

Emerging the Impact of Quality Management Practices on Graduates Employability in Tertiary Education Institution: A Proposed Framework

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Abstract: In the rapidly changing environment of higher education, the maintenance of high quality and standards in education has become a major concern for higher education institutions and governments. For almost decade now, there are so many innovative programs and projects were implemented in response to the quest for quality. Colleges and universities under increasing pressure to produce quality outcomes especially in employability. In line with this, continuous improvement of quality in higher education is really important to produce graduates who are educated and skillful before entering the working field. This paper addresses the impact of quality management practices on student employability in tertiary education institutions. The result of this study is expected to enhance the student employability in the future.

Key words: Quality Management Practices • Employability • Graduates Employability • Tertiary Education Institutions

INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth in the number of Tertiary Education Institutions (TEIs) in Malaysia aligns with the governments agenda to prepare a skilled and professional workforce to achieve the status of developed country by the year 2020. In the rapidly changing environment of higher education, the maintenance of high quality and standards in education has become a major concern for higher education institutions and governments [1,2,3,4]. For almost decade now, there are so many innovative programs and projects were implemented in response to the quest for quality [5].

As documented by Juran [6], the concept of quality is relevance across the time. In short, quality can best be defined as satisfied and being loyal by clients [7]. In simple words, one can say that a product has good quality when it complies with the requirement specified by the client [8,9,10,11].

The quality management in higher education is needed not only aims to improve the performance of the institutions [12,13] but also to helps the students employability. In addition, education as a tools to

develop, empowers people and strengthens nations. All institutions especially higher education is expected to have quality management in place as a way of assuring the customers about the high standards of the program and achievement through outcomes [12,14]. A good quality of education is necessary to achieve customer's satisfaction [15,16,17,18,19,20]. Roselena [21] mentioned that students as customer are entitled to a good quality of education and they have right to assess an educational institutions.

Since there some critics contend that higher education institutions are falling behind the time in meeting the relevant job requirements of organizations [22,23,24,25,26]. Therefore, government had implemented quality management practices in higher education institution in order to help the institutions to promote the graduates employability.

Problem Statement: One of the greatest challenges of Malaysian economies today is the episode of unemployment that has maintained a rising trend over the years [27]. Stressing the importance of the needed to reducing the rate of graduates unemployment and

increased the level of employability in Malaysian, there is a need for institutional changes of mindset to overcome the fundamental problems of quality rather than quantity [28]. Bracey [29] suggested that the way to reduce the unemployment problem among graduates by equip themselves with relevant employability skills as needed by the recent employers.

Rahmah [30] mentioned that one of the factors the unemployment problem among the graduates is not because of the lack of job opportunities instead it happens because of other factors such as the quality of the graduates. According to Noor Azina [27], a good academic achievement is no longer a guarantee for the graduates to get a job. It is a benefit for the graduates however it is not a guarantee for them to be given jobs and does not show that the graduates are able to conduct the task given by the employers.

Meanwhile, a study conducted by Central Bank of Malaysia [31] also proved that the Malaysian graduates are less skilled as compared to the international graduates. Therefore, government needs to handle this matter very well since there is a big gap between the quality level of Malaysian graduates with the international standard and at the same time to ensure that our country has skilled and marketable graduates [32].

Another factor that contributed to the unemployment problem among the graduates is the quality of education [33,34,35,36,37,38,39]. According to Hoy and Miskel [40] the quality of education is depending on the quality of teaching and learning process, educational facilities and infrastructure and well-planned curriculum. In fact, the quality of the students is the output from the quality of education [39,41,42].

Enhancing employability is a higher education institution priority. Therefore, Becker [43] believes that a high investment in producing useful human capitals is important as long as it can give positive impacts to the economic productivity. In line with this, continuous improvement of quality in higher education institution is really important since higher education is considered a key to graduates career development.

Research Questions: The research questions addressed in the present work are:

- What is the Quality Management Practices (QMP) and Students Employability?

- Do quality management practices in higher education institution can help in enhancing the graduate employability in Malaysia?
- Do QMP relate to the graduates employability in Malaysian higher Education Institutions?
- Do QMP can improve the graduate employability skills in reducing the unemployment problem?

Research Objectives: Generally, the objective of this study is to examine the relationship of quality management practices and students employability in Malaysia Higher Education Institutions. Specifically, this study has four main objectives:

- To examine the meaning of quality management practices and students employability.
- To determine the critical success factor of quality management practices in enhancing student employability in Malaysia Higher Education Institutions.
- To investigate the relationship between the quality management practice and students employability in Malaysia Higher education institutions.
- To analyze the way in reducing the unemployment problem by improving the graduate employability skills.

