

A CONCEPTUAL PAPER ON THE PRECURSORS OF EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS OF GIATMARA GRADUATES IN MALAYSIA

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Article history

Received date : 2-3-2024

Revised date : 3-3-2024

Accepted date : 7-4-2024

Published date : 30-4-2024

To cite this document:

Bustaman, H. A., Ramli, N., Ab Rahman, S. M., & Ridzwan, R. (2024). A conceptual paper on the precursors of employability skills of GIATMARA graduates in Malaysia. *International Journal of Accounting, Finance and Business (IJAFB)*, 9 (54), 1 - 9.

Abstract: *This conceptual paper aims to investigate the precursors of employability skills among graduates of GIATMARA, a vocational training institution in Malaysia. By drawing upon existing literature from vocational education, human resource management, and employability studies, we seek to establish a comprehensive framework that sheds light on the factors influencing the development of employability skills among GIATMARA graduates. The study begins by examining the historical roots and contemporary practices of vocational education in Malaysia, emphasizing its role in addressing the skills gap and promoting economic growth. We then explore the concept of employability skills, defining its key components and highlighting its importance in enhancing graduates' job prospects and career advancement. The subsequent sections analyze various factors influencing the development of employability skills among GIATMARA graduates, including the quality of training, the relevance of the curriculum, the effectiveness of teaching methods, and the role of industry partnerships. It takes employability skills to survive in the technological age. Employers discover, however, that job seekers lack certain knowledge and skills. As graduates get ready to enter the job market, employability skills are critical. The study sought to determine the impact of knowledge and skills on employability among Malaysian graduates of technical and vocational education and training. To finish the study, respondents who had graduated from GIATMARA were chosen. The sample size was chosen using simple random. Descriptive statistics like frequency, mean, and standard deviation were used in the quantitative data analysis of this study's data. Data was gathered using questionnaires that were modified to align with the study's goal after being lifted verbatim from a few other studies. Individuals served as the research study's unit of analysis. The science direct and Scopus databases were*

the primary sources of references for the literature reviews in this study. The information from the literature review's implications was given, and it suggested several frameworks for GIATMARA to enhance its graduates' employability. The findings were discussed and presented by the research questions. The framework highlights the significance of knowledge and skills related to the GIATMARA curriculum for the creation of GIATMARA graduates who are employable and competitive in Malaysia. In conclusion, this paper proposes several avenues for future research aimed at refining our theoretical model and developing practical recommendations for policy makers, educators, and employers seeking to foster greater levels of employability among GIATMARA graduates. These include exploring innovative teaching methods, leveraging technology to enhance learning outcomes, and fostering collaborative partnerships between stakeholders. Ultimately, it is hoped that this work will contribute towards a more robust and sustainable vocational education system in Malaysia, one that better serves the needs of graduates and the wider economy.

Keywords: *Employability Skills, TVET, Skills, Knowledge, Graduates*

Introduction

A person with employability skills may be more likely to land a dream job and pursue a career path thanks to a combination of personal accomplishments, insights, and traits. Employability skills are, in general, those knowledge and skill sets that students need to have to meet the different demands of the job market once they graduate. A crucial component of higher education is developing graduates' marketability so they can function well in the labor market (Mahmud, Boroh, Mail, Basir, Fabeil, Mohidin & Pazim, 2020; Tandika, & Ndjuyeye, 2022). Technical and Vocational Education can play a key role in providing the workforce in the future with employment capabilities Malaysia needs a highly skilled workforce to support the growth of the industry. With the changing job market and progressive technological change, workers are expected to keep abreast of global economic developments. (Kenayathulla, Ahmad & Idris, 2019).

Employability skills are work skills that refer to general or non-technical competencies including achievement, understanding, and personal qualities that make an individual able to obtain employment and succeed in his or her chosen occupation (Ju, Zhang, & Pacha, 2012; Mello et al., 2017). Every employee and prospective employee must have good work skills due to technological change and increasing globalization with strong competitiveness. The company wants graduates who are technically competent and also equipped with relevant job skills (Mgaiwa, 2021; Pitan, 2016). Employability skills must be a must for every graduate. Integrating work skills in learning is expected to produce graduates who are ready to be recruited by the employers and industries. Educational institutions as graduate providers must respond quickly to every change of skills having the knowledge, skills appropriate to the needs demanded by the industry.

