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Quality of Education and Marketability against Career Readiness: A TVET Students' Perspective

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Abstract--- *The ability to empower an economy requires more than just information. Given the goal of achieving long-term stability, Malaysia will require technical and vocational education training (TVET) qualifications from its human resources. Meanwhile, educational institutions will be challenged to produce knowledgeable human resources with the skills needed to face the ever-changing work environments. This study aims to identify the relationship between the quality of educational service, marketability skills and career readiness among TVET students. Data were collected from a cross-sectional survey of 448 final year TVET students at a public university and were examined using a stratified sampling method. The findings reveal a positive significant correlation between the quality of educational service, marketability skills and career readiness. The implication of this study is that students are prepared and aware of the need for career development skills. Value-added skills make students marketable and are dominant indicators of increasing student career readiness.*

Keywords--- *Educational Quality, Marketability, Career Readiness, Higher Education in TVET.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The development of the fourth industry requires a knowledgeable and skilled workforce to foster and spur economic growth in the country (Maat et al. 2018; Rasul et al., 2013; Rasul et al., 2014). The Malaysian National Key Economic Area (NKEA) requires a workforce with technical and vocational education training (TVET) background to increase to 1.3 million by 2020. This growth is largely led by the Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) and the country's TVET education sector is expected to produce 2.5 times more employable graduates by 2025. Fully capitalising on this aspiration requires that higher education institutions play an important role in providing human resources capable of adapting to the job market requirements (Suarman, 2014; Yanti et al., 2015; Yusof & Jamaluddin, 2017) because having academic achievements does not guarantee that a graduate will be offered jobs. Instead, having various technological skills will be vital in moving forward. The crucial role of higher education institutions in dealing with the need for increased technical and marketability skills training has been highlighted as the main area requiring attention.

Ensuring the production of quality human capital needs to be underlined in the educational services offered to students. These educational services need to be offered by trustworthy institutions capable of developing strong mastery of knowledge and value-added skills among students. Previous studies have found that student satisfaction with the quality of educational services offered to them was low and moderate (UKM, 2003; Jalali et al., 2011). This finding is

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well reflected by today's massive shortage of people skilled in marketability aspects (Ismail, 2012; Parmjit et al., 2014; Ahmad et al., 2015; Sadak, 2016; Yusof & Jamaluddin, 2017). Despite having excellent academic qualifications, graduates have been observed to be weak in skills acquisition, such as social communication, critical thinking, teamwork and digital literacy, which are quite often the keys to unlocking the human potential. Moreover, a lack of career readiness among graduates can cause the unemployment rate to increase (Yusof & Jamaluddin, 2017). More alarming is that previous findings by Lau et al. (2018), Alias and Rahman (2017), Mansor and Rashid (2016), Kankok et al. (2015), Mustafa and Muhammad Faizal (2013), Mansor and Rashid (2013) and Awang et al. (2004) have found that career readiness among university students was weak, due in large part to the lack of proper understanding of the work and the need to merely obtain a college degree. Students do not seek to improve their skills acquisition required for work and often think entering the workforce with just a degree is sufficient (Yusof et al., 2013).

Becker's human capital theory (1994) indicated positive linkages between productivity and education and training. A positive correlation has also been ascertained between productivity and individual income levels. According to Becker, based on the adaptation of the three-dimensional CIRO assessment theory by Warr et al. (1970), education and training are the input dimensions, while productivity or skills are the dimensions of reactions and the career readiness generating individual incomes through career channels is the output dimension. The previous study, which combined Becker's human capital theory and the three-dimensional CIRO assessment model, attempted to link the quality of educational services offered to TVET stream students with the acquisition of marketability skills and career readiness among students. The same three-dimensional education evaluation with the adaptation of human capital theory was also conducted by Awang (2004) and Awang et al. (2004), shedding light on input dimensions, processes and output. The main purpose of this research was to identify the relationship between the quality of educational services, marketability skills and career readiness among students studying in a TVET college, Malaysia Technical University Network (MTUN).

