

Relationship between Employability Skills towards Career Management among Vocational Students

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ABSTRACT

Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is an important route for vocational education and skills development in Malaysia. Vocational college, Kluang, Johor offers several elements of career management that are applicable to students; for instance, they are taught to always believe in themselves so that they can make informed choices related to careers and secure the best job available. The objectives of this paper are to find and analyse the similarities and linkages between employability skills and career management. The findings will be recommended to education institutions so that they can produce students highly sought-after by the industry; in addition, these students are equipped with practical and soft skills and are ready to take up jobs in the real-world workplace. A quantitative survey in the form of a questionnaire is used as an instrument for the purpose of this study; Likert scale is employed to help respondents give appropriate answers. The population for this study comprises 210 third-semester students from Vocational College Kluang, Johor; the sample consists of 90 people drawn from the population. This study uses mean score, standard deviation and analysis of variance (ANOVA) for statistical measurement. Results of this study taken will be shared with vocational colleges, which may use the findings to improve the employability skills of students. The findings will also be utilised to shape academic and vocational modules as well as the process of teaching and learning. Generally, this paper introduces the new concept of building a relationship between employability skills and career management for vocational students. This model is

important and should be developed because self-knowledge and career-related skills are associated with career management and employability skills, which are vital topics for students.

Keywords: Career management, employability skills, vocational students

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INTRODUCTION

The transformation of vocational education began in 2013; it emphasised the practice of industrial or technical internship, which indirectly lightens the burden of student academic composition. The system of technical and vocational education is intended to play an important role in training skilled workers and professionals who can meet all the demands of employers or industry (Hamzah, Bakar, & Kazilan, 2006).

The identified employability skills and other aspects related to students that the education system must address include the following: communication skills, technology, skills in planning and managing activities, skills of working with others and in groups, problem-solving skills, management skills, ability to select and analyse information, skills and techniques of applying mathematical concepts and skills of understanding culture. The addition of employability skills to the curriculum will give students an early preparation for their future career to ensure they are ready to work when they enter industry (Kwok, 2003).

Every employee must possess the essential elements of employability skills so that he or she can be a versatile worker, has initiative and ability to solve different problems and can handle different tasks. Very often, employability skills are associated with personal image, attitude, behaviour, habits, and ways of communicating with others, problem-solving and decision-making skills and organising skills. Knight and Yorke defined employability skills

as a set of achievements, knowledge and personal attributes that enable individuals to get jobs easily and be successful in their chosen occupation (Knight & Yorke, 2004).

The characteristics and nature of the work itself demand workers who have employability skills; jobs today require individuals who have the power of initiative, flexibility and ability to assume different roles for different types of work. It is imperative for students to master employability skills in preparation for real-world employment. According to Cox and King, students should prepare themselves for their future career by diversifying into various skills available i.e. technical or employability skills that can help them in their future career (Cox & King, 2006).

In addition to employability skills that are necessary to prepare students to enter the job market, career management is also important for career planning, self-preparation, decision-making, adaptability and productivity enhancement. Most teenage students do not know the direction of their career after leaving school (Damiri & Yahaya, 2004); with this aimlessness, it is difficult for them to plan their future in line with the skills they have acquired. Vocational college, Kluang, Johor offers elements of career management that are applicable to students; for instance, they are taught to always believe in themselves so that they can make wise choices related to careers. When a person has to make a choice related to career, he or she must look at it from various angles associated with the chosen profession such as ability, qualification,

aptitude and personality (Islam, Hamid, Shukri, & Abd Manaf, 2013). They should also be smart in managing their career once they have launched into it; they must be careful to choose jobs that suit their interests and personality, as this is an essential aspect that will ensure a successful career.

Career management can be viewed as the ability to build a career and intentionally manage the interaction of work, learning and other aspects of an individual's life (van Acker & Bailey, 2011). The benefits of career management have been acknowledged in terms of individual and social well-being (Raybould & Sheedy, 2005). A less-promoted area is the contribution of career

management skills to economic growth through employability, productivity and education or work efficiency (Bridgstock, 2011).

In the context of employment, skills are abilities that are discrete, something developed by an individual through his or her ability to perform various activities with intelligence (Van Acker & Bailey, 2011). In the context of this study, according to Harvey, individuals' employability skills are closely linked to the job market (Harvey, 2001), and employers urgently need workers who are qualified to maintain or increase the productivity of their company (Juhdi, Pa'Wan, Othman, & Moksini, 2010).

