Employability Skills: Perspectives Between Pre-Vocational Programme Teachers and Employers in Brunei Darussalam

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Abstract—**Globally, the main goals of education and training of students with disabilities are to prepare them for independence and employment. Hence, it is important for students with disabilities to be equipped with employability skills in order to adapt to changing environmental demands. Hence, a study with five main objectives was conducted specifically on Pre-Vocational Programme implemented in 28 selected government secondary schools. First aim was to identify employability skills that were integrated by teachers in the lessons. Second aim was to identify employability skills emphasised by employers. Third aim was to explore teachers' and employers' perspectives on employability skills according to importance placed by them. Fourth aim was to identify challenges faced by teachers in teaching employability skills. Fifth aim was to ascertain suggestions in teaching employability skills. The findings provide insights into how teachers can be supported to develop students' employability skills as a preliminary step towards positive outcomes.**

Keywords—employability skills; homeroom teachers; employers; pre-vocational programme in Brunei; vocational education

I. Introduction

In 1994, Brunei Darussalam's Ministry of Education embraced the concept of inclusive education and its philosophy after signing the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education [1]. One of the initiatives introduced by Ministry of Education to support special educational needs of students in inclusive school is the introduction of Pre-Vocational Programme. Currently, there are 28 selected government secondary schools implementing the programme. Pre-Vocational Programme is a 5-year programme specially designed for students with high support needs and students with learning difficulties. According to Musim and Wong [2], the programme aims to assist Pre-Vocational Programme students: 1) develop their potential to acquire some basic academic, social, daily living, and pre-vocational skills; 2) to prepare them for adult life; and 3) to become useful, contributing members of society.

Since 1999 a total of 1 492 students graduated from the programme, only 230 graduates managed to find jobs in hospitality, farming and food beverages industries, while the remaining 1 262 graduates are still looking for jobs [3]. Some parents of these unemployed graduates felt that the programme did not help their children much in preparing for work and finding jobs. The graduates also lack employability skills.

II. Employability Skills

In people's lives, work is considered to be one of the important activities [4] because people need to work in order to earn a living and fulfill basic human needs. For people with disabilities, being employed is important as well because having disability means socially isolated and having paid work can reduce such isolation [5]. In the 21st century, globalisation and advancement in technology have caused drastic changes in workplace practices. In fact, the world's industrial sectors such as manufacturing, marketing, information and communication technology and others are rapidly changing leading to a highly competitive industry widely described as fourth industrial revolution or Industry 4.0[6].

To accommodate the rapid changes requires a dynamic and versatile workforce. In effect, it has undeniably caused a shift in the skills demanded by employers. Current employers expect their employees to have relevant personality traits and employability skills to accommodate constant changes in work demands [7,8]. According to Yusoff et al. [9] employers find employability skills other than academic to be more important in the recruitment process. Employability skills are a set of skills that allow individuals to obtain, retain and succeed in employment [10]. Lankard [11] classified seven categories of employability skills namely demonstrate positive image, demonstrate positive work behaviour, practice good work habits, communicate effectively, accept responsibility, cooperative and ethical. The greatest feature of employability skills is that the skills are transferable across workplaces. In context of people with disabilities, the economic change has created greater challenge for them to prepare themselves for the dynamic working environment.

Employers express concerns regarding people with disabilities' lack of employability skills as one of the factors contributing to the negative perception towards workers with disabilities [12]. Employers are concerned with safety, attendance, productivity, punctuality, appearance, social skills and other employability skills [13]. In relation to the Pre-Vocational Programme, students with moderate to severe learning impairments are generally taught basic academic skills, living and social skills and basic vocational and work skills based on a guideline prepared by Special Education Unit [14]. Upon completion of the 5-year programme, each student will only receive a participatory certificate from Ministry of Education. Yet, many of the students are unemployed since graduating from the programme. Haji Abdul Tahir [15] argued that it is due to students' lack of employability skills and job-related skills and employers' perception of equating impairment with inability. For students with disabilities, it is necessary for them to be taught employability skills in schools as the skills are important for job search and job retention leading to successful employment [16]. Hence, the objectives of the study were five-folds. First, the study sought to identify employability skills that were integrated by teachers in the lessons. Second was to identify employability skills that were emphasised by employers. Third aim was to explore teachers' and employers' perspectives on the importance of employability skills. Fourth aim was to identify challenges faced by teachers in teaching employability skills in schools. Fifth aim was to ascertain suggestions in teaching employability skills.