Literature Review: This article will emphasizes on the impact of the quality management practices on students employability in tertiary education institutions. The purpose of this discussion is to derive the perspective that is going to be used in defining the quality management practices and students employability for this present study. The need to implement the quality management practices in tertiary education institutions is crucial since it can help to overcome and enhance the employment issues in Malaysia.

Defining Quality Concepts: According to Eng & Yusof [44] one of the problems with QM implementation is the lack of a universally accepted definition of quality. Quality has been defined in various ways because different quality has different ways to solve the problem of quality. Since the concept of quality is dynamic, it is divided into three sub-categories; quality, quality management and quality management practices.

Quality: As expressed by quality scholars such as Crosby [45] had defines quality as conformance to organizations own quality requirement. Conversely, Juran [46], Feigenbaum [47] and Deming [48] define quality from customer perspective or external customer-led approach. As such, Juran [46] defines quality as product performance that leads to customer satisfaction as well as product that free from product deficiencies.

This study operationalized the term of QMPs with the given definition by Deming [48] defines quality as exceeding the customer expectations. In the other word, quality means focusing in the customer's need and anything that does not do this is not a quality feature.

By offering wider scope, Spencer [49], defined quality as satisfying or delighting the customer. Means that, In order to satisfy the customer, the quality improvement initiatives must begin with an understanding of customer perceptions and needs. While Gryna, Chua & Defeo [7] supported the statement by defining quality as satisfied and being loyal by clients. In fact, quality had been variously defined as excellence, value, conformance to specifications, or meeting customer expectations.

Quality Management: Quality Management (QM) is really important, primarily because it is one of the key strategies of world class manufacturing [50]. Foster [51] stated QM is the management process that be central or dominant of action of the quality control and quality assurance. Therefore, QM supports the idea that quality is the responsible of all management, not just a quality manager [51]. QM has four component; quality planning, quality control, quality assurance and quality improvement.

Meanwhile, Juran [46] mentioned that QM the assembly and management of all activities aimed at the production of quality by organizations of various kinds. He added, the key force that have demanded revolution in managing quality include greater innovation of product and also services. QM ensures that an organization, product or services is consistent. Due to its potential benefit, quality management will remain as an important strategy for organizational leader.

Therefore, Flynn, Schroeder and Sakakibara [52] come out with the best definition of quality management as "...an integrated approach to achieving and sustaining high quality output, focusing on the maintenance and continuous improvement of processes and defect prevention at all levels and in all functions of the organization, in order to meet or exceed customer expectations".

Quality Management Practices: In order to satisfying the management objective, it has to satisfy the customer requirements and expectations [13,53]. Research on the interaction of organizational context and QM practices found that the choice of QM practices depends on the manufacturing strategy [54] Moreover, according to Flynn, Schroeder and Sakakibara [52], organization that adopt a quality management strategy focus on achieving and sustaining a high quality output using management practices as the inputs and quality performance as the output.

According to Jaafreh and Al-Abedallat [55], the successful implementation of QM is depend on the Critical Success factors (CSF). This statement first brought by Saraph [56] stated that CSFs are are the pre-conditions necessary for successful QM. Jaafreh [55] added that many studies have attempted to analyze different QM practices into a meaningful set of CSFs to help user conceptualize the QM concept easily. The present study used the following six critical success factors of QMPs namely leadership, strategic planning, customer focus, information analysis, human resource focus and process management. This dimension based on dimension presented in Malcom Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA).

Quality Management Practices in Higher Education

Institutions: Quality management practices (QMP) has been successfully implemented in various areas such as manufacturing, services sector, some government agencies, the health care sector and many others. However, quality in higher education system is difficult to identify because it was originally developed in the manufacturing sector [54]. Moreover, most of the problem in defining quality management practices in higher education comes from the problem of identifying the customer [57].

Dahlgaard [58], define total quality in education as "an educational culture characterized by increased customer satisfaction through continuous improvement, in which all employees and students actively participate". From the definition, we can see that the whole process should be geared towards meeting the needs of customers while looking for the future improvements needed. Therefore, higher education institutions should emphasize services to deliver quality to the customer [59]. Indeed, HEI should clearly define their customers and pay attention to their level of satisfaction [13,60,61,62].

Moreover, higher education institution can adopt the QMP approach by viewing their services as product and involve academic staff for maintenance and improving standards [63,64,65,66]. In fact, Sudha [14] stated that, the higher education institutions should worry about quality. According to him, the educational institutions need to adopt QMPs is because the pressure from industry to improve the quality of education in line with the rapid change in technology, change in government policy, customer satisfaction, increasing competition and maintaining standards among public and private institutions.

