

**A COMPARATIVE PERCEPTIVE OF CAREER COMPETENCY BETWEEN
EMPLOYERS AND INTERNS**

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ABSTRACT: *This study provided some information about the career competency skills needed by employers, when recruiting their employees. First, it must be noted that equal attention was given to hard or technical skills, as well as to soft skills. Without this combination, employers will end up recruiting one-dimensional employees thus denying them a workforce that is multi-tasking and able to execute their responsibilities well. Second, there was an urgent need for higher vocational education to measure constantly employers' level of satisfaction with regard to the quality of graduates that universities are churning out every year. Third, universities must ensure that they have constant engagement with industry in order for them to be able to detect changes in industry quickly. The ability to do this will enable universities to react proactively instead of reactively to any changes taking place in industry.*

KEYWORD: Career Competency, Higher Vocational Education, Vocational Education And Training, Employer, Human Resource Practice

INTRODUCTION

Learning for Jobs is an OECD study of vocational education and training (VET) designed to help countries make their VET systems more responsive to labor market needs. The Swiss VET system is very impressive. School and work-based learning are integrated; the system is well-resourced, flexible and comprehensive, including a strong tertiary VET sector. VET teachers

and trainers, examiners and directors are well prepared, quality control is ensured, and career guidance is systematic and professional. Evidence is well developed and routinely used to support policy arguments(OECD, 2011).

But at the same time there are a number of challenges. The global recession may reduce the provision of apprenticeship training, the entry of international companies may threaten dual system arrangements, competition between academic and vocational education could be sharpened by demographic changes, and there are some equity concerns. The OECD review assesses the main challenges faced by the VET system and presents an interconnected package of policy recommendations. For each recommendation, the report describes the challenge, the recommendation itself, supporting arguments, and issues of implementation.

An important function of the VET system is to equip the workforce with a mix of skills appropriate to the economic conditions required into the future. To that extent, the identification of desirable changes to the existing system, and any associated stresses and tensions, requires both an articulated view about the future of the economy and a methodology for translating that view into the skill categories addressed by the system. In recent years, there has been considerable interest in the role which ‘career competency’ or generic skills play in meeting future skill requirements(Kuijpers & Meijers, 2012).

However, these discussions typically fail to relate skill requirements to any detailed view of the future industrial and occupational structure of the economy. By the early 1970s, the production system of the industries had completed the transition from labor-intensive to skill-intensive. Industry was stepping into a capital-intensive phase. Consequently, there was an increased demand for individuals with well-educated managerial and leadership skills. The first institute of technology was established in order to provide further education opportunities for graduates of vocational high schools and junior colleges. More institutes were established, and offered master and doctoral degree programs.

Higher education and working life provide a specific environment for learning – an environment that has not been studied to the same extent. Relevant in this context are a number of phenomena, including a widened access to higher education, changes in technology and in work organizations, and the overall impact of globalization. All these factors have led to career competency being seen as something to be addressed in the upper secondary and higher education sectors, with consequent demands for more apprentice-like or work-based learning in these sectors. Since there are a great variety of models for work experience, the challenge is one of selecting the best model to adopt as a prelude to working life. This

underlines the need to study the collaborative relations between employers and HE institutions, with the aim of improving work experience as a true learning experience within the education system.

The basis should accord with the expectation of the school's operational strategies, foster the strengths for the students, and improve career competency for the students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Career learning in education

In the current global economy, jobs change so quickly that it is not easy for an increasing number of individuals to learn vicariously, while the presence of the boundaryless career makes it problematic to develop concrete outcome expectations with regard to one's career path (Guindon & Hanna, 2002). To understand career development in a turbulent context a more 'agented theory' is needed. Such an approach is offered by constructivist learning theory (Fox, 2001; Hua Liu & Matthews, 2005; Savickas, 2002, 2005); it is based on the idea that learning is a process in which the learner transforms information into meaningful knowledge. It is a process of 'becoming critically aware of one's own tacit assumptions and expectations and those of others and assessing their relevance for making an interpretation' (Mezirow, 2000).

In the constructivist view, meaning is constructed – by creating a story – from information through a dialogue with oneself and others about real-life experiences (Bruner, 1990; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). In an educational context, career stories (Savickas, 2002, 2005) emerge in a dialogue in which personal meaning is attached to concrete experiences with work: the learning environment has to be practice-based and dialogical (Bailey, Hughes, & Moore, 2004; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997; Kuijpers, Meijers, & Gundy, 2011). In order to achieve a dialogue, the thoughts and feelings of students with respect to their work experiences must be given a central place in the conversation (Bardick, Bernes, Magnusson, & Witko, 2006; Philip, 2001). The dialogue cannot be a one-off discussion, but must be a form of ongoing support (Harrington & Harrigan, 2006; Riverin-Simard, 2000).

