among each faculty.

The students were provided with 5 aspirations to choose from. Among Malaysians, full time employment (39) was the most common aspiration by a significant amount followed by further education (14), part-time employment while studying (10) and travelling (7). Research review showed that most Malaysians wanted to do full time employment the most, followed by further education, hence agreeing with the findings [7].

For non-Malaysians, both further education (19) and full-time employment (20) were significantly greater than the other's with the former having 1 student more than the latter. Part-time employment (10) was half the number of the other two with travelling (3) being the least in number (Figures 2 and 3). The order of aspiration from most

Faculty	Percentage of students in each Faculty
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences	10%
Faculty of Built Environment, Engineering, Technology, and Design	24%
Faculty of Business and Law	16%
Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences	33%
Faculty of Hospitality, Food, and Leisure	17%

Table 1: Percentage of students in each faculty.

Malaysians	Non-Malaysians
54%	46%

Table 2: Percentage of Malaysians and non-Malaysians participated.

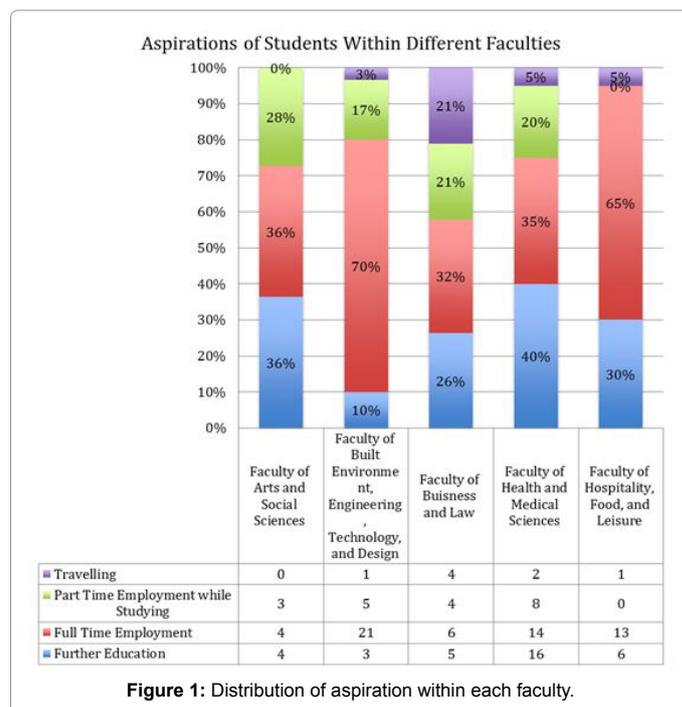


Figure 1: Distribution of aspiration within each faculty.

to least common is the same as that of the research review except for the fact that in the review, percentage of those who picked full time employment was much higher than that of further education [5].

