



Employability Skills in the TVET Trainer Training Program: The perception Between Experienced Trainers and Novices Trainers

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Abstract: This paper is aimed to determine the importance of employability skills among experienced and novice trainers in the TVET trainer training program. This is due to, some employers reported TVET graduates' lack of employability skills and facing difficulties to fulfil the current employment demands and professional expectations needed by industries (e.g., people management skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills, teamwork, professionalism, knowledge, and principles, problem-solving skills, and decision-making skills). A survey questionnaire was distributed during the TVET training program. A total of Experienced Trainers (n=34) and Novice trainers (n=137) were participating in this study. This study ranked the 25 abilities/items according to eight main constructs of employability skills based on a score ranging from (1) – to (5). The findings indicated that there is a different rank of employability skills between experienced and novice trainers. From these findings, it shows that communication skills, teamwork skills, self-discipline skills, and interpersonal skills are equally perceived to have a high importance level (top 4 highest) by both experienced trainers and novice trainers, while leadership skills, learning skills, and conceptual skills are equally perceived to have a lower importance level according to both experienced trainers and novice trainers. This calls for the planning of a specific curriculum that can be integrated into the TVET trainer training curriculum. It is necessary to transform the educational institutes into lifelong education centres to facilitate this employability skills formation among the graduates. In embedding the employability skills into the curriculum, teaching, learning, and assessment processes, steps must be taken to ensure that there is a constructive alignment between them. The desired employability skills should be made explicit through the learning outcomes of the modules that lead to high academic standards, leadership, industry-defined work readiness, and advanced and continuing education.

Keywords: Employability skills, TVET trainers, trainers training program

1. Introduction

The impact of global change and rapid development of technology had created a need for a skilled workforce to be competence and competitive in the labour market. In the theory of Knowledge-based economy (K-economy), knowledge in addition to labour, land, entrepreneur and physical capital is one of the key factors of production that facilitate economic growth with new technologies and innovations created through the application of knowledge. A K-economy comprises a highly skilled workforce in a microeconomic and macroeconomic context where organizations and industries create jobs that require specialized skills to meet the needs of the global workforce (Pologeorgis, 2019). Hence, a more flexible workforce with advanced technical skills coupled with well-developed employability skills such as critical

thinking, creativity, problem-solving and analytical skills, is greatly needed by the employer in the organization and industry to meet the challenges faced by the business.

Employability skills can be defined as the knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviour and other characteristics not only to get employment but to fulfil its potential and contribute to the organization's strategic directions with the success that an individual needs to perform roles or succeed in their professional duties (Aliyu et al., 2016; Salleh et al., 2017). K-workers can be described as competence workers with highly qualified, intelligent, motivated, innovative, and entrepreneurial individuals enabling them to engage in a rapidly evolving and increasingly advanced complex work process to provide the best quality work. But, at the same time, employers claimed that one of the unemployment problems among recent graduates, including graduates from post-secondary and tertiary learning institutions is a lack of employability skills or generic skills demanded by industries (Hossain, 2018). Thus, this paper is aimed to determine the different perceptions of experienced and novice trainers related to the importance of employability skills.

2. Training

A knowledgeable and skilled workforce contributes to the growth of employment opportunities. The education and training sector is faced with the challenge of responding to the ever-changing skills demands of the economy since many graduates leave the education sector without the required skills to succeed in the workplace (Zinser, 2003). There is huge graduate unemployment because of a mismatch between what graduates learned at universities and what industries need. The gap between the demands of employment and the quality of youth is one of the major factors that lead to unemployment. Some of these skills mismatches arise from individual career choices in terms of field of study and employment preferences where they will not be able to use their field-specific skills on the job and their employers will not reward these skills. Skills mismatches can also arise from gaps in higher and tertiary education, such as the quality of teaching, faculty, and pedagogy to the extent that education is adapted to the needs of the marketplace (World Bank, 2007). In addressing the skills mismatch, Richardson (2009) highlights the important role of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system that should play in matching the skills needed by employers against the skills offered by workers.

