Measuring Student Performance, Student Satisfaction and its Impact on Graduate Employability

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Zulhamri Abdullah, PhD
Faculty of Modern Languages & Communication

Syed Agil Alsagoff, MA
Faculty of Modern Languages & Communication

Prof. Dr. Mohd Fauzi Ramlan, PhD
Faculty of Agriculture

Prof. Dr. Mohammad Shatar Sabran, PhD
Faculty of Human Ecology

Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia

Abstract
The ever increasing of figures in the unemployment rate of graduates was mainly due to the fact that most of the graduates were released to the labor market well trained in their areas of specialization but without being fully equipped with skills that are required in the new economy world. The study seeks to examine the role of students development in the higher institutions. With the rise of business complexity and uncertainty around the world, currently employers have looked for talent and competencies of new workers who are capable of make a difference in their organization. Today's business in public and private sectors is hampered by a shortage of skilled workers who should possess highly academic qualifications and excellent soft skills. We identify the status of student performance based on Chickering's seven vectors, student satisfaction and their institutional image. A quantitative survey approach was employed in this study in the Northern University of Malaysia. 368 usable responses were sought in this study. The survey was self-administered in the classroom to increase the response rate from students. The findings from this research showed that most students are good at 'Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationship', followed by 'Developing Integrity'. However, the average means score of 'Developing Competence' and 'Managing Problem Solving and Critical Thinking' is significantly affected the student performance. Most of students are above averagely satisfied with a university performance. Many perceived the institutional image are above averagely good. This study will contribute to both of theoretical and practical implications on the university's student development.

Introduction

Educational institutions play an essential role in development. They support global development strategies with the necessary high-qualified man power and research (Al-Turki and Duffuaa 2003). The core outcome required from institutions of higher learning is one of building capabilities in students for engaging in effective action in all domains of knowledge. As academic and educational options increase, students seek institutions that will provide them with unique, memorable, and personal educational experiences. Also, today's student is a customer seeking an educational program that will prepare him/her for a successful career and gainful employment. As career competition grows ever fiercer in the working world, the importance of students doing well in school has caught the attention of parents, legislators and government education departments alike. The purpose of this study is to add additional contributions to the body of work on student performance, satisfaction and graduate employability.

Defining Student Performance:

According to Mavis (2010) assessment bridges the gap between teaching and learning. Perhaps, second only to teaching, assessing student performance is a fundamental in the life of a teacher. Assessment is important because it provides students with feedback about their performance; this information reinforces their areas of strength and highlights areas of weakness. Using this feedback, students can direct their study strategies and seek additional resources to improve their performance.

In addition, (Mavis 2010) from the perspective of the teacher, another equally important function of student assessment is providing evidence necessary for decisions about student progress. The various student assessments within a class define the types and levels of achievement expected of students. A part of a course of study, student assessments describe a developmental process of increasing competency across a range of domains deemed necessary for graduation.

The 21st century skills include the "basics" measured by the state tests and much more. They include a broad array of skills, such as problem solving, decision making, innovation, creativity, respect, responsibility, organizational skills, initiative, and perseverance. They can be developed as much by how we teach as by what we teach. That is, these skills have a great deal to do with instruction, not just content (Daggett, Ed.D).

Academic Performance

Education institutions worldwide have always placed great emphasis on the factors governing the performance of students. Student's academic performance is a product of various factors eg. psychological, socio-economic and environmental factors (Syed & Raza, 2006). Students performance are not the result of simple cause-effect relationships, but of interactions among factors such as ethnicity, gender, age, learning abilities, learning support, motivation of learning and achievement (Patricia et al, 2006). Yvonne & Kola (2001) even elaborated that student performance is very much dependent on the type and location of the institution as well as the socio-economic background (as cited in Kooi and Ping 2007).
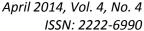
As far as academic performance is concerned, it is important to look at the roles played by the social support. It is an aspect that should be reviewed since it is described as both a buffer against life stressors as well as an agent promoting health and wellness (Dollete et al., 2004). Social support from family, peers, and teacher has been recognized as a protective factor for children and teens. Studies have shown the increased risk of adolescent problems in the absence of parental supports or decreased levels of parental support, and the buffering effects of parental support on student stress (Quomma and Greenberg, 1994) (as cited in Dzulkifli and Yasin, 2009).