III. METHODOLOGY

The research took the form of a quantitative exploratory case study whereby quantitative data were collected via online survey. The researcher had selected exploratory case study as the researcher was interested in exploring the perspectives of teachers and employers on employability skills according to importance as there was no new study on Pre-Vocational Programme since 2011. Exploratory case study is used mainly as a preliminary step before embarking on a large-scale investigation [17]. The respondents involved in the study were teachers in the Pre-Vocational Programme and employers who had given cooperation in providing Pre-Vocational Programme students the opportunities to undergo work placement at their work premises.

As mentioned previously, instruments to collect quantitative data were in the form of two online surveys. First survey was designed for teachers and second survey was designed for employers. The surveys were in the English format consisting of 11 questions for teachers and 12 questions for employers respectively. Items in the survey were adapted from Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) [18], Buntat et al [19] and Ab Halim et al [20]. Question 10 for both surveys consisted of a list of statements relating to common skills for teachers and employers to select from and add alternative skills under "others". Question 11 for both surveys also required each teacher and employer to answer using a five-point Likert. There were 29 skills listed under Question 11. A high value given to a skill indicates high importance whereas a low value indicates the opposite.

Having the same Question 10 and Question 11 allowed researcher to make comparison of the responses given by teachers and employers.

IV. FINDINGS

A. Demographics

Table 1 describes the demographic profile of the teachers in the Pre-Vocational Programme who responded to the survey. A total of 201 teachers responded to the survey whereby 147 were females and 54 were males. Majority of the Homeroom Teachers were females about 30 whereas 12 Homeroom Teachers were males. Similarly, most of the Relief Teachers were females about 21 and 12 were males. It is important to note that 30 of the Homeroom Teachers had Bachelor Degrees and only 3 Homeroom Teachers had Master Degrees. Most of the male Relief Teachers possessed Higher National Diploma. Only 2 male Relief Teachers had bachelor degree and master degree respectively. In comparison, most of the female Relief Teachers had GCE O Level about 6 of them. Highest qualifications achieved by the female relief teachers were 2 teachers with Master Degree, 3 teachers with Bachelor Degree and 3 teachers with Higher National Diploma. The data was analysed using descriptive method involving frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation.

TABLE I. PARTICIPATING TEACHERS' PROFILES

Designations and Qualification	Gender			
	Male		Female	
	N	%	N	%
Homeroom Teacher				
Teaching Certificate	1	1.9	3	1.7
Diploma	2	3.7	5	2.9
Higher National Diploma	0	0	3	1.7
Bachelor Degree	9	16.7	16	9.2
Master Degree	0	0	3	1.7
Subject Teacher				
Teaching Certificate	1	1.9	6	3.5
Diploma	0	0	1	0.6
Higher National Diploma	2	3.7	11	6.3
Bachelor Degree	21	38.9	55	31.6
Master Degree	6	11.1	23	13.2
Relief Teacher				
GCE O Level	0	0	6	3.4
GCE A Level	1	1.9	3	1.7
Teaching Certificate	1	1.9	1	0.6
National Vocational Certificate	0	0	1	0.6
Higher National Certificate	1	1.9	0	0
National Diploma	2	3.7	2	1.1
Higher National Diploma	4	7.4	3	1.7
Bachelor Degree	2	3.7	3	1.7
Master Degree	1	1.9	2	1.1
Total	**54**	**100**	**147**	**100**

Table 2 describes the demographic profile of the employers who responded to the survey. 10 employers attempted the survey whereby 5 are males and 5 are females. It also shows that 5 out of 10 employers have Bachelor Degree and only 2 have Master Degree. In addition, 5 out of 10 employers hold managerial positions.

TABLE II. PARTICIPATING EMPLOYERS' PROFILES

Company and Position	Male		Female	
	N	%	N	%
Company A Manager Bachelor Degree 8 years			1	20
Company B Manager Bachelor Degree 12 years			1	20
Company C Manager Bachelor Degree 10 years			1	20
Manager GCE O Level 25 years			1	20
Company D CEO Bachelor Degree 30 years	1	20		
Director Master Degree 3 years	1	20		
Manager Master Degree More than 5 years	1	20		
Company E Manager Master Degree More than 20 years			1	20
Company F Supervisor Higher National Diploma 1 year	1	20		
Supervisor Diploma 2 years	1	20		
Total	5	100	5	100

B. Employability Skills integrated by Teachers in the Lessons

Table 3 shows the employability skills integrated by teachers in the lessons. Of all the skills, the top 8 skills integrated by teachers are "cooperating with others" (90%), "following instructions" (88.6%), "working in a team" (84.6%), "respecting people" (84.6%), "listening", "understanding and asking questions" (78.6%), "interacting with others" (74.6%), "maintaining cleanliness" (70.6%) and "taking responsibility for own actions and decisions" (70.6%).