The capacity of the TVET sector to adequately prepare skilled workers through the availability of relevant skills development programs of high quality depends largely on the quality of its trainers, through the quality of its trainer training programs. The learning process and student learning outcomes are not only determined by the structure pattern and curriculum content but are also influenced by the trainer's role, competencies, and characteristics (Njat, 2016) trainers who teach and guide them. There has been a great deal of discussion and literature about preparing students for learning, motivating students, encouraging learning, and creating an enabling environment to facilitate learning and others. However, very often the most crucial element, an undeniable precondition, and an unquestionable factor, namely trainer preparation, is overlooked to maximize learning outcomes for their students. It is very clear that the trainer or instructor is an important part of the teaching and learning process. Students need to be guided by a trainer or instructor who will dispense their knowledge and opportunities to become competent workers in the workforce market. The trainer role can be referred to as the way the trainers see their roles, sensitive and responsive to the demand of trainees and the organization to transfer knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Effective learning and teaching require a commitment on all sides to implement the nation's vision and mission in education (Yusof & Ibrahim, 2012). Today, TVET is expected to provide graduates with both technical and vocational skills as well as employability skills that play an increasingly important role in their preparation for employment and career development.

3. Methodology

Figure 1 presented the illustration of the methodology for this study. There are three main phases were designed. The Integration of Employability Skill in Trainer Training Program Survey was used to assess the perception of trainers and trainee trainers regarding the importance of employability skills faced in integrating employability skills during their skill training sessions. Before the data collection, the reliability of the questionnaire was analysed during the pilot study. From the analysis, the Cronbach's alpha showed the questionnaire to reach acceptable reliability, the Cronbach's alpha (α) value is ranging from 0.82 to 0.89 for the employability skills, as shown in Table 1. There were two groups of samples for this study: the first was the trainers of the Vocational Training Officer (VTO) program from the main public TVET trainer-training centre: Centre for Instructors and Advanced Skill Training (CIAST) and the second was the trainee trainers that participated in the VTO program. This survey was distributed to different respondents, in total 34 respondents are trainers or instructors at the TVET trainer training program (Vocational Training Operation program) from the main public TVET trainer-training centre: Centre for Instructors and Advanced Skill Training (CIAST) and trainee trainers that participated in the trainer-training program are 137 respondents. All samples were selected from the main campus in Selangor and CIAST satellite campus located in 12 states from Melaka, Pahang, Negeri Sembilan, Johor, Terengganu, Kelantan, Perak, Kedah, Penang, Selangor, Sabah and Sarawak. Means and standard deviations for each of the eight employability skills and 25 abilities were calculated and presented in rank order to identify the level of importance of the employability skills.

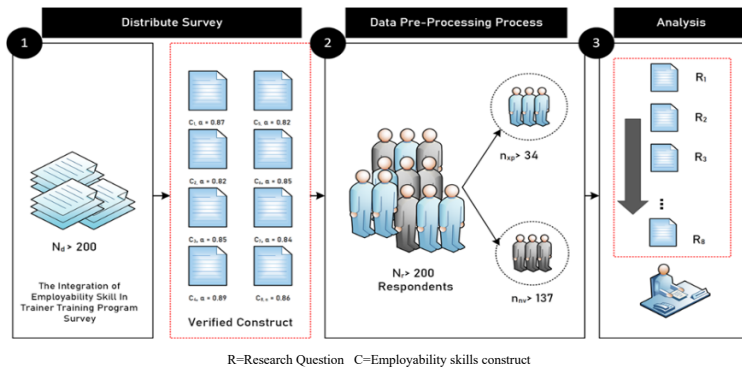


Fig. 1 - Overview of the methodology

Table 1 - Reliability Test for employability skills

Item	Cronbach's Alpha
Employability skills:	
Communication skills	0.87
Teamwork	0.82
Multitasking and prioritizing	0.85
Conceptual skills	0.89
Interpersonal skills	0.82
Leadership skills	0.85
Self-discipline skills	0.84
Learning skills	0.86

4. Results and Discussion

Table 2 summarized trainers' perceptions regarding the importance of employability skills. The table shows the ranks for means and standard deviation for each employability skill. Rankings on the perception of the importance of employability skills were based on the highest mean values perceived by both experienced trainers and novice trainers. Based on the mean value, the results indicate that most of the trainers (experienced and novice trainers) perceived that all the employability skills were important.