Research has shown that social support plays an important role in managing psychological problems. Lack of social support has been found to be one of the factors that lead to many psychological problems among students. Support from family and friends have been found to reduce the impact of psychological problems among students (Calvete and Connor-Smith, 2006). Villanova and Bownas (1984) for example found that social support could help students to cope with everyday life stressor and lighten the burden of academic workload. Without enough support from family and friends, they would be in trouble and are vulnerable to depression, stress and anxiety. This finding was supported by Dollete et al. (2004) who found that social support could act as a protective factor that could decrease psychological problems among students such as stress. A study by Wentzel (1998) found that social support provides motivational influence on students' performance. This study is supported by the findings by Quomma and Greenberg (1994) who found that less social support from these sources would lead to failure. Furthermore, a negative correlation between anxiety, stress, and depression, and social support has been reported by Nahid and Sarkis (1994) in that low level of support have been associated with high level of anxiety, stress, and depression in college students (as cited in Dzulkifli and Yasin, 2009).

Davis et al. (2006) studied student perception to the rewards received based on performance in the classroom. Their study investigated the relationship between student rewards, their perception of the rewards system, and motivation for academic success. Bude et al. (2009) studied student perception in problem-based learning of statistics. Their findings suggest that a more positive perception is achieved when having a guided tutorial format than those with a traditional tutoring format. Earley (2006) suggested a need to improve the level of perceived relevance in statistics courses to increase the performance of students taking such classes. Students perceiving a low relevance in their future use of statistics did not perform in statistics classes as well as those students who perceive a higher relevance in their future applications of statistics (as cited in Chow, Finney, & Woodford, 2012).

Ferreira and Santoso (2008) found that accounting students showed poorer performance when they had negative perceptions about the subject. Their findings also suggest that students who gain a positive perspective in the accounting course before the end of the semester tend to show better performance. Similarly, Dempster and McCorry (2009) found that undergraduate psychology students' perception related to their performance in statistics is heavily influenced by their attitudes about their pre-existing skills and understanding of mathematics and statistics. Based on these findings, they suggested some interventions that might be used to change the attitudes at the beginning of the learning, so as to remove or minimize the barrier to learning and performance in the course (as cited in Chow, Finney, & Woodford, 2012).

Soft Skills Performance

The emphasis placed in the tertiary curriculum upon the acquisition of what have come to be known as 'hard skills' (the sciences, mathematics, economics, statistics, etc.) is prevalent in many universities around the globe. However to compete effectively within the global economic market, the efficacy of hard skills mediation and deployment requires that the people who make use of them must also possess a high level of competency in soft skills. As defined by Perreault (2004), the concept of "soft skills" is intended to emphasize an individual's personal qualities, attributes, and communication skills which enable that person to inform and shape productively the rudimentary ideas of others into transparent and pragmatic scenarios. According to Schulz (2008), soft skills are imperative to any educational program which aims to foster competencies which lead to the provision of a balanced life-style for its students, both during and after college. Kauffeld; Grote and Frieling (2003) propose that hard and soft skills together constitute the unifying dimension of professional competence which allows an individual to achieve a goal-oriented and situational directedness with regard to working tasks, and that the best indicator for the assurance of predictably higher success outcomes will depend on the level of harmonic integration of hard and soft skills (as cited in Truong, & Laura, 2013).

According to Keeley, 2007, soft skills play an integral role in advancing economic growth, especially in developing countries. Soft skills are largely grounded in communication ability, negotiation skills, flexibility and a capacity to adjust to new situations and negotiate challenging proposals. Soft skills encourage forms of empathetically motivated interaction with the aim of building bonds of trust and relationships of loyalty with colleagues and customers, and soft skills interaction of this kind are now being recognized as the foundation upon which the edifice of successful business relationships can be built (as cited in Truong, & Laura, 2013).

Vietnam has been one of the best performing economies in the world over the last decade. Real GDP has on average grown by 7.3 percent per year during 1995-2005 (Anh, 2008). Nevertheless, the economy is facing multiple challenges of globalization. While infrastructure and resources are generally tolerably adequate, the curriculum desperately needs revision not only to attract students but to meet the contemporary needs of employers (Powell & Lindsey, 2010). According to Hien (2007), this has put pressures on Vietnamese higher education to keep pace with the market demand, not only in regard to the acquisition of the technical knowledge workers presumably require but for the inculcation of the 'soft skills' requisite for effective social interaction and overall performance success. This being so, universities in Vietnam are in the midst of a curriculum crisis driven by the need to reconsider and re-conceptualize their pedagogic goals in light of changing job markets and approaches to them. In the context of this new economic environment and the growing awareness of the integral place of soft skills training, in business success, new educational directions are rapidly emerging, and skillful leadership will be required to resolve the burgeoning crisis (as cited in Truong, & Laura, 2013).

