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Assessing the Effective Marketing and Employers' Perception of the Quality of the Diploma in Public Administration of UiTM Sarawak Branch

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the socio-economic status and employers' perception of work quality of Diploma Public Administration (DPA) graduates' of UiTM Sarawak Branch who graduated over the years from 1997 to 2000. In addition, the study also examines the graduates' perception of DPA program's relevance to employability. Our sample consisted of 436 graduates. The response rate for graduates was 36 percent and the employers' response is 17 percent. The study shows that the profile of a typical DPA graduate is below 30 years old, earning less than RM1,500 per month, has Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of 2.80 and is employed in the Government sector. Our findings indicate that 70 percent of DPA graduates are employed and 14 percent are pursuing higher education. Regarding the DPA curriculum structure, majority of respondents are of the opinion that it is relevant to the job market however more emphasis need to be given to improving the standard of English language amongst DPA graduates. Addition comments request extended industrial attachment, teaching communication skills and Information Communication Technology (ICT) skills. Employers are of the opinion that UiTM DPA graduates exhibit comparable work quality to other local university graduates. DPA graduates also scored well in the generic skills required by employers.

Background of the Problem

It is reported in the newspapers that the number of unemployed graduates are on the rise and that the situation needs immediate attention from the relevant authorities. Hence, this study is necessary to find out how the DPA graduates are coping with the realities of the working environment and also to determine the employers' perception regarding the quality of DPA graduates, including graduates' perception on relevant matters.

Objective of the Study

The main objectives of the study are:

- To evaluate the employers' perception regarding the work quality of DPA graduates
- To examine the socio-economic background of the DPA graduates
- To examine the relationship between curriculum and the job held by the DPA graduates
- To analyze through graduates' perceptions, the effectiveness and relevancy of the DPA curriculum in preparing the DPA graduates for the job market
- To analyze the pattern of employment of DPA graduates
- To examine the relationship between academic performance and their job status

Significance of the Study

The findings from this study can be used to evaluate the effectiveness and relevance of the curriculum in preparing the students for the job market. Apart from that, findings of this study can be used as input to develop strategies for human resource development for the Bumiputera at the State and National level.

Research Questions

In line with the objectives, the study hopes to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the employers' perception toward the work quality of DPA graduates?
2. What is the socio-economic background of the DPA graduates?
3. How relevant is the DPA curriculum to the job market?

4. Which industries employ the DPA graduates?
5. Is there a correlation between the standard of English and employability?
6. Is there a correlation between their academic performance and employability?
7. Is there a correlation between their academic performance at entry and CGPA upon graduation?
8. Is there a significant difference between gender and CGPA?
9. Is there a correlation between the graduate's CGPA and their parents' educational level?
10. Is there a correlation between the graduate's CGPA and their parents' average monthly income?
11. How many DPA graduates continued their studies after graduation?
12. Is there a correlation between the year of completion and employment after graduation?
13. What was the duration for the DPA graduates to get their first full time job?
14. What is the opinion of the DPA graduates about their own job prospects?

Definition of Terms

1. **Work Quality**
Work Quality in this study refers to meeting or exceeding employer's expectations
2. **Marketing**
Marketing in this study refers to preparing the graduates for the job market.
3. **DPA Graduates**
Diploma in Public Administration in the context of this study refers to students who have successfully completed the Diploma Public Administration.
4. **CGPA**
Cumulative Grade Point Average

Theoretical Framework

Number of theoretical frameworks help to understanding the complex relationship between university and the work environment. These are learning organization, systems approach and quality systems. University as a learning organization basically means that a university should have mechanisms to be aware of changes in the job market so that courses could be tailored to meet job requirements of the industry. Systems approach perspective as applied to university regards students as inputs, which are processed through teaching and learning environment to perform quality graduates who are market-ready

for jobs. Quality systems view graduates as meeting the expectations of the employers (industry). Since universities are now in the process of implementing quality systems into teaching and learning process, it only logical that their product (graduates) should meet employer expectations. In short, the quality of a university is measured based on the performance of its graduates in the employment world and not through passing rates in examinations.

Literature Review

Some studies have identified the following factors that can improve and enhance the graduates' employability: good communication skills, proficiency in English, working experience, good interview skills and the willingness to learn. Thousands of Malaysian university graduates are unable to find jobs because they have non-marketable courses in their diplomas or degrees, according to a government economic panel. The graduates were mainly from five areas of study namely: arts (31.1 per cent), economics (11.3 per cent), accounting (9.2 per cent), business administration (8.8 per cent) and Islamic studies (8.6 per cent). The rest were from science field (7.8 per cent), engineering (5.5 per cent) and others (9.2 per cent). A poor command of English has been cited as another possible reason why they have failed to find work.

According the National Economic Action Council (NEAC), the high number of unemployed graduates can be attributed to the unfavorable economic situation, higher number of graduates produced by universities and a mismatch between the courses and market needs. It is an employer's market and companies are more selective about whom they hire. Moreover, there is unwillingness on the part of the private sector to spend money on re-training, except for critical areas, so graduates with little experience are thus left out.

