

Elements of Employability Skills Among Students from Community Colleges Malaysia

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ABSTRACT : The significance of this study was to identify the elements of employability skills which integrated by instructors of community college within teaching process and its importance to employers in Malaysia. Five research questions were established for this study. 270 respondents were selected among instructors at community colleges in southern region through purposive sampling. Questionnaires were used to gain data which applicable for research with observation design. The questionnaire were segregated into two sets with different format of arrangements. The feedback were then analyzed through descriptive statistic (min, rank) and inference statistic. t-test then applied to identify the significant difference of perception on employability skills between community colleges' instructors and employers from industry. It turn out both party have the same agreement on the importance of three elements in employability skills. However, there were some difference existed in perception toward communication skill, work group skill and ICT skill. This project finally revealed four worker characteristics desired by employer which are: show interest in working; punctuality; able to work efficiently and; determination.

Keyword: *Employment Skills, Community Colleges, Industry, Communication Skills, ICT Skills, Teamwork Skills, Globalization*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Necessity of quality labor force have turning critical in the globalized environment and high technology nowadays. To be competitive in meeting today's high tuned technology exporting and servicing employment requirements, current educational system and academical practices need to re-orientate while industries need to emphasized on employment trainings in order to continue improving their knowledges, skills and creativity. Ministry of Higher Education being suggested to lauch programs about career seminars in Institutes of Higher Learning (IPT) to overcome unemployment for graduates in factors of unmatch labor supply with quality and qualifications demanded by knowledge-based economic or k-economy (Khairina, 2004). As it, Technical and Vocational department need to stress on this issue to train up prerequisite graduates that able to suffice industries requirements.

1.1 Employability

There were a lot of definition trying to explain the meaning of Employability, however, most of them were just attachment of terms. Gainer (2002) has summarized out a set of skills that will give a competence to addressed as Employable, they are: Communication Skills,

Interactional Skills, Computer Skills, Civilization Skills, Ethics, Personal Management, Vocational Mature, Problem Solving Skills, and Career Development Skills . Lankard (1990) also defined Employability as a person who hold a feature of Good Self-Image, Good Interpersonal Skills, and Good Attitude. Lastly, from an article “ Yukon Work Futures: Skills for Today’s Workplace” published by The Conference Board of Canada (1996), Employability being explained as a terminology used to define skills and quality candidate posed when undertake vacancies offer by companies.

1.2 Employability Skills

The Conference Board of Canada (2000) has outlined ‘Employability Skills’ as one of the terms to clear out expertises and qualities expected by employers on those new staffs. Employability Skills being defined as skills that can be transfer from one job to another and is practicable enough to cover all careers available. Employability Skills are very essential as graduates who posed a good technical expertise but not armored by employability skills will be ranked as low quality. Today’s market has a steady stream towards globalization and diversification, industries were now only looking for technical expertises or ‘hard skills’, at the same time they are count in candidates’ employability skills or ‘soft skills’. It is easy to understand as employers are looking for candidates who are able to fully contribute themselves among variety of positions. Further authenticated by Sharil (2000), industries now actually demanding candidates that posed both technical and employability skills.

1.3 Communication Skills

Abdul Rahman (2002) stated out three requirements to practice effective Communication Skills that were Authenticity, Kindness and Emtatpy. Authenticity means honestly and openly for process feelings and idea to hand, Kindness cover the nature of sincere, respect and supportive, while Empathy show an ability to understand and think from the point of others as well as understand others’ feeling. With the combination from the requirements, Candidates are expected to cover certian skills like speaking, writing, listening, positive on front of spokesman and able to dominate audience. Hence, aspects given are challenges for students to master Communication Skills as to be Employable.

1.4 ICT Skills

Ellington, Percival and race (2003) proposed that educationally utilize ICT will help students to prepare themselves for their careers. ICT will expose students to a wider and automatical learning opportunities. Moreover, students may be more creative, innovative and stimulative on their learning activities. Advancement of technology is a catalyst to be competitive in today’s global market. As it, employers are paying more attention to recruit graduates that posed a good ICT Skills. Research contributed by Smits (2001) turned up a high demand of ICT professional in industry sectors.

1.5 TeamWork Skills

Management of technical projects in setting up a high potential teams is the most challenging topic nowadays, as it require a capable leader who will the plannings, organizing, monitoring and feedback together with participative teammates who will follow the instructions delegated. A research from Callen (2003) revealed quite a number of supervisors shared a

perceptions that companies now is preferring graduates that posed a good Teamwork Skills, whereas Interpersonal Skills is a added advantages when they start to participate in the workforce.

