Employability Skill Readiness among Business' Students

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Abstract: *In Malaysia, like other countries, face a serious skill gap, where the employment supply skill is not match with skill required by employer. Therefore the objective of this study is to identify the level of employability skill work readiness among business' students in a private higher learning institution and to determine on main employability skill they perceived they are ready. The methodological design for this study was quantitative by using a survey instrument and used to collect data from 200 respondents. The results indicated the level of employability skill among respondent is high, they claimed ready in terms of listening skill, teamwork and collaboration also innovation skills and they fully aware of the skill areas need to improve. The study suggests that a policy marker to develop work skill readiness standards to make sure there is a matching on skill supply and demand between industry and workforce.*

Keywords: employability skill, readiness, business' student, Malaysia

1. Introduction

Currently, an academic qualification is no longer guarantee for graduate' employment. Due to technology and economic extension, employers are now looking for candidates that having a set of skill that match with their needs. Even though the job vacancies are increasing but are only filled by part of the workers (Zaliza Hanapi & Mohd Safarin Nordin, 2013). Unemployment issue in Malaysia is not because of lacking on job opportunities market but mainly exist due to other factors such as the low quality of a graduate (Sharifah Farhana Syed Othman, Rahmah Ismail, & Abdul Hair Awang, 2011). Meanwhile Chook Yuh Ying,(2013) Job street said, in Malaysia beside of attitude, main reasons for graduate fails to get the job is their lacking employability skills. It is supported by Mohamad Idham Md Razak, Asliza Mohd Yusof, Wan Nor Syazana, Wan Effa Jaafar & Adi Hakim Talib, 2014 indicated that Malaysian' graduate having problem in English language proficiency. Finally Yasmin Mohd Adnan, Md Nasir Daud, Anuar Alias & Muhammad Najib Razali, 2012 revealed that the primary weaknesses of Malaysian graduates are: management, problem-solving, communication, leadership, creativity, critical thinking, proactive, self-confidence and interaction skills, the result, graduates having difficulty to obtain which match with their qualification.

Meanwhile, employers complained that their unable to find the right talent to fulfil the certain vacancy, they said the new graduate is lacking on employability skill; they are not equipped with the relevant skills and knowledge needed by the industries and their not qualified for the posts required as well they claimed graduate unfulfilled with the education and skill for criteria and requirement industry (Rahmah, Ishak, and Wei Sieng, 2011; National Associated of Manufactured (NAM), 2011; Marchante, Bienvenido and Pagan, 2011). Meanwhile Zabeda (2009) added that there is a big gap between the quality levels of the Malaysia graduates with the international standard. In order to achieve Malaysia' vision to produce skilled, versatile and marketable graduates, therefore this scenario needs to be highlighted.

Hence, this paper aims to identify the level employability skill work readiness among business' student and to determine which skill that they perceived they ready. The emphasis is being placed on basic skills, applied/technical skill, interpersonal skills and 21st century skill. These skills are identified as the mains skill that employer needed by literature (Valery Lang Hall, 2010; Robert I Lerman, 2013; Learning Express Library, 2014; Yasmin Mohd Adnan, Md Nasir Daud, Anuar Alias & Muhammad Najib Razali, 2012; Ediagbonya & Kennedy, 2013; Hunt, 2007; Verica Babić & Marko Slavković, 2011; Kevin Lowden, Stuart Hall, Dr Dely Elliot & Jon Lewin, 2011; András Farkas, 2008; Achsah Carrier & Meredith Gunter, 2010; Kelebogile Paadi, 2014; Julia Braham & Carol Elston, 2010; Latisha Asmaak Shafie, 2010; Oyadongha Diseye Juliet, 2013; Emily R. Lai & Michaela Viering, 2012; Martin Humburg, Rolf van der Velden &Annelore Verhagen, 2013; Janet B. Bray, Kimberly A. Green & Ken Kay, 2010; Anthony P. Carnevale, 2013; and Jean-Claude Brizard, 2014).

1.1 Research Problem

The number of graduate is increasing each year; in 2007 the total is 168,879 and increased to 173,183 in 2008. Meanwhile the unemployment rate is 3.1 % in August 2013, even though, it is under full employment base on International Labour Organization Standards (ILO) which define full employment as the unemployment rate less than 4 % the literature showed that unemployed among graduate still high. Among the reasons are; lacking the skills required in job market expectation (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2011 and Berlingieri & Erdsiek, 2012); increase the number of supply in labour market (The Star, 2013, October 23); quality of the graduates (Rahmah et al, 2011) and the rest blamed graduate for lacking of employability skills such as time management, creativity in managing problem, poor in communication skills, low self-confidence, lack of problem solving skills and lack of attitude towards work discipline (Nora, 2013, Suhaimi, 2011 and Ministry of Education, 2012).

