

INTEGRATION OF EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS IN TVET TRAINER TRAINING  
PROGRAMME: TRAINER'S READINESS IN TEACHING EMPLOYABILITY  
SKILLS

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my great husband, Ab Rahim Pondar who supported and encouraged me throughout the journey despite the ups and downs, and to my dearly loved daughter, Nuril Yaqin, son-in-law Fiqri, and adorable grandchildren Nuh, Ara and Farha who have inspired me and given me the strength to finish this long journey. Without their love, endless prayers, patience, understanding, and support I would not have been able to devote so much time and effort to my research.

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I Dedicate This Work with Thankfulness and Apologies

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## ABSTRACT

This research is aimed at studying the current state of the trainer's competency and the integration of employability skills being practised in the trainer training programme. On the other hand, this study will provide evidence regarding the readiness level of novice trainers and the challenges they face in integrating employability skills into their training programmes. TVET trainers are expected to play an important role as facilitators to develop the employability skills required by TVET graduates. This study primarily used quantitative data and a survey research design, and TVET trainers provided their perceptions on their understanding of the significance and competency level of teaching employability skills, the integration of employability skills, and their readiness to teach employability skills to their trainees at the workplace. A total of 34 experienced trainers ( $n = 34$ ) and 137 novice trainers ( $n = 137$ ) participated in this study. Based on a score range of 1 to 5, this study ranked the 25 skills and items in accordance with the eight key employability skill constructs. The findings indicated that the overall mean of both trainers' perceptions was high in terms of the importance of employability skills (4.23–4.71), their competency (4.15–4.44), and their readiness (4.31–4.75) in embedding employability skills. Additionally, these results showed that both trainers' perceptions of their challenges in integrating employability skills were lower (2.99–3.68) in terms of curriculum and institutional or administrative issues. The findings give the impression that the competencies and readiness of TVET trainers in relation to employability skills integration have implications for the improvement in the development and performance of TVET graduates in their workplace. There is a need to increase trainer competency in the readiness of the teaching and learning process to improve the learning achievement of TVET students based on attitude, knowledge, skills, and institutional support.

## ABSTRAK

Kajian ini adalah bertujuan meneroka integrasi kemahiran kebolehkeraan dalam programme latihan pengajar dan mengetahui kompetensi pengajar serta integrasi kemahiran kebolehkeraan yang diamalkan dalam program latihan pengajar TVET. Kajian ini juga bertujuan menilai tahap kesediaan pengajar novis dan cabaran yang dihadapi dalam mengintegrasikan kemahiran kebolehkeraan dalam latihan kemahiran. Kajian ini menggunakan data kuantitatif dan reka bentuk kajian tinjauan di mana pengajar berpengalaman TVET dan pengajar novis memberikan persepsi mereka tentang pemahaman tentang kepentingan, tahap kecekapan dalam mengajar kemahiran kebolehkeraan, integrasi kemahiran kebolehkeraan dan kesediaan mereka mengajar kemahiran kebolehkeraan kepada pelatih mereka di pusat latihan kemahiran. Data untuk kajian ini menggunakan kajiselidik berasaskan web yang melibatkan 137 pengajar novis dan 34 pengajar berpengalaman. Dapatan menunjukkan bahawa min keseluruhan persepsi kedua-dua pengajar adalah tinggi dari segi kepentingan kemahiran kebolehkeraan (4.23–4.71), kompetensi (4.15–4.44), dan kesediaan mereka (4.31–4.75) dalam menerapkan kemahiran kebolehpasaran. Selain itu, keputusan ini menunjukkan bahawa persepsi kedua-dua pengajar terhadap cabaran mereka dalam mengintegrasikan kemahiran kebolehpasaran adalah lebih rendah (2.99–3.68) dari segi kurikulum dan isu institusi atau pentadbiran. Dapatan ini memberi gambaran bahawa kecekapan dan kesediaan pengajar TVET berhubung dengan integrasi kemahiran kebolehkeraan mempunyai implikasi kepada peningkatan dalam pembangunan dan prestasi graduan TVET di tempat kerja mereka.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATION

CIAST	-	Centre for Instructors and Advanced Skill Training ( <i>Pusat Latihan Pengajar dan Kemahiran Lanjutan</i> )
DKM	-	<i>Diploma Kemahiran Malaysia</i> (Malaysian Skills Diploma)
DSD	-	Department of Skills Development ( <i>Jabatan Pembangunan Kemahiran – JPK</i> )
ETP	-	Economic Transformation Plan
ILO	-	International Labour Organisation)
K – Economy	-	knowledge-based economy
K-Workers	-	Knowledge workers
SKM	-	Sijil Kemahiran Malaysia (Malaysian Skills Certification (MSC))
MP8	-	Eighth Malaysia Plan
NKEA	-	National Key Economic Area
NKRA	-	National Key Reformation Area
NOSS	-	National Occupational Skills Standard ( <i>Standard Kemahiran Pekerjaan Kebangsaan</i> )
OPP3	-	Third Outline Perspective Plan
P-economy	-	Production-based economy
TVET	-	Technical Vocational Education and Training
UNESCO	-	United Nation for Education, Science and Cultural Organisation
VTO	-	Vocational Training Officer/ Operation Level 3



