Career Choice and Employability Skills for Vocational College Students

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Abstract. This study is a quantitative research based on the survey conducted that aims to look at the relationship between employability skills and career choice for Vocational College students. The study involves 106 respondents consisting year three students from Batu Pahat Vocational College and Muar Vocational College using questionnaires as instruments. The results from the analysis show that the relationship between skills employability and career choice is high, with an ETA value of 0.742, which proves that the variables have a strong correlation. In conclusion, employability skills affect students in such a way that they tend to choose a career based on the course they take up.

1. Introduction

Employability skills are an important aspect in ensuring qualified graduates are employed. Most technical graduates depend solely on their academic credentials to get a job. They lack non-technical skill competency or better known as employability skills [1]. This situation creates dissatisfaction and becomes the main problem for employers to choose the right candidate for a certain post. However, the career choice by the student must be the right one and suitable because career is a work experience that affects the lifestyle and well-being [2].

Therefore, career choice is a very important decision for a student. It should be in line with the courses taken up by the students when they were studying at the Vocational College (VC) so that they are competent enough to carry out any tasks given to them when they are in the realm of work. Technical and Vocational Education training student need of emerging abreast of changes from time to time for industrial economy based on economy. Most employers now require students who will be employees who not only have technical skills but also requires employability skills to improve productivity and competitiveness.

Students with employability skills will be able to adapt to all types of work and versatility. Graduates students from educational institutions have no labour market because the students do not have soft skills and employability skills. Prospective employer are less optimistic about the graduates of the institutions, especially in the aspect of personality, appearance, self-confidence, lack of communication skills, the ability to make decisions is limited and not able to work in groups [3].

The study states that if the career choice is not taken seriously, the individual may be trapped in a career that they are not interested in, making the career less meaningful to them [4]. However, local graduates are advised not to be too choosy in finding jobs after they graduate because excellent careers
can also be built from bottom level [1]. To obtain a desired career, students are required to have academic ability, technical skills and employability skills [5]. The RMK-10 also emphasizes a combination of soft skills and efficiency of the work force that is able to face the challenges of the 21st century (10th Malaysia Plan).

Therefore, VC graduates should be prepared to equip themselves with these skills and form self-esteem to engage in the realm of work [6]. Instead, any workplace requires workers with high technical skill couple with well-developed employability skills [7]. Employability skills are important and have been proven in helping people in adapting with changes and improve career opportunities in the workplace [8]. So, the objective of this research is to look the relationship between employability skills and career choice for Vocational College students.

1.1. Problem Statement
There are several persistent problems among some students who venture into this field who do not have the skills required by employers and hence disqualified for the job. The problem of career choice in this engineering field is when the graduates are over confident in choosing a career in the same field that they took up during their VC education without having the self-employed skills. Many technical graduates are still unemployed because they only rely on academic qualifications and the lack of employability skills required by employers [9].

However, the students are not entirely to be blamed as the students explained that the application of employability skills through the course content provided by schools or institutions is not sufficient to meet the demand of the industry [3]. There is one of barriers to successful employment that is a lack of employability skills [10]. There are issues surrounding the role of higher education, deficiencies in the classification of graduate destinations, the challenging of predicting the needs of employer of the future, and gaps between strategies, perceptions and the realities [11] and the results show in [11] study shows that the student will find their own unique responses to these challenges.

The potential of employability skills has been argued for increasing work-related outcomes and also help the people adapting with changes and improving career opportunities in the workplace [12]. Based on the problems presented, it clearly shows that in the past research done only focus on students from universities and graduates from technical and vocational fields that have been working in a particular sector. However, there is no research done on the Vocational College students yet.

1.2. Term of Definition
There is several terms use in this study to make readers understand more about career choice and employability skills among VC students.

1.2.1 Employability Skills
Employability skills are the quality of the individual that is required by the employer [13]. This skill can be applied in any field of work. While [14] defines the employability skills as the skills required by an employee to succeed in a job. [15] The employability skills list consists of several skills which includes communication skills, critical thinking and problem solving, teamwork skills, continuous learning and information management, entrepreneurship skills, ethics and moral and professional leadership.

1.2.2 Career
Career is defined as individual perception or a characteristic attitude and behaviour of a person related to work activity and experience in life [16]. However, [17] defines a career as a journey or the progress of an individual in a field of life that makes the choice of employment for daily living. [18] stated career refers to the first thing that students sought after graduation. Career is an occupation that
someone needs to have in their life to make an effort in their daily life. If they have a good job, it can make their life better and they can live in happily.

1.2.3 Career Choice
Career choice is an important aspect of individual life. This is because the chosen career will determine the role pattern of the individual in society. In addition, [19] concludes that there are three main reasons for difficulty in making career choices. Firstly, that person has interests in various fields. Secondly, the person could not gauge his/her ability and personality. Finally, the lack of knowledge and information about the profession to be chosen.

2. Methodologies
The study is quantitative research based on the survey conducted. The findings from the sample were then generalized to population studies. The selection of the design is in accordance with the main focus of this research as the relevant studies conducted on employability skills are often done on the technical and vocational students [20-22].

2.1. Population and Sample
This study was conducted at Vocational College located in Johor. There are three VC in Johor which have same courses that are Kluang Vocational College, Batu Pahat Vocational College and Muar Vocational College. Although only two VC have been involved in this study. Kluang VC is a pioneer for Johor, so their students had started a year earlier and was not in the same semester with two colleges yet. Therefore, the colleges selected for this study are Batu Pahat VC and Muar VC.