Employability skills are essential for graduates to succeed in the job market. The lack of employability skills and knowledge among job seekers is a significant concern for employers. This conceptual paper aims to investigate the precursors of employability skills among graduates of GIATMARA, a vocational training institution in Malaysia. The study draws upon existing literature from vocational education, human resource management, and employability

studies to establish a comprehensive framework that sheds light on the factors influencing the development of employability skills among GIATMARA graduates. The study examines various factors influencing the development of employability skills among GIATMARA graduates, including the quality of training, the relevance of the curriculum, the effectiveness of teaching methods, and the role of industry partnerships. The study also explores the impact of individual factors, such as motivation, self-efficacy, and career aspirations, on the acquisition and application of employability skills. The study proposes several avenues for future research aimed at refining the theoretical model and developing practical recommendations for policy makers, educators, and employers seeking to foster greater levels of employability among GIATMARA graduates. The study aims to contribute towards a more robust and sustainable system of vocational education in Malaysia, one that better serves the needs of both graduates and the wider economy.

Thus, the primary goal of this study is to review the most significant research findings on employability skills for GIATMARA graduates in the literature. It is vital to conduct additional research on this as it is very important. Finding and validating employability skills indicators that are strategic and important for graduates is one of the best ways to start the process of getting the industry more interested in them. In order to assist the graduates who will enter the workforce, the research results will also provide a framework that can be used as a proposal and reference material as an anticipatory measure in the preparation of the GIATMARA curriculum.

This paper is organized as follows: First, it discusses how employability skills relate to the literature. The theoretical underpinning is then discussed in the paper as a possible explanation for the primary mechanism. The conceptual framework which is predicated on two underlying theories was then discussed. The paper concludes with implications and a final thought.

Literature Review

Employability Skills

Employability skills, also known as soft skills, are the essential qualities and attributes that enable individuals to effectively navigate the workplace, interact with others, and achieve success in their careers (Succi & Canovi, 2020). These skills are highly valued by employers and are often considered equally important as technical or hard skills. Some key employability skills include:

- a. **Communication:** The ability to convey information clearly and effectively, both verbally and in writing, and to understand and interpret what others are saying.
- b. **Teamwork:** The capacity to work collaboratively with others towards a common goal, contribute to group efforts, and respect the opinions and contributions of team members.
- c. **Problem-solving:** The capability to identify issues, gather relevant information, and develop and evaluate potential solutions to make sound decisions.
- d. **Adaptability:** The flexibility to adjust to new conditions and changing environments, as well as the willingness to learn new skills and take on new responsibilities.
- e. **Leadership:** The aptitude to motivate, guide, and influence others to achieve a shared vision or objective, as well as the ability to take charge and make decisions when necessary.

- f. Time management: The skill of effectively managing one's time and prioritizing tasks to achieve goals and meet deadlines.
- g. Critical thinking: The ability to analyze information objectively and make reasoned judgments based on evidence.
- h. Emotional intelligence: The capacity to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions, as well as the ability to perceive and influence the emotions of others.
- i. Creativity: The skill of thinking outside the box, generating new ideas, and finding innovative solutions to problems.
- j. Professionalism: The demonstration of a high standard of behavior, integrity, and work ethic in the workplace.

Winberg et al., (2020) suggested that employability is the capacity to recognise, pick up, adjust, and continuously improve the knowledge, abilities, and character traits that increase the likelihood that graduates or students will find and produce meaningful paid and unpaid work that benefits the economy, workforce, community, and themselves. Bennett (2016) defined employability as finding, creating, and sustaining meaningful work across lengthening working lives and multiple work settings.

The application of employability skills is to ensure that one gets the opportunity to acquire the required work skills, job maintenance, and work competencies (Mitiku, Zeleke & Adem, 2021; Sermsuk, Triwichitkhun, & Wongwanich, 2014). The effect can be an economic downturn for a country (Sarkar et al., 2020). If someone cannot find employment, these issues could become urgent. Eventually, because its effects stem from a lack of employability skills, it will contribute to a nation's economic downturn. Because of the rapid advancement of technology, growing globalization, and intense competition, all current and potential employees need to possess strong employability skills. Employers are looking for graduates with relevant employability skills in addition to technical proficiency (Mgaiwa, 2021; Pitan, 2016). In connection with employer engagement, employability skills of communication, problem-solving, and self-management would be improved (Ng, Chan, Wut, Lo & Szeto, 2021).

