

Antecedents Influencing The Work Readiness among Selected Practical Training Students in Malaysia

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Abstract

This empirical study aims to examine the antecedents influencing the work readiness among selected practical training students in Malaysia. One of the ways to produce high quality graduates is through practical training. The variables selected for this research are work readiness (WR), personal relations (PR), training experience (TE), job experience (JE), and learning experience (LE). This research is a quantitative study in which questionnaire were distributed to the practical training students from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). A total number of 374 samples have been carefully selected for the analysis. Data analysis for this study is using the SPSS. Based on the result, it indicates that learning experience (LE) is the most significant factor that influence work readiness. The result of this study is essential to highlight the importance of factors that contribute to work readiness in the Malaysian context.

Keywords: Work Readiness, Personal Relations, Training Experience, Job Experience, Learning Experience

Introduction

Today's globalised world demands graduates who are competitive and ready for the ultimate list of careers to explore. Graduate employability has become a performance indicator for universities (Boden and Nedeva, 2010). Nurlaela et al (2019) mentioned that students are required to do industrial work practices in order to prepare them in the working world. Ghufron and Rini (2011) stated that industrial work practices are an important component in the training system to develop participants' knowledge and management skills. According to Santrock (2012), students should already have a high level of work readiness in the final semester to be better qualified for a career. However, the factors that contribute to the work readiness of these students is still arguable. There were contradictory evidences and lack of

empirical contributions from past research that highlight the factors influencing work readiness among practical training students.

According to Siburian et al (2022), the crisis of human productivity is a reality. As one of the countries in Southeast Asia, Indonesia has a significant gap between the discrepancy of industrial needs and the ability of new graduates (Priyono, 2019). The benefits of industrial work practice are to provide opportunities for student to practice management skills, to give practical experience to students, to provide opportunity for students to solve problems in the field, and to bring the students closer to assignment and bridging their preparation to enter the working world (Hamalik, 2007). According to Statista, the unemployment rate in Malaysia was at approximately 3.73 percent in 2022. Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) stated that unemployment rate remains at 3.4 percent in 2023. Despite improving job statistics, MIDF Research mentioned that it is expected the average jobless rate to maintain at 3.4 percent in 2024. The possibility of global economic slowdown and the rising cost of living may lead to the unemployment rate remains unchanged. Caballero and Walker (2010) stated that global financial crisis on graduate recruitment and selection may become difficult to secure employment for graduates. As for Malaysia, the unemployment rate among youth in this country can be seen in table below

Table 1
Malaysia Youth Unemployment Rate



Source: International Labor Organization (2023)

Salleh et al (2019) stated that low, moderate and highly skilled jobs are in high demand in Malaysia, however, it's either not favoured or beyond capabilities of local graduates. Therefore, industrial work practice is relevant to prepare the youth/students the experience in the world of work and may lead to the reduction in unemployment rate of a country. This has led the researchers to do an empirical study on the factors that influence the work readiness among university students. The objectives of this study were to investigate the relationships between personal relations (PR), training experience (TE), job experience (JE), and learning experience (LE) and work readiness (WR) among selected university students in Malaysia.

Literature review

Work Readiness

In today's working world, job readiness among practical students is essential because those who are well-prepared are more confident and equipped to succeed. Lau et al (2018) stated that work readiness is the graduate employability or possession of necessary skills required

to secure employment. Firdaus (2012) defined work readiness as a process to reach a goal by involve in the development of student work that includes knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values. Work readiness skills assist the interns to interact well with other people which will lead to various opportunities for the intern to engage easily the working world. Workplace and work readiness skills are crucial since workplace-readiness skills is the key to successful entry into the workplace and to continued employment (Blom, 2013).

Personal Relations

Personal relationship (i.e. family relationship, emotional relationship and financial relationship) can be referred to as relationships which extend beyond professional relations. At some organizations, it is considered as unethical for a personal relationship to intrude or influence working practices and decisions. However, Seligman (2011) stated that healthy, positive relationships are one of the five pillars of authentic wellbeing. Roffey (2016) stated that the quality of relationships at work matters for a person's ability to flourish personally and to enhance sense of achievement in which relationships at work become more functional and role driven as people come and go. Walker et al (2015) stated that employers find that some graduated are not work ready, particularly in areas of personal and relational competencies.