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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Overview of chapter**

The purpose of this study is to survey the integration of employability skills in the trainer-training programme and to examine the readiness of trainers and novice trainers in embedding the employability skills in the skill training programme. This study aims to determine the current state of the trainer's competency and integration of employability skills being practised in the trainer training programme. On the other hand, this study will provide evidence regarding the readiness level of novice trainers and the challenges faced in integrating employability skills into their training programme. This chapter presents the background of the study, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, theoretical framework, the scope of the study and operational definition. The thesis outline will be highlighted at the end of this chapter.

#### **1.2 The demand of knowledge-workers in Malaysia**

The impact of global change and the beginning of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, rapid development of technology in Malaysia had created a need for a skilled workforce to be competitive in the world market. In such a fast-changing employment landscape, the ability to prepare for future skills will be required to take advantage of the opportunities presented by these trends. As a result of the various organisational changes, the required skills, knowledge, and competencies have changed. A knowledge-based economy comprises a highly skilled workforce in a microeconomic and macroeconomic context where institutions and industries create jobs that require

specialized skills to meet the needs of the global marketplace (Pologeorgis, 2019). Researchers and institutions such as the World Bank, International Labour Organisation (ILO), European Union (EU) commission, and McKinsey Global Institute (MGI) have undertaken several studies on future skills. Recent studies (Mintullabo et al., 2019; WEFORUM, 2020; Whiting, 2020) highlighted skills capable of handling and managing change, including problem solving, self-regulation, ability to learn, development, and management of personal competence and skills related to digitisation, which will be highly needed. Hence, a more flexible workforce with advanced technical skills coupled with well-developed employability skills such as creative thinking, problem-solving and analytical skills, is needed by the employer in the industry to meet the challenges faced by the business. Building up human resources is crucial to becoming a developed nation because it will result in knowledgeable, competent, and highly skilled workers. The ability in preparing the country's workforce to become a world-class knowledge worker (K-worker) will be crucial as it will be the most important asset for creating the competitive advantage and future economic well-being. Available research indicated employability skills as the key to employment that should be incorporated in the curriculum.

In the 21st century, employability skill is the most required skill besides technical knowledge in an attempt to compete for employment and sustain a job at the industrial global market. Employability can be defined as the knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviour and other qualities that a person must possess in order to succeed in roles or in their professional responsibilities as well as in order to realise their full potential and that display outstanding and excellent performance contribute to the strategic goals of their organisation (O' Flaherty and Beal, 2018; Mustapha, 2015) defined competency as clusters of skills, knowledge, abilities, behaviours, and attitudes. K-workers can be described as highly qualified, intelligent, motivated, innovative, and entrepreneurial individuals, which with these characteristics, they are able to engage in a rapidly evolving and increasingly advanced complex work processes to provide the best quality work. However, at the same time, based on previous research (Hossain, et al., 2018; Sieng & Yussof, 2017), industrial 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. Several reports issued

by employers have urged educational organisations to make more explicit efforts to develop the ‘key’, ‘core’, ‘transferable’, ‘soft’, ‘employable’ and/or ‘generic skills’ needed in many types of employment. The current system of development and skills training needs to be re-evaluated and improved to ensure the supply of K-workers produced by all training agencies fulfils the needs of the industry. Thus, a k-worker needs to be versatile and willing to learn continuously to acquire, apply and create knowledge in the areas of modern technologies. They must be prepared for lifelong learning, able to work in teams and must be able to constantly anticipate the needs of the future particularly at the workplace. According to Spöttl, (2000), to develop K-workers, occupational competence should encompass four basic competencies; i) technical competency ii) learning competency, iii) methodology competency and iv) social competency as illustrated in Figure 1.1. These competencies are the basic component required by the knowledge-based human resources.

