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ENHANCING EMPLOYABILITY THROUGH INDUSTRIAL TRAINING: INSIGHTS FROM EVENT OPERATION CERTIFICATE GRADUATES AND INDUSTRIAL TRAINING EMPLOYERS

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ABSTRACT

To fulfil the required credit hours for graduation, all final semester students in the Event Operation Certificate (EOC) program offered by Pasir Salak Community College are required to undergo industrial training. Aside from improving students' existing skills, industrial training stands as the main platform to develop their talents, ultimately helping them towards secured employment in the events industry. However, rapid technological changes and development in the events industry have resulted in a mismatch between knowledge and skills. The theoretical knowledge and skills acquired at the educational institutions often demonstrate a disparity with the practical applications within industries. Hence, the purpose of this study was to investigate the role of industrial training in enhancing the employability of EOC graduates post-graduation. The study employed a qualitative approach via a case study design. Purposive sampling was used to recruit the respondents based on their knowledge and experience to answer the research questions. The sample consisted of 11 EOC graduates from Pasir Salak Community College and three employers with experience in training EOC students during the industrial training period. The data was collected through in-depth interviews using semi-structured questions. All interview sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for thematic analysis by coding and identifying recurring themes. The findings revealed that the majority of EOC graduates who underwent industrial training were given multiple tasks by employers in preparing themselves for future employability in the events sector. The graduates also acquired various new skills from the industrial training, including digital skills. However, most EOC graduates faced challenges throughout their industrial training, encompassing time limitations, physical exhaustion, communication obstacles, and unexpected mental strain. Meanwhile, employers prioritize negotiation within communication, technical training, and event concepts during industrial training and value digital skills as a bonus for graduates entering the workforce. Overall, they see industrial

training as a platform for sparking interest, fostering positivity, and encouraging graduates to venture into the events business.

Keywords: Employability, Event operation certificate, Graduates, Industrial training, Skills development.

INTRODUCTION

In today's challenging world, theoretical knowledge and skill training provided by institutions are insufficient to guarantee graduates' employability. Graduates must have the competencies and employability skills to remain competitive in the job market. It is also imperative for them to possess relevant and up-to-date knowledge, practical and soft skills, and a positive attitude as a thorough preparation before facing the increasingly challenging world of work. To address this need, the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) Malaysia, in collaboration with the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) and local Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), has made industrial training a prerequisite for graduation across Certificate, Diploma, and Bachelor-level programs (KPT, 2010). Industrial training refers to the placement of students for practical training purposes under the supervision of selected local or international industrial partners. In the context of the Event Operation Certificate program under the Department of Polytechnic and Community College Education (JPPKK), industrial training must be conducted within four months in either the fourth or final semester (JPPKK, 2022).

To advocate the Malaysian Education Development Plan 2015 - 2025 (Higher Education), community colleges have been investing significant efforts to produce TVET graduates of high quality, efficient, and meet the requirements of the industry (JPPKK, 2022). However, rapid changes and development in the events industry nowadays have resulted in a mismatch between the knowledge and skills (Jaafar & Khan, 2022) acquired from formal learning in college with the current practice in the industry (Werner et al., 2022). Therefore, industrial training stands as the best platform for students to gather the latest skills and new experiences to be applied in the events industry. Apart from the opportunity to practise theoretical knowledge and skills received from formal learning, industrial training also allows students to deepen their technical and soft skills that will improve and guarantee their employability in the events sector (Barron & Knight, 2017).

The implementation of industrial training has been found to create positive values among students through the assignment of various industry-related tasks by employers (Zaini & Shari, 2022). Industrial training mainly aims to improve and further develop students' skills and provide better employment opportunities. Certainly, when viewed through the lens of an employer, industrial training serves as a valuable means for organizations to uncover the capabilities of immigrants and ascertain the most fitting areas to harness a newcomer's skill set (Abdul Shukor, 2020). However, research suggests that industrial training may not yield the expected results (Yusof & Mohiddin, 2018). This accounts to various possible reasons, including the disorientation of the scope of work. Furthermore, Yusof and Mohiddin (2018) reported that some industrial training employers take advantage of the students by instructing them to perform tasks and unrelated skills that are outside the scope of work. These tasks, aside from being irrelevant, also add more burden to the students' workload, time, and energy, in addition to the minimal attention given to their welfare. Undoubtedly, students' attitudes, personal effectiveness, resilience, and self-confidence play an important role in determining the success of industrial training towards ensuring their employability after graduation (Hanson & Codina, 2022).

