

Modeling the Predictors of Career Development Learning and Work Integrated Learning towards Employability among the Graduates of Hospitality School in Malaysia

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Abstract

This study investigates the structural relationships of career development learning and work integrated learning towards employability among hospitality graduates. Questionnaires that consist of career development learning, work integrated learning and graduates employability was administered to 425 hospitality graduates from University Teknologi MARA (UiTM). Findings showed that the significant relationships between career development learning, workplace experience and graduates' employability upon graduation is confirmed in Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). It can be inferred from this that it is important for students to attain the career development learning and work integrated learning in order to be highly employable. Implications and suggestions for future research are also provided.

Key Words: *Employability, Career Development Learning, Work Integrated Learning, Structural Equation Modelling.*

Introduction

For the past three decades, Malaysia's economy has grown at an annual rate of 6.6%, but the unemployment rates have increased from 2.6% in 1996 to 3.6% in 2003 as reported by Department of

Statistics Malaysia, 1996–2003 (Ismail, 2011). In February of 2014, the unemployment rate in Malaysia was reported at 3.2 % (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2014).

The analysis of unemployment rate was reported in the Tenth Malaysia Plan with 30,000 graduates could not find job six months after graduation (Economic Planning Unit, 2010). Each year, 200,000 of the total 923,000 students were estimated to complete their study in various areas of field from institutions of higher learning. Consistently, a recent survey through Graduate Online Tracer Study (MOHE, 2010) reported that 42,955 of graduates were still unemployed after six months of their graduation. Statistics on recent graduate's employment status by MOHE Graduates Online Survey in 2008 indicated that there were 35.6 % of first degree graduates in Tourism, Hospitality and Food and Beverage were unemployed (Abu Bakar, Jani & Zubairi, 2009).

Most of all, labour market now is less predictable, changing more rapidly and more competitive (OECD 1993; Conner & Pollard, 1996, cited in Perrone & Vickers, 2003). Consequently, some fresh graduates are facing obscurity in getting a job. Thus, it is pertinent to highlight some effects of graduates' unemployment on the economy growth and towards graduates themselves. It appears that both unemployment and underemployment has contributed some negative effect which are increasing in burglary and armed robbery; psychological and financial stress; aggression, fear, anxiety and frustration; homelessness, wandering, vagrancy, insecurity; prostitution, kidnapping and drug addiction (Olowe, 2009).

Pool and Sewell (2007) suggests that it is essential for students to receive some education in career development learning to get a better chance of securing occupations in which they can be satisfied and successful. The currents and future working environment also require graduates to be "work-ready", equipped with work experiences (Hodges & Bruchell, 2003) in order to be more competitive

Smith, Brooks, Lichtenberg, McIlveen, Torjul and Tyler (2009) propose that there is a need to provide evidence that career development learning can significantly give impact to the students' outcome. Therefore, this study will cover the perceived relationship between career development learning and employability from the perspective of Malaysian graduates specifically among hospitality students. As work integrated learning through internship training is one important part in hospitality program, the effect of internship on employability among graduates was also addressed. The body of a manuscript opens with an introduction that presents the specific problem under study and describes the research strategy. Because the introduction is clearly identified by its position in the manuscript, it does not carry a heading labeling it the introduction. Before writing the introduction, consider the following questions (Beck & Sales, 2001, p. 100).

Literature Review and Hypotheses

Graduates' Employability

Graduate employability (GE) recently has become a main issue for institutions because of the changing nature of the graduate labour market, mass participation in institutions of higher learning, pressures on student's finance, competition to recruit students and expectations of students, employers, parents and government (McNair, 2003). Lees (2002) mention that from the perspective of institutions of higher learning, employability is about to produce graduates who are able and capable which gives an impacts upon all areas of university life, in terms of the delivery of academic programs and extra curricula activities.

Consequently, Pool and Sewel (2007) refer employability as "having a set of skills, knowledge, understanding and personal attributes which makes a person more likely to choose and secure occupations in which they can be satisfied and successful". Based on their definition, they have developed a model that can be used to explain the concept of employability and known as "CareerEDGE". According to that

model, career development learning and experience are construct as a “key” to choose and secure occupations in which the graduates has the opportunity to achieve satisfaction and success.

Career Development Learning

Career development learning (CDL) is associated with lifelong learning and related to: Learning about the content and process of career development or life/career management. The content of career development learning in essence represents learning about self and learning about the world of work (Patton & McMahon, 2001). Watts (2008) indicates in his study, career development learning can help students to enlighten their future and expose the path they will choose, which they can build their employability and venture competences. He also asserts that career development learning may be organized variously to raise students’ awareness of employability and how to get self-management in their studies and extra-curricular activities to optimize the employability. Pool and Sewell (2007) point out that graduate needs to grab the best chance of securing occupations in which they can be satisfied and successful by receiving some education in career development learning.

