

THE ASSESSING FACTORS ON EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS AT GIATMARA GRADUATES IN MALAYSIA: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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Abstract: *Employability skills are needed to face the era of technology. However, the employers find a lack of skills and knowledge among job seeker. An employability skill is very important for the graduates as a preparation to enter the labor market. The purpose of the paper was to access how effect of skills and knowledge on employability skills among Technical and Vocational Education and Training graduates in Malaysia. Graduates from GIATMARA were selected as respondents in order to complete the study. The simple random was used to select the sample size. In order to analyze the data of this study, the quantitative data analysis was done using descriptive statistics such as frequency, mean and standard deviation. The data was collected by questionnaires which adapted from a few studies with modification in order to make it appropriate with the objective of the study. The unit of analysis for this research study was individual. As the main references, the literature reviews in this research were derived from science direct and Scopus database. The implications of literature review were provided the information and recommend a set of frameworks for GIATMARA to improve the employability skills of GIATMARA graduates. The discussions of findings were presented according to the research questions. The framework indicates the importance of skills and knowledge toward GIATMARA curriculum for the production of employable and marketable GIATMARA graduates in Malaysia*

Keywords: *Employability Skills, TVET, Skills, Knowledge, Graduates*

Introduction

Employability skills are a set of personal achievements, understandings, and attitudes or qualities that indicate an individual is potentially better able to get a desired job and succeed in a career choice. In general, employability skills are aspects of skills and knowledge that students need to possess to meet the various demands of employment in the labor market after they graduate. The marketability aspect of development graduates is an important core in higher education to enable them to work well in the job market. (Mahmud, Boroh, Mail, Basir, Fabeil, Mohidin & Pazim, 2020). Technical and Vocational Education can play a key role in providing the workforce in the future with employment capabilities Malaysia needs a highly skilled workforce to support the growth of the industry. With the changing job market and progressive technological change, workers are expected to keep abreast of global economic developments. (Kenayathulla, Ahmad & Idris, 2019).

Employability skills are work skills that refer to general or non -technical competencies including achievement, understanding and personal qualities that make an individual able to obtain employment and succeed in his or her chosen occupation (Ju, Zhang, & Pacha, 2012; Mello et al., 2017). Every employee and prospective employee must have good work skills due to technological change and increasing globalization with strong competitiveness. The company wants graduates who are technically competent and also equipped with relevant job skills.(Pitan, 2016). Employability skills must be a must for every graduate. Integrating work skills in learning is expected to produce graduates who are ready to be recruited by the employers and industries. Educational institutions as graduate providers must respond quickly to every change of skills having the knowledge, skills appropriate to the needs demanded by the industry.

Hence, this study focuses on reviewing the most important literature findings on employability skills for GIATMARA graduates. This is very important and crucial to do further research. One of the most appropriate steps is by identifying and validating from the search for employability skills indicators that are considered important and strategic for graduates, so that they can be engaged more by the industry. Furthermore, the results of this research will be a framework that can be a proposal and reference material as an anticipation measure in the preparation of GIATMARA curriculum in order to helps the graduates who will enter the workforce.

This paper is structured as follows; First, it relates to the literature about employability skills is discussed. Then, the paper is presented about the theoretical foundation as an option explanation of the main mechanism. Followed by discussion about the conceptual framework which based on two underpinning theories. Finally, the paper ends with implications and conclusion.

Literature Review

Employability Skills

Winberg et al., (2020) proposed that employability is the ability to discern, acquire, adapt, and continually enhance the skills, understanding and personal attributes that make students or graduates more likely to find and create meaningful paid and unpaid work that benefit themselves, the workforce, the community, and the economy. Bennett (2016) defined employability as the ability to find, create, and sustain meaningful work across lengthening working lives and multiple work settings.

The application of employability skills is to ensure that one gets the opportunity to acquire the required work skills, job maintenance and work competencies (Sermsuk, Triwichtkhun, & Wongwanich, 2014). The effect can be an economic downturn for a country (Saunders & Zuzel, 2010). These problems can be an emergency and occur if a person is unable to get a job. Eventually, it will be a contributor to the economic downturn for a country as its effects are due to lack of employability skills. Every employee and prospective employee must have good employability skills due to technological change and increasing globalization with strong competitiveness. Employers want graduates who are technically competent and also equipped with relevant employability skills (Pitan, 2016). In connection with employer engagement, employability skills of communication, problem solving and self-management would be improved (Ng, Chan, Wut, Lo & Szeto, 2021).

Skills

Skills, as a term, are defined in various ways. In most cases, it is related to the highest level of education obtained by the migrant. Such an approach is sometimes criticised due to the certain prestige of schools or universities, and thus a different level of knowledge, skills and competencies obtained (Boucher, 2019).

Employers require graduates to have the basic technical skills required for their particular profession (Low et al., 2016). However, beyond that, studies have found that soft skills receive greater attention in organizations (Stewart et al., 2016) and higher education (Pang and Hung, 2012). Based on data collected from job advertisements placed in the career section of the newspaper, Dunbar et al. (2016) found that employers place great emphasis on soft skills and discuss technical skills at a lower level.