In Malaysia, human capital development is one of the priority areas in the country's development agenda under the Ninth Malaysia Plan which ran from 2006-2010 (The Economic Planning Unit 2006). The higher education provision in Malaysia has been criticized for not producing graduates with adequate soft skills. The Malaysian Prime Minister in tabling the Ninth Malaysia Plan on March 31, 2006 reinforced that the development of human capital and the upgrading of the mental and intellectual capacity of a nation must be a priority if Malaysia

is to be a developed country. In the light of the above, the Minister of Higher Education announced that public universities in Malaysia must introduce soft skill elements and must incorporate them in the undergraduate syllabus. Beyond the Minister's directives, there are at least two critical reasons underpinning the need in strengthening undergraduates' soft skills in Institutes of Higher Learning. First, there are criticisms from employers that graduates are generally academically proficient but lack in soft skills such as communication and analytical skills. Second, the increasing globalization of the work force and job markets impose much more competitive skills on our graduates (Shakir, 2009).

Until now, Cambodia is still regarded as a country that lacks an infrastructure, both soft and physical. Although the investors note the improvements in and near the urban centers, most of the population is rural. The UN mentioned in An Investment Guide 2003 research report that in the case of Cambodia, the major challenges are not hard to identify. Perhaps the most importance is human resource development. The advantage of being located in a dynamic region is counterbalanced by the competition that the neighborhood offers. The innate capacities of Cambodians have been on display at Angkor for a thousand years. Their development of skills that power a modern economy is something yet to be accomplished. Although investors speak positively about the trainability and capacity for hard work of the country's labor force, they also stress repeatedly that the training it has received is clearly inadequate. This is why Cambodia needs to develop and modernize its education to meet the required skills (Seng, 2010).
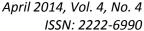
Expectancy-Disconfirmation Paradigm

One of the widely discussed and tested approaches in measuring customer satisfaction is Oliver's (1980) expectancy-disconfirmation model or one of its variants. Expectancy-disconfirmation is a derivative of adaptation-level theory and suggests that customers compare the actual product and service performance with their prior expectations (Arambewela et all., 2002). The expectancy-disconfirmation paradigm (Oliver, 1980) (as cited in Arambewela and Hall, 2009) postulates that customer satisfaction is related to the size and direction of disconfirmation, which is defined as the difference between an individual's pre-purchase (pre-choice) expectations (or some other comparative standard) and the post-purchase (post-choice) performance of the product or service as perceived by the customer (Oliver, 1980; Anderson, 1973). If expectations are met or exceeded, the customer is satisfied. Dissatisfaction results when perceived performance falls below expectations.

Many researches have tried to answer the question how consumers judge their satisfaction after purchase of goods or consumption of services, or, what are the essential determinants of satisfaction. The Expectancy Disconfirmation (ED) Model is one major mechanism which is of great relevance in the present time in satisfaction studies (Oliver, 1997). Consisting of expectations, performance, and the outcome of their comparison, namely, disconfirmation, the model has been shown to adequately account, at least, as one major method by which consumers form satisfaction judgments (Khurana 2012).

Student Satisfaction

Student satisfaction is student's short term attitude, derived from the evaluation of the received education service (Elliot and Healy, 2001 as cited in Qi, 2009). Cronin et al., (2000)

interpreted customer satisfaction as a customers' response to fulfillment. It is a judgment of a "service feature or a service itself, and provides a pleasurable of consumption related fulfillment (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2000 as cited in Qi, 2009). The measurement of student satisfaction can be useful to post-secondary institutions, to help them to pinpoint their strengths and identify areas for improvement. Satisfaction ratings go beyond teaching assessments, which have a narrow focus, to include broader aspects of the student learning experience. The evaluation of the quality and performance of a service such as university education, can take place only after experiencing or consuming because customers have limited tangible pre-choice cues. The perceptions formed during this evaluative process are key indicators of customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Halstead et al, 1994) (as cited in Arambewela et al., 2002). To grasp the complexity of that learning experience, it is not enough to know the degree to which students are satisfied, it is important to understand the factors that contribute to student satisfaction. For the purpose of this study, the factors are service performance, university performance, and university ranking.

Service quality or service performance is the exclusivity of experiences students engage in as part of their whole-person development. Firdaus (2005) (as cited in Huang, 2009) designed HEdPERF (Higher Education Performance which categorized 5 determinants of service quality in higher education. They are non-academic aspects, academic aspects, reputation, access, and program issues. Non-academic aspects refer to aspects that are essential to enable students fulfill their study obligation, and relate to duties carried out by non-academic staff. Academic aspects refer to those such as positive attitudes, good communication skills, sufficient consultation, regular feedback to students and outstanding ability of the teaching staff which relate to the responsibilities of academics. Reputation is an overall perception of an organization, what the organization stands for, what the organization is associated with, and what products or services the organization is supposed to provide. Reputation of a university is the professional image projected by the university. Access is the availability, approachability and convenience of both academic and non-academic staff. Firdaus (2005) suggested that the dimension "access" is one of the most important determinants of service quality in higher education. Program issues were defined as offering wide ranging and reputable academic programs or specializations with flexible structures and health services. Ford et al., (1999) included program issues in the determinants of service quality when they compared students' service quality perceptions in New Zealand and the USA (as cited in Huang, 2009).

