

The Relationship between Employability Skills and Self-Efficacy of Students With Learning Disabilities In Vocational Stream

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, the unemployment among special needs students with learning disabilities is getting worse in Malaysia. Societies are always not confident of the employability skills of people with special needs, as the former do not believe that the latter could work efficiently. Since they are often associated with low self-confidence, the capabilities of people with special needs are often in doubt, and their self-efficacy is also open to question. Self-efficacy is included in the environmental factors that contribute to the degree of skilfulness. Therefore, this study aims to explore the level of employability skills and self-efficacy of students with learning disabilities, and determine the relationship between the two variables. This quantitative survey research was conducted at the Indahpura Special Education Vocational Secondary School, Kulai, Johor. About 60 students from four courses were recruited for the purposed of this study. An instrument was adapted with minor modifications from the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) to study the employability skills and The General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) to study the self-efficacy. Data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science Version 19.0 (SPSS 19) to obtain the frequency, mean, standard deviation, percentage and correlation between the variables. The results show that employability skills and self-efficacy of the students with special needs are at a moderate level. The findings of the study reveal that there is a strong positive relationship between self-efficacy and the student's employability skills. In conclusion, special education students with learning disabilities have room for improving their employability skills, and they can do it through these avenues: attend entrepreneurship programmes, participate in community services, and undergo self-improvement courses as well as practical training in relevant agencies. Societies are duty-bound to provide continual guidance to the students with special needs so that they can be a useful, and competitive work force to serve the country.

Keywords: *Employability skills, Self-efficacy, Learning disabilities, Vocational stream*

Introduction

In Malaysia, the unemployment caused by an excessive number of graduates has not been fully resolved and many parties including the government view this situation as a serious matter. In particular, the issue of unemployment among the people with disabilities (PWD) sees no light at the end of the tunnel. According to Ariffin (2006), a government policy as contained in the Service Circular No. 10/1988 states that at least one percent of employment opportunities in the public sector should be allocated to PWD. However, until now, the government policy remains unfulfilled. Based on the employment and labour statistics from the Ministry of Human Resources, as of June 2015, only five disabled persons with learning disabilities were employed in the public sector compared with the total number of about 193,914 who were able to work. This information proves that a large majority of disabled people are unemployed. One most probable reason is that they did not sit for the Malaysian Certificate of Education (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia) examination or gain a pass in it, which is a requirement for securing a job in the Malaysian public sector.

According to statistics from the Department of Social Welfare in 2016 (Department of Social Welfare Statistic Report 2016), about 409,269 Malaysians were registered as PWD. People with learning disabilities contribute 35% to this the statistic, followed by people with physical disabilities, 34.8%, the visually impaired, 9.8%, the mentally disabled, 8.2%, with hearing impaired, 7.8%, with speech disabilities, 4.7%, and with other disabilities, 0.5%. From the total number, only 3047 PWD were hired in the public sector as of the year 2015. PWD undergo a learning process through the Special Education Program, which is designed for the students with special needs (Mohamed, 2005). Most of them are not given the opportunity to work based on the skills they have acquired. According to a study conducted by Mohamed Yusof et al., (2014), out of 99 students who had completed training in a special vocational school, 69 of them were working. However, only 24 of the 69 working people found jobs related to the skills they had learned at the special vocational school. This indicates that 70 % of them did not work in the sector related to the skills they had learned at the vocational school (Mohamed Yusof et al., 2014). The skills of the special needs group are often questioned. Employers generally have the perception that people with special needs are incapable of working properly and inefficient in performing a job. Employment skills refer to the general competencies required by a particular type of occupation, such as communication skills, problem-solving skills, team-working skills and interpersonal skills of an individual (Mcardle, Waters, Briscoe, & Tim, 2007). According to Harvey (2003), employability has a deeper meaning and not just a getting a job. Students need to have the right characteristics, be equipped with the right techniques and experience to enable them to get a job, so that they are able to progress further in their careers. Their employability skills are often questioned due to their physical or mental deficiency. Communities usually have the perception that special needs people are unable to work properly and inefficient in performing a task.

