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Identifying the Employment Skills Among Malaysian Vocational Students: An Analysis of Gender Differences

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Abstract: 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 Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) by enabling industry-led approach is crucial to produce skills human capital that meet the industry demand and support the migration of all economic sectors towards knowledge intensive activities, in line with the aspiration to become a high-income nation by 2020. Technical and Vocational Education can play a major role in providing future workforce with employability skills. Therefore, the research aims to examine the differences in competency perceived level by gender for vocational students majoring in hospitality. Questionnaires were distributed to 841 hospitality students in five regions in Malaysia. Descriptive statistic and independent sample T-Test were used to analyse the data. The findings show that there is no significant difference between male and female. The mean score of male is higher than mean score of female. Thus, the result provides evident that male is more competent in hospitality employability skills compared to female student in vocational colleges. The findings provide insights to curriculum developers and policy makers on the appropriate interventions that need to be taken to improve the employability skills of the graduates.

Keywords: Employability skills, hospitality, TVET, Malaysia, gender differences.

1. Introduction

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. 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. Technical and Vocational Education can play a major role in providing future workforce with employability skills. Malaysia seeks to expand student enrolment in TVET to support the Government's push for more medium and high skilled workers under the Economic Transformation Programme (ETP). This field now comprises only 25 percent of the workforce (Eleventh Malaysian Plan, 2016 –2020). Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education) emphasizes that Malaysia needs graduates who are able to successfully navigate complex challenges such as global warming, economic crises and others. Thus, graduates not only required to have the right knowledge and technical expertise, but also the capacity to make ethical decisions and the resilience to deal with rapid change. The 2012 McKinsey Study, Education to Employment, showed that over 70 percent of universities belief that they have adequately prepared students for the workplace. However, only 40 percent of employers' belief students are adequately prepared for workplace.

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This huge gap is due to the negative perception conceived by the people about the industry like long working hours, low salary package, low profile jobs etc. This gap can be absolved by improving their perception positively. The hospitality and tourism industry is only industry that requires the men and women workforce in equal ratio. Certain departments in the hotels cannot be imagined to run without females like housekeeping, front office and vice versa. But the reality states contradictory facts. The ratio of men and women workforce is not equal. A study conducted in China by Yafang and Gongyong (2008) indicated that the females are more inclined towards opting hospitality as career than of males owing to their positive perception towards the industry.

Paradoxically, in India it is observed that less number of females opt hospitality courses as their career. The visits to certain hospitality institutes have confirmed the low ratio of female students admitted in the hospitality programmes than male students. This imbalance has adversely affected the industry too. Thus, it has become imperative to find out the reasons behind this imbalance. It has instigated to undertake the present study that investigates the perception of the male and female towards the industry in India as well as to see the significant differences between the perceptions of male and female.

This present study is significant from the academic and industry point of view. It helps in bringing awareness amongst youth male as well as female towards plethora of job opportunities offered by the industry and to encourage them to choose for hospitality as career so as to fulfil the man force requirement of the industry. It analyses the reasons that cause this imbalance between two genders and the same can be rectified. The study is equally important for the administrators and policy makers as the various reasons responsible for forming negative perception can be known and thus amended. The research aims to examine the differences in competency perceived level by gender for vocational students majoring in hospitality.

2. Related Works

This part provides an overview of current literature to support the present study. Employability skills are referred to as the skill required to secure and retain a job and recent usage of the term that is often used to describe the training or foundation skills upon which a person must develop job-specific skills. Employability skills are those essential skills necessary for acquiring, keeping and performing well on a job (Shafie & Nayan, 2010). Such skills include; managing resources, communication and interpersonal skills, team work and problem-solving and acquiring and maintaining a job. Generally, employability skills are required by students to prepare themselves to meet the needs of various occupations after graduation. According to Shafie & Nayan, (2010) today's employers are worried about getting good workers who not only have basic academic skills for example reading, writing, science, mathematics, oral communication and listening but also higher order thinking skills for instance learning, reasoning, thinking creatively, decision making and problem solving.