Managing and measuring performance have been among the key drivers of the public sector reform in recent years. It is one of the central elements of the reinventing government movement (Holzer and Kloby, 2005). Traditionally, it is defined as the process of quantifying effectiveness and efficiency of action (Waal and Counet, 2009). Performance measurement is an established concept that has taken a renewed importance in a variety of organizations (Greiling, 2005). Historically, performance measurement systems were developed as a means of monitoring and maintaining organizational control which ensure that an organization pursues strategies that led to the achievement of overall goals (as cited in Zangoueinezhad and Moshabaki, 2011).

Performance measurement provides the basis for an organization to assess how well it is progressing towards its predetermined objectives, helps it identify its strengths and weaknesses, and decides on future initiatives, with the goal of improving organizational

performance (Purbey et al., 2007). Performance measurement is not an end in itself, but a tool for more effective management. Performance measurement results indicate what happened, not why it happened, or what to do about it. In order to make an organization effective, the performance measurement outcomes must be able to transit from measurement to management. It must also be able to anticipate the changes needed in the strategic direction of the organization and have a methodology in place for accomplishing strategic change (as cited in Zangoueinezhad and Moshabaki, 2011).

Many methods and techniques have been suggested to evaluate the performance in universities or higher education institutions over the years. However, well-known financial measures such as return on investment (ROI), internal rate of return (IRR), net present value (NPV) and payback period have been demonstrated as inadequate (Fryer et al., 2009). In the assessment of university performance, it is critical to understand how teaching and research contribute to organizational and strategic goals, and evaluation methods that rely on mere financial measures alone are not suitable. Evaluation of the performance of a university can be diverse. Several previous studies on university performance measurement have employed various methods such as data envelopment analysis (Fandel, 2007), statistical methods (Park and Lohr, 2007), productivity indexes (Sarrico et al., 2009), and Malmquist indices (Worthington and Lee, 2008) (as cited in Zangoueinezhad and Moshabaki, 2011).

The twentieth century has witnessed the massive expansion of higher education around the world, with enrollments going 200-fold from 1900 to 2000 (Schofer and Meyer 2005) (as cited in Bowman and Bastedo, 2011). Despite ongoing debates about their uses and validity, university rankings are a popular means to compare institutions within a country and around the world. Unsurprisingly higher education attainment has also become increasingly important for job market outcomes. The development of individual rankings systems has become a contested arena of its own as international league tables like Jiao Tong University rankings and the *Times Higher Education Supplement (THES)* rankings compete for dominance (Institute for Higher Education Policy 2007; Usher and Savino 2006) (as cited in Bowman and Bastedo, 2011).

More than two decades after US News and World Report first published its special issue on "America's Best Colleges" and almost a decade since Shanghai Jiao Tong University published the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), university rankings continue to dominate headlines for several reasons. First, they present a simple and easy comparison of educational performance and productivity nationally and across international boundaries. Second, by drawing attention to the characteristics and performance of the top universities world-wide, rankings have become a major tool for measuring educational quality and excellence. This is true for HEIs but also for nations. And, third, given the importance of higher education to social and economic growth and prosperity, especially in these difficult times, rankings are often interpreted as an indicator of a nation's global competitiveness (Hazelkorn, 2013).

Nations, their institutions and all aspects of daily life, are regularly measured against each other according to indicators in which comparative and competitive advantages come into play with geopolitical implications. While countries are increasingly dependent upon talent, many are under severe demographic pressure. Society is aging at the same time that the birth rate is falling, especially in the more developed countries. At the same time, the knowledge society is placing a premium on education and high educational attainment. Because higher education plays a fundamental role in creating competitive advantage, this situation presents a challenge

for national strategies based on growing knowledge-intensive industries, and heightens competition for high-achieving students (Hazelkorn, 2013). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify the status of student performance based on Chickering's model, student satisfaction and their institutional image.

Research Method

Primarily, data will be collected through survey questionnaire. An initial list of survey questionnaire will be developed based on the literature review on the key facets of student development practices and from the direct observation and literature analysis. These questionnaire will be tested for reliability by conducting a pilot study on 30 participants. The items in the scale will be refined until a reliability of at least 0.8 is achieved. The sample will be selected from public in the respective reputable universities.

Target population and sample

Target population will be students from major universities. Approximately 30,000 undergraduate students would be a population of this study in Malaysia, Vietnam and Cambodia which are identified from the student affairs management personnel levels respectively. Thus, this study is known as CLMV study. The population of study varies depending on countries. A sample of 1500 respondents will be randomly selected in Malaysia, Vietnam and Cambodia. In this first phase, we were distributed 500 questionnaires to university students. However, only 368 usable responses are valid to be analysed. In this paper, we only presented the first phase of the CLMV study.