II. METHODOLOGY

1) Sample

A cross-sectional survey involving 6,252 final year MTUN students was designed. The estimated minimum sample, as recommended by Cohen et al. (2001), was 370 students selected through stratified random sampling. In this study, 450 instruments were distributed and after retrieval and data cleaning, 448 remained. Hence, a total of 448 samples were used to analyse the research hypotheses of this study.

H_1: A positive correlation can be found between quality of educational services and marketability skills.

H_2: A positive correlation can be observed among quality of educational services, marketability skills and career readiness.

2) Measurement

The scales to measure marketability skills were adapted from Sadak (2016) while the scale to test career readiness was adapted from Mansor and Rashid (2016) and that for quality of education services was adapted from Ibrahim et al.

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(2012). A five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 5 ('strongly agree') was employed to measure the quality of education services, marketability skills and career readiness among students. The primary data were obtained from questionnaire items that had been tested for reliability using the internal consistency method. The pilot study was conducted on 50 students. The reliability values for the items were $\alpha = 0.887$ for quality of the educational services construct, $\alpha = 0.918$ for the quality of training services construct, $\alpha = 0.932$ for the marketability construct and $\alpha = 0.845$ for career readiness construct. Results of the pilot test showed the reliability of the items was high in explaining each construct, as assessed with Cronbach's alpha values (Geore & Mallery, 2011).

3) Data Analysis

A statistical analysis for inferential studies using SPSS 25 was adapted, in which the Pearson correlation test was used to observe the relationship between the independent and the dependent variables (Piaw, 2014). In this study, Pearson correlation was used to identify the relationship between the quality of educational services with marketability skills among students and to identify the relationship between quality of educational services and marketability skills with career readiness among students. The results of the Pearson correlation test recommended by Baba (1997) with range 0.00 – 0.020 (Very Weak), 0.21 – 0.40 (Low), 0.41- 0.60 (Moderate), 0.61 – 0.80 (High) and 0.81 – 1.00 (Very high).

III. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

1) Relationship Between Quality of Educational Services and Marketability Skills

Statistical testing was performed to explain the obtained results using a Pearson's product-moment correlation test. The results between educational service quality (educational services and training quality services) with marketability skills are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Relationship between quality of educational services with marketability skills

Construct		*Educational Services*	*Training Services*
Marketability Skills	Pearson Correlation	.489**	.503**
	Sig. (two-tailed)	.001	.001
	N	448	448

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The results in Table 1 indicate a significant relationship between marketability skills and educational services at $r = 0.489$, Sig. = $0.001 (p<0.01)$. A strange but positively moderate relationship was observed between marketability skills and educational services. At $r = 0.503$, Sig. = $0.001 (p<0.01)$, a significant relationship can be found between marketability skills and training services. Another positively moderate relationship can be seen between marketability skills and quality of training services. Thus, H_1, which posits that a positive correlation between quality of educational services and marketability skills exists, is accepted.

2) Relationship Between Quality of Educational Services, Marketability Skills and Career Readiness

The results indicating the relationship of education service quality (educational and training services), marketability skills and career readiness are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Relationship between education service quality, marketability skills and career readiness

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Construct		*Education Services*	*Training Services*	*Marketability Skills*
Career Readiness	Pearson Correlation	.464**	.409**	.663**
	Sig. (two-tailed)	.001	.001	.001
	N	448	448	448

**Correlations are significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 2 shows that a significant relationship exists between career readiness and education services at r = 0.464, Sig. = 0.001 ($p<0.01$), indicating a positively moderate strength between career readiness and education services. The results also indicated a significant relationship between career readiness and training services at r = 0.409, Sig. = 0.001 ($p<0.01$). The strength of the association between career readiness and training services was at a moderate level and yet was a positive relationship. In contrast, career readiness formed a positively strong association with marketability skills at r = 0.663, Sig. = 0.001 ($p<0.01$). Thus, H_2, which proposes the existence of a positive correlation between quality of educational services, marketability skills and career readiness, is accepted.