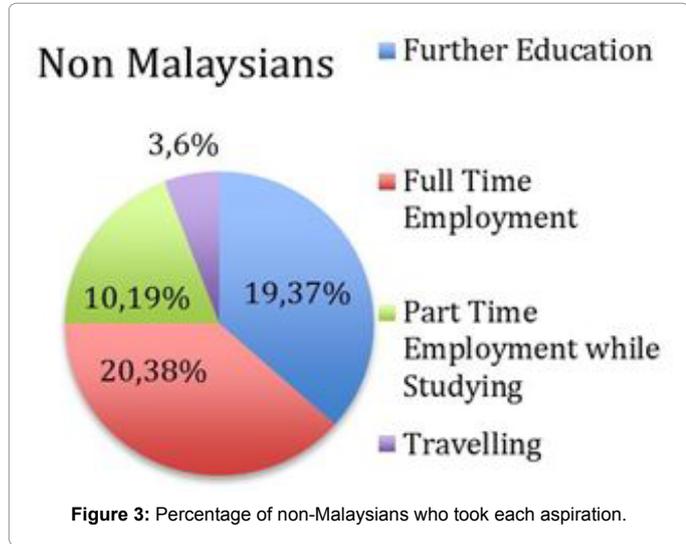
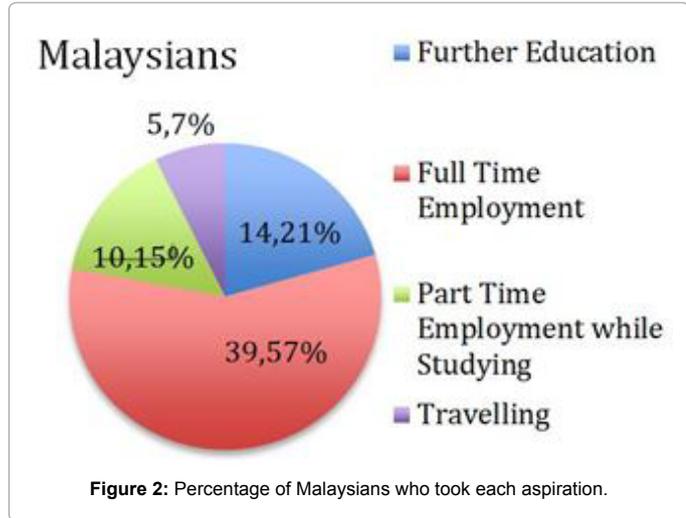
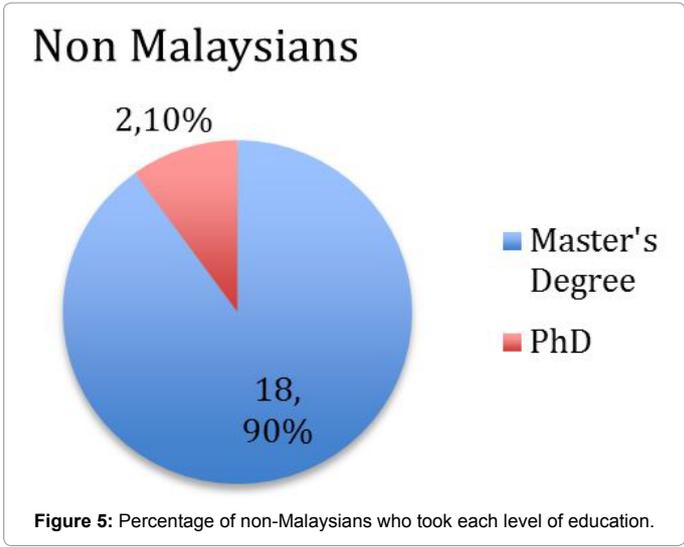
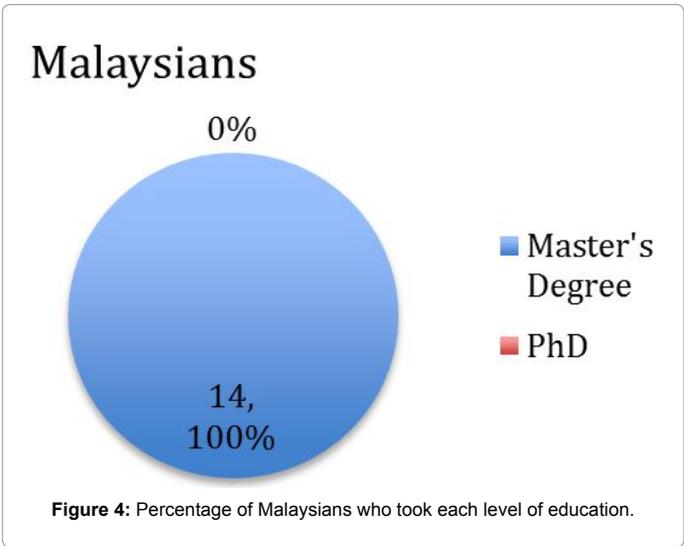
### Further Education

Out of the 120 usable responses, a total of 34 participants selected further education as their aspiration. The preferred levels of education they wanted to receive and their reasons and concerns of undergoing further education are given below (Figure 4).

All Malaysian's choose Master's degree (14) as their preferred level of education, while none of them chose PhD.