In addition, attitudes play an important role in the quest for employment. This statement is supported by Safani and Salleh (2000) who state that the attitudes of PWD contribute to unemployment. They prefer to be among their own kind rather than work together with other people. This shows that they have no confidence in their own skills, and

lack the ability to work outside their comfort zone. As such, they focus on one type of job without considering other requirements to secure better future work. This pattern of thinking will affect their psychosocial development (Rohany, 2003). The context of social psychology refers to the personalities, attitudes and individual achievement. The PWD group is often embroiled in the issues of self-confidence and questionable abilities, hence, the psychological value of self-efficacy needs to be taken into consideration in training PWD since it is a psychological factor that contributes to the level of employability skill (Dickerson and Green, 2002).

Therefore, this study has the objectives of ascertaining the level of employability skills as well as the self-efficacy of students with learning disabilities in Indahpura Special Education Vocational Secondary School. In addition, this study aims to find out the relationship between employability skills and self-efficacy of the students, since previous researches show that both variables influence each other. The findings of this study will give a real picture of the levels of employability skills and self-efficacy of the students with learning disabilities, and can be the basis for better preparing them to enter the work environment. The outcomes of this study can be used as a reference for developing education and training programmes in the future, especially for those with special needs. It is hoped that the measurement of employability skills would change the mindset of the community and employers that people with special needs should be given opportunities to work with other normal individuals. It is one of the aims of the Special Education Philosophy that skilled people with disabilities can carry out duties entrusted to them by the employers; children with special needs should be provided with the optimum development in order to function as skilled, independent, and able individuals, so they can manage their own lives, realise their own potential and live normally in the society.

Methods

This study uses the quantitative approach with a survey design to conduct a research among the students at the Indahpura Special Education Vocational Secondary School. The population of the study includes 71 students with disabilities while the sample of the study is 60 students of year-2 students. The Krejcie & Morgan (1970) table was referred to in the determination of the sample size. A questionnaire was used as an instrument for this study, which consists of three parts; A, B and C. Part A contains several questions related to the respondents' demographics; Part B contains questions adapted from the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) 1991, which are employed to assess the employability skills; Part C consists of questions adapted from The General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) which are utilised to assess self-efficacy. The researcher personally administered the data collection process. For the purpose of data analysis, the researcher used the SPSS 19.0 software package. The statistical tests carried out in this study are mean score analysis and Pearson Correlation. Table 1 shows the mean score range and the interpretations of the levels of employability skills and self-efficacy with reference to the respective variables.

Table 2, shows the interpretations of correlation between the employability skills and self-efficacy.

Table 1: Interpretation of employability skills and self-efficacy

Mean score range	Skills level interpretation
3.01-4.00	High
2.01-3.00	Moderate
1.00-2.00	Low

Table 2: Pearson correlation interpretation

value	Strength of relationship
± 0.50 to ± 1.0	High
± 0.30 to ± 0.49	Moderate
± 0.10 to ± 0.29	Low

Results

Under this heading, several points will be discussed, which consist of demographics, the level of employability skills and self-efficacy of the students with learning disabilities. In addition, this section will elaborate on the relationship between the two variables of employability skills and self-efficacy.

Demographics

There are 4 courses offered at the school for the students with learning disabilities namely Housekeeping Operation, Esthetics, Food Preparation and Manufacturing, and Hairdressing. Table 3 shows the results of demographic analysis. The number of male students for the Housekeeping Operation course (n = 11, 42.3%) is higher than that of female students (n = 4, 11.8%). For Food Preparation and Manufacturing course, the number of male students (n = 7, 26.9%) is less than that of female students (n = 8, 23.5%). The Esthetics course has an enrolment of 15 female students (n = 15, 25%) without any male students. In the Hairdressing course, the number of male students (n = 8, 30.8%) is higher than that of female students (n = 7, 20.6%).