Training Experience

Experience is knowledge or skills obtained from practice or from outside the learning effort (Chalpin, 2006). Training equips individuals with the necessary skills, knowledge, and adaptability to person task effectively. According to Richards (2023), an internship is one of university students' most common on-the-job training type and it can be one of the influential ways of teaching students the skills and knowledge needed to work in a professional environment. Trainings for interns at their chosen companies can built their strong connection and they can also learn skills to use in their future careers. Trainings assists the students to be enthusiastic and being curious to learn and this can help them to be ready in the world of work.

Job Experience

Job experience can be defined as the knowledge, skills, and expertise an individual has developed through their work history. It can contain the challenges and achievement an individual has experiences in the workplace and the professional relationships that a person built with colleagues, clients, and customers (Shethna and Thakur, 2023). According to Keenan (1995), most graduates have little, if any, direct job-related experience. Work experience is crucial in shaping the work readiness of students and is reflected in the internship program (Wena, 2009). Tasks prepared for interns at workplace can assist them in enriching their hands-on experience and critical thinking in which play a vital role in shaping one's work readiness after graduation.

Leaning Experience

Some of the experiential learning includes internships or practicums in which the students will learn by doing and by reflecting on the experience. Universities have seen work-integrated learning as a mechanism for improving work readiness (Bilsland et al., 2019). Experience learning was first conceived by Dewey that sprouts into various interpretations. Learning experience refers to the spectrum of activities, interaction, and environment that an

individual acquires knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Through learning experience, the interns can apply what they have learned in a practical setting and thus, helps to prepare them for their career. Kruger et al (2015) mentioned that experiential learning has support the student engagement and giving the learner the opportunity to experience first-hand about the application of particular skill.

Methodology

This applied study is using quantitative method to analyse the factors influencing the work readiness among selected respondent in Malaysia. The instrument used for this study was a questionnaire in which this technique was regarded as a technique of data collection constructed by giving a set of to-be-answered questions or written statement to the respondents. The inclusion criteria for this study is the selected students from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). Respondents selected were the students from management fields, consisting of International Business, Human Resource, Finance, Marketing and Office Management. A total number of 374 responses from selected participants for this study were accepted for the analysis. The questionnaire used in this study is using a 7-point Likert Scale to measure the perception of the respondents in this study. The findings of this research were analysed using multiple regression tests using SPSS with a significance level of 5 percent. There are five variables in this study comprises of four independent variables and one dependent variable. According to Azizah et al (2021), there is a significant correlation with the direction of a positive relationship between industrial work practice experience and work readiness. Based on the framework, the study hypothesis based on the literature can be formulated as follows:

- H1 = There is a relationship between personal relations (PR) and work readiness (WR).
- H2 = There is a relationship between training experience (TE) and work readiness (WR).
- H3 = There is a relationship between job experience (JE) and work readiness (WR).
- H4 = There is a relationship between learning experience (LE) and work readiness (WR).

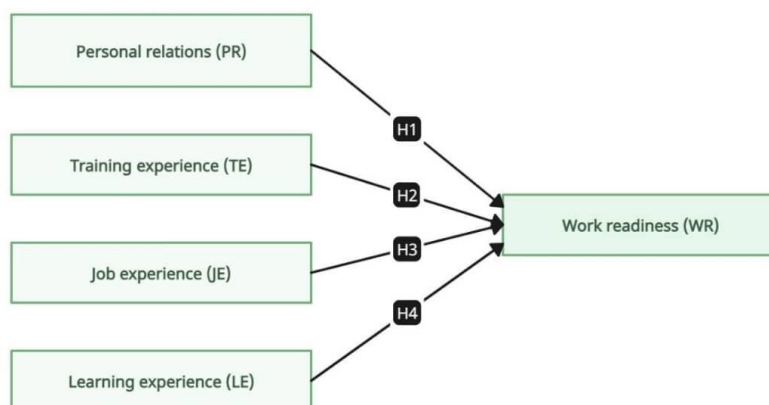


Figure 1: Framework

Results and Discussion

This study analysed the work readiness among selected respondents in Malaysia. Based on the total number of 374 responses, analysis for this study are as follows.

Table 2
Correlations
Correlations

		WRtotal	PRtotal	TEtotal	JEtotal	LEtotal
Pearson Correlation	WRtotal	1.000	-.280	.040	-.217	.607
	PRtotal	-.280	1.000	.465	.574	-.146
	TEtotal	.040	.465	1.000	.552	.119
	JEtotal	-.217	.574	.552	1.000	-.073
	LEtotal	.607	-.146	.119	-.073	1.000

Based on the table above, it shows that PR and JE have weakly negative correlation, while TE has a very weak correlation level and LE has a strong correlation level. Pearson Correlation is to describe the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two quantitative variables. From the result, it indicates that learning experience (LE) has the highest correlation of 0.607.