90% of the non-Malaysians choose Master's degree (18), while PhD (2) was only chosen by 10% of the people (Figure 5).

The reason why most students wanted to undergo further education after completing their Bachelors' degree was to increase their opportunities and options (16), as higher the level of education, the more opportunities they would get. The research review shows that as the level the education increase, the employment rate decrease [11]. Interest in the subject (11) was the second most common reason why they chose further education. However, some needed to undergo



further education to reach the criteria of the job they want to do (7), as some jobs require a specific level of education to be met (Figure 6). No student wanted to study as a result of getting influenced by his or her friends (0).

The greatest concern among the students who selected further education was their course being too expensive (15). The second greatest concern among the participants was the fact that some students have personal/family responsibilities (9), which might get in the way of their studies.

Furthermore, there were some who worry that studying further would be too much hard work (7) as the courses gets harder as you go from Bachelor's to PhD. Some participants simply lack confidence (3) although they want to study more. One participant selected 'Other' (1) as she had no concerns (Figure 7).

### Full time employment

Out of 120 responses, 58 participants selected full time employment as their aspiration. Following is their distribution among private and government industries, their reasons for selecting each industry and reasons and concerns for full time employment after graduation.

From the Figure 8, 80% of the participants wanted to work in a private industry (47). Only 20% wanted to work in the government industry (11).

From Figure 9, a total of 11 students, most students wanted to work in the government because they provide more benefits (4) and a more Table job (3). Some people like the government more because they have better working hours (2). Only one person took the option that there is better pay for higher-level workers and only person took the option "others". The reason given by the participant who chose others was, "to help financially less capable people", as some government jobs revolves around helping poor people.

Within the 47 students who choose to work in the private industry, faster carrier growth (14), was the most common option, followed by better starting salary (12). Private jobs are known to have better starting salaries when compared to government jobs in which the salaries increase with experience and more time in the job. Quicker hiring process (8) and higher job satisfaction (8) each was selected by the same amount of people. Only 5 people chose others (Figure 10). Reasons given by those who selected others were, "I want to find a job that lines up with my value system", "to acquire chances to work in overseas branches", "family business", and "better tech stacks".

More than half of the students selected gaining work experience (44) as their reason for picking full time employment. This is because it is easier to find jobs when you have work experience. This was

Private and Government industry

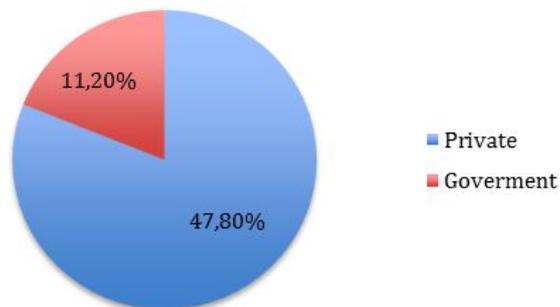


Figure 8: Percentage of students who wants to work in government and private industries.

Percentage of Students in each catagory

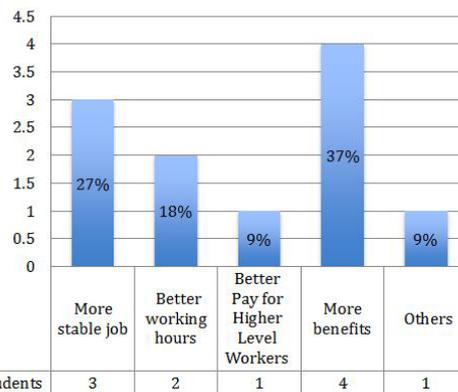


Figure 9: Reasons to work in the government industry.

Percentage of Students in each catagory

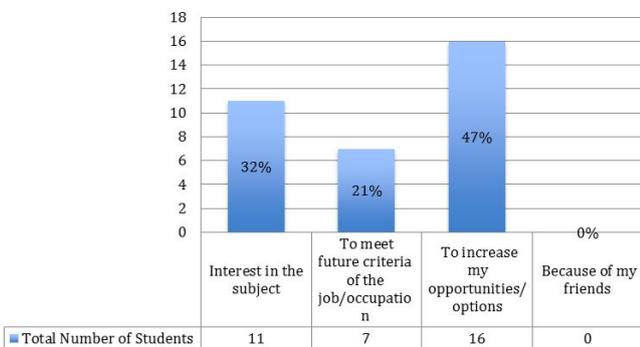


Figure 6: Reasons to undergo further education.