Table 3: Student distribution based on courses and gender

Courses	Gender (%)				Total	
	Male	(%)	Female	(%)	Frequency (n)	(%)
Housekeeping Operation	11	42.3	4	11.8	15	25
Food Preparation and Manufacturing	7	26.9	8	23.5	15	25
Esthetics	0	0.0	15	44.1	15	25
Hairdressing	8	30.8	7	20.6	15	25
Total	26	100	34	100	60	100

The level of employability skills of students with learning disabilities

Based on Table 4, the total mean value for employability skills of the students at the Indahpura Special Education Vocational Secondary School (min = 2.28, standard deviation = 0.52) shows that the level of employability skills is at a moderate level.

Table 4: The level of employability skills of students with learning disabilities

Employability skills	Mean score	Standard deviation	interpretation
	2.28	0.52	moderate

Table 5 shows the descriptive analysis of the employability skills of the students with learning disabilities. The analysis indicates that the students' skill is at a moderate level for all components, except information management which is at a low level.

Table 5: Descriptive analysis for employability skills of the students with learning disabilities at the Indahpura Special Education Vocational Secondary School

Employability skills	Mean score	SD	Mean score interpretation
Basic skills	2.43	0.57	moderate
Thinking skills	2.25	0.62	moderate
Personal qualities	2.56	0.59	moderate
Resources management skills	2.23	0.61	moderate
Interpersonal skills	2.26	0.61	moderate
Information management skills	1.99	0.53	low
System management skills	2.13	0.52	moderate
Technology management skills	2.21	0.65	moderate
Total	2.28	0.52	moderate

Table 6 shows the descriptive analysis of the items in employability skills of the students with learning disabilities. There are 27 items in the instrument grouped under eight categories.

Table 6: Descriptive analysis for items in employability skills of the students with learning disabilities at the Indahpura Special Education Vocational Secondary School

Item	Employability skills	Mean score	SD	Mean score interpretation
B1	Speaking	2.57	.59	moderate
B2	Listening	2.58	.70	moderate
B3	Reading	2.38	.74	moderate
B4	Writing	2.47	.60	moderate
B5	Mathematical skills	2.15	.69	moderate
B6	Combining ideas or information in new ways	2.20	.68	moderate
B7	Making decisions	2.30	.65	moderate
B8	Training leadership skills in identifying and problem solving	2.28	.72	moderate
B9	Using cognitive skills in problem solving	2.23	.65	moderate
B10	Self-appearance	2.42	.70	moderate
B11	Self-management	2.58	.70	moderate
B12	Accepting critiques and orders	2.72	.61	moderate
B13	Integrity	2.52	.68	moderate
B14	Time management	2.18	.68	moderate
B15	Financial management	2.13	.68	moderate
B16	Material and facilities management	2.40	.72	moderate
B17	Interacting with colleagues	2.62	.80	moderate
B18	Interacting with others	2.15	.69	moderate
B19	Variability in others	2.02	.57	moderate
B20	Collecting and organising information	2.13	.62	moderate
B21	Interpreting and conveying information	2.08	.56	moderate
B22	Using computer to process information	1.75	.60	low
B23	Understanding the organisational structures	2.22	.72	moderate
B24	Identifying health and safety issues	2.08	.56	moderate
B25	Understanding employee policies and related laws	2.08	.50	moderate
B26	Selection of tools and procedures	2.28	.67	moderate
B27	Applying technology to any task	2.13	.72	moderate

Level of self-efficacy of the students with learning disabilities

Table 7 shows the level of self-efficacy of the students with learning disabilities. The mean score for self-efficacy (min = 2.53, standard deviation = 0.37) is at a moderate level. The descriptive analysis for the self-efficacy shows that 7 students have a low self-efficacy level (11.67%), 46 students have a moderate self-efficacy level (76.67%) and the rest have a high self-efficacy level (11.67%). Overall, the majority of the students have a moderate level of

self-efficacy. The number of students with a high level of self-efficacy is similar to that of the students with a low self-efficacy level.