2.1 Hospitality in Vocational Education

Today, the study of hospitality is considered important due to the fact that it is a vital industry in the service sector. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, hospitality industry is estimated to have a total of 262 .6 million jobs which presented the world's workforce by the year 2017 and being one of the most resilient industries in the world (WTTC, 2009). Hence there is an increasing need for the hospitality education sector to provide enough manpower to cater to the ever-changing and demanding industry.

Technical Vocational Education (TVE) is defined as that type of education which fits the individual for gainful employment in recognized career as semi-skilled workers or technicians or sub-professionals (Oni, 2007). According to Maclean and Wilson (2009), TVE is concerned with the acquisition of skills and knowledge for employment and sustainable livelihood. TVE is that aspect of education that exposes the learner to the acquisition of demonstrable skills that could be transformed into economic benefits (Akerlele, 2007). It is a planned program of courses and learning experiences that begin with an exploration of career options, supports basic academic and life skills, and enables achievement of high academic standards, leadership, preparation for industry-defined work, and advanced and continuing education (Maclean & Wilson, 2009).

The TVET sector in Malaysia is expected to play an important role in the economy of the country since the government is promoting the development of human resources in the industry sector, to guarantee the competency and the skills of the workers. However, the government established many vocational education and training institutions. These institutions are under the supervision of four Ministries: - Ministry of Education, Human Resources, Entrepreneur Development and Youth and Sports (Western Australian Trade Office in Malaysia, 2003). On the contrary to academic institutions, the private sector is not as active in this area due to the fact that vocational training institutions are an intensive (Western Australian Trade Office in Malaysia, 2003).

Employability skills may be broadly defined as the basic academic, personal and teamwork skills that employers expect from their workers, which are expected to be developed by the educational system. According to Munro (2007) employability skills involve the ability to contribute to work efficiency in an organization combined with good oral and written communication skills and critical thinking, which form the foundation of both academic and workplace success. Bennett (2006) argued that employability skills include not only the attributes that are desired from prospective

employees but also the basic requirements an individual needs to be considered for employment. These skills are required to perform a task efficiently and to contribute to the growth of an organization.

Finally, Spowart (2011) suggested that key competencies necessary for success in the work environment, identified as soft skills such as customer service and communication skills, should be included and assessed as part of the hospitality curriculum. In summary, most but not all studies found that competencies in listening, communication, human relations, leadership, and management of others were most important for success. A few studies found leadership and interpersonal competencies to be of lesser importance than being adaptable to a changing environment or possessing strong financial competencies. Even fewer studies identified working knowledge of the product as essential for managerial success.

Based on previous study reviewed, female students were found to be more confident and academically inclined when using online as a learning platform. They prefer more care in tutoring and they have different interaction styles compared with male students and ultimately perform better than male students (Yukselturk & Bulut, 2009; Price, 2006). In Malaysia, it is concluded that more female learners are keen in e-learning compared to male students (Mahmod, Dahlan, Ramayah, Karia & Asaari, 2005).

Mohammad and Alsaleh (2013) in their study of motivational factors illustrated that there were two significant factors for female motivation, which were Job opportunities, and Modern major, it means that female students are more motivated to study Hospitality and tourism courses than male students, While the one significant factor toward a male student was Ease in studying showed that male students were strongly agreed on ease of studying this major compare with female students.

3. Methodology

This research applied quantitative methodology. The respondents consist of final year students in hospitality course. 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. The instrument for the study consisted of 2 sections; demographics and employability skills. Part A of the student questionnaire consist of demographic information including gender, race, household income, parental education, and current CGPA. While Part B measures the employability skills of the students and it contains 150 items adapted from generic skills questionnaire developed by the SCANS (1991), Mohd Sattar et al., (2009), Soft Skills (KPTM 2006) and Malaysian Quality Framework (MQA), (2005) including Communication Skills, Teamwork Skills, Problem-solving Skills, Initiative and enterprise Skills, Planning and organizing Skills, Self-management Skills, Resource Management Skills, Technology Skills, Leadership Skills, and Basic Skills. However, based on literature review, other skills that are included are Entrepreneurship Skills, Learning How to Learn, Working with Others, Technical and Vocational Skills, Ethical and Professional Moral Skills. Descriptive analysis was used to analyse the quantitative data [Add about t-test]. Independent Samples T – test was conducted to answer the research question. Result of Independent Samples T-test is shown in the finding.