Students, however, do not seem to participate in a career dialogue willingly; they are hardly motivated to participate in reflective activities about their careers when these are prescribed as part of the curriculum (Law, Meijers, & Wijers, 2002). Therefore, a learning environment in which students can make their own choices improves their motivation and ability to give direction to their careers (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). A career-oriented learning environment that is a learning environment that stimulates the development and application of career competencies. It can be into account the research findings presented – probably an

environment in which the student can get real-life work experience (i.e. a problem-based curriculum), have a say in his/her own learning process (i.e. an inquiry-based curriculum), and – finally – can participate in a career-oriented dialogue about his/her learning experiences with work.

Career learning: theoretical perspectives

A good career choice is made when the personality and the talents of a potential employee match with the required knowledge and skills of the job in question. With this in mind, it is assumed that counsellors and teachers need only provide students with reliable information about their talents and with information about the knowledge and skills that are needed to carry out particular jobs. The idea here is that students can then make rational choices regarding their careers. The limitations of this model are now becoming evident. One's career path has become more and more unpredictable (Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005) and therefore it is increasingly difficult to make rational and information-based career choices (Guindon & Hanna, 2002). Knowing that it is impossible to provide accurate information about the individual and/or the labor market, it is clear that career guidance and counselling in the traditional way is becoming more and more obsolete (Hughes & Karp, 2004; Richard, 2005). The result is not advantageous for students, especially when one considers that 'as the educational system multiplies choices, and in a market-based system the consequences of choices become ever more important, actual responsibility for making decisions falls mainly on students' (Connell, 2003).

Students should not be provided with more (or even better) information just before a decision needs to be made, but should be helped to learn how to gather their own information and to transform this information – by developing career competencies – into meaningful knowledge and actions with regard to self, work and career. There were five distinctive career competencies identified : capacity reflection (observation of capabilities that are important for one's career), motivation reflection (observation of wishes and values that are important for one's own career), work exploration (researching job possibilities), career directedness (making thoughtful decisions and taking actions that allow work and learning to correspond with one's capabilities and motivation and challenges at work), and finally, networking (building and maintaining contacts focused on career development(Kuijpers & Scheerens, 2006; Kuijpers, Schyns, & Scheerens, 2006). It is clear that developing career competencies is a higher-order learning process that needs a non-traditional learning environment. This begs the question as to what a powerful career-learning environment really is and places finding that out firmly on the agenda.

Employers' perspective

Branine found that graduate employers are more interested in personal attributes and soft skills than degree classification, subject or university attended (Sleezer, Gularte, Waldner, & Cook, 2004). Research confirmed findings from previous studies, by showing that new university students fared less well in the labor market than those from older universities. This could indicate that employers' actions may not be matching their words (Wilton, 2011).

The high importance attached to working effectively with others and communicating effectively aligns with previous studies examining stakeholder perception of the relative importance of industry relevant career competency skills. Team working and communication are consistently identified as among the most highly desired graduate skills by employers in developed economies (AAGE, 2011; Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006; CIHE., 2008).

As today's workforce comprises an array of cultures, generations and nationalities, the need for employees who can efficiently and sensitively work with others has never been greater. Team-working, along with others, is not a static skill but continuously evolving as changing technological, societal and political environments generate new scenarios in which we must work with others. As outlined in the skills framework, communication spans verbal communication, giving and receiving feedback, effective presentations, and participation in meetings. These combine to form a toolkit essential in work-ready graduates in different work areas and activities. There are, however, other stakeholder studies which suggest different importance rankings. Heterogeneous meanings and different interpretations of skill definitions mean comparisons should be treated with caution.

There is varying opinion on whether demand for industry-relevant skills is influenced by contextual factors. Jones (2009) argues context is important while Billings (2003) maintains variations in skill requirements are more likely due to different interpretations in skill meanings (Billings, 2003; Jones, 2009). Jackson and Chapman's (2011) study found context made little difference in academic's determination of the relative importance of different career competency skills. In this study, there were minor variations in the relative importance of skills by unit type and work experience. The former appear to be sample specific; the latter indicates that students with full-time positions assign greater importance to *developing initiative and enterprise* than others (Jackson & Chapman, 2011).

