THE SELF-ASSESSMENT OF HOSPITALITY EMPLOYMENT SKILLS AMONG
VOCATIONAL STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Malaysia needs high skilled workforce to support growth of the industry. With dynamically changing job market and progressive technological change, employees are expected to keep abreast of global economics. In the process of achieving the status of developed nation by the year 2020, Malaysia needs to restructure its workforce to ensure that middle level workers are highly skilled. Current job environment demands multi-task and skills. Thus, university graduates must be prepared to meet the demand especially in the hospitality industry. The purpose of this study is to identify the hospitality employability skills consist of fifteen elements of employability skills among vocational students in Malaysia. The objective of this study is to identify the level of hospitality employability skills among vocational students. This study also analyzed whether there are significant differences in the competency level of vocational students by gender. The research also identifies the differences of hospitality employability skills by location (rural and urban), examines the determinants of hospitality employability skills among bakery and culinary students separately, identifies differences between perceived importance and competency gained in employability skills among bakery and culinary students and examines the skills that are needed by students for entering the hospitality profession. This research applied quantitative and qualitative methodology. The respondents consist of final year students in bakery and culinary programme. Stratified sampling was used to select students in hospitality programs from 22 vocational colleges in Malaysia. Questionnaires were distributed to eight hundred forty one students in five regions in Malaysia. Interview was also conducted with ten vocational students in central region, Malaysia. Descriptive and inferential statistics such as T- test and multiple regression analysis were used to analyse the quantitative data. The results showed that the level of hospitality employability skills among vocational students in Malaysia were at high level of competent and importance (93.2%). Findings also revealed that male students are more competent in hospitality employability skills compared to female students in vocational colleges. The result also provided evidence that rural students are more competent in hospitality employability skills compared to urban students in vocational colleges. The result found that the competence gained by bakery students in terms of employability skills is lower than the importance perceived by those students. The findings also showed that the competence gained by culinary students in terms of employability skills is lower than the importance perceived by those students.

PENGUASAAN KEMAHIRAN KEBOLEHKERJAAN HOSPITALITI DI KALANGAN PELAJAR VOKASIONAL

ABSTRAK

Malaysia memerlukan tenaga kerja berkemahiran tinggi untuk membantu pertumbuhan industri. Kekerapan perubahan yang mendadak di pasaran kerja dan juga perubahan teknologi, menyebabkan pengeluaran tenaga kerja yang akan datang diharapkan dapat seiring dengan kehendak pasaran ekonomi antarabangsa. Sehubungan itu, Malaysia perlu menstruktur semula pengurusan tenaga kerja, agar menghasilkan kumpulan pekerja peringkat pertengahan yang berkemahiran tinggi, seiring dengan matlamat negara pada tahun 2020. Dewasa ini, persekitaran kerja menuntut pelbagai tugas dan kemahiran, graduan univesiti perlu bersedia untuk memenuhi permintaan industri terutamanya di bidang industri hospitaliti. Tujuan kajian ini dijalankan untuk mengkaji penguasaan kemahiran kebolehkerjaan hospitaliti yang terdiri daripada lima belas kemahiran kebolehkerjaan dalam kalangan pelajar kolej vokasional di Malaysia. Secara terperinci, kajian ini menganalisis tahap kemahiran kerjaya hospitaliti dalam kalangan pelajar vokasional, mengenal pasti sama ada wujud perbezaan dalam kalangan pelajar kolej vokasional mengikut jantina, mengenalpasti perbezaan kemahiran kebolehkerjaan hospitaliti dikalangan pelajar kolej vokasional di kawasan bandar dan luar bandar, menguji kecenderungan kemahiran kebolehkerjaan hospitaliti dikalangan pelajar vokasional kursus bidang bakeri, menguji kecenderungan kemahiran kebolehkerjaan hospitaliti dikalangan pelajar vokasional kursus bidang kulinari, mengenal pasti perbezaan di antara kepentingan dan kompentensi kemahiran kebolehkerjaan hospitaliti dikalangan pelajar kursus bidang bakeri, mengenalpasti perbezaan di antara kepentingan dan kompentensi kemahiran kebolehkerjaan hospitaliti dalam kalangan pelajar kursus bidang kulinari, mengenalpasti kemahiran kebolehkerjaan dalam kalangan pelajar kursus hospitaliti, dan mengenalpasti kemahiran-kemahiran yang diperlukan oleh para pelajar untuk memasuki bidang hospitaliti. Kajian ini mengaplikasikan kaedah kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Kaedah sampel rawak bersrata (stratified) juga digunakan dalam kajian ini iaitu memilih pelajar dalam bidang hospitaliti dari kolej vokasional di Malaysia. Sampel yang dipilih adalah dari kumpulan pelajar tahun akhir kolej vokasional dalam kursus kulinari dan bakeri. Borang soal selidik telah diedarkan kepada 841 orang pelajar di lima zon di Malaysia. Temubual juga dijalankan ke atas 10 orang pelajar vokasional di zon tengah Malaysia. Kajian yang dijalankan ini adalah berbentuk statistik diskriptif dan inferens contohnya Ujian T dan Analisis Regresi Berganda untuk kajian diskriptik. Hasil dapatan kajian menuujukkan tahap kompentensi dan kepentingan kemahiran kebolehkerjaan hospitaliti dalam kalangan pelajar vokasional di Malaysia adalah tinggi sebanyak 93.2%. Dapatan yang diperolehi menunjukkan bahawa pelajar lelaki adalah lebih kompeten dalam kemahiran kebolehkerjaan hospitaliti berbanding pelajar perempuan di kolej-kolej vokasional. Hasil dapatan kajian ini juga memberikan bukti bahawa pelajar luar bandar lebih kompeten dalam kemahiran kebolehkerjaan hospitaliti berbanding pelajar bandar di kolej-kolej vokasional. Selain itu, hasil dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa pelajar kursus bakeri mempunyai jumlah kompentensi kemahiran kebolehkerjaan yang rendah berbanding jumlah kepentingan yang diperolehi oleh semua pelajar. Selain itu, hasil dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa pelajar kursus kulinari juga, mempunyai jumlah