Percentage of Students in each catagory

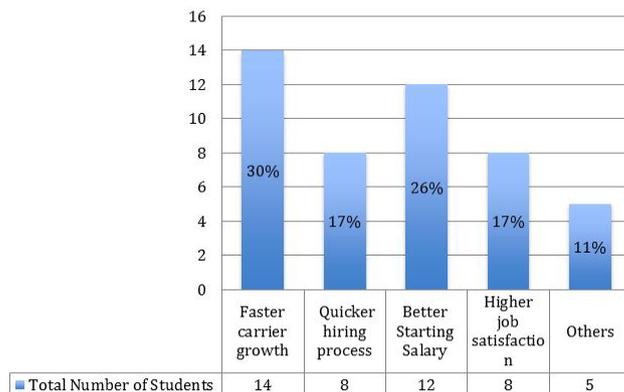


Figure 10: Reasons to work in the private industry.

Percentage of Students in each catagory

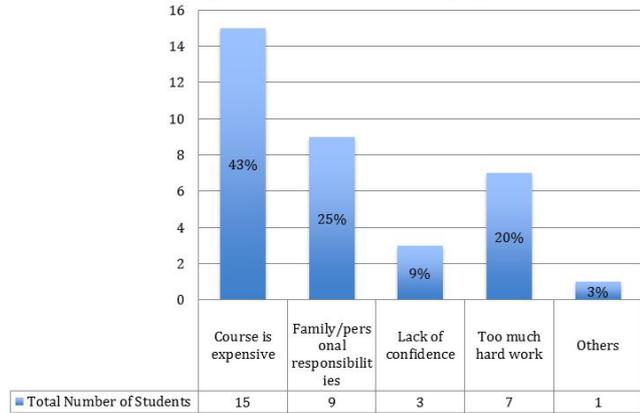


Figure 7: Concerns of continuing education.

proven in the literature review [16]. The other reasons were selected by significantly lower number of students, with family responsibilities having been picked by 7 participants and further education not being required by 5 participants. Furthermore, 1 person chose no funds to study further and 1 person chose others (Figure 11). The reason given by the student who picked others was "to gain financial stability".

Students who wanted to get a full time job after graduation were most concerned about the inability to get a better job (22) as it would be hard to get a job with just a Bachelor's degree without any work experience. A lot of students selected that getting back to studies will be difficult (18) if they start working right away as they plan on continuing their education after working for a while. Some of the students were concerned about the delay in finishing their future higher degrees (10) if they work instead of continuing their studies. 1 student picked the option that he or she would feel left out when friends go to university. 7 students picked others (Figure 12). The reasons given by these students are, "I may not feel ready", "no more breaks", "not enough experience to be employed" and "no concern".

### Part time work while studying

Out of the 120 responses, 20 participants selected working while studying as their aspiration. Their reasons and concerns of selecting this option are given below (Figure 13).

Most of the students chose part-time work while studying to increase their job skills (13) as studying would increase their knowledge on a specific subject and their ability to carry out an activity more effectively during work. Some participants simply wanted to study while working to enjoy student life (6) and these students were half of those who selected the first option. 1 student wanted to pay the course fees (Figure 14).

Among the participants who selected part-time work while studying, most people were concerned about not being able to give complete commitment to studies (11) and having less time for family life because of both studies and work (8). Some were also concerned because the course will take longer to be completed if they did work while studying (1). No students selected the option, "all courses not accepting part-time students".

### Travelling

Out of 120 participants, 8 respondents selected travelling as their future aspiration. Following are their reasons and concerns of selecting travelling (Figure 15). Most of the students wanted to travel to learn more about other cultures (3), which would help them to deal with people of different backgrounds that they may encounter at work. Some people wanted to travel to relax their mind (2) and to discover what to do next in life (2). 1 person chose to travel to impress employers by gaining real life experiences.