Table 3
Coefficient Model
Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.651 ^a	.424	.418	3.06210

a. Predictors: (Constant), LEtotal, JEtotal, TEtotal, PRtotal

b. Dependent Variable: WRtotal

Table 3 shows the Correlation Coefficient (R) of 0.651 and the Coefficient of Determination (R²) of 0.424. this indicate that the magnitude of the correlation of the independent variables to the work readiness of the selected youth chosen in this study is 42.4 percent. The remaining 57.6 percent is the effect of other variables excluded in this study.

Table 4
ANOVA
ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2547.578	4	636.894	67.925	<.001 ^b
	Residual	3459.912	369	9.376		
	Total	6007.489	373			

a. Dependent Variable: WRtotal

b. Predictors: (Constant), LEtotal, JEtotal, TEtotal, PRtotal

Based on the result above, it shows the significance value is <0.001 and since the p-value is less than 0.05, therefore, the result is significant. It indicates that the sample data for this study provide sufficient evidence to conclude that the regression model fits the data better than the model with no independent variables.

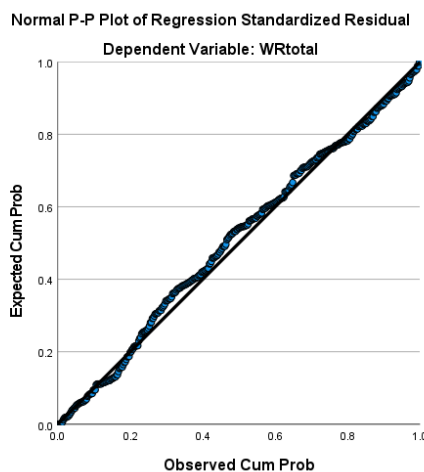
Table 5
Regression Coefficient
Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	12.903	1.523		8.471	<.001
	PRtotal	-.151	.043	-.177	-3.519	<.001
	TEtotal	.152	.054	.141	2.832	.005
	JEtotal	-.144	.049	-.153	-2.913	.004
	LEtotal	.529	.039	.553	13.493	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: WRtotal

Based on the results of the Regression Coefficient in Table 5 shows that the significance values of the four variables are PR = <0.001, TE = 0.005, JE = 0.004, and LE = <0.001 which indicate that all these variables are less than 0.05. Hence, it can be concluded that the regression model, and all independent variables have significant effect on work readiness.

Table 6
Scatterplot



Based on the graph above, the variables have a positive association. Since the points on the scatterplot closely resemble a straight line, therefore, this graph illustrates a linear relationship. The line is at 45-degree angle which shows that the strength of the relationship between variables is at the strongest linear relationship.

This study proved the contribution of work readiness. Nevertheless, the researchers suggest that further research to collaborate with other universities or organizations to broaden the area of participants in order to explore other possibility of responses.

Conclusion

Findings of this study indicate that learning experience (LE) has the most significant and positive influence on work readiness among industrial training students. Based on the t-test values, results also revealed that learning experience (LE) and training experience (TE) to be statistically significant. Therefore, learning and training are the two important factors that contribute to the readiness of practical students to be in the world of work. Trainings are vital

since it will equip youths with skills that are required by employers at workplace Companies with information and required skills can prepare the youth/students for the job market through employability or soft skills trainings. Through trainings and learning, the character traits and interpersonal skills that influence an individual's relationships with other people can be improved because employability skills complemented hard skills (i.e. a person's knowledge and occupational skills) at the workplace.

The researchers would suggest for the companies to collaborate with universities on programs such as Work Readiness program to seek for employment opportunities for the Malaysian youth/students. Through this program, the students are prepared for the opportunities such as internships or apprenticeships that guarantee them employment. More initiatives such as developing partnerships with the industries can enhance work readiness among the university students. The transformation in relationships between university, industry and government which coined as "Triple Helix" by Etzkowitz in 2003 with mutual perspectives of these three groups can increase the effectiveness of the "Triple Helix" that makes a graduate ready for employment. Government roles on facilitation of higher education such as funding on programmes related to work readiness among youth is also crucial to reduce the unemployment rate in the country. Tymon (2013) stated that the higher education to provide intellectual stimulating learning in order to produce work ready individual with necessary skills to thrive in today's ever-changing workplace. Future researchers can extend the studies to develop findings that fit specific cultural, economic, and institutional contexts.

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