Knowledge

Knowledge is an intangible firm asset, which can be used in a company's skills, expertise and problems. Basic knowledge of user knowledge measurement knowledge about obtaining information about the attached organization, assigned task or project, application of subject learning and some current issues around it. (Lim Khong Chiu, 2016). To enhance the development of graduates' knowledge and skills for job creation, there must be curriculum restructuring, renewed pedagogical approaches and competencies, building linkages between higher education and industry, and career training and mentoring (Okolie, Nwajiuba, Eneje, Binuomote, Ehiobuche & Hack-Polay, 2021).

Knowledge is defined as the substance present in a person's mind (Shulman, 1987), body (Johnson, 1989), or personal experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). In the new world economy creativity and knowledge become important factors of production, in addition to sources of capital, labor, land and nature. The importance of knowledge for development is likely to increase; and knowledge may influence the difference between prosperity and poverty (Sedziuviene & Vveinhardt, 2010)

Theoretical Development

Human Capital Theory (HCT)

This study focused on human capital theory (HCT), originally proposed in the 18th century by Adam Smith and later popularized by Becker (1962). Human capital refers to a collection of individual attributes, such as knowledge, skills, experience, training, abilities, talent, intelligence, and judgment. The fundamental argument of Human Capital Theory is that

education and training are investments that make people more productive. Accordingly, individuals who are more productive will earn more and be more employable. Scholars (see, e.g., Becker, 1962; Sicherman & Galor, 1990) have argued that quality higher education as example, training can make it easier for a person to find employment and build a career. The theory suggests that employability characterizes the way in which a person enhances his or her desirability to the world of work. Analyzing employability using the lens of human capital as a theoretical frame, regular university curriculum reviews, competence development through university–industry partnerships, strengthened quality assurance systems, and the alignment of university education with the country’s development plans are important aspects of shaping and improving a person’s employability. As a result, the quality of skills, knowledge, training, experiences, abilities, talent, and intelligence developed through higher education forms the human capital for obtaining employment.

Resource-based View (RBV) Theory

The RBV, first posited in the literature by Wernerfelt (1984), is built upon the theory that a firm’s success is largely determined by the resources it owns and controls. Resources are typically defined as either assets or capabilities. Assets, which may be tangible or intangible, are owned and controlled by the firm (Collis, 1994). Capabilities are intangible bundles of skills and accumulated knowledge exercised through organizational routines (Nelson and Winter, 1982; Teece et al., 1997).

RBV suggests that organisations can create competitive advantage by acquiring or developing resources that are rare, valuable and hard to imitate and replace (Barney, 1991). The Finch et al. (2016) study, following Barney (1991) and Teece et al. (1997), extended this notion further and suggested that employability can be viewed as the complex integration and application of five specific resources and dynamic capabilities, namely, intellectual, personality, meta-skill, job-specific and integrated dynamic capabilities. Based on Finch et al.’s (2016) categorisation of employability along the RBV, we conceptualise that GWR can be defined as an integrated dynamic competence that requires the reconfiguration, synthesis and integration of four resources or dimensions that namely, intellectual, personality, meta-skill and job specific – that need to be channeled by graduates into a holistic, compelling and personal narrative that appeals to potential employers.

Conceptual Framework

To accomplish this purpose, this study has constructed a conceptual framework based on two underpinning theories. The first is HCT and the second is RBV. Figure 1 depicts the conceptual framework of skills and knowledge and link them to employability skills. The dependent variable implies to employability skills while the independent variable indicates skills and knowledge.

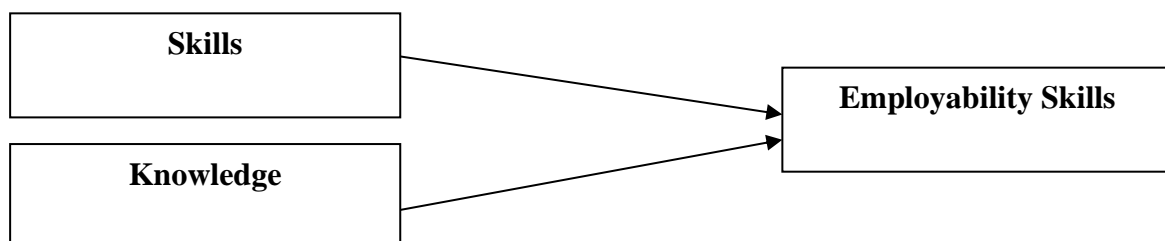


Figure 1: Conceptualization of the relationships between Skills, Knowledge and Employability Skills

The hypotheses were constructed as follow:

H₁: There is a positive relationship between skills and employability skills

H₂: There is a positive relationship between knowledge and employability skills

Implications for Future Research

This study provide new a understanding about the effects of skills and knowledge on employability to the GIATRAMA trainees in Malaysia. As a result, research outcome can be taken as input for future research, to serve as a guide to generate hypotheses to be tested. Consequently, this study suggests that there is a need for further research to find out the new insight of employability skills which is more focusing on the recruitment criteria used by employers in different local labour market conditions, and for different occupations.

Conclusion

The results of this study allow the researcher to conclude that the quality of employability skills greatly influences the sustainability of the graduate's career. In addition, employability skills will helps the graduates adapt quickly and grow their work readiness in order to face global competition and future world work. Employability is a skill that graduates should have to continue their career in life. In order to face the competition in the future labour markets, graduates need to renew their employability skills.

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