Also known as career education, Watt (1977) defines it as consisting of planned experiences designed to assist the development of: self-awareness – in terms of interest, abilities, value and others; opportunity awareness- knowing what work opportunities and what their requirement are; decision learning – decision-making skill; and transition learning – including job search and self-presentation skill. This formulation widely describes as DOTS models; decision-making learning (D), opportunity awareness (O), transition learning (T) and (self-awareness (S). Activities that help students to become more self-aware, to enable them to give real deliberation to the things that they take pleasure in doing, engrossed in, motivate them and suit their personalities should be included as proposed by DOTS model. Job market search needs to be learned by them in order to see what opportunities are available, how to present themselves effectively to the potential employers, and how to make decisions about their careers (Watts, 2006).

H1: There is a significant relationship between career development learning and graduates’ employability.

Work Integrated Learning

Work integrated learning (WIL) is kind of learning resulting from participation in a workplace community setting (AGCAS, 2005). Most of the universities offer their students with work-integrated learning such as internship, practicum, practical placement, industry-based project, mentoring or vacation work in many of their academic programs.

This program require students to implement their learning knowledge and reflecting upon the experience, knowing themselves and the world of work better in order to authorize them to enter and succeed in the world-of-work (AGCAS, 2005). Excellent work experience can boost learning and employability, so that work experience opportunities can be well-managed to be educationally valuable (Knight & Yorke, 2002).

H2: There is a significant relationship between workplace experience and graduates’ employability.

Method

Participants and Procedures

The respondents of this study consisted of Hotel Management, Tourism Management, Foodservice Management and Culinary Art Management fresh graduates from the Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia. All respondents graduated in May 2015 both in degrees and diplomas and they were selected through systematic sampling. The rationale for choosing this group of students is due to their experiences as first time job seeker after graduate from university. In

addition, they were also selected because they have already working experiences during their practical or internship training in tertiary program. Data was collected via mail survey and self-administered questionnaires to 760 respondents but only 450 questionnaires were returned. However, only 425 questionnaires that were found useful and have been retained for further analysis.

Measures

A 22-items instrument was used to measure career development learning was adopted from the outcome of career development learning, namely the DOTS model as listed by Watts, 2006. 24-items used to measure work integrated learning through internship training adapted from Muhammad, Yahya, Shahimi and Mahzan (2009); Smith, Dalton and Dolheguy (2004); Singh and Dutta (2010); and Dickerson and Kline (2008). Employability was measured using 39-items adapted from York and Knight (2004) pertaining on aspect of employability that graduates should possess in enhancing the employability. All of the items were measured by using the 5-point Likert Scale.

Data Analyses

The demographic information was used to provide an overview of respondents' profile. A principal factor analysis was performed to reduce the number of factors or items from each variable. The final results from this factor analysis were then used for further investigation using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) with AMOS 20.0 program. It aims to find the most optimal model or a combination of the variables that fits well with the data on which it is built and serves as a purposeful representation of the reality from which the data has been extracted, and provides a parsimonious explanation of the data (Kline, 1998). In this study, the SEM technique was used to identify the influence of career development learning and work integrated learning to graduates' employability upon graduation.

Results

Profile of Sample

70.8% (N=301) of the respondents were female while the remaining 29.2% (N=104) were male. The ages of respondents involved were at a range from 22 and 26 years old. Most of the respondents are 24 years old with 36.2 % (N=154). Among of them, 69.4 % (N=295) are degree holder graduates and only 30.6% (N=130) held a diploma certificate. 28.7% (N=122) were graduates from Tourism Management program. It was found that all of the respondents had an internship training experience or practical work experience in hospitality industry with duration of training for 3-6 months. The respondents' present status shows that majority of graduates were employed with 76.2% (N=324), 9.9% (N=42) were unemployed and 13.9% (N=59) furthering their study to the higher level.

Structural Equation of Hypothesized Final Model

Based on the modification index of CFA, the measurement model of exogenous and endogenous and the final model as the examination of the hypothesized model confirmed the constructs of GE, CDL and WIL of the hypothesized paths. In SEM, factor analysis and hypotheses are tested in the same analysis. SEM techniques also provide fuller information about the extent to which the research model is supported by the data. Goodness of fit indices for the 12 observed variables of CDL, WIL and GEB shows that the reading is good if it ranges from 0.188 to 0.941 for the significance standardized regressions weight. Standard error (SE) for each observation shows the goodness of fit and low level reading from 0.014 to 0.029, and estimate (Square Multiple Correlation) of observation shows the contribution level to the latent variable (0.099 to 0.885). The standardized regression weight between CDL and GE is 0.525, and between WIL and GE is 0.296. The final model shows the model explained in a substantial portion of the variance in all the endogenous variables (square multiple correlations) that indicates the two exogenous variables (CDL

and WIL) jointly explained 42.3% variance in GE. Finally, from the Structural Model the reading for GFI is at 0.90 (acceptable fit criteria) and RMSEA is less than 0.08. The measurement model has a good fit with the data based on assessment criteria such as GFI and RMSEA (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Table 1 summarizes the goodness of model fit of CDL, WIL, GE and the structural model. The structural models testing of endogenous variables (CDL and WIL) fulfill the GFI (GFI > 0.90) and RMSEA criteria (less than 0.08).

