GENERIC SKILLS GAP OF PROSPECTIVE GRADUATES FROM THE PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYERS’ PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The issue of acquisition of generic skills amongst graduates is often related to multiple factors such as the tertiary educational training, industrial experience, employer’s role and the graduates’ attributes. Past studies on employability of graduates have placed great emphasis on the supply side efforts in generic skills development which includes the tertiary curriculum design and delivery mechanisms. This is consistent with the Consensus Theory of human capital development which postulates that instilling generic or soft skills at tertiary level will ensure the employability of graduates and their subsequent rise in the corporate ladder. On the other hand, another theory, i.e., the Conflict Theory has raised doubts on the feasibility of tertiary educational role and questioned the responsibility of employers in providing training to prospective graduates and collaborating with universities in enhancing generic skills. Realizing the inadequacy of both theories the authors recognized the need to elicit the employer’s perspective to identify the generic skills that graduates should possess for the work place. Besides that, the extent to which the prospective graduates lack those generic skills required by employers will also be identified. The results will reveal the skills gap that will further provide information as to the role of the respective stakeholders and institutions in imparting the generic skill in effective manners. On the demand side, there were numerous studies that have examined the private sector employer’s perspective but few studies have examined the public sector employer’s perspective. Also, few studies have explored the generic skills gap that exist between what employer’s perceive the desired skills prospective graduates should posses with what the prospective graduates’ actually possess. The objectives in this study are two-fold: i) to identify employers’ perception of the ideal generic skills that graduate employees should possess, and 2) to elicit employers’ perception of the lack of generic skills that prospective graduates (i.e. industrial trainees) currently possess. The importance of identifying the graduate’s generic skills gap from the public sector employer’s perspective is to enable various stakeholders and institutions to take responsibility and initiate reform measures in imparting the relevant and appropriate skills to the graduate students. To achieve this, a qualitative research design was utilized, involving primary interview data collected through 16 key informant interviews of employers in the public sector in Kuantan and Johor Bahru. These key informant employers were selected from the UKM’s social science industrial trainees
who attended training at these two sites. These interview data were analyzed using content analysis and were later compared with extant literature to identify unique and contextual features. The findings indicate that there are specific generic skills in the area of information and social interaction skills that the public sector employers seek from the graduates. This study implies the need for a stakeholder-responsibility approach in prescribing a comprehensive normative solution to the employability of graduates. In addition, it also postulates that the culture of learning and gaining varied skills in different spheres of life need to be inculcated amongst students from early years. It is hoped that the findings will benefit the higher learning institutions in programming their postgraduate effectively.

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