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Base on above problems, the study in this area is needed in order to produce graduate that able to fulfil the need of the industry and able to compete the global labour market.

1.2 Research Objectives

The research objectives of this study are:
1. To identify levels of employability skill readiness among business' student in a private higher learning institution.
2. To determine the perception of business' student in a private higher learning institution on their main employability skill readiness.

2. Literature Review

This section will discuss on work readiness among graduates and skills that literature said that graduate are lacking. They are basic skills, applied skills, interpersonal skill and 21st century skills.

2.1 Work Readiness

Work readiness refers to the prepared graduate as new entrants area to which are furnished with the attitudes, skills and knowledge to be successful in the workplace. Caballero & Walker, 2010) includes preparation on employability skills, cognitive skills, non-cognitive skills and behavioural (ACT, 2013). There is a need strategic alliance between business and education (Ohio SHRM state council, 2015) and study on work readiness able to predict the graduate's potential job performance and career advancement in the workplace (Fullarton, Costa & Dunning, 2013).

Ministry of Human Resources (2010) reported that only 30% vacancies filled up graduate job seekers and this scenario was more serious in West peninsular Malaysia (about 71% unfilled vacancies) than in East Malaysia (about 30% unfilled vacancies). It due to unready on unemployment skill needed by industry (Chung-Khain Wye, Yet-Mee Lim Teck-Heang Lee, 2012), American Diploma Project Network (2011) reported similar scenario in US. As the conclusion work readiness is believed to be indicative of graduate potential in terms of long term job performance and career advancement. (Cabellero, Catherine Lissette, Walker, Arlene, 2010).

2.2 Basic Skill

It is a basic ability to read, write, speak, listen, and perform basic mathematical procedures. Such as the ability to interpret written information and writing skills include the ability to communicate thoughts in letters and a report which is mathematical skills include the ability to solve practical problems through the use of a variety of mathematical techniques (Secretary of Labour, the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, 1991). Surveyed done by the partnership for 21st century skills and the society for human resource management (2006) on 400 employers claimed that graduate deficient on basic skill in writing (English), mathematics and reading comprehension. Meanwhile in Thailand, the Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI) said that basic knowledge and skills for jobs is the fundamental characteristics of employees required by

employers (Yongyuth Chalamwong & Khanittha Hongprayoon, 2012). In Malaysia reported that basic skills include counting, reading, writing, listening and communication found to be the second lowest important skills(Mohamad Sattar et al. 2009) and it is needed to succeed in a postsecondary option and a transition to entry-level skills training for work readiness (Alssid et al., 2002). Finally studied by Alex wilson (2012) on 542 British companies with 1.6 million workers identified that employers are experiencing gaps in basic skills such as literacy, numeracy and Information Technology.

2.3 Applied /Technical Skill

Having a proficiency in "applied skills" is critical for young people entering the workforce today. It is refer to those skills that enable new entrants to use the basic knowledge acquired in school to perform in the workplace (The Conference Board, 2006). It includes "4 Cs"; critical thinking and problem solving, communication, collaboration, and creativity and innovation skills. Having a proficiency in "applied skills" is critical for young people entering the workforce today. 21st century skills and society for human resource management, 2006, reported that employer said the applied skills will become more important in the future such as critical thinking/problem solving, information technology application, teamwork/collaboration, and creativity/ innovation diversity.

2.4 Interpersonal Skill

Interpersonal skills can be defined broadly as those skills which one needs in order to communicate effectively with another person or a group of people.(Julia Braham & Carol Elston, 2010) Meanwhile National Work Readiness Credential Performance Rubric (2013) define interpersonal Skills as Self-Management, Professional Relationships, Professional Appearance, Negotiation, Teamwork and Professional skills. Verica Babić & Marko Slavković (2011) concluded that the most valuable soft skills from trade and service sectors are enthusiasm, teamwork and communication skills. The least valuable soft skill among managers from all sectors is leadership. Finally Yasmin Mohd Adnan, Md Nasir Daud, Anuar Alias & Muhammad Najib Razali (2012) said, ethics & professionalism, critical thinking & problem solving are the main interpersonal skills looking by employers. In US (International Education Studies, 2013) reported that four most important skills international students believed they needed to obtain are teamwork, interpersonal skills, time management, and management.