According to literature review, a lot of employers has been casting about for candidates that posed both technical and employability skills that they believe will directly bloom up company's productivity and competitiveness (Nurahimah and Rosmawati, 2002). However, instructors and employers facing quite some complications to integrate employability skills onto their apprentices.

2.0 METHOD

2.1 Research Objective

A lot of researches carried out before revealed that most of the employers are looking for candidates who posed sufficient Employability skills like Positive Thinking, Efficient Expertise, Good Problem Solving Skills, Good Decision Making Skills, Good Socialization, Good Interpersonal Skills, and Effective leadership (Baxter and Young, 2000). As it, this research was to identify elements for Employability Skills integrated by Community Colleges in their technical syllabus with the elements Employers cherish for. Besides, this research pointed out challenges for instructors to integrate the elements in their classes. Lastly, this research also identified the perceptions hold by both Instructors and Employers on importance of elements.

2.2 Procedure

This survey used designed survey form method where samples were devided into two groups that were instructors from Kolej Komuniti Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi and employers in southern region. There were nine College Community and companies participated from Johore, Negeri Sembilan and Melacca. A total number of 135 target samples were contributed from college instructors from faculty of technical and technical besed companies.

2.3 Test Instrument

A set of questionnaire were employed by this survey. According to pilot study carried out before, credibility and value Alpha Cronbach is more than 0.6 has authenticated the adoption of this questionnaire. There were 3 major parts in questionnaires seperated according to instructors and companies. For Instructors, part A was about their academic background and biodata, part B was to survey information about elements of Employability Skills and part C was to figure out challenges to integrate Employability Skills into their classes. For companies, part A was to collect their company background, part B was to mirror out their desired elements of Employability Skills, and part C was to line up the elements in sequence.

3.0 RESULTS

3.1 Table 1 bring forth instructors' biodata for their gender, courses, field of coach and coaching experience.

Table 1: Distribution of Instructors from Kolej Komuniti Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi

Gender	Frequency	Frequency Percentage (%)
Male	57	47.90%
Female	62	52.10%
Total	119	100%

Courses	Frequency	Frequency Percentage (%)
Diploma	25	21.00%
Degree	70	58.80%
Masters	24	20.20%
Total	119	100%

Field of Coach	Frequency	Frequency Percentage (%)
Electric Technology	35	29.40%
Air Technology	17	14.30%
Manufacturing Technology	11	9.20%
Building Maintenance	10	8.40%
Automotive	12	10.10%
Others	34	28.60%
Total	119	100%

Coaching Experience	Frequency	Frequency Percentage (%)
Less than 1 year	6	5.00%
1 – 4 years	52	43.70%
5 – 10 years	45	37.80%
More than 10 years	16	13.40%
Total	119	100%

3.2 Table 2 layed out gender, positions, nature of business and working experience of industries' participants.

Table 2: Distribution of Companies Participated from Southern Region

Gender	Frequency	Frequency Percentage (%)
Male	66	61.10%
Female	42	38.90%
Total	108	100%

Position	Frequency	Frequency Percentage (%)
Managers	7	6.50%
Supervisors	48	44.40%
Others	53	49.10%
Total	108	100%

Nature of Business	Frequency	Frequency Percentage (%)
Manufacturing	39	36.10%
Construction	28	25.90%
Others	41	38.00%
Total	108	100%

Working Experience	Frequency	Frequency Percentage (%)
1-4 years	61	56.50%
5- 10 years	30	27.80%
More than 10 years	17	15.70%
Total	108	100%

3.3 Table 3 indicated min point and ranks for Communication Skills. The highest min point for colleges is ‘Able to be a good audience’ while for companies is ‘Always in armed state’.