IV. DISCUSSION

Pearson's correlation analysis was performed to identify the relations between quality of educational service (education and training services) and marketability skills. The input dimension explored existing institutional services and the quality of its training and practical services. A significant relationship was observed between the quality of education and training services with marketability skills. A moderately strong association between the quality of the institution's educational services and the quality of training offered was also seen. These results were supported by Romle and Shamsudin (2008) who also found a positive correlation between assessment variables (such as facilities, course evaluation, attentive lecturers, counselling services, communication with universities and social activities) and the dependent variable of student acceptance.

These findings also offered supporting evidence for Becker's human capital theory that education and training that encompass all aspects of services offered to students will have a positive effect on productivity and skills acquisition. Similarly, Kankok et al. (2015) provided evidence that co-curriculum, research programme, and skills/industry training makes university students marketable, with co-curriculum, careers and instructors contributing a moderate level of strength correlation. Isa and Hussin (2015) focused on understanding the effectiveness of the education system and found that the student experience may very well be a significant factor affecting the marketability of graduates.

Therein lies the difference between findings by Awang et al. (2004) and Awang (2004). Training quality provided by institutions was observed to have a positive influence on graduate marketability and yet was negatively associated with trainer marketability. On the surface, Awang et al. (2004) and Awang (2004) appear to have pointed out that each quality improvement made by a training institution would reduce the possibility of trainees working outside their fields by 0.9 times. Similarly, the quality of practical training services was found to have a significant effect despite being negatively associated with the trainee marketability. Thus, any improved quality measures taken for practical training services would equate to the likelihood of trainees working outside their field. Nevertheless, the findings by Awang et al. (2004) and Awang (2004) did not support the notion that every improvement in the quality of educational services will result in increased skills development. Awang et al. (2004) and Awang (2004) investigated the means of improving

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the quality of training services offered in an attempt to enhance the marketability skills of trainees and the tendency of trainees working outside their field but with the same skillsets.

Pearson's correlation analysis was also carried out to understand the relation between quality of educational service and marketability skills to career readiness. A significantly moderate level of strength was discovered between the quality of institutional services and marketability skills to career readiness. Another positive relationship between marketability skills and career readiness was found with a high level of relative strength, following Becker's human capital theory that education and training will have long-term effects on individual productivity and income levels. Individual income levels are affected to a certain extent by career decisions in addition to affecting other areas of life.

Career readiness and workability are the results of an individual's commitment to acquire some knowledge on important skills to gain a head start on the job market. Zakaria et al. (2016) suggested that strong and positive relationships between workability and career choices. They added that high-performing students have much better attitudes toward career setting, which is consistent with the findings by Sadak (2016) who identified positive relationships between relevant aspects of the institutions (co-curriculum, experience, research) and marketability skills (thinking skills, effective traits and work values). The findings by Syed Kamarudin and colleagues collectively provided significant support to the strong relationship between marketability skills and workability.

Mansor and Tan (2009) indicated a significant relationship between vocational identity and career concerns. Similarly, Ahmad et al. (2015) demonstrated the strong correlation between workability and the availability of skills among students. Mansor and Rashid (2016) looked into the aspects of educational services in influencing career readiness in addition to educating students on the positive relationship between career counselling services and career readiness. In terms of career readiness, Mansor and Rashid (2016) put across a clear message that individuals who attend career counselling services would have higher chances of becoming career ready because they will be much better educated in career decision-making as compared to those who did not attend career counselling services. This finding is similar to a certain extent similar to previous findings that reported marketability as an influential factor in determining individual occupations. The educational services offered to students require the kind of quality that will affect career readiness. The university needs to be recognised not only as the venue for applying marketability skills but also the place where career programmes such as counselling services and career readiness workshops are carried out.

V. CONCLUSION

In this study, the students were driven by the positive and significant correlation between the quality of educational services, marketability skills and career readiness. The affiliation between the dimensions enhancing skills and marketability for the students, their readiness for jobs also increased. Any institutions looking to produce quality graduates must ensure that their long-term educational plans include value-added course options to increase graduate readiness for real-world employment.

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