TABLE III. EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS INTEGRATED BY TEACHERS IN THE LESSONS

Skills emphasised by teachers	Responses	
	N	%
Cooperating with others	181	90%
Following Instructions	178	88.6%
Working in a team	170	84.6%
Respecting people	170	84.6%
Listening, understanding and asking questions	158	78.6%
Interacting with others	150	74.6%
Maintaining cleanliness	142	70.6%
Taking responsibility for own actions and decisions	142	70.6%
Be aware of personal safety	141	70.1%
Maintaining personal hygiene	137	68.2%
Personal grooming (clean hands, trimmed nails, clean teeth, clean face, nicely combed hair and so on)	130	64.7%
Demonstrating punctuality	121	60.2%
Practicing time management in completing assigned tasks	120	59.7%

C. Employability Skills emphasised by Employers

Table 4 shows the employability skills emphasised by employers. Top 8 skills emphasised by employers are "following instructions"(100%), "deal with others with honesty and integrity"(100%), "acting positively towards change" (100%), "cooperating with others"(100%), "working in a team"(100%), "interacting with others"(100%), "maintain cleanliness" (100%) and "demonstrate punctuality"(100%).

TABLE IV. EMPLOYABILITY EMPHASISED BY EMPLOYERS

Skills emphasised by employers	Responses	
	N	%
Following Instructions	10	100%
Deal with others with honesty and integrity	10	100%
Acting positively towards change	10	100%
Cooperating with others	10	100%
Working in a team	10	100%
Interacting with others	10	100%
Maintain cleanliness	10	100%
Demonstrate punctuality	10	100%
Taking responsibility for own actions and decisions	8	80%
Be aware of personal safety	8	80%
Follow a dress code or uniform guidelines	8	80%
Personal grooming (clean hands, trimmed nails, clean teeth, clean face, nicely combed hair and so on)	8	80%
Maintaining personal hygiene	8	80%
Show high level of efforts and dedication	8	80%

D. Important Employability Skills according to Teachers and Employers' Perspectives

Employability skills' means were ranked in order from higher to lowest mean value and arranged accordingly in Table 5 and Table 6. The highest mean indicates higher importance placed by the teachers and employers.

TABLE V. IMPORTANCE OF EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS ACCORDING TO TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES

Item No	Employability Skills Components	Mean	Standard Deviation
	Basic Skills	**4.32**	**0.81**
5	Communication	4.46	0.89
4	Listening	4.43	0.79
1	Reading	4.30	0.92
3	Counting	4.23	0.88
2	Writing	4.19	0.74
	Personal Qualities	**4.21**	**0.79**
12	Responsible	4.47	0.87
16	Integrity	4.39	0.74
17	Self-Discipline	4.31	0.73
13	Self-Confidence	4.30	0.90
15	Self-Management	4.19	0.83
18	Adaptability	4.05	0.75
14	Social Ability	4.03	0.73
25	Serving Customers	3.92	0.82
	Resource Skills	**4.10**	**0.84**
20	Time Management	4.21	0.82
21	Money Management	4.00	0.79
	Thinking Skills	**3.89**	**0.88**
10	Knowing How to Learn	4.11	0.78
11	Reasoning	3.93	0.76
8	Problem Solving	3.93	0.79
7	Making Decisions	3.90	0.85
6	Creative and Innovative	3.80	0.82
9	Visualising	3.71	0.91
	Interpersonal Skills	**3.88**	**0.87**
23	Teamwork	4.23	0.89
19	Ability to Work Independently	4.15	0.78
24	Teach Others	3.83	0.78
29	Resolving Conflicts	3.83	0.87
28	Working with People with Different Backgrounds	3.83	0.89
27	Ability to Negotiate	3.70	0.87
26	Being a Leader of a Team	3.56	0.89
	Information Skills	**3.59**	**0.89**
22	Demonstrating Computer Skills	3.59	0.89