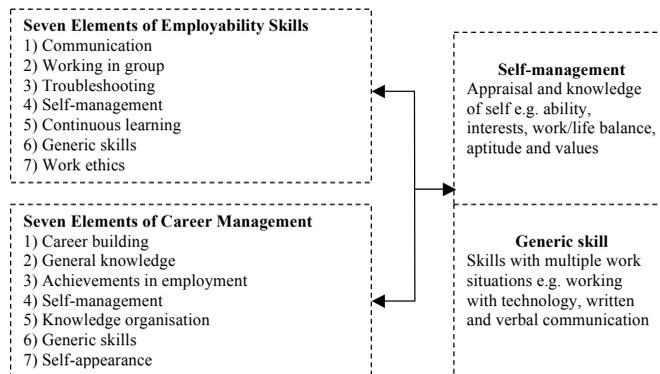


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the relationship between employability skills and career management
Source: Curriculum Standard of Vocational College

Figure 1 show that career management is essential to employability skills, as they play a large part in determining which, when and where generic and specific skills are learnt and used.

Career selection is the process of career development, according to Ginzberg (1971). The result of choosing a career will determine

the pattern and the role practised by an individual in society. Caplow stated that career choice is an important determinant of status and position in society (Caplow, 1954), and this status has an impact on the value of life, attitude, style and personality (Douglas & Shepherd, 2002). There are various career theories developed that are

used by researchers in their study of career fields. Some of the theories are approaches leading to a very clear structure such as the theory of traits and factors, the Holland theory and the theory of Anne Roe (Sidek, 2006). The theory of Super was founded by Donald E. Super, who also used the process approach (Super, Starishevsky, Matlin, & Jordaan, 1963).

Other factors that influence an individual to balance between personal life and the reality of work include opportunities for education, work experience, aspirations, changes, changes in financial resources and requirements of the labour market. According to Ginzberg, level of education is important in making career choices (Ginzberg, 1971). The other factor is level of education that also can determine the type of work suitable for a person. With a high level of education, there is a better chance of getting a better job; with only primary education, the chances of getting a good job are slim (Mustapha, 2011).

A module on employability skills and career management integrates elements of both that are useful for students. These elements include self-management skills and team skills. On the positive side, industry generally requires workers who can meet their needs, and this is the main criterion for the selection of industry workers. The aim of this study was to develop a pattern of measurement for knowledge, skills, capabilities and behaviour, all of which are key factors to success in one's career. This is important because researchers can analyse similarities and relationships

between employability skills and career management, both of which are required by students to meet the needs of industry and to be highly capable workers in the workplace.

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive and inferential surveys were conducted to collect quantitative data. Students were selected from the Electrical and Electronic Technology Engineering Department, Vocational College, Kluang, Johor. The purpose of the study was to investigate elements of employability skills and career management.

Population and Sample

The researchers used the quota sampling technique to select suitable respondents. This procedure ensures a balanced number of respondents.

Research Instrument

The instrument was a questionnaire consisting of two parts. Part A was designed to obtain background information such as gender and courses taken. Part B was to identify the elements of employability skills and career management based on the students' perception; both employability skills and career management had seven elements each.

The skills framework used in this research was the curriculum of the college. Both employability skills and career management had 82 item indicators each, as shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1
Item indicators of elements of employability skills

| Elements of Employability Skills | Number of Items |
|----------------------------------|------------------|
| 1. Communication | 1-17 (17 items) |
| 2. Problem solving | 18-32 (15 items) |
| 3. Lifelong learning | 33-42 (10 items) |
| 4. Self-management | 43-52 (10 items) |
| 5. Work ethics | 53-60 (8 items) |
| 6. Working in a group | 61-74 (9 items) |
| 7. Technology | 75-82 (8 items) |

Table 2
Item indicators for element of career management

| Elements of Career Management | Number of Items |
|-------------------------------|------------------|
| 1. Career building | 1-17 (17 items) |
| 2/ General knowledge | 18-32 (15 items) |
| 3. Achievements in employment | 33-42 (10 items) |
| 4. Self-management | 43-52 (10 items) |
| 5. Knowledge of organisation | 53-60 (8 items) |
| 6. Generic skills | 61-74 (19 items) |
| 7. Self-appearance | 75-82 (8 items) |

Table 1 shows the item indicators for the seven elements of employability skills, while Table 2 shows the item indicators for the seven elements of career management. This study was reviewed by four experienced academics. A pilot study conducted had an overall Alpha value of more than 0.7. Examples of the values obtained are: lifelong learning (0.9), work ethic (0.906) and self-management (0.948) for employability skills, while for career

management they are: general knowledge (0.908), employment (0.926) and generic skills (0.954). The findings of Part A were analysed to find frequency and percentage of the respondents' demographics, while those of Part B were calculated to find the mean. A 5-point Likert scale was also used to interpret the data. The instrument used was the survey questionnaire, which was the most appropriate method to achieve the objectives of this study. This method also helps respondents to easily select answers. The information obtained from the questionnaire was encoded and then keyed into a computer data file for further action. The respondents were students of the vocational college.