Previous Research

In 2000, UiTM Shah Alam did the fourth tracer study led by Professor Dr. Abdul Haim Mohd Nawawi on graduates who graduated from UiTM between 1990-1999. Lecturers from the faculty of Diploma Business Studies (DBS) led by Associate Professor Rosita Hj Suhaimi also did a follow up study on the DBS graduates who graduated from the year 1998-1999. In 2002 a group of final year DPA students led by team leader Diana Sophia Anak Barieng also did a study on DPA graduates who graduated from UiTM Cawangan Sarawak from the year 1998 to 2000. According to the results of the study, a majority of the DPA graduates continue their studies either full-time or part-time and are employed in the public sector. The Education Ministry has also instructed local universities to conduct a study on the quality of their graduates by getting feedback from

the industries. So far two universities have sent their reports while others have not yet responded. Dr. Hassan said a full report on the study was expected to be ready in April 2003 (Sunday Tribune 20 November 2002). Overseas universities are also conducting studies on their graduates to get feedback on their programs and their experiences after leaving the college.

Research Methodology

This study employs the survey methodology namely questionnaires. It was done on DPA graduates from University Teknologi MARA Cawangan Sarawak, who had completed their studies from the year 1995 to 2000. The population for the study consisted of 436 students who completed their studies in Diploma in Public Administration (DPA) at University Teknologi MARA Cawangan Sarawak from the year 1995 to 2000 and their employers. The researchers took the entire population as the sample for the study. The researchers developed their research instrument through review of related literature. Basically the research instrument is divided into two parts: first part is to be completed by the graduates and the second part is to be completed by their employers. A pilot study of about 100 respondents was conducted to determine the reliability of the research instrument. The data for the survey was collected by mail questionnaire. Out of 436 sets of questionnaires mailed, 161 were returned by the DPA graduates a response rate of 37%. About 25 sets of questionnaire were returned undelivered due to incorrect address. About 75 questionnaires were returned by the employers, which gave a response rate of 17%.

The data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 10, where it was interpreted using the Descriptive Statistics and Inferential Statistics.

Among the limitations for the study were, the study was limited to the student who completed their study in 2000, difficulty in tracing the students who are extending their study, incomplete student records, time constraint and finally, low response rate for both the pilot study and the actual study.

Major Findings

- **Graduates' Perspective**
About 75 percent of the graduates are employed and only 14 percent of them are furthering their studies. About 64 percent of the graduates are employed in the public services as Administrative Officers and Assistant Administrative Officers for nearly 3 years, earning about RM 1000 to RM 1500 per month. 57 percent of the graduates managed to be employed within 6 months. The graduates indicated that write-in and newspaper

replies as the most commonly used job search methods. The most important factors influencing job application according to the graduates are proficiency in English, positive attitude and interview skill. The graduates indicate that pay and status of jobs are less important. The graduates identify that Office Management (PAD 260), Fundamental of Management (PAD 160) and Personnel Administration (PAD 254) are among the core-subjects relevant to job. The graduates further identify that English (ENL/BEL) and Computer and Information Processing (CSC 134) are among the non-core subjects relevant to job. The graduates also added that practical training and Young Executive Training Program (PLEM) are very beneficial in job search. In their opinion the DPA program has good career prospects and has prepared them well for the working world. Finally, about 84 percent of the graduates say that English language, as the medium of instruction, will improve and enhance employment prospect.

- **Employers' Perspective**
Employers' aspects of work quality include teamwork, self-confidence and positive attitude, while problem solving, analytical thinking skills and critical thinking skill were given low rating. About 91 percent said that the DPA graduates meet their expectation. 81 percent of the employers identify that the overall work quality of the DPA graduates is good. The 57 percent employers added their work quality is about the same as graduates from other public universities, while 39 percent said that they are better.

Conclusion

The findings support the current trend in employment i.e. stated that English proficiency and positive attitudes are vital for success in searching for jobs nowadays. The least important factors are relevant qualification, pay and job status.

Most of the graduates felt confident about their career prospects and that the DPA program is relevant to their current job. In addition most of the graduates said that the DPA program prepared them well for their first job. The employers were satisfied with the overall performance of the DPA graduates and considered DPA graduates to be equal in quality to graduates of other universities.

Recommendations

- **Recommendations from graduates**
 1. Extend practical training from the current period of one month to at least 3 months.

2. Make it mandatory for all students to have practical training.
 3. Emphasize teaching of good communication skills.
 4. Emphasize the teaching of ICT skills.
 5. Revise the curriculum regularly to reflect the current trends in the job market.
 6. Emphasize the usage of English language to improve job prospects.
 7. Conduct more study/site visits.
 8. Make PLEM activities more rigorous.
 9. Promote leadership skills.
 10. Organize workshops or seminars for student's awareness of real-world issues.
- Recommendations from employers
 1. More emphasis to be given to English so that the graduates can communicate fluently in English.
 2. Give more practical knowledge instead of theoretical knowledge because sometimes the graduates applying the knowledge in real working environment.
 3. Improve soft skills such as interpersonal and communicational
 4. Graduates to have more ICT knowledge since ICT is the norm in most working environment today.
 5. Extend practical training period from one month to six months so that graduates can really learn effectively during the practical training.
 6. Improve critical thinking and ability to solve problems.
 7. Public speaking should also be given more emphasis in the DPA course.
 8. Graduates need more exposure to the working world and more learning site visits to organisations.
 9. Graduates should also be involved in community projects so that they become more socially responsible.

Strategies to Enhance The Employability of Graduates

There are a number of ways in which universities, government, graduates and the private sector can enhance the chances of graduates finding work after graduation:

1. Review of curriculum
2. Smart partnership between Universities and industry
3. Ranking varsities by employment rate of graduates
4. Internships
5. Coping with a job Interview
6. Two majors for undergraduates

7. Campus Job Fairs/Career Centre
8. Promotion of self-employment among graduates
9. Government subsidy
10. Problem based learning (PBL)
11. Centre for Employment studies

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