TABLE VI. IMPORTANCE OF EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS ACCORDING TO EMPLOYERS' PERSPECTIVES

Item No	Employability Skills Components	Mean	Standard Deviation
	Resource Skills	**4.45**	**0.60**
20	Time Management	4.50	0.71
21	Money Management	4.40	0.52
	Personal Qualities	**4.41**	**0.92**
16	Integrity	4.60	0.97
12	Responsible	4.50	0.97
17	Self-Discipline	4.50	0.97
15	Self-Management	4.40	0.97
13	Self-Confidence	4.40	1.07
25	Serving Customers	4.30	0.82
14	Social Ability	4.30	0.95
18	Adaptability	4.30	0.95
	Basic Skills	**4.34**	**0.92**
1	Reading	4.40	0.70
2	Writing	4.40	0.70
5	Communication	4.40	1.26
4	Listening	4.30	1.06
3	Counting	4.20	0.92
	Interpersonal Skills	**4.31**	**0.75**
23	Teamwork	4.60	0.70
28	Working with People with Different Backgrounds	4.40	0.52
24	Teach Others	4.30	0.67
29	Resolving conflicts	4.30	0.82
26	Being a Leader of a Team	4.20	0.79
27	Ability to Negotiate	4.20	0.79
19	Ability to Work Independently	4.20	1.03
	Thinking Skills	**4.10**	**0.88**
7	Making Decisions	4.20	0.79
11	Reasoning	4.20	0.79
8	Problem Solving	4.20	0.92
6	Creative and Innovative	4.10	0.99
10	Knowing How to Learn	4.00	1.05
9	Visualising	3.90	0.88
	Information Skills	**4.00**	**1.15**
29	Demonstrating Computer Skills	4.00	1.15

According to the teachers, the top 3 employability skills were "basic skills" (M=4.32, SD= 0.81), followed by "personal qualities" (M=4.21, SD= 0.79) and "resource skills" (M=4.10, SD=0.84). In contrast, top 3 employability skills according to employers were "resource skills" (M=4.45, SD= 0.60) was ranked highly followed by "personal qualities" (M=4.41, SD=0.92) and "basic skills" (M=4.34, SD=0.92). Resource skills refer to the ability to identify, organise, plan and allocate resources such as time and money. Personal qualities refer to the individual traits to be successful in a workplace. Basic skills cover reading, writing, counting and communicating. Both teachers and employers valued similar skills but were ranked differently.

E. Challenges faced by Teachers in Intergrating Employability Skills in the Lessons

TABLE VII. CHALLENGES FACED BY TEACHERS IN INTEGRATING EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS IN THE LESSONS

Challenges	Responses	
	N	%
No training for teachers in developing students' employability skills	117	58
No evaluation package to measure students' employability skills and achievement of skills	103	51
No available guidelines to integrate elements of employability skills in classroom	89	44
Not being exposed to elements of employability skills	82	41
Not enough time to integrate employability skills	72	36
No content of employability skills included in Pre-Vocational Programme Curriculum	69	34
Do not know the importance of employability skills	37	18
Do not understand the term employability skills	24	12
Most of the employability skills taught are based on teacher's assumptions. It may or may not be relevant. As such it would be better if proper guidelines are given that the relevant ones are included in the curriculum.	1	0.5
Students are not interested	1	0.5
Most lessons are academic oriented	1	0.5
Limited allocation of budget to run activities	1	0.5
Handling students of multi disabilities in one classroom	1	0.5
Lack of resources	1	0.5

Table 7 highlights the challenges faced by teachers in integrating employability skills in the lessons. Top 3 challenges faced by teachers were "no training to develop students' employability skills" (58%), "no evaluation package to measure achievement of employability skills" (51%) and "no available guidelines to integrate employability skills in classrooms" (44%).

F. Suggestions by Teachers in integrating Employability Skills

TABLE VIII. SUGGESTIONS BY TEACHERS IN INTEGRATING EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

Suggestions	Responses	
	N	%
More practical and hands-on learning activities for students	164	82
Educational visits to training centres such as Youth Development Centre (Pusat Pembangunan Belia), Centre for Capacity Building (Pusat Perkembangan Kapasiti) and Brunei Arts and Handicraft Training Centres (Pusat Latihan Kesenian dan Pertukangan Tangan)	155	77
Collaboration between schools and employers to provide opportunities for students to gain work experiences such as packaging activity in school	154	77
Educational visits to local businesses and industries in Brunei Darussalam	153	76
Collaboration between schools and employers to provide opportunities for students to gain work experiences such as students undergo work experience at employer's place	150	75
Training for students must meet current industry demand	143	71
Employers participate in education and training	132	66
Examples of lesson plans or activities to integrate employability skills	1	0.5
Teachers must have interest and skills to teach. Not being forced by school administration.	1	0.5
Strategy on how to handle different ability of students and how to equip them with skills	1	0.5

Table 8 depicts the suggestions shared by the teachers. Among the suggestions, the top 5 suggestions were "more practical and hands-on learning activities for students" (82%), "educational visits to training centres" (77%), "collaboration between schools and employers for students to gain work experience in school" (77%), "educational visits to local businesses and industries" (76%) and "collaboration between schools and employers for students to gain work experience such as work attachment at employers' place" (75%).