Findings

As depicted in Table 1 to 8, the findings showed that the overall mean score are above 3.50 which mean student performance of this study is above averagely good. Specifically, 'Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationship' is highlighted among the highest mean score. This is followed by 'Developing Integrity' and 'Developing Purpose'. However, 'Managing Problem Solving and Critical Thinking' is among the most critical component, which mean scores are below 4.00. This is followed by 'Developing Competence'. These findings showed the significant effect to their student performance.

Table 1: Individual Construct Mean Score - Section D: Influential Factors - Developing Competence (n=368)

	Mean	s.d.
Section A: Influential Factors - Developing Competence		
1. I have developed physical competence	3.80	0.770
2. I have developed intellectual competence	3.69	0.706
3. I have developed interpersonal competence	3.71	0.768
4. I am more confidents after completing this program	3.73	0.781
5. I have high level of critical skills and reasoning ability	3.64	0.778

Table 2: Individual Construct Mean Score - Section D: Influential Factors - Managing Emotion (n=368)

	Mean	s.d.
Section B: Influential Factors - Managing Emotion		
1. I am able to balance my emotions	3.86	0.844
2. I have developed a sense of awareness	4.07	0.716
3. I am able to adapt my emotions to the situation	3.98	0.776
4. I am able to recognize my own emotion in most situation	3.94	0.721
5. I do not blow up my frustration when situation or people upset me	3.80	0.927

Table 3: Individual Construct Mean Score - Section D: Influential Factors - Moving Through Autonomy Towards Independence (n=368)

	Mean	s.d.
Section C: Influential Factors - Moving Through Autonomy Towards Independence		
1. I am able to function independently	4.27	0.741
2. I respect the right of others and am able to give and take in relationships	4.37	0.655
3. I have high level of problem solving ability	3.83	0.753
4. I am very self-directed in my academic pursuit	3.88	0.704

	Mean	s.d.
5. I rarely depend on my classmate for approval/suggestion of class assignment	3.48	0.993

Table 4: Individual Construct Mean Score - Section D: Influential Factors - Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationship (n=368)

	Mean	s.d.
Section D: Influential Factors - Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationship		
1. I am able to appreciate and tolerate differences in others	4.13	0.633
2. I am able to develop healthy and mature relationships	4.12	0.615
3. I am able to develop relationship with people from different background	4.19	0.660
4. I have developed many friendships through social media	4.06	0.709
5. I actively connect myself with friends through social media	3.89	0.898

Table 5: Individual Construct Mean Score - Section D: Influential Factors - Establishing Identity (n=368)

	Mean	s.d.
Section E: Influential Factors - Establishing Identity		
1. I am comfortable with my own image	4.12	0.778
2. I am comfortable interacting with opposite gender	3.77	0.965
3. I am happy with my own identity	4.17	0.712
4. I am happy and comfortable in leading, organizing and participating any events	3.81	0.918
5. I highly value interacting with my peers and lecturers in classroom	4.06	0.770

Table 6: Individual Construct Mean Score - Section D: Influential Factors - Developing Purpose (n=368)

	Mean	s.d.
Section F: Influential Factors - Developing Purpose		
1. I am able to appreciate and tolerate differences in others	4.16	0.654

		Mean	s.d.
2.	I am able to develop healthy and mature relationships	4.15	0.682
3.	I am highly committed to exploration of new areas or visit new sited	4.09	0.720
4.	I am high level of personal commitment to achieving my academic goal	3.99	0.706
5.	I am able to developed positive outlook on my professional life	3.98	0.721

Table 6: Individual Construct Mean Score - Section D: Influential Factors - Developing Integrity (n=368)

		Mean	s.d.
Section G: Influential Factors - Developing Integrity			
1.	I have developed a better set of human values	4.05	0.689
2.	I have adopted the standard community values to suit my personality	3.86	0.740
3.	I will be more positive and proactive in my social behavior	4.01	0.694
4.	I highly respect the values and beliefs of others	4.10	0.707
5.	I highly value the importance of academic success	4.06	0.752

Table 7: Individual Construct Mean Score - Section D: Influential Factors - Communicating Effectively (n=368)

		Mean	s.d.
Section H: Influential Factors - Communicating Effectively			
1.	I am able to communicate effectively	3.81	0.768
2.	I can speak effectively	3.87	0.772
3.	I am able to write clearly and concisely	4.04	0.754
4.	I am able to read and comprehend materials	4.15	0.752
5.	I am interact socially in a variety of situation	3.93	0.788

Table 8: Individual Construct Mean Score - Section D: Influential Factors - Managing Problem Solving and Critical Thinking (n=368)

		Mean	s.d.