Table 7: Descriptive analysis for self-efficacy items in the questionnaire

Item	Self-efficacy	Mean score	SD	Interpretation
C1	I'm always able to solve difficult problems if I try hard	2.77	0.65	moderate
C2	If somebody opposes me, I'll look for alternatives ways and the opportunity to get what I want.	2.12	0.45	moderate
C3	I always stick to my goals and achieve my goals easily	2.58	0.62	moderate
C4	I am confident that I can manage something unexpected efficiently and effectively.	2.43	0.56	moderate
C5	I am grateful for my intelligence, where I know how to deal with unexpected circumstances	2.82	0.57	moderate
C6	I can solve most of the problems if I try to do it right.	2.47	0.54	moderate
C7	I'm still able to calm down when I'm in trouble because I believe in my ability to deal with it.	2.50	0.50	moderate
C8	When I'm in trouble, I can usually find some solutions.	2.55	0.50	moderate
C9	I can usually handle anything that comes to me.	2.53	0.50	moderate
	overall	2.53	0.37	moderate

The relationship between employability skills and self-efficacy of the students with learning disabilities

The Pearson correlation value ($r=0.55$, $p<.01$) shows that there is a strong positive relationship between self-efficacy and employability skills for the students with learning disabilities (refer to Table 9). The Pearson correlation value is derived from the Pearson correlation value interpretation in Table 8 which is based on the work of Pallant (2001).

Table 8: Pearson correlation value interpretation

Value	Interpretation
± 0.50 until ± 1.00	Strong
± 0.30 until ± 0.49	Moderate
± 0.10 until ± 0.29	Weak

Thus, the null hypothesis is successfully rejected. Data analysis shows that there is a strong positive relationship of self-efficacy with basic skills components and personal quality.

Table 9: The strength value between items in self-efficacy and the elements in employability skills based on Person Correlation analysis

	Self-efficacy									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Employability skills	0.36	0.50	0.18	0.35	0.17	0.33	0.48	0.37	0.55	0.53
Basic skills	1	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.1	0.4	0.3
Thinking skills		1	0.30	0.40	0.28	0.33	0.26	0.31	0.31	0.39
Personal qualities			1	0.62	0.41	0.34	0.30	0.21	0.15	0.24
Resources management				1	0.36	0.61	0.42	0.34	0.34	0.55
Interpersonal management					1	0.40	0.33	0.12	0.24	0.17
Information management						1	0.63	0.48	0.54	0.57
System management							1	0.50	0.64	0.60
Technology management								1	0.66	0.70

Discussions

In general, this study has achieved three objectives set out at the beginning of the investigation: explore the level of employability skills and self-efficacy of the students with learning disabilities, and determine the relationship between the two variables. A total of 60 students from four courses were roped in as respondents. According to the research outcomes, the employability skills of the students with learning disabilities at the Indahpura Special Education Vocational Secondary School are at a moderate level. The employability skills were measured using an instrument adapted from the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS). This instrument contains 27 items that are categorised into eight areas of skills; basic skills, thinking skills, personal qualities, resources management skills, interpersonal skills, information management skills, system skills and technology skills. Based on the mean score, the students with learning disabilities obtain

higher score in personal qualities skills; which encompass self-management, appearance and integrity. It shows that these students could manage some of the important aspects of life even though they are not in their best condition physically and mentally.

On the other hand, the students obtain the lowest score in information management skills. The reason could be that they do not have much exposure to information management such as information gathering, interpretation of information and using computer to manage information. Other than that, the students lack of thinking skills, computer skills and technology skills. The level of basic skills proficiency will influence the acquisition of employability skills. The logic of reasoning is simple: basic skills such as reading, writing, speaking and listening are the key to master the employability skills. According to the National Joint Committee of Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) (2001), the learning problem refers to the real difficulty of reading, writing, speaking and listening, deciding or solving the mathematical problems as a result of a variety of problem arising from the central nervous system dysfunction. The problem of controlling behavior, perception and social interaction may be present with the learning problem but not vice versa. However, there are many factors that can contribute to the employability skills of PWD students.