Table 3: Ranking for Communication Skills from College Community and Companies

No. Item	Communication Skills	Community Colleges		Companies	
		Min	Rank	Min	Rank
Q6	Able to communicate effectively.	4.29	11	3.99	9
Q7	Performing based on objectives.	4.24	12	2.59	13
Q8	Able to elaborate idea perspicuously.	4.35	7	4.17	2
Q9	Able to voice out in front of audience.	4.37	5	4.06	8
Q10	Able to communicate well in Malay.	4.46	3	4.07	7
Q11	Able to convey information nicely.	4.36	6	4.09	5.5
Q12	Able to be a good audience.	4.5	1	3.98	10
Q13	Able to attract audience’s attention.	4.31	9	4.12	4
Q14	Effective in ordering people.	4.29	10	3.9	12
Q15	Always in armed state.	4.44	4	4.19	1
Q16	Good socialization skills.	4.49	2	4.09	5.5
Q17	Able to communicate well in English.	4.15	13	3.92	11
Q18	Good in starting conversations.	4.34	8	4.16	3

3.4 Table 4 indicated min point and ranks for Teamwork Skills. The highest min point for colleges is ‘Able to motivate workmates while for companies is ‘Industrious and committed’.

Table 4: Ranking for Teamwork Skills from College Community and Companies

No. Item	Teamwork Skills	Community Colleges		Companies	
		Min	Rank	Min	Rank
Q19	Able to motivate workmates.	4.45	1	4.15	5
Q20	Confidence to lay decisions.	4.39	5	4.18	2
Q21	Able to solve conflicts effectively.	4.37	8	4.09	8
Q22	Self-confidence.	4.34	9	4.14	6
Q23	Self-discipline.	4.22	11	4.07	10
Q24	Ability in critical adjustment and react reasonable.	4.21	12	4.02	11

Q25	Able to encourage workmates.	4.38	6	4.17	3.5
Q26	Self-appreciation.	4.4	3	4.08	9
Q27	Ready to accept challenges.	4.4	4	4.17	3.5
Q28	Industrious and committed.	4.44	2	4.31	1
Q29	Able to solve issues creatively.	4.14	13	4	12
Q30	Honest and sincere to carry out duties.	4.3	10	3.97	13
Q31	Opened for people point of view.	4.37	7	4.11	7

3.5 Table 5 indicated min point and ranks for ICT Skills. The highest min point for colleges is ‘Able to effectively improving understanding on ICT’ while for companies is ‘Able to bring in ICT skills into planning, analysis and process of data’.

Table 5: Ranking for ICT Skills from College Community and Companies

No. Item	ICT Skills	Community Colleges		Companies	
		Min	Rank	Min	Rank
Q32	Able to effectively improving understanding on ICT.	4.26	1	3.94	10.5
Q33	Able to bring in ICT skills into planning, analysis and process of data.	4.08	7	4.12	1
Q34	Able to utilise e-mail effectively.	4.18	3	3.95	9
Q35	Able to identify information well.	4.06	10	3.98	8
Q36	Able to source internet for information.	4.09	6	3.9	13
Q37	Able to utilise e-mails to enhance interactions.	4.07	8	4.01	7
Q38	Able to utilise technologies effectively.	4.17	4	3.91	12
Q39	Able to utilise technologies without assistances.	4.04	11	4.09	4
Q40	Able to provide good working reports by computers.	4.07	9	4.04	6
Q41	Able to cope in variety of multimedia component.	4.11	5	4.1	2.5
Q42	Able to use variety of software’s effectively.	3.97	13	4.05	5
Q43	Able to employ electronic learning network system effectively.	4.03	12	3.94	10.5
Q44	Able to use internet for critical adjustment and creativity.	4.25	2	4.1	2.5

3.6 Table 6 indicated features that companies prefer on candidates from Community Colleges. Among these features, ‘Show Initiative’ has the highest min which mean companies favour employees that with working passions.

Table 6: Features of Employees favored by Companies

No. Item	Elements for Employability Skills	Min	Rank
Q45	Punctual	4.68	2
Q46	Show Initiative	4.76	1
Q47	Concentrate on job	4.46	9
Q48	High Motivation	4.58	5
Q49	Caution on self and others	4.55	7
Q50	High Concern for own job	4.49	8
Q51	Serious on job	4.63	4
Q52	Careful when performing	4.41	10
Q53	Efficient in carry out task	4.64	3
Q54	High output quality	4.57	6

3.7 Table 7 indicated challenges faced by instructors to integrate Employability Skills desired by companies.

Table 7: Challenges to Integrate Employability Skills

No. Item	Elements for Employability Skills	Min	Rank
Q45	No contents of Employability Skills included in syllabus.	3.05	3
Q46	Curriculum designed not emphasised on Employability Skills.	3.04	4
Q47	No tests relate for Employability Skills were designed.	2.9	7
Q48	No instructions delegated to integrate Employability Skills into syllabus.	2.75	10
Q49	No guidance to integrate elements of Employability Skills.	2.76	9
Q50	Not understand or clear about elements of Employability Skills.	2.94	6
Q51	Not clear about importance Employability Skills.	2.84	8
Q52	Lack of time to integrate elements of Employability Skills in class.	3.13	1
Q53	No specified measurements to integrate Employability Skills in class.	3.12	2
Q54	Not being exposing to elements of Employability Skills.	3.01	5

3.8 Table 8 indicated an *Unlean t-test* that shown a difference in perceptions hold by companies and instructors in community colleges.