118

Section I: Influential Factors - Managing Problem Solving and
Critical Thinking

1.	I am able to analyze and evaluate experience	3.96	0.715
2.	I am able to think creatively to solve problems	3.85	0.680
3.	I am able to identify and manage new information	3.85	0.715
4.	I am able to summarize the concepts covered in class	3.80	0.717
5.	I am able to connect the learnt materials with other readings, class discussions and other experiences	3.86	0.714
6.	I am able to identify the theories and assumptions learnt in class	3.88	0.698

As illustrated in Table 9, most of students are above averagely satisfied with their university performance with some reasons such as the lectures in the institution, the courses and assessment of the institution, and the interaction and support from lectures of the institution. Most students perceived 'the interaction and support form staffs of the institution' are the lowest mean score in this section.

Table 9: Individual Construct Mean Score - Section D: Influential Factors - Student Satisfaction (n=368)

		Mean	s.d.
Section I: Influential Factors - Student Satisfaction			
1.	I am satisfied with the lectures in this institution	3.86	0.940
2.	I am satisfied with the courses and assessment of this institution	3.86	0.895
3.	I am satisfied with the physical environment of this institution	3.77	0.908
4.	I am satisfied with the interaction and support from lectures of this institution	3.86	0.936
5.	I am satisfied with the interaction and support form staffs of this institution	3.63	1.010

As depicted in Table 10, most of students are proud of being a student of the institution with the highest mean score of 4.10. This is followed by 'the institution has positive perception from internal and external public' with mean score of 3.89. Most students perceived 'the institution is unique' are the lowest mean score in this section.

Table 10: Individual Construct Mean Score - Section D: Influential Factors - Institution's Image (n=368)

119

	Mean	s.d.
Section J: Influential Factors - Institution's Image		
1. This is an unique institution	3.79	1.010
2. I am proud of being a student of this institution	4.10	0.875
3. This institutions image is better than the competition institution	3.86	0.968
4. This institutions has positive perception from internal and external public	3.89	0.973

Graduate Employability

The global economy favors knowledge and technology. Higher education is increasingly being viewed as central to national strategies for securing shares in the global market and universities as the repositories of valuable human capital to support national development. The contribution of universities to economic development can be seen in three areas: (i) producing and accumulating human capital; (ii) generating, disseminating, and applying knowledge; and (iii) innovating and inventing new information and technology. The accelerating shift to high-technology industries and an information technology economy requires sustained human resource development and training. Therefore, an appropriate higher education system is critical for preparing a competent workforce (Tan and French-Arnold, 2012).

Employability remains high on the agenda for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the UK, as well as other developed nations, as students become more selective in their choice of courses and institutions (Rae, 2007). Such is the case of nations in Asia, as the issue of graduate employability is on the rise. Data from the Indonesian Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration show that from 2007-2009 the number of people seeking jobs exceeded the number of job vacancies for HEI graduates. With a high percentage of graduates looking for jobs, e.g., 26.7 percent in 2009, Malaysia also faces high graduate unemployment rates. The Philippines has no recent data on unemployment of new graduates per se, but the number of unemployed college graduates in general has been increasing according to data from 2007 to 2009. According to the Malaysian study, graduates of technical studies and ICT were more likely to be employed, but even they found it hard to find jobs as reported in the ICT case study from Malaysia, with 39.3 percent being unemployed at the time of the survey in 2008 (Tan and French-Arnold, 2012).

Employability has been defined as: "a set of skills, knowledge and personal attributes that make an individual more likely to secure and be successful in their chosen occupation to the benefit of themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy" (Moreland, 2006). Accepting that this is just one of various definitions in use, it does illustrate one of the problems of the employability issue, in that it asserts that by acquiring a certain set of "skills, knowledge and personal attributes" a person is more likely to be employable. Whilst this may be valid, there are surely other factors that may also apply. A person, such as a graduate, is not simply the carrier of a set of "skills, knowledge and personal attributes". Their own unique identity, personality and motivation, going beyond "personal attributes", which often change markedly

during the HE experience, are also likely to be factors. Also, the wider context of the university and the degree subject, in relation to demand from employers, and in the prevailing economic climate, may be significant (Rae, 2007).

Current interpretations of employability range from the use of simple measures, such as whether or not a graduate has secured a job (using graduate first destination surveys), to in-depth scholarly books on the subject. If employability is measured in the simplistic terms of whether or not a graduate has managed to secure a job within six months of graduating, it only provides a very vague and imprecise indication of what the student has gained. Questions need to be asked about whether or not the graduate is using the skills, knowledge and understanding gained in their degree studies in a "graduate level job", which in turn opens up a whole new debate about what exactly a "graduate level job" entails. There is so much more to employability than gaining employment, and first destination statistics do not take into account the fact that some graduates may have taken lower level jobs in order to deal with financial pressures, particularly after incurring debts through their studies (Pool and Sewell, 2007).