RESULTS

Table 3 shows the number of respondents and their gender for demographic sampling. Table 4 and Table 5 show the mean scores and standard deviation for the elements of employability skills and career management. This was done to answer the first research question: "What is the rank of the mean scores for the elements of employability skills and career management among vocational students?"

Table 3
Respondents' demographic distribution

| Gender | No. | Percentage |
|--------|-----|------------|
| Male | 49 | 54.4 |
| Female | 41 | 45.6 |
| Total | 90 | 100 |

Table 4
Mean scores and standard deviation for elements of employability skills

| Variables | min | SD | Score mean | Rank |
|---------------------------|------|------|------------|------|
| Achievement in employment | 3.87 | 0.47 | High | 2 |
| Self-management | 3.80 | 0.51 | High | 4 |
| Knowledge of organisation | 3.77 | 0.59 | High | 5 |
| Generic skills | 3.67 | 0.46 | High | 1 |
| Career building | 3.92 | 0.64 | Medium | 6 |
| General knowledge | 3.75 | 0.69 | Medium | 7 |

Table 5
Mean scores and standard deviation for elements of career management

| Variables | min | SD | Score mean | Rank |
|--------------------|------|------|------------|------|
| Communication | 3.93 | 0.53 | High | 2 |
| Problem solving | 3.79 | 0.62 | High | 3 |
| Self-management | 3.94 | 0.67 | High | 1 |
| Lifelong learning | 3.47 | 0.46 | Medium | 5 |
| Work ethic | 3.41 | 0.59 | Medium | 6 |
| Working in a group | 3.41 | 0.59 | Medium | 7 |
| Technology | 3.51 | 0.67 | Medium | 4 |

The mean scores obtained for the elements of employability skills are as follows: communications, problem solving and self-management skills were at a high level, while lifelong learning, work ethic, working in a group and technology were at medium level. The elements of career

management that record a high mean score were achievement in employment, self-management, knowledge of organisation, generic skills and self-appearance, while the elements of career management that had medium mean scores were career building and general knowledge.

Table 6
Relationship between employability skills and career management

| Relationship | | Career Management | Employability Skills |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Career Management | Pearson | 1 | 0.754** |
| | Correlation Sig. (two-tailed) | | 0.000 |
| Employability Skills | Pearson | 0.754** | 1 |
| | Correlation Sig. (two-tailed) | 0.000 | |

Table 6 shows the relationship between employability skills and career management. The value of $r=0.75$, indicating a strong positive correlation between employability skills and career management among the students. This test showed a significant correlation between employability skills and career management, with $p<0.1$. This means that the null hypothesis of this study was successfully rejected. The result clearly shows that there is a relationship between employability skills and career management. The results suggested that students who can manage a good career are those who have a high level of employability skills.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of the study showed that vocational college students: are always ready to learn new skills; they have the potential to assume high positions in an organisation; have good social skills and can mix with others; and are responsible people who can keep secrets or official information (Raybould & Sheedy, 2005). Learning science is the search for personal or professional escape time, voluntarily and due to self-motivation; it is also the development of human potential through the learning process. Continuous effort is needed to motivate individuals to acquire knowledge and values necessary to live confidently and creatively so as to face the challenges of life (Juhdi et al., 2010). The findings showed a significant relationship between students' employability skills and their career management skills. This

finding is supported by Bridgstock (2011), whose study led to the conclusion that students' career management skills are a key element in the development and establishment of a country's economy. Institutions of vocational education clearly play a significant role in developing and shaping this process by financing strategic work and improving teaching and education so that their graduates can get a job. With employability and management skills, vocational graduates can meet the requirements of the job market and industry; in addition, they will be of high calibre and possess an adequate level of education to take on responsible jobs in the workplace.

Finally, students need to develop career management skills early on in vocational college. They must have acquired employability skills by the time they graduate with a vocational certificate in Malaysia. Other parties such as industry, parents and lecturers must work together to build and shape students' self-management and generic skills because the skills learnt through daily activities concerning the environment, behaviour and attitude will encourage them. Lecturers and counsellors have to cooperate with industry in giving guidance and inspiration to students, which will help them to acquire more employability skills in order to be excellent workers. Students need guidance in the course of their study and training, and it is a big responsibility for the college to provide them with relevant education, which will fulfil the requirements of industry.

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