The selected factor for both VC because they have same courses of Construction Technology, Electronic Technology and Welding Technology and the students are also in the same semester. The population for this study is the final year students which should be 4th year students. However, both the new Batu Pahat VC and Muar VC operations in January 2013, then the first group students were admitted into the 3rd year. Therefore, the researcher decided to select third-year students who took Construction Technology, Electronic Technology and Welding Technology as the population of this study.

The population for this study was the third-year students of the Construction Technology, Electronic Technology and Welding Technology courses from Batu Pahat Vocational College and Muar Vocational College. There are 90 respondents from Batu Pahat Vocational College and 60 respondents from Muar Vocational College. The sample size determination for this study is based on the calculations proposed by [23] using the formula [24]. Based on the calculation of sample size, the total numbers of students required as a sample for the study are 106 people.

2.2. Research Instrument
The instruments used in this study was a set of questionnaires which contains four parts, namely part A, B, C and D. Part A is a demographic questionnaire, part B is a questionnaire adapted for self-efficacy of CDSE-SF from [25], part C is the employability skills questionnaire adapted from SCANS (2001) and part D is a career choice question. The reliability of the instrument is evaluated by experts in the Faculty of Technical and Vocational Education at University Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM).

2.3. Data Analysis
Data analysis for this study uses descriptive and inferential analysis. In this study, descriptive analysis is used to describe information such as gender, course, course selection and respondents’ aspirations. Inferential statistics involved in this study was Eta-squared ($\eta^2$). An eta-squared test is a measure of effect size for use in ANOVA used to identify the relationship between the different level of variables.
that are nominal and interval. It is used to identify the relationship between employability skills and career choice.

3. Results

The data obtained through this study were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0. Table 1 shows the total distribution of students based on gender. Table 2 shows the distribution of students based on three courses namely Construction Technology, Electronic Technology and Welding Technology.

Table 1. Distribution of students based on gender.

| Gender  | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|---------|---------------|----------------|
| Male    | 77            | 72.6           |
| Female  | 29            | 27.4           |
| Total   | 106           | 100            |

Table 2. Distribution of students based on courses.

| Course                | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Construction Technology| 32            | 30.2           |
| Electronic Technology  | 43            | 40.6           |
| Welding Technology    | 31            | 29.2           |
| Total                 | 106           | 100            |

Table 3 shows the course selection rates either by the Vocational College or by their own choice. The results of analysis show that majority of the students choose their own courses. Only a small number of students is forced to take up courses set by that college. Table 4 shows the suitability of courses to suit ambition. The selection of the field is based on the student’s ambition, but not on a small group whose selection is determined by the college.

Table 3. Course selection by students and Vocational College.

| Course Selection          | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| By Vocational College     | 20            | 18.9           |
| Own Choice                | 86            | 81.1           |
| Total                     | 106           | 100            |

Table 4. The suitability of course selection to suit ambition.
Table 5 shows the descriptive analysis of the employability skills level of the Vocational College students. Basic skills show the highest average mean score of 4.05 and high interpretation mean. This indicates that the students master basic skills such as reading, writing and calculating well. Technology skills show the lowest average mean score which is 3.58 and moderate interpretation mean. This demonstrates the skills that involve the students’ ability to seek out diverse information sources, assess existing data, analyse written data, computerize data and disseminate analysis results to others are not dominated by all students.

| Item             | Average mean score | Interpretation mean |
|------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
|                  | Mean               | Standard deviation  |                     |
| Basic skills     | 4.05               | .759                | High                |
| Thinking skills  | 3.86               | .631                | Moderate            |
| Personal skills  | 3.79               | .687                | Moderate            |
| Resource skills  | 3.76               | .658                | Moderate            |
| Interpersonal skills | 4.01         | .681                | Moderate            |
| Information skills | 3.71            | .677                | Moderate            |
| Technology skills | 3.58              | .639                | Moderate            |
| Total average mean score | 3.82         | .676                | Moderate            |

Table 6 shows the selection of career according to the course being pursued. Majority of the students are more confident to choose a career based on the field that is being followed. However, there are a few who do not choose a career according to the field, but they rather choose to venture into the government sector hoping for a guaranteed comfortable life.

| Career Choice | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|---------------|--------------|----------------|
| No            | 15           | 14.2           |
| Yes           | 91           | 85.8           |
Table 7 shows the value of the coefficient of correlation of the relationship between the employability skills and career choice. There is a strong and positive relationship with ETA reading value of .742. Students are confident of the skills they have and they will succeed in pursuing the same fields as their current course.

| Relationship                  | ETA Value |
|-------------------------------|-----------|
| Employability skills VS Career choice | .742      |

5. Conclusions
Through the study, it can be concluded that the employability skills possessed by students are inadequate and need to be improved. VC plays a role in ensuring their graduates dominate the employability skills as expected. By acquiring good employability skills, VC graduates will be much better. They indeed have been provided with good technical skills through the existing curriculum. Hence, the acquisition of high employability skills will make them the most demanding graduates who are much needed by employers. Researchers concluded that good employability skills help students to choose careers precisely because they have no problem to constantly adapt to the new working environment and they are confident to implement skills with their careers. So, this paper will contribute on student in making career choice in their life.

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