Skills and employability skills

Employability skills, also known as soft skills, are the essential qualities and attributes that enable individuals to effectively navigate the workplace, interact with others, and achieve success in their careers. These skills are highly valued by employers and are often considered equally important as technical or hard skills. Some key employability skills include communication, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability, leadership, time management, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, creativity, and professionalism. These skills are highly transferable and can be applied across various industries and job roles (Tushar & Sooraksa, 2023). Skill development is an integral part of preparing oneself for employment opportunities. Acquiring strong employability skills requires intentional effort, constant learning, and practice. Individuals can develop these skills through formal education, internships, volunteering, networking, and participating in workshops and seminars. By investing in themselves and honing their employability skills, individuals can position themselves for long-term professional success and satisfaction. The term "skills" has several definitions. Most of the time, it has to do with the immigrant's greatest degree of education. Because of the relative prestige of schools and universities and the resulting disparity in the level of knowledge, skills, and competencies attained, this approach is occasionally criticized (Boucher, 2019).

Employers require graduates to have the basic technical skills required for their particular profession (Edeigba, 2022; Low et al., 2016). However, beyond that, studies have found that soft skills receive greater attention in organizations (Pang et., al., 2019; Stewart et al., 2016) and higher education (Pang & Hung, 2012; Pazil & Razak, 2019). Based on data collected from job advertisements placed in the career section of the newspaper, Dunbar et al. (2016) found that employers place great emphasis on soft skills and discuss technical skills at a lower level.

Knowledge/ level of understanding and employability skills

Knowledge is an intangible asset of a company that can be applied to its problems, skills, and expertise. Basic understanding of user knowledge measurement, including how to find out about the organization that is attached, the task or project that has been assigned, how to apply what has been learned in class, and some current issues related to it. (Lim Khong Chiu, 2016). Curriculum restructuring, updated pedagogical approaches and competencies, establishing connections between higher education and industry, career training and mentoring are all necessary to improve the development of graduates' knowledge and skills for job creation. (Okolie, Nwajiuba, Eneje, Binuomote, Ehiobuche & Hack-Polay, 2021).

Knowledge is defined as the substance present in a person's mind (Hlatshwayo, Skosana & Khoza, 2022; Shulman, 1987), body (Johnson, 1989; Kasamali, 2021), or personal experience (Adhikari, 2021; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). In the new world economy creativity and knowledge become important factors of production, in addition to sources of capital, labor, land, and nature. The importance of knowledge for development is likely to increase; and knowledge may influence the difference between prosperity and poverty (Meghji, et al., 2020; Sedziuviene & Vveinhardt, 2010)

The relationship between knowledge and employability skills is symbiotic, whereby acquiring and applying knowledge contributes to the development of essential employability skills, and vice versa. Strong knowledge in one's area of expertise helps individuals to demonstrate competency, confidence, and credibility in their respective fields, which in turn bolsters their employability skills (Alsadig, & Zakariya, 2023). Acquiring and developing strong knowledge and employability skills require intentional effort, constant learning, and practice. Individuals can invest in themselves by pursuing higher education, attending workshops and seminars, engaging in mentorship programs, and networking with peers and experts in their fields. By cultivating a culture of lifelong learning, individuals can continue to grow professionally and personally, achieving long-term success and satisfaction in their careers.

Theoretical Development

Resource-based View (RBV) Theory

The Resource-Based View (RBV) theory is suitable for the application of exploring the precursors of employability skills of GIATMARA graduates in Malaysia for several reasons. The RBV theory focuses on the internal resources and capabilities of an organization, which can be applied to individuals as well. In the context of GIATMARA graduates, the theory can be used to analyze how the unique skills, knowledge, and capabilities possessed by the graduates contribute to their employability. The theory emphasizes that valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources can provide a competitive advantage, and this can be applied to the unique skills and knowledge acquired by the graduates through their education and training at GIATMARA.