Table 2 - Trainers' perception of the importance of employability skills (n=171)

Rank*	Experienced Trainers (n=34)			Novice trainers (n=137)		
	Items	M	SD	Items	M	SD
1	Self-discipline skills	4.71	.46	Communication skills	4.61	.47
2	Communication skills	4.59	.46	Interpersonal skills	4.58	.57
3	Teamwork skills	4.55	.41	Teamwork skills	4.57	.48
4	Interpersonal skills	4.53	.55	Self-discipline skills	4.53	.60
5	Multitasking and prioritizing skills	4.43	.47	Multitasking and prioritizing skills	4.50	.54
6	Conceptual skills	4.38	.49	Conceptual skills	4.49	.58
7	Learning skills	4.29	.46	Learning skills	4.46	.55
8	Leadership skills	4.23	.55	Leadership skills	4.42	.64

Further analysis, 25 abilities/items according to eight main constructs of employability skills were measured: 1) Communication Skills (4 items), 2) Teamwork skills (3 items), 3) Multitasking and prioritizing skills (3 items), 4) Conceptual skills (3 items), 5) Interpersonal skills (3 items), 6) Leadership skills (3 skills), 7) Self-Discipline skills (3 items) and 8) Learning skills (3 items). Table 3 presented the rankings for the top 5 abilities and bottom 5 based on the perception of the importance of employability skills. The ranking is based on the mean values from experience trainers' perspective. The findings indicated that the three top-ranked most important employability skills perceived by

experienced trainers were self-discipline skills, communication skills, and teamwork skills. Ability to speak in clear sentences (verbally), ability to respect other's attitudes, behaviour, and beliefs, ability to work effectively as a team member in a group, ability to build a good rapport with others, and ability to practice active listening skills and respond are attributes with highest means score in each employability skills domain, namely communication skills, teamwork skills, and self-discipline skills. Experienced trainers perceived the ability to lead a project, ability to supervise members of a group to accomplish a project, ability to develop an inquiring mind in seeking knowledge, ability to make problem-solving decisions related to ethics, and ability to receive new ideas through autonomy learning are attributes with the lowest means score in employability skills group, namely leadership skills, learning skills, and conceptual skills.

Table 3 - Trainers’ perception regarding importance of employability skills from experienced trainers’ perspective

Rank*	Experienced Trainers			
	Items	Employability Skills	M	SD
<i>Top 5 items</i>				
1	Ability to speak in clear sentences (verbally).	Communication Skills	4.76	.43
2	Ability to respect others’ attitudes, behaviour, and beliefs.	Teamwork	4.71	.46
3	Ability to work effectively as a team member in a group.	Teamwork	4.62	.49
4	Ability to build a good rapport with others.	Self-discipline Skills	4.62	.49
5	Ability to practice active listening skills and respond.	Communication Skills	4.59	.50
<i>Bottom 5 items</i>				
21	Ability to receive new ideas by autonomy learning.	Learning skills	4.29	.52
22	Ability to make problem-solving decisions related to ethics.	Conceptual skills	4.29	.63
23	Ability to develop an inquiring mind in seeking knowledge.	Learning skills	4.26	.62
24	Ability to supervise members of a group to accomplish a project.	Leadership skills	4.24	.70
25	Ability to lead a project.	Leadership skills	4.12	.64