Malaysia has an enormous number of graduates entering the local employment market every year, and this trend shows no signs of slowing down. At the same time, the 1996 financial crisis had negative effects in terms of rising unemployment. Even now, Malaysia continues to face the stark reality of rising graduate unemployment in spite of significant changes in the Malaysian economy since 1996 (Sirat et al. 2012).

Since the mid-2000s and with the establishment of the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) in 2004, the issue of rising unemployment levels among local graduates in certain disciplines has remained high on the Malaysian government's agenda. There is a general perception, particularly among employers, that unemployment of HEI graduates is due to their lack of generic skills and serious inadequacy in terms of work-related competencies (Sirat et al. 2012).

In an effort to address this issue, the MoHE initiated a move to combine conventional discipline-related courses and entrepreneurship courses. Not only is the curriculum being revised to include subjects such as small business management, skills and competencies such as English language, team work and analytical skills are also being promoted, posing challenges to the structure, system and culture of universities. The MoHE argues that with such a curriculum, graduates will be exposed to skills that would be useful for them to start their own business, creating jobs for themselves and others in the process (Sirat et al. 2012).

The Malaysian government and employers are in unison in interpreting employability of graduates as their marketability in the workforce. Employers have increasingly voiced their dissatisfaction to the MoHE about the employability of local graduates, arguing that while many graduates are being churned out of HEIs annually, there is a limited supply of those considered to be of "good quality", and that rising unemployment among graduates is primarily due to mismatch between supply and demand (Morshidi et al., 2009) (Sirat et al. 2012).

While many stakeholders, particularly employers, have different opinions about what needs to be done by universities to improve the employability of local graduates, medium- to long-term solutions remain unclear. Despite strategies and programmes introduced by the government to foster employability among graduates, unemployment among local graduates remains high (Sirat et al. 2012).

Given the many challenges in life that graduates must deal with, it is very important that higher education is concerned with promoting comprehensive excellence amongst university

graduates. Of paramount importance is the development of characteristics that epitomize the philosophy of a university and the aspirations of a nation, rather than simply the production of graduates who have the ability to secure employment after completing their studies. Higher education must prepare graduates for all aspects of the outside world: employment, local issues and global problems. Thus, the higher education curriculum must prepare graduates to play adequate roles in discourse on issues such as nuclear energy, climate change and globalization, and to not only fit the needs of the industrial sector (Sirat et al. 2012).

Implications

The number of unemployed graduates is partly caused by imbalances in the economy. The financial crisis and economic downturns in recent years are certainly reasons for the reduction in the number of jobs, but supply-side factors also contributed to the high numbers of unemployed graduates. The kind of skills required for graduates to enter the labour market need to be clearly understood so that higher education institutions (HEIs) can foster these skills in their students. Relevance of their programmes plays an important part in helping their graduates find employment (Tan and French-Arnold, 2012).

In Malaysia, according to both NGOs and industry employers, employable graduates are those who are prepared to work, have the appropriate skills and competencies, and the ability to learn and re-learn. NGOs listed humanitarian values (honesty, caring, patience) and socially-desirable attitudes (open, curious and confident) as the key characteristics of employability. Employers, on the other hand, listed attitudes such as preparedness, positivity, interest, dedication, team spirit, and readiness to face challenges and hardship, and work-related competencies such as the ability to apply theory in the working environment, the ability to speak English and communication skills as important characteristics. Employers also listed qualifications as an important requirement for employability, but qualifications were not considered to be as important as attitude. For example, as one employer noted, "we look first at their qualifications (technical), but their academic qualification will make up 20 percent and the rest will depend on their attitude and adaptability". Thus, the responses indicate that a high grade point average will not guarantee employability (Sirat et al. 2012).

As Indonesia's economy is shifting toward the industry and service sectors, more highly trained and skilled work force will be needed to fill the demand. One of the major challenges of HEIs is how to keep their programme relevant to the demand and requirement of the emerging economy. Therefore, a closer relationship between universities and industries is highly recommended. While HEIs develop curricula that are adaptive to the needs of industries, likewise the employers should open its doors to students for internships and training. More industry involvement in the design of curricula, updating courses with the industries' needs in mind, and defining the competence and qualifications needed by the industries will certainly benefit all the stakeholders. Graduates also have to take some responsibility in honing their employability. It is not enough to possess academic knowledge and good grades. Job applicants who stand out are those who have demonstrated their soft skills, particularly those that are highly desired by employers (Nugroho et al. 2012).

