EMPLOYERS' PERCEPTIONS OF DIGITAL LITERACY TOWARDS HOSPITALITY STUDENTS' EMPLOYABILITY

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ABSTRACT

Hospitality students nowadays must be able to consider on their career planning in order to comply with the demand from the hospitality competitive environment. This conceptual paper will reveals the employers' perception of the digital literacy towards their employability within the industry. Previous studies have dealt with the essential competences that may influence the employability but only few highlighted the relationship between digital skills with the individual potential to get a job. At this monumental era, someone that entering job market will be having difficulties to detect what the employers really want from them. Therefore, in this study, researcher will try to gather the literatures that may support the fact that most of education policy and the training efforts should focus more on the digital skills.

Keywords: *Employers' perception, digital literacy, digital skills, employability*

INTRODUCTION

In the growing economies like Malaysia and few other countries, employability issue has been arised lately. Bernama (2018) reported that the unemployment rate for pur country still controllable whereby based on the International Labour Organisation (ILO) definition that any country recorded unemployment below 4.0% as a full employment nation. However it was said by one of The Star online author, Dass (2018) that the youth unemployment, which includes unemployed individuals aged 15 to 24, a typical age range that covers those who have just finished high school or graduated from colleges and looking for jobs, remains stubbornly high. This is not a new issue whereas the hiring patterns among the companies in slow pace forcing the youth left unemployed.

Robinson (2018) stated as highlighted in the World Bank's forthcoming 2019 World Development Report on the changing nature of work, digital literacy is found out to be as the most demanding requirement to compete for jobs and access economic opportunities. Since hospitality industry is moving towards an increasingly connected future in which platforms, personalisation and integrated technology play a central role whereas the progress of digitisation is increasing the level of competition, putting pressure on revenues and profits. To take advantage of market growth, incumbent businesses need to understand the direction of change and the most promising strategies for success that's why right hiring is very important to avoid the company loss.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

All workers regardless of any sectors need to have comprehensive understanding on how to handle those digitised tools within the organisation. Research indicated by Pirzada and Khan (2013) points out that the students might be facing with the difficulties in finding a job due to the lack of understanding in digital knowledge. This statement proves that as an employer, they will be looking at this area before selection process takes place. Different people might hold different views on digital knowledge itself. Some view digital knowledge as switch on the computer and may operate all the software inside, meanwhile the others' may understand digital knowledge as holding the tablet and perform the entire task using this tool. Employability will be affected by the digitisation whereas at the same time it may be vital for the sustainable development of the organisation afterward (Ali,

Alisha, Murphy, Hillary, Nadkarni and Sanjay, 2018). This kind of knowledge may become the added value for an individual to uplift their potential to be selected during the recruitment process. Findings indicated by Rocha (2018) mentioned the working culture currently being exposed to the existence of technology and the work process will be more efficient and the end results are way much better.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Evidences from many empirical studies found out that most of researchers agreed on the importance of preparing the employees with the digital literacy before they entering the job market (Bahadur & Yadav, 2015; Velde, 2009). In today's monumental era, every employers need to make sure their employees do understand on the digital usage in the workplace to avoid productivity loss and work inefficiency. Kin Siong (2003) reported that ICT illiterated workforce is the group that should be readily available within every organisation to improvise the Malaysian ranking for the computer literacy. Therefore the hospitality graduates should be able to get ready with the possibilities that their digital literacy will be tested during the interview process.

3.1   *Hospitality Students' Employability*

Ali et al (2018) initiated that students' employability may be perceived by eight competency dimensions of (1) self management (2) strategic positioning (3) implementation (4) critical thinking (5) communication (6) interpersonal skills (7) leadership and (8) industry knowledge while Pirzada and Khan (2013) argues that the fresh graduates should be able to utilise technology tools to get a good career advancement. Another research stated that digital literacy has been ranked to be at the top 10 over 33 as a prioritise for hospitality graduates (Gursoy, Rahman, and Swanger, 2012). Hospitality businesses were likely to be said as well operated when the services offered were at the best however as time passes, the technology skills should be practised started from the safety measures till at the level of managing the organisation long term planning (Ali et al, 2018).

In common with the other industry, this labor intensive industry always looking at the best skill sets of individual to be hired, therefore the higher institution nowadays should be able to equip the students in accordance with the demand from the industry. As Law, Buhalis and Cobanuglu (2014) proposed in his study, hospitality businesses were becoming technology driven to operate successfully. Kang and Gould (2014) investigated that usually the vacancies in the managerial hierarchy within the hospitalitaty organisation will be filled with the hospitality graduates meanwhile for the bottom positions the firm tend to select the candidates from various learning fields taken by them. According to Muhammad Naim (2003), the hospitality graduates may easily be hired at the middle level positions in the firm if they have certificate at either diploma or degree level so this statement proves that if the hospitality graduates able to finish their education at higher level and have good understanding in digital skills, it is not difficult for them to be employed.