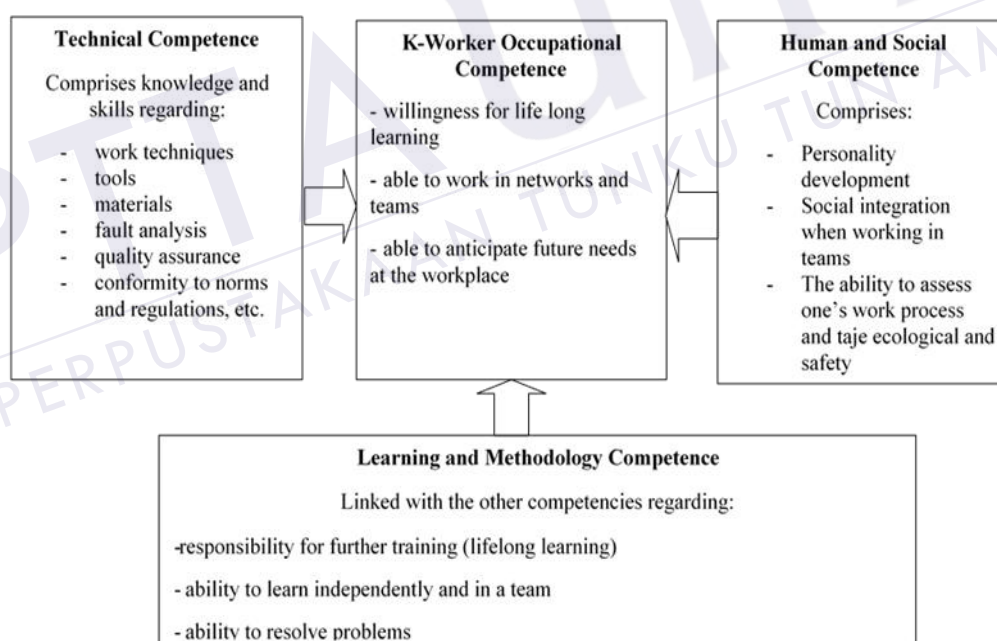


Figure 1. 1: Occupational competency of k-workers model  
(Source: Bader; Spöttl, ITB-University Bremen, 2000)

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has been reputable for decades. This is demonstrated by the government's progressive efforts to mainstream and expand TVET education throughout the 10th through 12th Malaysian

Plans in order to increase future workers' employability and skill levels (Arifin & Rasdi, 2017). In the most recent Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (MOHE, 2015), the Ministry aims to increase the employability of graduates to over 80% by 2025. TVET system have an important role in developing skilled workers as K-workers to satisfy the needs of the industry. Technical skills need to be mastered by the graduates as it is the core component, but they also require performing well in social skills and personal attributes which enable graduates to be employed in the industry.

### **1.3 Background of the study**

TVET has been recognised for its importance since the mid-1960s. Reforms within the technical TVET system have started a big shift towards a knowledge-based economy. Youth unemployment is a growing concern globally. According to the World Employment Social Outlook (2018), young people under the age of 25 have a higher likelihood of being unemployed than adults. The global youth unemployment rate currently stands at 13%, which is three times higher than the figure for adults at 4.3% (ILO, 2018). Unemployment among young people in Malaysia has raised concerns about the potential mismatch between labour market requirements and the skills of young people leaving formal education. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia, the unemployment rate in Malaysia has increased by 17.1 percent, which is 610.5 thousand as compared to 521.3 thousand in the same month in 2019. The unemployment rate in March 2020 increased to 3.9 percent (The Office of Chief Statistician Malaysia, 2020). This issue has been an area of concern for the Government because if the increasing number of graduates are not aligned with the number of jobs created, this could contribute to a serious unemployment problem in the country (Azmi, et al., 2018) and later create an imbalance between workforce supply and demand (Institute of Labour Market Information and Analysis, ILMIA, 2018; Ministry of Finance, MoF, 2020). Employers are dissatisfied with the graduates' employment skills, and they anticipate higher education institutions to instil the desired employability skills among their graduates (Patwardhan, 2019). The researchers identified that graduate unemployment is due to the industry-academia

widening gap of mismatching graduates' skills with industrial demands (Azmi et al., 2018; Baqutayan, et al., 2019).

UNESCO (2016) described TVET as comprising education, training and skills development relating to a wide range of occupational fields, production, services, and livelihoods. 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. It was observed that the requirements of the industry in terms of skill requirements continue to change due to technology development, suggesting that education and training should look into the curriculum and review or make changes so as to include employability skill into the new curriculum. There is still a contention that graduates' shortcomings are caused by higher education institutions' failure to adequately prepare students for entry into the workforce, despite the growing importance of general soft skills being acknowledged in a number of studies on graduate job readiness (Winterton and Turner, 2019).