The variations detected for *student status*, *English as a first language* and *continent of birth* highlight the need to examine differences in industry-relevant skills and the influence of culture across Eastern and Western countries. Given the significant number of Asian students in the

sample, it is important to note their preferences for *self-awareness* and *problem solving* may inflate these skills' importance in the study. Literature from the Asia Education Foundation (AEF) (2011) cites self-awareness as critical for living and working in Asia. Conversely, the lack of importance assigned to *initiative and enterprises*' may be distorted by the large number of Asian students. Conventional wisdom would suggest the heavy focus on entrepreneurialism and job mobility in Australia's market economy – as opposed to the 'job for life' mentality in the more restrictive, command economies in certain Asian countries – may explain these variations (AEF., 2011). These findings prompt further exploration into variations in career competency skill provision and importance among countries in the East and West, building on the work of Velde (Velde, 2009). Interestingly, findings did not support variations in the relative importance of certain skills by sex detected in Wickrasinghe and Perera's study of Sri Lankan students (Wickramasinghe & Perera, 2010).

Career competency may be viewed from three different perspectives: students, employers and higher education providers. There is strong support for career competency skills provision in undergraduate programs and the groups agree on the importance of team working and communication as pivotal components of the graduate toolkit (Jackson & Chapman, 2011). The role of contextual influences – such as academic discipline, industry sector and country of origin – within and across these groups is more difficult to gauge.

Interns' perspective

For many graduates the economic drivers are strong. They recognize the value of career competency skills and that a degree on its own may not be enough (Boys et al., 1988; Hind, 2006). The number of students graduating has increased dramatically in the last two decades, which has potentially led to an over-supply of graduates who find it hard to start their careers. This is evidenced by an increase in graduate unemployment, increased competition between graduates, and higher levels of uncertainty about what graduates can expect from higher education (Boys, et al., 1988).

For the view of current students, they are the intended recipients of career competency skills development, their views are important. Most textbooks on learning theory highlight the need for learner motivation and engagement with the process to ensure effectiveness (Teichler, 2003). What career competency is from their perspective? Do they have similar views to other stakeholders on what transferable skills, or attributes, might be necessary? Do they think career competency can, and should, be learned?

Early studies on the nature of student learning asserted that the most obvious explanation for

differences in educational attainment is the ability of the individual student. Critics of such 'deterministic' explanations (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) argue that it is class stratification that is directly linked to individual educational success or failure. Strongly influenced by Marxism, they argue that working class failure is the fault of the education system which is biased towards the 'culture' of the 'dominant' social class, i.e. the upper class. Students with upper-class background are said to have a built in advantage, because they have been socialized into the dominant culture. From this perspective, a student's success depends fundamentally on the education received in the earliest years of life and his or her social background. There are several empirical studies which show that the child's early years' socialization forms the basis for success or failure in the educational system (Lowe & Cook, 2003). Behavior patterns laid down in childhood are said to have important and lasting effects. Such explanations draw our attention to the importance of early socialization in shaping an individual's personality and motivation to succeed. From this perspective, children learn to have high expectations for success.

The themes of the home environment, parental support and the manner in which young children are prepared in school are also found in studies pertinent to student retention and progression in higher education (Clark & Ramsey, 1990). Lack of preparation for the demands of higher education is seen as being a key contributing factor to student dropout and underperformance. It is claimed that many first-year undergraduates, having little idea of what to expect and little understanding of how the university environment can affect their lives, are ill prepared for higher learning. The demands can be overwhelming for them and lack of understanding on the part of many tutors compounds the problem (Yorke, 1990). Most commonly cited in literature, include lack of academic preparedness, student difficulties of managing pressures of combining studying with employment, financial costs of participation and student debt (Lowe & Cook, 2003).

METHODOLOGY

Research question and research model

However, empirical evidence which shows that a career-oriented learning environment as defined above will enhance the development of career competency is lacking. The research presented here aims to provide an answer to the following questions:

- (1) To what extent is the higher vocational education offer their students' career competency?
- (2) Which aspects of the higher vocational education and human resource practice are related to the use of career competency by students?
- (3) To explore if current higher vocational educational curriculum provided as requested?

- (4) To correspond with the development of career competency among students of higher vocational education.