Conclusion

Educational institutions play a very vital role in the development of students and their performance. In this increasingly competitive environment of higher education, student satisfaction is gaining tremendous importance among policymakers. When students are satisfied with the products and services provided by HEIs, there will in turn be a positive result on student performance. The need to integrate and strengthen soft-skills training in students in HEIs cannot be overemphasized. The requirements of the work force and job markets require graduates to possess more than just academic qualifications. To be employable is to be well equipped with a harmonious balance of soft and hard skills. As such, it is suggested that institutions need to make greater efforts to help students acquire the employability skills required by many employers in today's world. The development of employability skills should be integrated into the curriculum to ensure that students graduate from these institutions with the skills needed by employers.

References

Al-Turki, U. and Duffuaa, S. (2003). Performance measures for academic departments. *The International Journal of Educational Management*. pp. 330-338

Arambewela, R. , Hall, J. and Zuhair, S. (2002). An analysis of factors of importance to international postgraduate students from asia studying in victorian universities. *ANZMAC 2002 Conference Proceedings*

Arambewela, R. and Hall, J. (2009). An empirical model of international student satisfaction. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics* Vol. 21 No. 4, 2009 pp. 555-569

Bowman, A.N. and Bastedo, N.M. (2011). Anchoring effects in world university rankings: exploring biases in reputation scores. *Higher Education*. April 2011, Volume 61, Issue 4, pp 431-444

Chow, A. F., Finney, T. G., & Woodford, K. C. (2012). Perceptions of performance: do learners understand as well as they think. *European Journal of Training and Development*, 36(5), 544-561.

Daggett, R.W. (Ed.D.). Improving Student Performance in Times of Declining Resources President, International Center for Leadership in Education.

Dzulkifli, M. D. and Yasin, M.A.S.M. (2009). The effect of social support and Psychological problems on Students' academic performance. *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference of Teaching and Learning (ICTL 2009) INTI University College, Malaysia.*

Hazelkorn, E.: How Rankings are Reshaping Higher Education in Climent, V., Michavila, F. and Ripolles, M. (eds). (2013). Los Rankings Univeritarios: Mitos y Realidades, Ed. Tecnos.

Huang, Q. (2009). The relationship between service quality and student satisfaction in higher education sector: A case study on the undergraduate sector of Xiamen University of China. Au Journal of Management, 38.

Khurana, N. Customer Satisfaction in High Involvement Products: Assimilation-Contrast Effects under the Expectation-Disconfirmation Paradigm in International Journal of Management Research, Vol. 3, No. 1 June 2012.

Kooi, L. T., & Ping, T. A. (2007). Factors Influencing Student's Performance in WAWASAN Open University: Does previous education level, age group and course load matter. I*nternet Article*.

Mavis, B. (2010). Assessing Student Performance. An Introduction to Medical Teaching, pp 143-178. Retrieved from http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-90-481-3641-4_11

Nugroho, W. S., Nizam, Samik-Ibrahim, R. M., and Handayani, P. W. (2012) "Graduate employability in Indonesia" in *Graduate Employability in Asia*. UNESCO Publication.

Pool, D. L. and Sewell, P. (2007). The key to employability: developing a practical model of graduate employability. *Education + Training* Vol. 49 No. 4, 2007 pp. 277-289.

Rae, D. (2007). Connecting enterprise and graduate employability Challenges to the higher education culture and curriculum? Education + Training Vol. 49 No. 8/9, 2007pp. 605-619

Seng, B. (2010). The Driving Forces Underlying the Growth of Total Factor Productivity in Cambodia Quantitative and Qualitative Studies. *TEMEP Discussion Paper Series.*

Shakir, Rosalina. (2009). Soft skills at the Malaysian institutes of higher learning. *Asia Pacific Education Review*. September 2009, Volume 10, Issue 3, pp 309-315 Retrieved from http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12564-009-9038-8

Sirat, M., Heng, C. L., Shuib, M., Rahman, S.A., Rahayu, S., Kamil, A. andSingh, J. K. N. (2012). "Employability of graduates in Malaysia" in Graduate Employability in Asia. UNESCO Publication

Tan, L.C and French-Arnold, E. (2012). "Employability of graduates in Asia: an overview of case studies" in *Graduate Employability in Asia*. UNESCO Publication.

Truong, T. T. H., & Laura, R. S. (2013). The Effects of Educating for Soft Skills on Success in Career Development among Graduates at Universities of Economics and Business Administration in Vietnam. *Postgraduate Research in Education*, 105.

Zangoueinezhad, A. and Moshabaki, A. (2011). Measuring university performance using a knowledge-based balanced scorecard. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management* Vol. 60 No. 8, 2011 pp. 824-843