Health issues might also influence the students in these aspects: unable to remember well, unable to comprehend complex directions, unable to count properly, unable to communicate well and unskilled in using tools that require systematic compliance and so on. The negative perceptions of the community might affect the ability of the students in demonstrating their employability skills. This in turn will exacerbate the students' interpersonal relationship and social interaction with the surrounding community. According to Abdou Issa (2013), persons with disabilities face many obstacles and challenges in getting a job for example, the lack of self-esteem, working environment not suitable for disabled people, low wages, lack of a labour market for the disabled, negative attitudes of employers and negative responses to the capacity of those with disabilities. However, the level of employability skills of the disabled can be greatly increased by additional efforts tailored to train them, such as the Entrepreneurship Programme, community service programme, practical programme with the external agencies, and exposing the students to do problem-solving exercise.

According to the research finding, nine items of the instrument were adapted from *The General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE)* to gauge the level of self-efficacy. The findings indicate that the majority of the students have a low level of self-efficacy. The results of applying the instrument, show that the student were not confident when someone opposed them, and they were easily distracted by others. They also less confident in their ability to do or to complete a task within a specified time frame. The findings of Lackaye, Margalit, Ziv and Ziman, (2003) show that the students with learning disabilities have a low level of self-efficacy in the academic and social life. Their feelings were also more negative; they felt hopeless and put less effort in the lesson. This is proven when this study also found that the students' proficiency level of thinking skills scored a moderate level. Consequently, the students' self-efficacy level of solving difficult problems is also at a moderate level. The students' self-efficacy level needs to be improved so that they are able to equip themselves with the quality skill needed by the employer. A high level of efficacy definitely gives the students a great return of personal achievement in particular, and benefits their employer in general. Hence, the involvement and participation of all parties are necessary to raise the self-efficacy level of the students at the Indahpura Special Education Vocational Secondary School.

The last finding shows that the two variables of employability skill and self-efficacy have a strong positive relationship based on the interpretation value as guided by work of Pallant (2001). It is evident that self-efficacy plays a significant role and contributes to the development of employability skill of the students with learning disabilities. This is in line with the study by Ab Halim (2013) which demonstrates a strong positive relationship between self-efficacy and employability skills of the vocational students with hearing difficulties, who are enrolled at the Polytechnic and Community College, Malaysia. This proves that students with a high level of self-efficacy will exhibit better employability skills. In fact, in the real workplace, employers are highly concerned with the self-efficacy of the workers, usually the more efficient working individuals perform excellently in the job. Several studies found that disabled workers are loyal, reliable and require moderate convenience. The findings show that several essential elements will facilitate the integration of people with disabilities with others at work: developing an organisation's climate of openness and tolerance, putting employees in disguise amidst management planning and operating processes, and investing in good human resource management practices. This integration is seen to improve the self-efficacy level of people with special needs. The reason is obvious; they can compete with ordinary individuals and get guidance from the community around them, directly or indirectly. Erik, Katharina, & Magnussverke (2008) conducted an investigative study of relationship between workability and self-efficacy; the results of the cross-lagged analysis show that workability provides a preliminary picture of self-efficacy.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the employability skills and self-efficacy of the students at the Indahpura Special Education Vocational Secondary School are at a moderate level. The employability skills and self-efficacy of the students need to be improved so that they possess the quality required by that the employers. High efficiency certainly gives a great return of personal achievement in particular, and benefits the employers in general. Therefore, concerted efforts of all parties are necessary to raise the levels of employability skills and self-efficacy of the students with disabilities. There is a strong positive relationship between self-efficacy and employability skills. It can, therefore, be concluded that students with high self-efficacy are equipped with good employability skills. The vocational education syllabus places, in fact, a great emphasis on providing special education students with the experience to master the employability skills. This study gives an overview of the employability skills and self-efficacy of the students with learning disabilities, which can be a source of reference for other researchers when they carry out similar investigations, and contribute to the development of special education programmes for students with learning disabilities in Malaysia.

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