The RBV theory also considers that resources must be combined and integrated effectively to create capabilities, which in turn can be linked to the development of employability skills. For instance, the knowledge and skills acquired by the graduates can be considered valuable resources, and their ability to effectively combine and apply these resources in a work context can be seen as a capability that enhances their employability. Therefore, by applying the RBV theory, the study can gain insights into how the internal resources and capabilities of GIATMARA graduates contribute to their employability, providing a valuable theoretical framework for the analysis.

The RBV, first posited in the literature by Wernerfelt (1984), is built upon the theory that a firm's success is largely determined by the resources it owns and controls. Resources are typically defined as either assets or capabilities. Assets, which may be tangible or intangible, are owned and controlled by the firm (Collis, 1994; Reid, Smith & Xu, 2023). Capabilities are intangible bundles of skills and accumulated knowledge exercised through organizational routines (Araújo et al., 2022; Teece et al., 1997).

RBV suggests that organizations can create a competitive advantage by acquiring or developing resources that are rare, valuable, and hard to imitate and replace (Barney, 1991; Lubis, 2022). The Finch et al. (2016) study, following Barney (1991) and Teece et al. (1997), extended this notion further and suggested that employability can be viewed as the complex integration and application of five specific resources and dynamic capabilities, namely, intellectual, personality, meta-skill, job-specific and integrated dynamic capabilities. Based on Finch et al.'s (2016) categorization of employability along the RBV, according to our conceptualization, GWR is an integrated dynamic competence that calls for the reconfiguration, synthesis, and integration of four resources or dimensions: intellectual, personality, meta-skill, and job-specific. Graduates must then channel these resources into a cohesive, captivating, and unique story that resonates with potential employers (Bridgstock & Jackson, 2019).

Conceptual Framework

This study has created a conceptual framework based on two underlying theories in order to achieve this goal. HCT is the first, and RBV is the second. The conceptual framework of knowledge and skills and how they relate to employability skills is shown in Figure 1. Employability skills are implied by the dependent variable, whereas knowledge and skills are indicated by the independent variable.

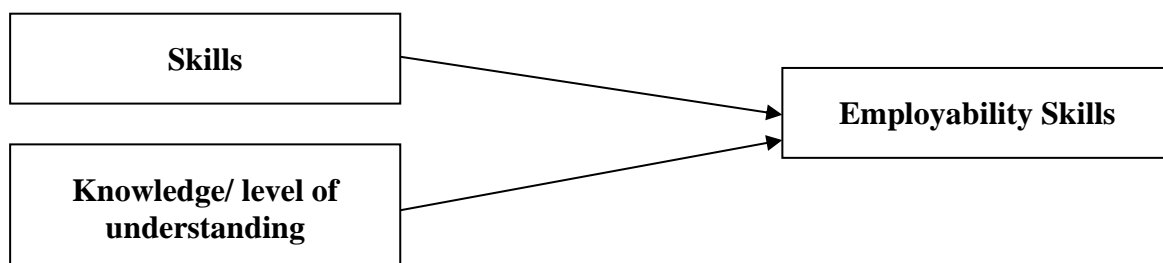


Figure 1: Conceptualization of the connections between Employability Skills, Knowledge, and Skills

The hypotheses were constructed as follows:

H₁: There is a positive relationship between skills and employability skills.

H₂: There is a positive relationship between knowledge and employability skills.

Conclusion

The study's findings enable the researcher to conclude that a graduate's career sustainability is significantly influenced by the calibre of their employability skills. Additionally, employability skills will help graduates become more globally competitive and prepared for the workforce by enabling them to adjust to changing circumstances more quickly. Graduates should possess employability to advance in their careers. Graduates must update their employability skills to compete in the future labor markets.

Implications for Future Research

This research offers fresh insights into how knowledge and skills affect GIATRAMA trainees' employability in Malaysia. Consequently, research findings can be used as a basis for future studies and as a means of formulating testable hypotheses. As a result, the study indicates that more research is necessary to uncover the novel understanding of employability skills, with a particular emphasis on the hiring standards employed by employers across various local labour market conditions and occupations.

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