Table 1. Summary of the goodness fit of CDL, WIL, GE and final model

Model Fit Indicator	CDL	WIL	GE	Final Model
(x ²)	10.322	7.203	128.489	182.060
DF	3	2	3.4	49
CMIN/DF	3.441	3.601	3.779	3.716
P	0.016	0.027	0.000	0.000
GFI	0.990	0.992	0.945	0.937
RMSEA	0.076	0.078	0.080	0.080

Discussion

Based on the findings presented, it was observed that career development learning significantly influences graduates' employability with a fairly correlation and standardized regression weight of 0.525 (p<0.01), indicating that career development learning significantly predicted graduates' employability, thus supporting H1. This is consistent with Watts (2008) where career development learning will able to assist students to make clear their chosen career path which they can develop and build their employability and competence. Career development learning can help to optimize the employability by raising student's awareness and how to manage their studies and extra-curricular activities (Watts, 2008).

Based on the result between career development learning dimension which is self/opportunities awareness and decision-making and transition learning, it was found that self/opportunity awareness and decision-making has more influence on graduates' employability with standardized regression weight of 0.780 compare to transition learning with standardized regression weight of 0.626. This result is also consistent with study done by McIlveen, Brooks, Lichtenberg, Smith, Torjul and Tyler (2011) which results of the survey indicate convergence of the career development-learning domains of self-awareness and opportunity awareness, but the relatively less integration of decision-making and transition learning.

Consequently, it was observed that work integrated learning significantly influences graduate employability with a fairly correlation and standardized regression weight of 0.296 (p<0.01), indicating that work integrated learning significantly predicted graduates' employability, thus supporting H2. The result highlights that the more exposure on internship training helps students to be more aware on self-interest, abilities and value or knowing what opportunities available and what requirement need to be complying.

They also feel that they are able to make considered decision about their career after internship training. This is in relation with Brooks et al (1995) and Taylor (1998) who suggest that practical experience and exposure gained during internship program to be helpful in improving career decision making. Similarly, McIlveen et al. (2011) find that self-awareness and opportunity awareness are rated as most often present in work-integrated programmes.

Implications

It is imperative that the importance of career development in enhancing graduate employability after graduation such as self-awareness, opportunity awareness, decision-making and transition learning has been realized among students. By that, it will help them to enhance their employability chances upon graduation. For that reason, it is important for the students to take part in their career planning by make

their own career goals and action plans to attain better career employability and employment chances in the future.

This study also can be used as a guideline for institutions to develop a better career development learning programs. Institutions play a big part in ensure the level of their students through the learning outcomes especially which related to career development. With the result of this study, university departments especially academics staff and career development practitioner may reflect upon which extent to give their students to possess and perceive about the career learning process during their tertiary program. Teaching and learning in the curriculum also should be more effective to prepare graduates to link their potential skills and knowledge to meet demand required by employers.

Through this study, the industry also has information regarding on students perception of internship program so that they will know how to assist students in meeting their internship goals better. Both school and industry should work together closely to develop a well-organized and quality internship program in order to enhance the level of graduates' employability.

Employers also can incorporate career development during any work experience by provision of career mentor; provide in-house speaker, rotate students through a range of role, skill development and training. The inclusion of career development opportunities within workplace experiences also can lead better matching of students and opportunities and help students to have a clear sense of whether they fit or not in any industry.

Limitations and Recommendations

Results gained might not be able to generalize to the other sample due to the limited sampling frame used since the respondents that taken are only from UiTM students. For future research, a bigger and more diversified sample could be used from various type institutions. Private and public universities have a different implementation and career development planning for their students. Since this study only focuses on one of the public university, it is worth to conduct and compare the result from both public and private institution students in the future research.

It is recommended that future research can be done in long term period to cover both perception and expectation from students regarding on the workplace experiences through internship training before and after the programs. It is also recommended that future research to study on level of understanding on career development learning in teaching and learning process among university employers and also in workplace supervision of internship training among employers.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that career development learning is one of an important element that could assist graduates to secure their future work after graduation. Thus institutions of higher learning should be aware on the need of effective career development learning among students during their tertiary programs. Internship training program also should be design systematically and well- planned by institution and industry to make this program provide good experiences to students.

Lacks of commitment from industry to prepare a better internship program have givesome negative perception from students about the effect of internship in influencing their learning on employability. Hence, both institution and industry should take appropriate actions and measurements in increasing and enhancing the learning condition and work integrated learning to help students to be more employable upon graduation.

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