kompentensi kemahiran kebolehkerjaan yang rendah berbanding jumlah kepentingan yang diperolehi oleh semua pelajar.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF APPENDICES

Chapter 1 Introduction

Overview

This chapter introduces the background of the study. The problem statement is highlighted together with the research objectives and research questions. The theoretical framework and the significance of the study are also presented in this chapter. Malaysia needs a high skilled workforce to support the growth of the industry. With dynamically changing job market and progressive technological change, employees are expected to keep abreast of global economics.

In the process of achieving the status of a developed nation by the year 2020, Malaysia needs to restructure its workforce to ensure that middle-level workers are highly skilled. Malaysian future workforce has to be able to cope with the changing nature and demands of works. Future workforce needs to acquire the employability skills required by all industries. Vocational and technical education can play a major role in providing the future workforce with employability skills. The Government would like more students to pursue education in technical and vocational training and be trained and qualified. This field now comprises only 25 percent of the workforce (Eleventh Malaysian Plan, 2016 – 2020). This Plan aims to boost this workforce to 35 percent, at par with academic and professional graduates.

Entering the 21st century, many important changes take place in the society's social life. This is the result of the changes, development, and sophistication of technology from previous times. Information and communications technology have been playing an important role in promoting products to the world market and it, in turn, improves the efficiency of economy. Globalization also speeds up growth of technology and brings changes at work to give impact to skills of individuals. It is anticipated that more works are likely to be generated in areas of information

processes, usage of computers and control systems. The new generation of works requires highly skilled workforce to use new technologies. Works in present times are characterized as change in production, from any amount of high-value production; an increase of workforce emulation; management of information; and extensive restructuring.

According to the U. S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (2011) and results of Gallup polls (Clifton, 2011), several interesting changes are occurring in the 21st-century workforce. For the first time in our history, the fastest growing segment of the workforce is people of color. The number of women in the workforce is also rising steadily. Secondly, the members of the workforce are working longer into their lives. While more people of color and more women are working than ever before and people are working longer into their lives, growth in the labor force has actually decreased each decade since the 1970's. The average length of time spent with a single employer is decreasing. This equates to more careers in a worker's lifetime than ever before.

For the first time in polling history, people report that, first and foremost, the most important thing in their lives is to have a quality job, one with a steady paycheck and regular working hours totally thirty or more hours per week. Additionally, because the Baby Boomer generation is aging, the labor force is steadily growing older. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projected that from 2006 to 2016, the number of workers ages 55 to 64 will increase by 36.5% while the number of workers who are 65 and older will increase by 81%. Aging of the workforce was echoed by the North Iowa Corridor Economic Development Corporation (2011). When local businesses were asked about how many employees do have in each of the following age ranges. Three areas showed change between 2010 and 2011.

There were decreases in the number of employees in the 19-29 and 30-39 age ranges and growth in the 60-65 age range. All other age ranges remained stable. Because more people of color and more women are joining the workforce workers are working longer, and workers are changing jobs more often, we have a workforce that needs career development for new workers and recurring career development throughout a worker's lifetime.