4. Findings and Discussion

This study involved 841 vocational students from Vocational Colleges in Malaysia who are in hospitality field. Table 1 presents the respondent's profile according to gender, ethnicity, CGPA, father's occupation, mother's occupation, family income, location, program, internship upon graduation and internship with industry.

Majority of the respondents are female (about 58.7 percent) and male are only 41.3 percent. In terms of ethnicity, there are 79.0 percent respondents who were Malay, 14.4 percent of them were Chinese, 2.4 percent of them were Indians also 4.3 percent of them were in other race. In term of CGPA category, majority of the respondents had CGPA 2.51 – 3.00 (50.7%). Meanwhile, 49.3 percent of the respondents are in range of 3.01 – 3.50. Based on parental occupation of respondent's category, majority of the respondents indicated that their father was working in government sector (43.3%). However, in terms of mother's occupation, most of respondents indicated that their mother was working in private sector (49.2 percent). According to Table 1, in terms of family income, the result shows that most respondents were from middle class family. Their family income mostly ranged from RM2001-RM3000 per month (44.0%). Meanwhile, 35.7 percent of the respondents indicated that their family income is between RM3001-RM4000. And 20.3 percent indicated that their family income is above RM4000 per month. In terms of location, 55.1 percent of the respondents were from rural area while 44.9 percent were from urban area. In terms of program of study, four hundred sixty three of the respondents are in bakery course (55.1%) while 44.9 percent are in catering course. Table 1 also shows that all the respondents had internship upon graduation and the internship was with the industry. In addition to the questionnaire, the differences in competency perceived level by gender for vocational students majoring in hospitality are explored. Independent Samples T – test was conducted to answer the research question. Result of Independent Samples T-test is shown in the tables.

Table 1 - Respondent's Demographic Profile

	Frequency (N)	Total (N)	Percentage (%)	Total (%)
<i>Gender</i>		841		100
Male	347		41.3	
Female	494		58.7	
<i>Ethnicity</i>		841		100
Malay	664		79.0	
Chinese	121		14.4	
Indian	20		2.4	
Others	36		4.3	
<i>CGPA</i>		841		100
2.00 – 2.50	0		0	
2.51 – 3.00	426		50.7	
3.01 – 3.50	415		49.3	
3.51 – 4.00	0		0	
<i>Father's Occupation</i>		841		100
Government servant	364		43.3	
Private servant	205		24.4	
Self - employed	212		25.2	
Others	60		7.1	
<i>Mother's Occupation</i>		841		100
Government servant	126		15.0	
Private servant	414		49.2	
Self - employed	167		19.9	
Others	134		15.9	
<i>Family Income</i>		841		100
Below RM2000.00	0		0	
RM2001.00-RM3000.00	370		44.0	
RM3001.00– RM4000.00	300		35.7	
Above RM4000.00	171		20.3	
<i>Location</i>		841		100
Rural	463		55.1	
Urban	378		44.9	
<i>Program</i>		841		100
Bakery & Pastry	463		55.1	
Catering	378		44.9	
<i>Internship upon graduation</i>		841		100
Yes	841		100.0	
No	0		0	
<i>Internship with industry</i>		841		100
Yes	841		100.0	
No	0		0	

Based on Table 2, in addition to the questionnaire, the differences of competency employability skills among male and female vocational students show that there is no significant difference between male ($M = 649.06$, $SD = 8.49$) and female ($M = 647.77$, $SD = 9.40$), $t(788.14) = 2.072$, $p = 0.39$. The mean score of male is higher than mean score of female. Thus, the result provides evident that male is more competent in hospitality employability skills compared to female student in vocational colleges.