Table 8: Distribution of Employability Skills Integrated by Community Colleges and Companies

	Min	Standard Deviation	<i>t-test</i>	p
Instructors (n=119)	4.4030	0.21178	0.270	0.000
Companies (n=108)				

4.0 DISCUSSION

This survey has covered five objectives. Analysis result found that instructors from community colleges agreed that they have integrated elements of Employability Skills in classes. It can be clearly verdict from average min of Communication Skills (4.35), Teamwork Skills (4.34) and ICT Skills (4.11). On the other hand, employers consider an element for Employability by Teamwork Skills (4.11), follow by ICT Skills (4.01) and lastly were Communication Skills (3.95). Ultimately, both instructors and employers agree on the importance on these three elements.

Elements that Employers cherished the most were ‘Show Initiative’ (4.76), followed by ‘Punctual’ (4.68), third was ‘Efficient in carry out task’ (4.64), and lastly was ‘Serious on job’ (4.63). According to Hasliza Hassan (2003), candidates who hold good academic results will not be competitive enough to earn their employment opportunity as one of the reasons is they unable to work as a team. They must further arm themselves with ‘soft skills’ to be gregarious and grateful among their workmates. Employers nowadays are looking forward capable employees that posed basic employment knowledge that will save amount of training and orientation fees. In detailed, they are recruiting graduates that attached themselves proper academic knowledge and well trained ‘soft skills’ that will promise these graduates will return highest quality of contribution.

For challenges faced by instructors from Community College in integrating elements of Employability Skills into their classes, there were five major challenges that were ‘Lack of time to integrate elements of Employability Skills in class’ (3.13); follow by ‘No specified measurements to integrate Employability Skills in class’ (3.12); ‘No contents of Employability Skills included in syllabus’ (3.05); ‘Curriculum designed not emphasised on Employability Skills’ (3.04); and lastly ‘Not being expose to elements of Employability Skills’ (3.01). Moreover, students treated this Employability Skills just a stepping stone have also lowered their employment opportunity. Instructors should concentrate and concern on this issue. Instructors should continue seek for assistance or further their knowledge as to deliver a better Employability Skills to students.

This research also revealed a significant difference in perceptions among instructors and employers on these three elements of Employability Skills. Although instructors claimed that they have integrated elements of Employability Skills into their classes, however, ability

of instructors to integrate is still in question marks. As it, they might not able to fully deliver the elements that companies favoured to students effectively. Lastly, this research has suggested some important elements for the three Employability Skills that are consider important and must be integrated. For Communication Skills, Able to Communicate Effectively; Able to Voice Out in Front of Audience and; Good Socialization Skills are the most important elements among. For ICT Skills, Able to Identify Information Well; Able to Provide Good Working Reports by Computers and; Able to Utilize E-Mails to Enhance Interactions should be given priorities. Lastly for Teamwork Skills, Opened for People Point of View; Self-Confidence, Self-Appreciation, and Able to Solve Conflicts Effectively will attract employers' attention the most.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This research concluded by a clear view on importance of Employability Skills for employment opportunity and it should be given more attention from education system in our country. Employability Skills act as a pinpoint to build up candidates' self-developments and personalities, hence it helps in their future competence and sociality. Besides, community colleges should continue update themselves for latest elements of Employability Skills that favor by companies as the syllabus carry out internal may meet the external requirements. Instructors may also build a connection with companies in order to obtain a trusty and direct flow of information about elements of Employability Skills. On the other hand, companies may work closely with ministry to help develop trainings for instructors about elements of Employability Skills as for win-win situation. Instructors receive direct information about requirements and favors or elements will then deliver to students. The ball rolls back to companies as students graduated and join them with proper academic result (hard skills) and desired personalities (soft skills).

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