2.5 21st Century Skill

The latest skills that required by industry is 21st century it refers to a broad set of knowledge, skills, work habits, and character traits that are believed to be critically important to success in today's world and can be applied in all academic subject areas and in all educational, career, and civic settings throughout a student's life. (The Glossary of Education Reform by The great schools partnership, 2014. It is skills needed by the workforce in order to make a useful contribution to the knowledge and information society in the

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21st century (Voogt and Pareja Roblin, 2010 and Allen and Van der Velden, 2012). Martin Humburg, Rolf van der Velden & Annelore Verhagen (2013) said the most importance skill ranking graduates to get hired in job are professional expertise, interpersonal skills, Commercial/entrepreneurial skills, Innovative/creative skills, Strategic/organizational skills and General academic skills. 21st century skills are competencies required for the jobs of the future and include knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs). It is critical for workers in order to remain competitive, attract the right type of industry, and engage the right type of talent in this knowledge-based, innovative economy (Anthony P. Carnevale, 2013).

3. Research Methodology

The paper attempts to identify the level of employment skills readiness among business' students in a private higher learning institution in Malaysia and also to determine the main employment skills that student perceived their ready for workforce. Questionnaires were distributed to 200 final business' students. There are Four (4) main section in the questionnaire contained questions concerning 1) basic skills 2) applied/ technical skills 3) interpersonal skills and finally 4) 21st century skills. The questions are designed base on previous literatures.

4. Results and Discussion

This section is going discuss the result of the study. The fist area will reliability test result and followed by result base on the objective of the study.

4.1 Reliability

It is done to 15 respondents of student and the result as below:

Table 1: Reliability Test

No.	Variable	Cronbach's Alpha Level	No of Items
1	Basic skill	0.769	8
2	Applied skill	.765	8
3	Interpersonal skill	0.794	7
4	21st century skill	0.855	6

4.2. Background of Respondents

The result shows that the number of female respondents is 59% meanwhile male is 41%. Malay respondents contributed 78.5%, Malay 39% and Indian 13.5% and Chinese 8%. More than half of respondents fall under the age group of 24-26 years old (56.6%). Almost all (96.5%) are single and the rest (3.5%) are married. Finally, the courses attended by respondents, 37.5% of them from Bachelor of Human Resource Management, followed by Business Management (18.5%) and the least from Sports Industry Management and Accountancy (3.5%). The details are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Background of Respondents

Variable	Category	Total	
		Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	81	41.0
	Female	118	59.0
Race	Malay	157	78.5
	India	27	13.5
	Chinese	16	8.0
Age	18-20	11	5.5
	21-23	74	37.0
	24-26	113	56.5
	27 and above	2	1.0
Marital status	Single	193	96.5
	Married	7	3.5
Courses	Accountancy	20	10.0
	Finance	21	10.5
	Business Management	37	18.5
	Human Resources management	75	37.5
	Sports Industry Management	7	3.5
	Industrial Management	9	4.5
	Administrative Management	31	15.5

4.3 Objective 1:- To identify the perception of business' student work readiness in a private higher learning institution.

The findings show that mainly respondent said their ready to enter job market. More than half of them (56.5%) said they aware and prepare to improve employability skills. Another 54.5% claimed that they know with position that fit to their skills and knowledge and 53.5% said they are prepared to join workforce. Even though most of respondents agree and strongly agree on their readiness but there are quite number of respondents said their not sure. Table 3 shows that 24% of respondents said that their not sure regards to their preparation to join workforce, meanwhile another 22% not sure about skills and personal traits employers are looking for. Finally 17.5 of respondent reviled that not sure on their awareness and preparation to improve employability skills. Base on above discussion, it can conclude that most of respondents claim their ready to join labour market and know what skills that employer needed and make preparation to make improvement. Never the less, study also concluded there were some respondent still not sure, therefore it is suggested that future study need to be done, may be by using interview so the accurate answer will be revealed. The details are presented in Table 3.

No.	Questions	Percent (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	The prepared to accept a job tomorrow if offered.	0	0	11	44	46
2	The skills and personal traits employers are looking for	0.5	5.5	22	32	41
3	The abilities to explain clearly the skills to employer	0.5	5	13	36	47
4	The knowledge on positions that fit to skills and knowledge.	0.5	0	13	33	55
5	The knowledge on different types of job skills	0	0	17	42	42
6	The preparation on join the workforce	0.5	0	24	22	54
7	Awareness and preparation to improve employability skills	0	1.5	18	25	57

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4.4 **Objective 2:- To identify perception of business' students on their employment readiness skills.**

This discussion will be base on four skill, they are basic skill, applied/technical skills/interpersonal skills and 21st century skills.