V. DISCUSSION

The study sought to identify the employability skills integrated by Pre-Vocational Programme teachers in the lessons. It also sought to examine the employability skills emphasised by employers.

According to Table 3, teachers put more emphasis on "cooperating with others" (90%), "working in a team" (84.6%) and "respecting people" (84.6%) in their lessons which was consistent with "teamwork" (m=4.23) and "working with people with different background" (m=3.83) also valued highly under "interpersonal skills" in Table 5. "Following instruction" (88.6%) and "listening, understanding and asking questions" (78.6%) were also emphasised by the teachers in Table 3 and was consistent with the "communication" (m=4.46) and "listening" (m=4.43) which were valued highly by teachers in Table 5. By referring to Table 4, employers had put more emphasis on "deal with others with honesty and integrity" (100%). This was consistent in Table 6 where "integrity" (m=4.60) had the highest mean under "personal qualities". In addition, "cooperating with others" (100%) and "working in a team" (100%) in Table 4 were valued highly. This was consistent with the results in Table 6 where "teamwork" (m=4.60) and "working with others with different backgrounds" (m=4.40), both also had the highest mean under "interpersonal skills". Other skills emphasised by employers to take note of according to Table 4 were "Following instruction" (100%), "maintain cleanliness" (100%) and "demonstrate punctuality" (100%). Corresponding to Table 6, this was also consistent with "communication" (m=4.40) under "basic skills" and "self-management" (m=4.40) under "personal qualities" where both were ranked third. Maintaining cleanliness and demonstrating punctuality were categorised under reliability within self-management as it encompassed self-control, reliability, positive attitude and presentation [21]. Reliability, in particular, refers to consistent attendance, time-keeping and standards whereas presentation refers to consistently clean, tidy and properly dressed [21]

The study has also sought to examine the perspectives of teachers and employers on employability skills according to its importance. The study found that there were similarities between important employability skills viewed by teachers and employers but were ranked differently. Top 3 employability skills were "personal qualities", "resource skills" and "basic skills". Generally, the teachers and employers valued "responsible", "integrity", "self-discipline", "self-management", "self-confidence" to be important under "personal qualities". Under "resource skills", both teachers and employer valued highly "time management" followed by "money management" skills. For "personal qualities", teachers ranked "responsible" as top skill whereas employers ranked "integrity" as top skill. For "basic skills", teacher valued "communication" to be important followed by "listening", "reading", "counting" and "writing". In comparison to employers, they valued top 3 skills namely "reading", "writing" and "communication" followed by "listening" and "counting". The findings of the study served as a reminder to schools that basic skills (reading, writing and communicating) were still clearly valued by employers [21]. Thus, schools should continually emphasise training on basic academic skills and provide sufficient instruction to their students. The findings further confirmed that top rated skills were fundamental personal attributes rather job specific skills. This was consistent with a study by Ju, Zhang, and Pacha [21] where they identified top employability skills emphasised by employers to take note of which were following instructions, being punctual, being respectful, sufficient basic skills (reading, writing and communicating) and basic work skills (attendance, follow schedules and stay on task and monitor quality of work).

The teachers shared their challenges in teaching employability skills and provided suggestions for improvement. Consequently, the suggestions indicated that there was a need to improve the Pre-Vocational Programme and the facility enabling graduates to develop employability skills in order for them to secure employment after completing the programme as pointed out by Haji Abdul Tahir [15]. Among the many suggestions, teachers mentioned that they would like to have a more practical and relevant hands-on activities to meet the current local demands apart from educational visits to local businesses and industries. This could be achieved through collaboration between schools and employers. By recognising the employability skills demanded by employers, it could lead to a better job training and preparation. Teaching the students employability skills could make the difference for them being hired for a job in their field [22]. This was consistent with Rabey [23] who suggested that secondary schools need to place more emphasis on life skills, work skills and knowledge of the workplace in order to improve secondary schools' ways to prepare their students for workforce.

VI. CONCLUSION

Employability skills have become more important in the present job market. Thus, the findings of the study have implication on training of Pre-Vocational Programme students. Some of the suggestions shared by teachers are more practical and hands-on activities, educational visits and collaboration between schools and employers by providing opportunities students to gain work experience at school through simulated work activities and work attachment at employers' premises. The teachers do welcome employers' involvement in education and training to ensure training meet the current employers' demand. The suggestions can help to develop and enhance students' employability skills giving them a competitive edge and opportunity for employment after completing the Pre-Vocational Programme.

Acknowledgment

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