The conceptual framework of this study

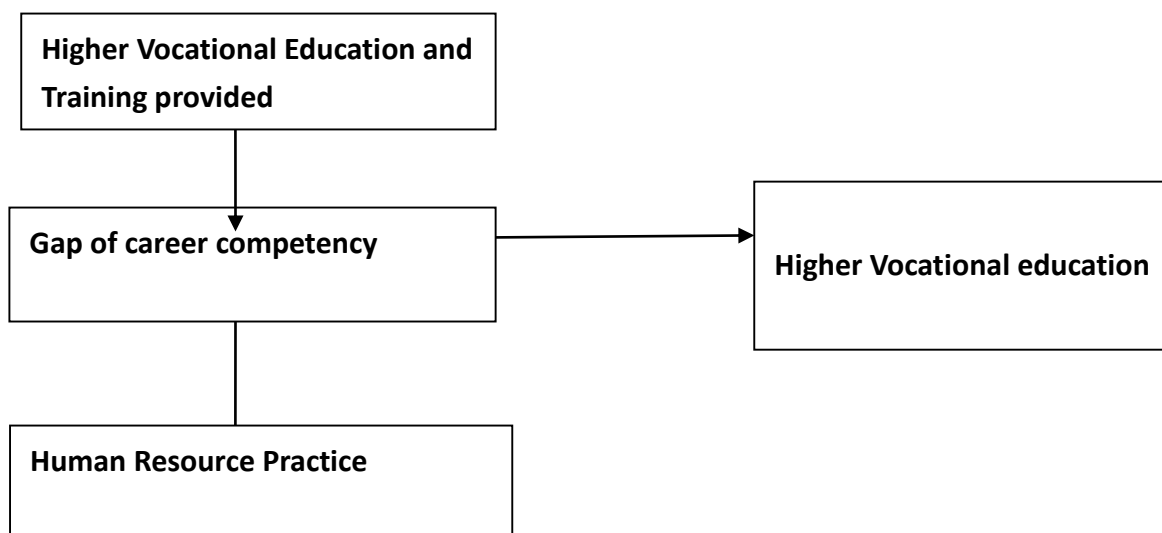


Figure 1.1: Research Framework of this Study.

Measurement

The study sample is drawn mainly from students of internship of higher vocational education and staff of Human Resource separately in industry. The instrument used for collecting data from the students, a self-evaluation-based questionnaire of 32 items, was developed in 6 phases. First, an analysis was made of existing questionnaires in the area of career competency. Since no existing instrument was found that was directly useful for this study, the report of the Commonwealth of Australia in 2002 became the foundation of the instrument used here to measure career competency. The selected items were presented to each of the students in the form of a written, self-completion questionnaire. The response categories of the items vary from 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree. On items about the learning environment the response category 'I don't know' was added. The questionnaire consisted of the following components.

RESULT

The Influences of Perceptive Towards Employers on Career Competency

Table 1.1 shows the regression results using the perceptive of career competency for employers as the dependent variable and three factors of career competency skills as the independent variables. If $R^2 > 0.1$, $F > 4$, and $p < 0.05$, it fulfills the significant requirements.

Moreover, according to Hair et al. (2006), if VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) is smaller than 2, it means no multi-co-linearity and if D-W (Durbin-Watson) value exists between 1.5 and 2.5, it means there is no autocorrelation. From the table, Factor 1 to Factor 3, it is shown that Enterprise and Self-Management ($R^2 = 0.570$, $F = 128.551$, $p\text{-value} \leq 0.000$, $D-W = 1.505$), Technology skill and Interpersonal communication ($R^2 = 0.667$, $F = 203.266$, $p\text{-value} \leq 0.000$, $D-W = 1.501$) and Problem solving ($R^2 = 0.684$, $F = 210.268$, $p\text{-value} \leq 0.000$, $D-W = 1.524$) all have positive influence with career competency. The p levels of the coefficient (beta, β) are also significant: Enterprise and Self-Management ($\beta = 0.638$, $p \leq 0.000$), Technology skill and Interpersonal communication ($\beta = 0.532$, $p \leq 0.000$), and Problem solving ($\beta = 0.558$, $p \leq 0.000$). The result shows that all three factors influenced employers' perceptive of career competency. Finally, this analysis combined all three factors of career competency skills into one regression to see the overall effect on employers' perceptive of career competency. This result shows that career competency skills substantially influence on the perceptive of career competency when they are combined into a system..

Table 1.1: The Influences of Perceptive towards Employers on Career competency

The Dependent Variable –The Influences of Perceptive Towards Employers on Career competency				
Independent Variables (Factors of Career competency Skill)	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Overall Model
	Beta	Beta	Beta	Beta
Enterprise and Self-Management	0.638***			0.638***
Technology skill and Interpersonal communication		0.532***		0.532***
Problem solving			0.558***	0.558***
R square	0.570	0.667	0.684	0.953
F value	128.551	203.266	210.268	642.585

p value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
D-W	1.505	1.501	1.524	1.991
VIF Range	1	1	1	1.646

Note: *** represents that the coefficients are significant at 0.001 or better, ** represents that the coefficients are significant at 0.05 or better, and * represents that the coefficients are significant at 0.1 or better.