The on-going changes at the workplace, the work itself and the development of advanced technology surely will require workforce to have advance knowledge in the areas of works, high skills, and positive attitudes. The advancement of new technologies changes the way works are done and brings about a shift of workforce requirement from low skills to workforce being well informed and high skilled (K-Worker).

The current workplace needs workforce with high technical skills as well as ability to relate to others. To overcome such challenges in work environment that always changes, society needs education and training which is at par with the requirements. In view of the current changes at workplace and the work it, current and future generation of workers have to be well trained and technical-vocational education plays a big role in producing workforce needed by the industries.

Technical-vocational education and training (TVET) system are designed to help students become successful workers. Unlike the academic system, TVET system is a system designed with the purpose of fulfilling the manpower demands of the industries by providing needed skills required at workplaces. Human capital is the most important resource for national development. The status of a nation, whether advanced or otherwise, depends on the competencies and skills of its human capital as well as the strength of its value system. (Eleventh Malaysian Plan, 2016 – 2020).

Due to today's business challenging competitive environments, organizations continue to focus on adaptation, cost reduction, increased productivity, new markets, new products and services as a mean to compete and survive in the industry. Organization choices with regard to recruitment and training are largely being driven by these business strategy directions. In this environment, employees need to play proactive roles to be able to support the increased competitiveness, innovation, flexibility and client focus. Organizations are increasingly seeking a more highly skilled workforce where generic and transferable skills are broadly distributed across the organization. There has been broad agreement that all young people need a set of personal attributes and skills that will prepare them for both employment and further learning. It is also recognized that the ongoing employability of individuals is dependent on them having a set of relevant skills, as well as a capacity to learn and how to learn new things.

Today employers seek out for a graduate that has the balance between academic and soft skills. It's no surprise that some students might do not even know what employability skills are all about, they might not even know what the employer expect from them upon their graduation. Some pointed out that, a degree is just a ticket, but how do they translate their academic performance into action when they are working, that is the moment of truth. Some employers underestimated the capability of a fresh graduate since they are so – called fresh blood that entering the workforce with no or little experience. Some mentioned about the incompetency of the fresh graduates, as they are not reliable, lack of creativity and poor communication skills derived from the low self-confident. In general, they are lack of so-called soft skills (Nurita et al., 2004).

A survey, conducted by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE, 2009), only 58.2 % of the bachelor graduates in 2009 are in the workforce, only 5.0 % further their study, 1.6 % enhancing their skills, another 24.7% unemployed and 10.5 % waiting for job placement. For this particular issue of employability, in July 2009, one seminar had been conducted to review some of the facts and figures regarding the issue.

The education ministry had set specific statement which is 75% of the graduates employed in their relevant field within six months of their graduation in order to produce competent graduates to fulfill national and international man power needs with (MOHE, 2009).

In progressing towards an advanced nation, we will need more high-skilled workers. Therefore, the Government would like more students to pursue the education in technical and vocational training and be trained and qualified. This field now comprises only 25 percent of the workforce. This Plan aims to boost this workforce to 35 percent, at par with academic and professional graduates. For this reason, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) will be strengthened (Eleventh Plan Period, 2016 - 20202). The government will be allocated 1 billion ringgit to the Skills Development Fund, compared with 500 million ringgit in the previous Plan period. Through this program, TVET graduates will have the opportunity to secure high-paying jobs in sectors such as oil and gas, aviation engineering, shipping and automotive (Eleventh Plan Period).

Ministry is trying their best to address the issue. Based on the text by Minister of Higher Education Malaysia recently. The graduates of higher education institutions, being employable means having the qualities needed to maintain employment and progress in the workplace. Employability from the perspective of a higher education institution is therefore about producing graduates who are capable and able, and these

impacts upon all areas of university life. According to Malaysian Eleventh Plan period, TVET diploma graduates accredited by Department of Skill Development (DSD) have limited access to continuing their studies at degree level in the institute of higher education (IHE) due to more emphasis on practical components, different quality assurance mechanism and the perception that these graduates are less academically inclined. On the other hand, TVET graduates accredited by MQA have more accessibility to pursue higher education in IHEs as their curriculums are inclined to the academic track. This has led to unclear TVET articulation. Lack of industry input in curriculum design has resulted in the mismatch of skills required by industry and the skills attained by TVET graduates. Industries demand for work-ready TVET graduates who are competent and multi-skilled.