Employability: The concept of employability has no single universally accepted definition. It is a dynamic concept and a general trend towards broadening of the concept [67]. According to Yorke [68], the term employability has been described in many ways, such as generic, transferable, intellectual, cognitive and interpersonal. Literature will review the concept of employability, employability skills and graduate employability from different perspective.

The simple concept by Hillage and Pollard [69] refers employability as “being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work”. They also suggested that employability should also be considered in terms of knowledge and attitudes. In the other word, that employability is not the same as gaining a graduate job, rather it implies something about capacity of the graduate to functioning a job and be able to move between jobs to remaining employable throughout their life.

The broadening of the concept of employability linked together with the skills. As documented by Ramlee [70], he linked employability to the acquisition of skills for life. He suggest that higher education should focus on key skills which were the key to the future success of graduates whatever they intend to do in later life. Skills identified by Dearing included; communication skills, numeracy, information technology, personal development training, problem solving and teamwork. This skills, also being studied and used by Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) to produce ‘work ready’ graduates to meet with successful employment [71].

However, Harvey is not agreed with Dearing’s statement. Harvey [67] argues that employability is not a set of skills but a range of experiences and attributes developed through higher level learning. Hence, employability continues to develop because the

graduate, once employed, they does not stop learning. In simple word, employability by this definition is about learning, or empowering learners as critical reflective citizens.

While, graduate employability skills referred to the soft skills and hard skills needed by the graduates to enter the job market (MOHE, 2006). Meanwhile, Yorke [68] suggested a different perspective for the concept of graduate employability skills. According to him, graduate employability skill can be defined as ‘a set of achievement, skills, understandings and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefit themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.

As suggested by Mohamad Shukri [59], element of the soft skills were categorized as ‘must have’ and ‘good to have’. Must have soft skills are those that must be acquired by every student upon graduation. Without these, students are not considered competent. In contrast a ‘good to have’ soft skills are perceived as generic skills that give value added to the students.

There are several ways to measured employability. Sivaraman, Balushi and Rao [71] suggested using Key Performance Indicator (KPI). According to them, employability or employment of graduates are taken as key performance indicators in many countries to measure the university program performance. This indicator called employment indicators [71]. For example, completion of industrial training of a specific duration by undergraduates is important expectation of employers. Training satisfaction is one of the KPIs to measure the attitude that individual develop about training undergone and is based on the individual perception [72,73,74,75].

The other way to measured employability is by identifying the skills of the graduates. Therefore, The Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) identified seven soft skills for inclusion in the national education curriculum, including skills related to communication, critical thinking and problem solving, teamwork, lifelong learning and information management, entrepreneurial, professional ethics and morality and leadership (MOHE, 2006). These skills will be gained by the students to make sure they are worthy to the organization or the workforce [67,76,78,78,79,80]. The measurement of the student skills through satisfaction will be observed by the employers during the industrial training.

Methodology: This paper examines either the quality management practices can contribute in enhancing the graduate employability in tertiary education institutions. In order to execute this study, the quantitative approach will be applied on the study. The designated questionnaire will be distributed to the graduates and the academicians as respondent. Meanwhile, random sampling technique was chosen. The respondents were drawn from target population randomly.

CONCLUSION

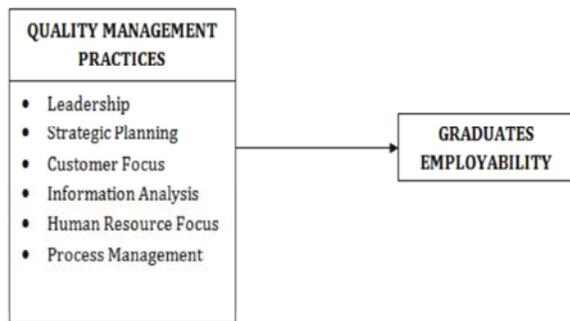


Diagram 1

Conclusion: Diagram 1 above shows the research framework of the relationship between the Quality Management Practices (QMP) and Students employability in Tertiary Education Institutions. This research framework clearly suggests that the QMPs have direct positive correlation with the students employability.

On the other hand, it is also to find out what is the effects of the critical success factors of QMPs (Leadership, Strategic Planning, Customer Focus, Information Analysis, Human Resource Focus and Process Management) [81,82] on the graduates employability when it all be implement in the Higher Education Institutions. After all, continuous improvement [83] of quality in higher education is really important to produce graduates who are educated and skillful before entering the working field.

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