Since the research purpose is to study on how employers' perceptions of digital literacy towards hospitality graduates' employability, this theoretical framework was developed from the previous literature sources (Pirzada and Khan, 2013):
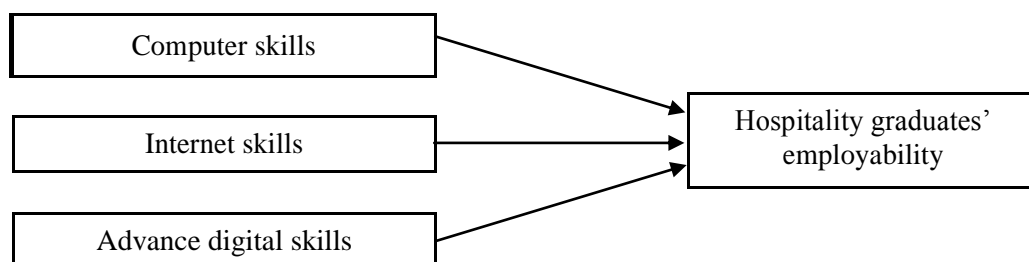
Pirzada and Khan (2013) proposed that employers' acknowledge digital skills are the combination set of those skills mentioned above in the diagram. Based on the illustrated framework, researcher viewed all those three skill may be cultivated from the digital literacy and it may affect the employability.

3.2   Interrelationship between computer skills and the graduates' employability

Eyong, Robert and Angrey (2017) concluded ICT has been as the key featuring skills should be embedded among the graduates because some of them perform poorly when it comes to computer handling whereas 49.8% of working adults will be using computer during the working time. Pirzada and his other friend (2013) introduced computer skills to be characterised as selecting ICT systems and devices effectively, utilising software tools, used specialised tools for work and also the flexibility in adapting with the changes of infrastructures and applications. Wilson (2007) felt that cyber shy among applicants no longer relevant because most of the employers are demanding for those who got basic understanding of computer hardware and software before accepting them in the firm.

3.3   Interrelationship between internet skills and the graduates' employability

Many definitions can be found on internet skills itself however van Dijk and van Deursen (2014) points out Internet skills to be similar to the social networking and how the users may be adapted with the internet surroundings. Martinez-Cerda and Torrent-Sellens (2014) viewed internet skills as the e-learning and e-skills whereby the indicators involved mostly related to the internet utilisation. According to Prensky (2001), the competences relate to internet basis are the workforce may apply the internet skills in efficient way, accomplish tasks given using the internet apps and also consist of the establishment and provisions of effectual, proficient function and information supervision and system protection. Employers are likely to select those candidates that able to master this skill due to the emergence of many competitive industries.

3.4   Interrelationship between advance digital skills and the graduates' employability

If compare between a hospitality graduate with the IT graduate, the employer in the hospitality firm will often get confused easily especially when the job descriptions in their advertisement higlights on the ability to operate different type of technology tools to perform tasks given such as designing webs and products packaging. Not all higher institutions that offering the hospitality courses will produce full skill sets of hospitality graduates that as being requested by the industry. Therefore, as being part of the higher institution context, the educators and academic practitioners should equip the students with the skills of using technology tools to increase firms' productivity, increase the users' performance and enhance the understanding level of symbols and image as said by Pirzada and Khan (2013) in their study.

METHODOLOGY

4.1   Methods for collecting literature

This conceptual paper is based solely on a review and analysis of research and data from previous empirical studies. For the literatures, researched reviewed several journals and found out Pirzada and Khan's write up was the most relevant journal that may be as the main reference for constructing this conceptual paper. Other methods that being used was the google search engine and also the digital books that can be found online. Since the topic deals with the technology and digital literacy with the employability, researcher also has tried to search the statistics related with those area to be inseretd in this paper.

4.2   Data collection for future research

To proceed with this research, a qualitative study will be used and the population to be studied would be the employers within the hospitality industry. The sample would consist of the employers that already signed MOU agreement with the Faculty since they were said as the potential employer to be for the Faculty graduates after they finish their studies in Kolej Universiti Islam Melaka. For ethical reasons, participants will be asked to read and sign a consent form stating that they willingly participated in the study and that any answers provided will be used as data and compiled into a report. The participants will also be informed that participation in the survey is completely confidential and voluntary and they are free to leave at any time.

FINDINGS FROM LITERATURE

Literatures found were very helpful in assisting the researcher to understand this conceptual paper very well and lead the researcher to some meaningful findings. Based on the empirical studies, it was found that the hospitality graduates manage get hired easily by the employers if they are able to perform well during the recruitment process and at the same time they able to convince the employers their understanding on the digital utilisation. The British Computer Society (n.d) and Knight (2011) supported this statement whereas based on their survey; almost 90% from the respondents agreed digital skill is one of the most important requirements to improve employees' efficiency and increasing business productivity.

CONCLUSION

The findings above led me to draw a conclusion and make recommendation for future research. It is obvious that the combination of those three set of digital skills mentioned in the framework got positive relation with the potential to be employed. We nowadays live in the society that so called as borderless era therefore in order to gain the mutual understanding between the employers and the pool of candidates, both parties need to be responsibility in embedding the digital skills to produce better outcome results.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Referred to the literatures, some of the recommendations for the future research are stated below:

Recommendation 1: Further research should be conducted more specific to the field of hospitality itself either the digital skills only meant for the graduates in general or else.

Recommendation 2: It would be interesting to investigate the level of digital literacy among the hospitality graduates and how it may impact the higher education institution in transfroming and shifting from the conventional courses toward modernisation era.

These are some of the recommendations for the future researchers that interested with this topic, which was not possible in this study because of time constraints.

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