Thus, the roles of higher education Institution in order to enhance graduates employability embedded into two main components: curriculum and co-curriculum. The fundamental questions to be answered are whether those two components are able to help to develop a strong character of the graduate." The minister pointed out the strategy for co-curriculum such as informal training, entrepreneurship program, Industry partnership, international internship programs and inculcating positive value. In transforming Malaysian educational systems for the 21st century, Ministry of Education Malaysia plays the role in preparing educators, learners, schools, higher educational institution towards first class mentality which is the main aim of The National Higher Education Strategic Plan (NHESP) and the first class mentality workers is characterized as a of human capital that can meet the needs of individual, family, community, nation and the world (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012). Therefore, educational institutions should recognize the important aim of the Ministry of Education Malaysia in order to produce semi-skilled and highly skilled workforce.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) worldwide also has taken steps to produce a high-quality skilled workforce for the future. This is not exceptional for the TVET in Malaysia and 21st century skills are being looked into for that particular reason (Aring, 2011; Bybee & Fuchs, 2006; Daniel & Hultin, 2002; Kechik, 2011; Nwogu, 2011; Ministry of Higher Education, 2012).

Worldwide reports regarding 21st century skills were looking at the issue of developing the competent workforce for the future and they are pointing to education systems, particularly at the higher education institutions since they are the providers of the human capital. Higher education institution held important roles and responsibilities to prepare students to be the workforce for the future especially in surviving the dynamic economic environment (N. M. Triki, 2010). As for TVET, to prepare for 21st century skills, all parties involved in the organization must look at the history of technical and vocational education to create a better future for the direction of TVET in the 21st century. There are many types of research, studies, and conferences related to transforming TVET for 21st century education being done worldwide. The topics raised revolved around the problems and issues faced by TVET institutions such as appropriate skills required to produce successful graduates, the transformation of education, suitable TVET programs, employability, and workforce to fit the global market. Dason, Hamzah, and Udin (2010) have reviewed the paths gone through by Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) in Malaysia. Some of the major problems faced by TVET in Malaysia, including lack of engagement with related industries, lack of educators who have experience in the industries, lack of funds and policy to support TVE, negative impression in TVE, and the curriculum is not effective and flexible were the major problems being discussed.

The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) market has been interesting for major countries over the world as a new consumer market due to the wealth of resources and a huge quantity of people. Meanwhile, ASEAN has concern with group cohesiveness of 10 countries in the Southeast Asia region; Thai, Laos, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Philippine, Brunei, Myanmar, Cambodia and Vietnam. This concern stems from negotiation power and sharing resource within the region. Moreover, these countries committed to the ASEAN Community in 2015 and aim to create a strong socio-culture community, economic community, and security community.

In the ASEAN economic community (AEC), the ASEAN Summits have considered and approved the ASEAN single market concept. Under this program, ten countries can move goods, service, capital and skilled workers without inter-trade barriers, such as tariffs and regulations. This agreement will begin in 2020 and would strongly affect Thai workers if the government is not prepared to educate and fulfill people capacity, especially in 7 key professional occupations; doctors, engineers, nurses, architects, accountants, dentists, and surveyors that are the primary job mobility group.

The government, education ministry and academic institutes must concern the readiness of new graduates for AEC. Each year many students graduate from private and public academic institutes. A few of them cannot seek jobs. Thus, the education institutes play important roles in the labor market (Dekker, Grip, & Heijke, 2002) for guiding students on how to apply for job positions and plan their individual career roadmap.

Most new graduate applicants are over-educated for their first jobs according to companies (Dekker, Grip, & Heijke, 2002). However, the qualities of graduates

have been a critical point. Not only is academic knowledge important, but also employability skill and job mobility. This research aims to explore the level of student employability skill, and identify factors that influence international job mobility. The research is divided into 5 parts. The first part is the introduction, the second part is a literature review, the third part describes the methodology, the fourth part presents the findings and the last part is a conclusion and discussion section.

The policy makers are still making plans to increase graduate's skills therefore they needs to enhance employability skills among graduates in order to meet the need of the current workforce. The key player in enhancing employability is the Higher education Institutions and their responsibility to identify how they can enhance skills of their future employees. Generic skills are the key term used as employability skills in most countries, but what is meant by this term varies in different countries. Before moving on, it is necessary to explore some definitions of employability and the main interrelated tenets explicitly inherent in this concept. The UK, France, Germany, Australia and the USA have been promoting the concept of employability and developing skills categories since the 1980s. The USA, Australia and the UK use the following descriptive words – 'core', 'generic', and 'key' – skills that are considered essential for employability.

Table 1.1 gives an example of the categorization used by other countries and terminology used in relation to employability skills. It provides a researcher with an interesting linguistic perspective for a discourse analysis study relating to the expectations, priority, and values that different countries place on employability skills. However, this is outside the remit of this research.