Meanwhile, Table 4 presented the rankings for the top 5 abilities and bottom 5 on the perception of the importance of employability skills based on the mean values from novice trainers’ perspective. Novice trainers also perceived communication skills and teamwork skills were the most important as experienced trainers, but they perceived interpersonal skills were among the three top-ranked most important instead of self-discipline skills perceived by experienced trainers. However, the top five attributes ranked most important were included in one of the employability skills domains either in communication skills or self-discipline skills but not in teamwork skills and interpersonal skills. The attributes with the highest means score perceived by novice trainers were the ability to speak in clear sentences (verbally), ability to build a good rapport with others, ability to manage time, ability to practice ethical attitudes in taking responsibility for society, and ability to practice active listening skills and respond. While novice trainers perceived the ability to do work with their initiative, ability to lead a project, knowledge of the basic theories of leadership, ability to supervise members of a group to accomplish the project, and ability to make problem-solving decisions related to ethics with the lowest means score in employability skills group, namely interpersonal skills, leadership skills, and conceptual skills. The lowest means score indicates these attributes have a low importance level according to the novice trainers’ perceptions.

Table 4 - Trainers' perception regarding importance of employability skills from novice trainers' perspective

Rank*	Novice Trainers			
	Items	Employability Skills	M	SD
<i>Top 5 items</i>				
1	Ability to speak in clear sentences (verbally).	Communication Skills	4.68	.53
2	Ability to build a good rapport with others	Self-discipline Skills	4.64	.53
3	Ability to manage time.	Self-discipline Skills	4.64	.57
4	Ability to practice ethical attitudes in taking responsibility for society.	Self-discipline Skills	4.62	.56
5	Ability to practice active listening skills and respond.	Communication Skills	4.61	.57
<i>Bottom 5 items</i>				
21	Ability to make problem-solving decisions related to ethics.	Conceptual skills	4.45	.65
22	Ability to supervise members of a group to accomplish a project.	Leadership skills	4.44	.69
23	Have knowledge of the basic theories of leadership.	Leadership skills	4.43	.68
24	Ability to lead a project.	Leadership skills	4.39	.73
25	Ability to do work with own initiative.	Interpersonal skills	4.34	.70

This finding shows that communication skills, teamwork skills, self-discipline skills, and interpersonal skills are equally perceived to have a high importance level (top 4 highest) by both experienced trainers and novice trainers, while leadership skills, learning skills, and conceptual skills are equally perceived to have a lower importance level according to both experienced trainers and novice trainers. The findings revealed that communication skills are one of the top employability skills domains perceived as important by both experienced trainers (2nd ranked) and novice trainers (1st ranked). This result supported Jackson and Chapman's (2012) findings indicating that communication is an important element of the graduate toolkit that feature highly among the employers as a necessary skill demanded from the graduates. Experts within the field of communications believe that effective communication is the solution to most issues of poor communication (Pearson & Nelson, 2000).

According to IPPTN (2004), lack of communication skills by graduates is the major cause of them being unemployed. The finding also showed that the level of teamwork skills is high perceived as third-ranked by both experienced trainers and novice trainers. This is like the results of research done by Singh et al., (2013) who found that teamwork skills are the most important perceived by instructors. Another study done by Zaharim et al., (2010) found that Malaysian employers required graduates to have excellent teamwork ability as their top requirement. This is also supported by Hashim (2015) regarding the practice of teamwork skills elements successfully applied among students of technical institutions. Teamwork skills are among the employability skills that are increasingly in high demand and as a main competency for graduates to successfully adapt to changes in today's rapidly changing technology-based work environment (ABET, 2012; UNESCO, 2014). A study done by Sulaiman et al., (2017) found that teamwork skills contributed to a positive impact on students to add values, build self-confidence, improve communication skills and interaction with others, and enhance the spirit of cooperation and commitment to the tasks given. Self-discipline skills are second of the most important employability skills ranked by experienced trainers and fourth-ranked by novice trainers. Mayot, (2015) reported self-discipline renders an important contribution in leading to the success of the individuals to generating awareness in terms of the ways to bring about improvements in terms and relationships with others. A study done by Jinman indicated that students typically lack the personal skills and basic self-discipline that is necessary within the workplace. The concept of self-discipline develops the abilities and competencies among individuals, so they can cope with problems and challenges in a well-organized manner. Similarly, in a study Puad, (2015), educators and recent participants of an employability skills training program perceived discipline and integrity, interpersonal skills, and professionalism were the most integral abilities that could help recent graduates in obtaining employment. Workers who have good self-discipline will influence work productivity which affect the sustainability of the company itself (Orner, 2009).