Among the participants who wanted to travel after graduation, most number of people was concerned about the cost of travelling (3),

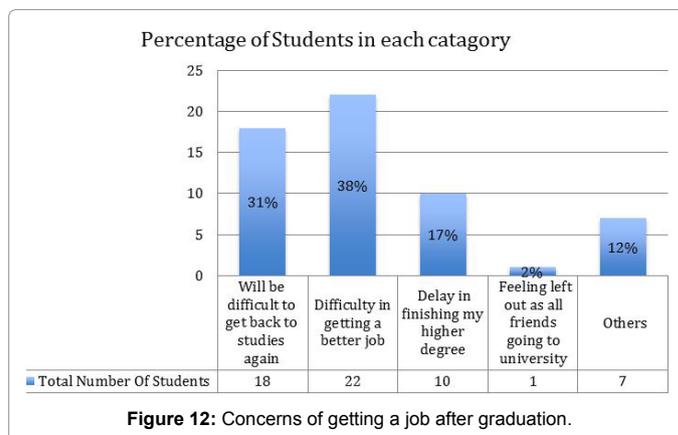


Figure 12: Concerns of getting a job after graduation.

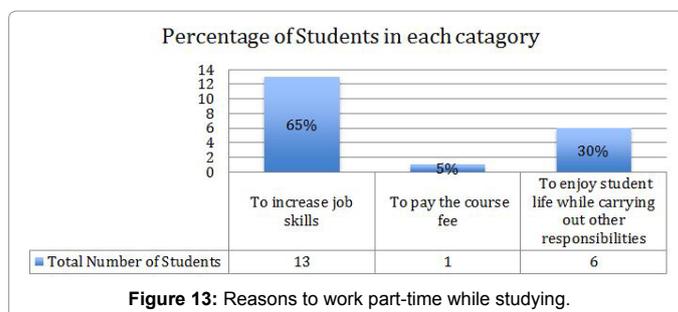


Figure 13: Reasons to work part-time while studying.

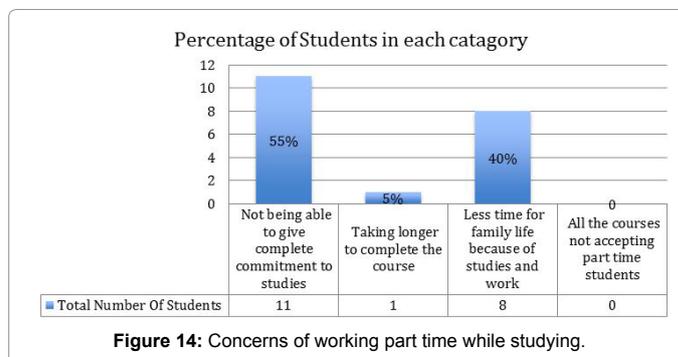


Figure 14: Concerns of working part time while studying.

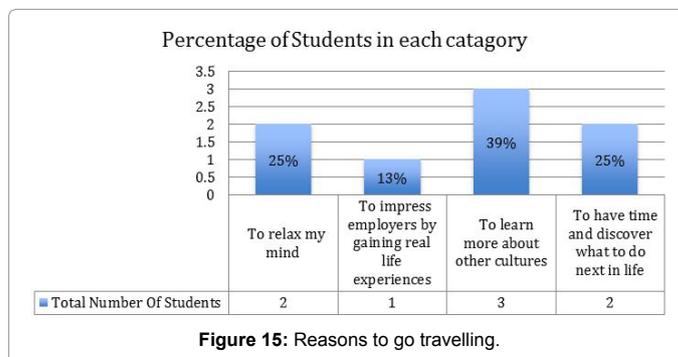


Figure 15: Reasons to go travelling.