In short, this study found that the differences of competency employability skills among male and female vocational students shows that the differences of competency employability skills among male and female vocational students show that there is no significant difference between male ($M = 649.06$, $SD = 8.49$) and female ($M = 647.77$, $SD = 9.40$), $t(788.14) = 2.07$, $p = 0.39$. The mean score of male is higher than mean score of female. Thus, the result provides evident that male is more competent in hospitality employability skills compared to female students in vocational colleges. However, the study carried out by Al-Alawneh (2014), stated that it can be inferred, that females' students scored higher than males' students in the two groups which may indicate that female students as more serious, disciplined, and achieve higher grades than males' students. Employability skills can assist students to learn how to learn. As males and females develop, they rely less on the authority of grades and adults' evaluations as sources of

feedback on their performance. It is interesting to note that (by comparison with others) males and females of high ability tended to underestimate their own performances while students of lesser ability tend to overestimate their performances. In addition, males and females producing good work were more self-critical than they were judgmental, whereas students producing poor work were less critical but more judgmental.

Table 2 - Summary of Independent T-Test for both group on Skills by Gender

Skills	Gender	N	SD	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances			t-test for Equality of Means		
				Lower	Upper	F	Sig.	Mean Difference	T	df	p
communication	Male	347	2.35	-.64	-.03	10.30	.00	-.34	-2.15	694.74	0.3
	Female	494	2.12	-.65	-.03						
teamwork	Male	347	2.11	-.58	-.06	16.08	.00	-.32	-2.49	839.00	0.1
	Female	494	1.70	-.59	-.05						
problem solving	Male	347	1.92	-.47	.06	.37	.53	-.20	-1.50	839.00	0.1
	Female	494	1.94	-.47	.06						
initiative	Male	347	2.10	-.36	.18	.87	.35	-.09	-.66	839.00	0.5
	Female	494	1.93	-.37	.18						
planning & organizing	Male	347	1.78	.03	.54	3.18	.07	.29	2.21	839.00	0.0
	Female	494	1.92	.03	.54						
self-management	Male	347	2.16	-.02	.60	3.07	.08	.28	1.79	839.00	0.0
	Female	494	2.38	-.02	.59						
learning	Male	347	1.81	.34	.91	13.16	.00	.62	4.46	823.26	0.0
	Female	494	2.25	.35	.90						
information technology	Male	347	2.01	.44	1.01	3.11	.07	.73	5.03	839.00	0.0
	Female	494	2.12	.44	1.01						
resource management	Male	347	2.03	-.52	-.02	17.57	.00	-.27	-2.06	659.93	0.0
	Female	494	1.70	-.53	-.01						
entrepreneurship	Male	347	1.90	.19	.75	1.85	.17	.47	3.36	839.00	0.0
	Female	494	2.08	.20	.74						
basic	Male	347	2.06	.61	1.18	0.02	.87	.90	6.24	839.00	0.0
	Female	494	2.05	.61	1.18						
leadership	Male	347	1.74	-.03	.54	25.85	.00	.25	1.81	835.31	0.7
	Female	494	2.32	-.02	.53						
working with others	Male	347	2.29	-.622	-.06	17.57	.00	-.34	-2.34	626.21	0.1
	Female	494	1.79	-.634	-.05						
ethical	Male	347	3.01	-1.177	-.40	13.66	.00	-.78	-3.90	688.92	0.0
	Female	494	2.68	-1.18	-.39						
tech vocational	Male	347	2.90	-.27	.46	5.09	.02	.09	.49	668.75	.62
	Female	494	2.48	-.28	.47						
competence	Male	347	8.49	.04	2.53	4.61	.03	1.28	2.07	788.14	0.3
	Female	494	9.40	.06	2.51						

5. Conclusion

In this regard, it is important that students know what they are attempting before they commence the task. Further, the student needs to know the standards of performance, know what he or she is trying to achieve, and be able to compare his or her own performance to that standard. The gender differences appeared to be managed by the authorities. Gender differences must put into the perspective when planning skills development courses so that individual needs are precisely targeted. In these respects, corrective measures should be taken to create a balance in gender-skills distribution. The equilibrium systems in skills acquisition should be moving toward stability and open up for a fair competition between genders in the employment market.

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