Experienced trainers perceived those interpersonal skills as fourth-ranked the most important, meanwhile, novice trainers perceived those interpersonal skills are second-ranked most important skills. This is in line with a study done by Petrova and Ujma (2006), interpersonal skills are rated highly by employers where these personality characteristics as an advantage for TVET graduates in securing employment as they may involve interaction and communication with others. There is awareness of the need for interpersonal skills as one of the core ingredients in the 21st-century world of work (Deba et al, 2014). According to the framework of the ERI-Net research program, interpersonal skills are one of the learning domains that need to be considered for the holistic development of the individual. This is supported by previous surveys (Zaharim et al., 2010; Richens & McClain, 2000) regarding employers' perception that interpersonal competencies were one of the most important workplace basic skills and competencies required for current employees.

From the results provided, leadership skills, learning skills, and conceptual skills are equally perceived to have a lower importance level according to both experienced trainers and novice trainers. This is similar to a study on the development of generic skills among technical students in Malaysia (Rahman,2011) provided evidence that students still lack certain skills including leadership skills. Other previous studies [Singh et al, 2013]; Suarta et al., 2019) also revealed that instructors, students, and employers perceived leadership skills as the lowest important level. This is in line with research done by Wye and Lim (2009), there was a mismatch between employers' requirements and undergraduates' perception of the importance of leadership skills. The results from an analysis in the literature review also showed that leadership skills are among the important skills compared to other generic skills that are needed concerning the work demands in the future (Bharathi,2016; Fajaryati & Akhyar, 2020; Knell et al.,2007; Lowden et al., 2011). This is supported by studies conducted in various Malaysian TVET institutions that showed that leadership skill has been mentioned as important for TVET students (Sesen et al., 2019). The results indicated students lack leadership skills that need to be developed and strengthen during their study at the tertiary level.

In conclusion, this study found that experienced trainers and novice trainers perceived all eight employability skills were important to TVET graduate's development with communication skills, self-discipline skills, teamwork skills, and interpersonal skills were the most important employable skills meanwhile leadership skills, learning skills and conceptual skills were least important. The employability skills are needed in all areas and levels of employment and industrial sectors and most of the employability skills needed in the workforce are more important than the actual ability to perform certain tasks (Awang et al., 2006; Rasul et al., 2009; Rasul et al., 2013). Education institutions should present a well-formed learning experience with enhancing graduate employability as a core constituent where employability skills are embedded in the curriculum process. At the vocational educational level, it is necessary to transform the educational institutes as lifelong education centres to facilitate this employability skills formation among the graduates. In embedding the employability skills into the curriculum, teaching, learning, and assessment processes, steps must be taken to ensure that there is a constructive alignment between them. The desired employability skills should be made explicit through the learning outcomes of the modules. To facilitate the employability skills of the graduate, it is recommended that educational institutions should adopt a holistic and integrated approach towards enhancing graduate employability, stand-alone soft skills modules, student involvement in work-related projects and extra-curricular activities, work placements, and guidance on job-getting skills through career services focusing to minimize the skills gap (Malhi, 2009). Another important thing is to introduce learner-centered pedagogy in the classroom. Learner-centered pedagogy in the early stages of education seems to be more helpful to employability skills development. It is recommended that the authorities should seek to have more of the employability skills elements of this learner-centered approach. They should incorporate the employability skills elements into the curriculum to prepare them for the future world of work. Besides, TVET education should be aligned with employer needs by developing skills needed in the workplace.

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