Table 1.1
Terminology relating to employability skills as used in different countries

Country	Term used
United Kingdom	Core skills, key skills, common skills
New Zealand	Essential skills
Australia	Key competencies, employability skills, generic skills
Canada	Employability skills
United states	Basic skills, workplace know-how, necessary skills
Singapore	Critical enabling skills
France	Transferable skills
Germany	Key qualifications
Switzerland	Trans-disciplinary goals
Denmark	Process independent qualifications

Source: National Centre for Vocational Education Research (2003)

Educational challenges are closely intertwined with the economic, political, social, cultural and religious agenda of any nation. Socially and culturally, there is an expectation for improvement in living conditions offered and created by higher levels of education of the masses. As economic activities change from an agricultural mode to that of manufacturing, industrial and digital, so too are their changes in the types of employability skills and competencies required. This ignited a constant challenge on the relevance of education. Many nations have given simultaneous emphasis to adult education and to universal education for the young, both emphasizing on basic literacy. As the level of education is raised and as life expectancy increases, the question of employability becomes all the more important; transforming the importance of education beyond basic literacy alone.

Recently, employability and the creation of a knowledge-based economy have become fundamental concerns in many countries, including Malaysia. Realizing the need to achieve a high-income economy, the Malaysian Government through its Eleventh Malaysia Plan (2016-2020) is transforming TVET by enabling industry-led approach is crucial to produce skills human capital that meet the industry demand and

10

support the migration of all economic sectors towards knowledge intensive activities, in line with the aspiration to become a high income nation by 2020. It also focuses on labor market reforms that aim to develop the country's human capital, with special emphasis on lifelong learning and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) as a means to raise the overall quality of the workforce by enhancing skills that have immediate applicability in the labor market. TVET is now commonly considered a mainstream education option, and many high-income countries adopt a 'dual pathway' model of education – a model that Malaysia plans to emulate as well. Thus, improving the availability, access and quality of lifelong learning through TVET is considered equally important to the formal academic pathway in the country.

The concept of lifelong learning, also a nascent focus for many countries, is one that has solid connections to TVET. In Malaysia, the various programs conducted at certificate and diploma levels are widely recognized as formal lifelong learning programs, and this is the main focus for the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) to begin acculturating lifelong learning in the Malaysian society. The Ministry is thus proposing the publication of a Blueprint on Lifelong Learning for the country; an effort that will greatly involve TVET programmes and providers.

In this study, the researcher focused on the field of hospitality because there is a limited number of studies regarding employability skills in hospitality programs in Malaysia such as effectiveness, perceptions of stakeholders regarding hospitality programs, standards and quality of the programs, and methods used in the programs. Additionally, there is a concern regarding the progress and impact of employability skills programs to improve the skills of the workforce and minimize unemployment.

Statement of the Problem

Malaysian labor force increased from 9.6 million in 2000 to 11.3 million in 2005 and by 2010 it is expected to reach 12.4 million. Among all employment sectors in Malaysia, manufacturing sector will experience the largest increment in employment. More people will be employed in manufacturing sector compared to other sectors. It is estimated that by 2010, 30% of the employment will be in manufacturing. Unemployment rate in Malaysia has been quite steady. It was 3.1% in 2000, 3.5% in 2005 and it is expected to remain at 3.5% in 2010. The Economic Planning Unit of Malaysia (EPU) reported that the number of workers increased at an average of 3.2% a year, from 9.6 million in 2000 to 10.5 million workers in 2003. An estimate of manpower requirement in industrial sector, especially in manufacturing was 2.8 million in 2003. This sector renders 270,700 opportunities of new works as a result of growth of domestic industry. This amount to average 3.4% in a year and in 2003 becoming 27.9% for entire work sectors. Unemployment is one of the problem faced by many countries. The International Labor Organization reported that there were about 6.67% unemployment rate in United States, 5.24% in Germany, 7.3% in United Kingdom and 5.72% in Australia. Meanwhile in Malaysia, the unemployment rate was about 3.22%. This report was based on unemployment rate in 2014 (International Labor Organization, 2014). According to Department of Statistics Malaysia, the unemployment rate in Malaysia has increased 0.3 percent in October 2014 compared to September the same year. This percentage involved 378,200 labor force that were unemployed during the Labor Force Survey conducted by Department of Statistics Malaysia (The Office of Chief Statistician Malaysia, 2014). The report define 'labor force' as people aged between 10 15 to 64 years and are either employed or unemployed during the survey being conducted and the 'unemployment rate' as the

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