Table 4 shows that mainly respondents ready for their basic skills, they also said their active listener (M= 4.26) followed by their excellent in sharing of ideas in various mediums, finally respondents said their able to interpret meaning of text in job manual M=4.2), the least of readiness skill is in expressing an idea in writing. The detail is in table 4.

Table 4: Descriptive Frequency Basic Skill

No	Question	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	I'm able to interpret meaning of a text in job manual	4.2000	.65739
2	I'm good expressing an idea in writing	3.7900	1.06846
3	I'm able to speak clearly and concisely	4.1000	.95633
4	I'm an active listener	4.2600	.95233
5	I'm able to locate information easily	4.1700	.73744
6	I'm able to find solution for complex issues	4.0900	.96777
7	I'm excellent in sharing of ideas in various mediums	4.2550	.80823

Similar with basic skill, mainly majority of respondent said their ready for applied/technical skill with the main skill that they were ready are: respondent said they are able to work independently (M-4.41); work with a diversity of people (M-4.25); and their ability to create new way of doing something (M=4.25) and the least is to lead a group of people (M=3.97) as shown in table 5.

Table 4: Descriptive Frequency Applied/Technical Skill

No	Question	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	I'm able to work with a diversity of people	4.2500	.74179
2	I know how to use suitable technology for task given	4.2000	.86820
3	I'm able to lead a group of people	3.9700	.93459
4	I'm able to create new way of doing something	4.2450	.87682
5	I'm able to work independently	4.4100	.75814
6	I'm punctuality person	4.1800	.79420
7	I'm responsible with my action	4.3400	.71902
8	I'm excellent in software and hardware of a computer	4.1000	.76349

On the areas of interpersonal skill, again respondents said they are ready as shown in table 5, they indicate that they are able to cooperate with their working partner (M 4.42), the second one; they have ability to motivate other during social interaction (M 4.395) and finally their ability in adapting various environment condition (M 4.38). The less readiness are the ability to follow in a task instruction given and in identifying and choosing alternative solution in an organization (M 4.21). The details is in table 5.

Table 5: Descriptive Frequency Interpersonal Skill

No	Question	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	I have ability to influence others	4.2550	.71592
2	I'm able to follow in a task instruction given	4.2100	.78035
3	I'm able adapting in a various environment condition	4.3800	.79925
4	I'm have ability to motivate other during social interaction	4.3950	.65661
5	I able to cooperate with my working partner	4.4200	.66014
6	I'm able to communicate with the correct tone with individuals	4.2550	.78936
7	I'm able to identify and choosing alternative solution in an organization	4.2100	.73389

21st Century Skill

As overall respondent perceived that they are ready for 21st century skills. Table 6 shows that the ability to come up with new ideas from a different angle to solve a problem is their main readiness (M 4.37); intelligence and a general aptitude to learn (M 4.284) and they able to contribute to the organization's commercial success (M 4.275). The least is the ability to work team and communicate with diverse kinds of people (M 4.14).

Table 6: Descriptive Frequency 21st Century Skill

No	Question	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	I have knowledge and skill to solve occupational specific problem.	4.2650	.65338
2	I'm able to work team and communicate with diverse kinds of people	4.1400	.91903
3	I'm able to contribute to the organization's commercial success	4.2750	.85029
4	I'm able to come up with new ideas from a different angle to solve a problem	4.3700	.78497
5	I'm able to commitment with organizational strategy and processes	4.2600	.69629
6	I'm intelligence and a general aptitude to learn.	4.2850	.87614

5. Conclusion

As the conclusion, majority of respondents claimed that their ready for employment skill especially in term of listening skill, lifelong learning and good self-direction, teamwork and collaboration and finally in their ability to come up with new ideas and to approach problems from a different angle.

Even though majority of respondent said their ready for employment but further study is still needed because this study only concentrate to a program in a private higher institution, therefore the perception is only from the small group. Future study should include more programs and more higher learning institution (public and private) hence, we will get more accurate perception. It is also suggest that the main stakeholder in education, government, student and higher learning institution collaborate to enhance the job readiness among graduates in Malaysia. The government should

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prioritise the agenda of improving the quality standard and to make sure higher learning institution offers courses that base on employer need for current and future employment. For the higher learning institute, they should work together with employer to make sure there are matching between syllabus and employer needs, and reduce the skills mismatch and unemployment rate.

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