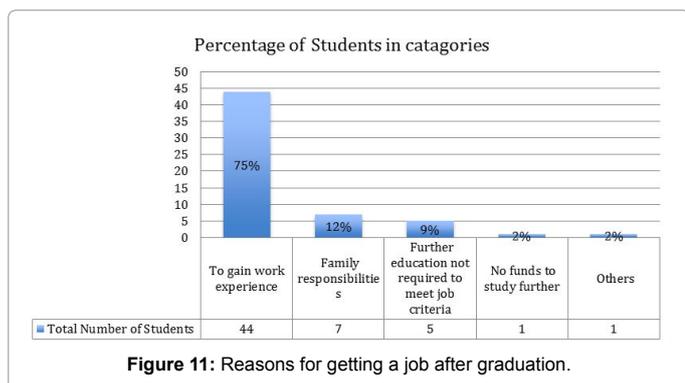


Figure 11: Reasons for getting a job after graduation.

and the delay it would cause in starting work/studies (3). Some were concerned about losing momentum in studies (2) if they stop for a long time and focus on other things. No participants were concerned about acquiring diseases or death if they travel (Figure 16).

## Chi-square Test Results

### Chi-square Test on the association between the faculty of study and aspiration

Pearson's Chi Square test done to prove whether there is a significant association between the faculty of study and aspiration showed a p-value (0.036) less than 0.05, therefore, there is a significant association between the faculty of study and the aspiration (Tables 3-5).

### Chi-square test on the association between the Malaysians/ Non-Malaysians and aspiration

Pearson's Chi Square test done to find out if there is an association between Malaysians/non-Malaysians and aspiration showed that the p-value obtained (0.212) was greater than 0.05, therefore, there is no significant association between Malaysians/non-Malaysians and the aspiration they choose (Tables 6-8).

### Chi-square test on the association between the Malaysians/ Non-Malaysians and levels of education

Pearson's Chi Square test done to find out if there is an association between Malaysians/non-Malaysians and the level of education showed a p-value (0.376) greater than 0.05, therefore, there is no significant association between Malaysians/non-Malaysians and the level of education they may choose (Tables 9-11).

### Limitations

Time constrains did not allow a bigger sample size to be taken, which would have improved the significance of the study and permitted the comparison of reasons and concerns of selecting each aspiration between faculties. Some participants completed the whole questionnaire instead of the one section they needed to do and these respondents were not included in the study. The sample size would have been bigger if all participants did the questionnaire correctly.