The Malaysian Qualification Accreditation (MQA) has established a standard of competency that students must meet in order to graduate from the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programme in Malaysia. In all educational sectors in Malaysia, the discussion regarding employability skills, or soft skills, has been going on for a while. Various high-level reviews and in-depth discussions with representatives from the TVET sector and other interested parties have been taking place. It is understood that these abilities take varied forms depending on the technical and discipline-specific context. Generally, most employers and organisations do not only look for technical skills, but they also emphasise generic skills are looking for employees who possess the attributes of employability skills such as people management skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills, teamwork, professionalism, knowledge and principles, problem-solving skills, and decision-making skills to fulfil the current employment demands and professional expectations needed by industries (Sorrel, 2017; Jayaram & Musau, 2017; Jayaram & Engmann, 2017). Graduates now are lacking generic skills that are importantly needed by employers to encounter the challenges in business (Azmi, Hashim & Yusoff, 2018).

Considering the importance of employability skills in a TVET curriculum to produce k-workers, the skills must be part of an explicit curriculum and taught to apprentices and trainees. Malaysia has identified human resource development as a

major emphasis and strategic policy in a knowledge-based environment by having skilled and knowledgeable workers (k-workers) that led to a heightened awareness of the need to reform the technical-vocational education and training (TVET) systems. A few studies were conducted to examine requirements and necessary skills to gain and retain employment (Table 1.1). The general conclusion from these studies is that generic/soft skills or employability skills in addition to core technical skills are becoming increasingly important to employers. All research findings lead to a similar conclusion, that people are expected to possess well-developed technical skills, as well as generic or employability skills which give them a high degree of flexibility, adaptability and the ability to work in a range of jobs and to develop and maintain employability.

Table 1. 1: Overview of international research on generic/soft/employability skills

No	Details	Representative Research
1	Literature reviews on emerging requirements and importance of generic/soft/employability skills.	Bailey, (2014); Grieve, (2013); Gillard, 2009); Singh & Singh, (2008); Sail et al., (2007); DEST, (2007); Yorke, (2006); Robinson, (2000).
2	Unemployment issues and employers' perspective on soft/ generic/ employability skills.	UNESCO (2013); Nurita et al., 2004); Mahamod & Alias, 2011; Nikitina & Furuoka, 2012; Ismail, et al., (2011).
3	TVET and development of generic/soft/employability skills.	Sail, & Alavi, (2009); Teh & Pendergast (2009); ILO/UNESCO. (2001).; Ramlee et al., (2008)

Among the issues and challenges from the government's perspective is holistic human capital that encompasses knowledge, skills and a positive attitude, a highly skilled workforce to support k-Economy and career paths and employability for youths. The skills of the workforce are in turn dependent on the quality of the country's education and training systems. Vocational education is seen as one of the essential elements for increasing economic productivity. A multi-skilled knowledge worker (k-worker) needs to be versatile and willing to learn continuously to acquire knowledge and skill. They must be able to work in rapidly changing and increasing complex work processes to deliver high-quality work. Undoubtedly, the Malaysian workforce's skills



and competencies are dependent upon the quality of the country's education and training systems where one of the crucial elements is knowledge-based education and training to be perceived by the Malaysian workforce. Regarding this matter, higher learning institutions and tertiary education are the most suitable location to improve the level of employability skills among undergraduates. The poor qualities of graduates remain a subject of contention among external stakeholders such as academics, employers, and the industry of Malaysian higher education institutions. Jobstreet (2017), the largest online recruitment firm in Malaysia, lists three undesirable attributes that Malaysian graduates have which are poor English language skills, poor communication skills and a poor character, attitude, and personality. For Malaysia, TVET is perceived as one of the crucial elements in enhancing the k-Based economy as a strategy to perpetuate rapid growth and continuous competitiveness. Therefore, to achieve the goal of producing k-workers, all parties involved in skills training in training institutions as well as workplace program-policy makers, managers of industries and training institutes, coaches, and trainers, must be committed to preparing trainees for the actual “world of work” by directly involving them to develop competencies required and relevant to the needs of industries. Soft skills formation at a tertiary level has been an education policy in Malaysia since 2006.

In the TVET training system, trainers are responsible to deliver the ongoing process of training according to the Code of Practice for TVET Program Accreditation (COPTPA) in embedding employability skills into the technical content. Thus, TVET trainers should have an overall mastery and competence of new skills to deliver vocational training that can facilitate the acquisition of skills for future change. The competency of a trainer is not only a priority in technical aspects, but they need to be competent in teaching or transferring knowledge on soft skills (non-technical skills) to develop employable K-Workers. To help students “learn in context,” instructors must become master practitioners among student learners, gain personal exposure to the world of work, and adapt their teaching to support authentic learning. The quality of the instructors or trainers is one of the important factors that determine the quality of the graduates from a learning institution. The instructors need to implement all the policies and goals set by the government through the Ministry of Education or Ministry of Human Resources. Therefore, it becomes the responsibility of an instructor to integrate various essential skills across the curriculum, which has been developed by



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