Explanation: From the above table, $R^2 > 0.1$, $F > 4$, $p < 0.05$, D-W value 1.991(1.5~2.5), and VIF 1.646 (< 2), they fulfill the significant requirements and the results mean that the career competency skills, including Factors 1~3, significantly influence the career competency toward employers.

The perceptive of Internship Students on Career Competency

Table 1.2 shows the regression results using the perceptive of career competency for internship students as the dependent variable and three factors of competency skills as the independent variables. If $R^2 > 0.1$, $F > 4$, and $p < 0.05$, it fulfills the significant requirements. Moreover, according to Hair et al. (2006), if VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) is smaller than 2, it means no multi-co-linearity and if D-W (Durbin-Watson) value exists between 1.5 and 2.5, it means there is no autocorrelation. From the table, Factor 1 to Factor 3, it is shown that Self-Management and Learning ($R^2 = 0.593$, $F = 142.989$, $p\text{-value} \leq 0.000$, $D\text{-W} = 2.153$), Enterprise and Communication ($R^2 = 0.736$, $F = 272.768$, $p\text{-value} \leq 0.000$, $D\text{-W} = 1.989$) and Planning and organization ($R^2 = 0.465$, $F = 85.338$, $p\text{-value} \leq 0.000$, $D\text{-W} = 1.866$) all have positive influence with career competency. The p levels of the coefficient (beta, β) are also significant: Self-Management and Learning ($\beta = 0.612$, $p \leq 0.000$), Enterprise and Communication ($\beta = 0.741$, $p \leq 0.000$), and Problem solving ($\beta = 0.449$, $p \leq 0.000$). The result shows that all three factors of career competency skills influenced internship students' perceptive of career competency. Finally, this analysis combined all three factors of career competency skills into one regression, to see the overall effect on internship students' perceptive of career competency. This result shows that career competency skills substantially influenced on the perceptive of career competency when they are combined into a system.

Table 1.2: The Influences of Perceptive Towards Internship Students on Career competency

The Dependent Variable –The Influences of Perceptive Towards Internship Student on Career competency					
Independent Variables (Factors of Career competency skill)		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Overall Model
		Beta	Beta	Beta	Beta
Self-Management and Learning		0.612***			0.612***
Enterprise and Communication			0.741***		0.741***
Planning and organization				0.449***	0.449***
R square		0.593	0.667	0.736	0.902
F value		142.9891	203.266	85.338	293.148
p value		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
D-W		2.153	1.501	1.866	1.942
VIF Range		1	1	1	1.650

Note: *** represents that the coefficients are significant at 0.001 or better, ** represents that the coefficients are significant at 0.05 or better, and * represents that the coefficients are significant at 0.1 or better.

Explanation: From the above table, R square > 0.1, F > 4, p < 0.05, D-W value 1.942(1.5~2.5), and VIF 1.650 (< 2), they fulfill the significant requirements and the results mean that career competency skills, including Factors 1~3, significantly influence on the perceptive of career competency toward internship students.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

Most people agree that education is a positive thing. The legal requirement of basic education in all developed nations supports this fact. However, the role that education plays in society and in individual lives is sometimes debated. There are those who think that people should primarily be educated to perform a skilled job, otherwise known as higher vocational education. Others feel that the whole mind should be expanded using a broad body of general knowledge. This is considered liberal education. Each of these educational ideals has their own advantages and disadvantages, as well as influences on society. Considered carefully, these ideals can create the foundation of an educational experience that enables a student to reach his or her highest potential in the workplace and in life.

Career competency skills are those basic skills necessary for getting, keeping, and doing well on a job. These are the skills, attitudes and actions that enable workers to get along with their fellow workers and supervisors and to make sound, critical decisions. Unlike occupational or technical skills, career competency skills are generic in nature rather than job specific and cut across all industry types, business sizes, and job levels from the entry-level worker to the senior-most position. Finishing schools are generally expected to build greater self – confidence, demonstrate self-direction, enhance communication skills, strengthen people skills, develop leadership skills, display a professional image and strengthen attitudes.

Useful knowledge and skills can be acquired in many ways. Liberal education is supposed to deliver the foundation knowledge and abilities to read, write, understand and apply numbers. Basic computer literacy has become the most recent addition to foundation skills. However, at work further general skills are required for employees to become productive and efficient. These include the ability to communicate, analyze and solve problems in production; to work to quality standards, handle relations with customers, clients and fellow workers, and supervise others. In addition, most workers need a specific professional competence in their chosen occupation to perform a certain set of tasks according to the occupational standards.

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