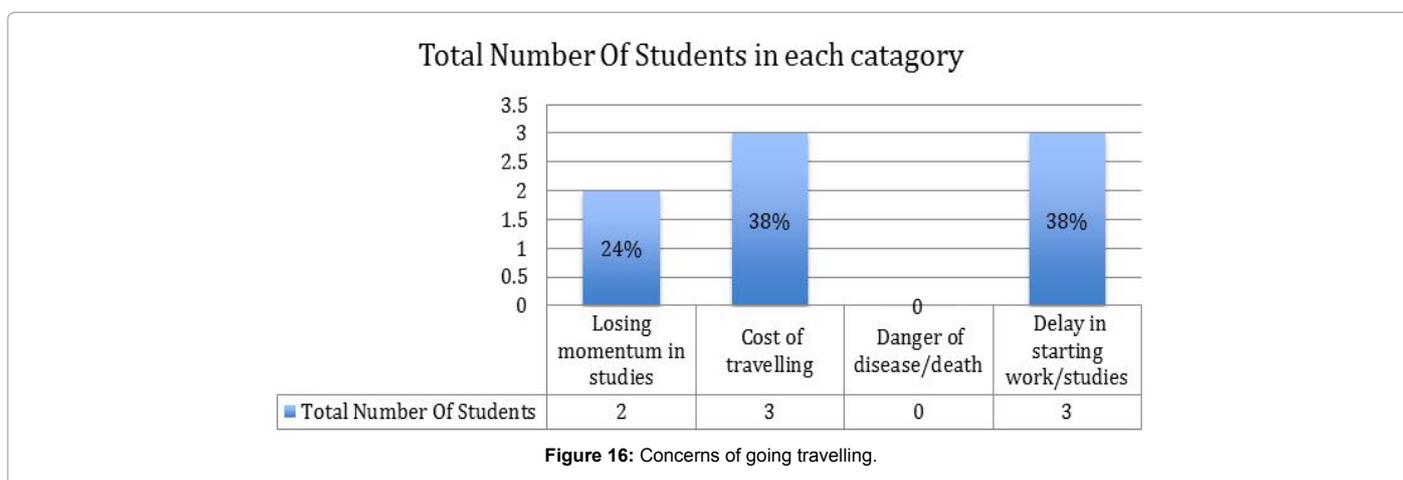


Figure 16: Concerns of going travelling.

Faculty × Aspiration Cross Tabulation						
		Aspiration				Total
		Further Education	Full-Time Employment	Part-Time Employment while Studying	Travelling	
Faculty	Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences	4	5	3	0	12
	Faculty of Built Environment, Engineering, Technology, and Design	3	20	5	1	29
	Faculty of Business and Law	5	7	4	4	20
	Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences	16	14	8	2	40
	Faculty of Hospitality, Food, and Leisure	6	12	0	1	19
Total		34	58	20	8	120

Table 3: The association between faculty of study and aspiration.

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	22.103 <sup>a</sup>	12	0.036
Likelihood Ratio	24.933	12	0.015
N of Valid Cases	120	-	-

10 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5.  
The minimum expected count is 0.80.

Table 4: Chi-square test on the association between faculty of study and aspiration.

Tested on Faculty and Aspiration	P Value	Significance
	0.036<0.05	Significant

Table 5: Summary of the test results.

Person is Malaysian or Non-Malaysian × Aspiration Cross Tabulation						
		Aspiration				Total
		Further Education	Full-Time Employment	Part-Time Employment while Studying	Travelling	
Person	Malaysian	15	38	10	5	68
	Non-Malaysian	19	20	10	3	52
Total		34	58	20	8	120

Table 6: Malaysians and Non-Malaysians associated with Aspiration.

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.504 <sup>a</sup>	3	0.212
Likelihood Ratio	4.517	3	0.211
N of Valid Cases	120	-	-

2 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.47.

Table 7: Chi-Square test between Malaysians/non-Malaysians and Aspiration.

Tested on Malaysians/Non-Malaysians and Aspiration	P Value	Significance
	0.212>0.05	Not Significant

Table 8: Summary of the test results.

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.106 <sup>a</sup>	3	0.376
Likelihood Ratio	3.09	3	0.378
N of Valid Cases	120	-	-

2 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 0.87.

Table 9: Chi-Square test on association between Malaysians/non-Malaysians and level of education.

Person is Malaysian or Non-Malaysian × Level of Education Cross Tabulation						
		Level of Education				Total
		Non	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	PhD	
Person	Malaysian	53	1	9	5	68
	Non-Malaysian	33	1	11	7	52
Total		86	2	20	12	120

Table 10: Malaysians and non-Malaysians associated with levels of education.

Tested on Malaysians/Non-Malaysians and Level of education	P Value	Significance
	0.376>0.05	Not Significant

Table 11: Summary of the test results.

The study would have been more reliable if all the participants were senior students in their last year of study, however, the sample size would not have been valid if the study was done this way, due to the limited time period allocated.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, greater number of students preferred full-time work after they graduate with a Bachelor's degree. In a similar light, large number of graduates plans to sustain further education after they graduate. In comparison, the sum of students who wanted to work part-time while studying was very less, and the number of students who wanted to go travelling was even lesser. There is a positive association between the course of study and the aspiration of the student. Likewise, majority of the students from arts, social sciences and healthcare wanted further studies after acquiring Bachelor's degree, in contrast to students from rest of the courses who wished to work full time following Bachelor's degree.

For both Malaysians and non-Malaysians, the arrangement of most to least common aspiration is the same. Identically, private industry was more favoured over government industry while Master's degree was preferred over PhD.

For the most part, every student had a reason why they chose the particular aspiration and, almost every student had a concern that made them uncertain about their aspiration.

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