The quality of Malaysian graduates is a pressing concern with employers noting a skills gap among them, hinting at potential inadequacies among HEIs to nurture crucial abilities required in the job market (Abdul Shukor, 2020). Such concern stems from heightened competition in the job market and persistent skills gaps, resulting in reports of graduates lacking the necessary skills for suitable employment (Bolli et al., 2021). Consequently, this situation markedly amplifies unemployment rates among graduates and exacerbates the mismatch between education and employment, especially in developing nations (Otache et al., 2021). These issues are often related to the graduates of event management to get a job in the industry (Adros & Wee, 2019). Proficiency in event management skills is considered important in the service industry in addition to theoretical understanding and critical thinking (Getz, 2002). Therefore, this study was undertaken to investigate the role of industrial training in enhancing the employability of Event Operation Certificate graduates post-graduation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Job Scope of Event Trainees

Job scope is an imperative aspect to ensure the effective delivery of industrial training. Therefore, the scope of tasks and assignments should provide students with the opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills learned and be exposed to work practices based on their respective fields of specialization (KPT, 2010). The scope of tasks plays an important role in industrial training to ensure that the objectives are not misguided or misused by certain parties against the students (Yusof & Mohiddin, 2018). Therefore, both HEIs and organizations involved in industrial training should come to an agreement on the specific tasks for students (KPT, 2010).

The specific task or job scope for industrial training provided by community colleges is determined by the program curriculum, which is designed to help the industry in organizing and planning training activities for students. Nevertheless, the industry has the right to adjust the scope of training in line with the activities and needs of the scope identified by the community colleges. These adjustments include revealing various types of tasks in the industry, such as supervision, data collection, experiments, equipment maintenance and repair, system design, development, and resource management. The training also provides an understanding of system processes and operations, covering aspects like production operations, inspection, and analysis. Additionally, there are dedicated training sessions in management and administration related to the field specialization. According to the guidelines from the Department of Polytechnic and Community College Education, this outlined scope ensures comprehensive exposure to industry tasks, system operations, and management practices during the industrial training sessions (JPPKK, 2022).

Exposure to the scope of tasks varies across different students depending on the respective organizations where they are attached to (Zulkifeli et al., 2022). This is because each company involved in industrial training differs in terms of the service offerings and the size of their respective businesses. Therefore, the selection of training place is important for students before undergoing industrial training to ensure maximum exposure to tasks related to their field of specialization, thus ensuring guaranteed employability after graduation (Zulkifeli et al., 2022). Clearly, the diversity of the scope of tasks received by students is also influenced by the location of industrial training where the level of exposure to a certain skill depends on the nature of the business (Mason et al., 2022).

Employability Skills in the Events Industry

The rapid growth and development of the events sector have increased the apparent demand for a qualified and efficient workforce (Lee et al., 2008). Following the COVID-19 outbreak, the events industry experienced a significant shift and transformation (Jaafar & Khan, 2022) and an extraordinary acceptance of innovation and adoption of technology (Yung et al., 2022), digital (Werner et al., 2022), soft skills, and entrepreneurship (Shariff & Abidin, 2022). It further led to the emergence of new business opportunities, including virtual and hybrid events, modern platforms for the production of video and other media, innovative events like parking lot concerts, and the involvement of various types of suppliers. This necessitates the adaptation of new skills, knowledge, and attitudes to face such scenario (Werner et al., 2022).

Past studies have reported the prominence of soft skills in the field of events, including communication skills, critical thinking, problem-solving, as well as teamwork and collaboration skills (Werner et al., 2022; Wang & Tsai, 2014). According to Werner et al. (2022), there are many important skills that should be acquired by graduates in the event management industry, such as planning, feasibility analysis, budgeting, communication, organization, and leadership. The authors further advocated that IT-related skills, technical expertise related to hybrid and online events, as well as risk and crisis management skills have become priorities among students.

An evaluation of event management programs by Barron and Knight (2017) found that the experience of holding a real event successfully helped students to understand the daily responsibilities, challenges, and opportunities associated with event management. This emphasizes the importance of experiential learning in developing key skills needed by future event staff (Barron & Knight, 2017). These skills include communication, problem-solving, leadership, computer, operational, health and safety, project management, event-specific assessment, people management, risk management, and licensing (Werner et al., 2022). This undoubtedly denotes that industry experience is key to event management education and to build a career in the events industry (Junek et al., 2009).

The employability skills required in a particular field are greatly influenced by the nature of the job itself. The events field requires its staff to work in a fast-paced environment with long working hours, including at night and on weekends (Chan, 2015). Aside from requiring physical strength to lift and move heavy equipment, those in the events industry have to work under pressure, necessitating emotional endurance and the ability to think well in solving potential problems that may arise during an event (Nizam & Kam, 2018). Chan (2015) found that event management is often exposed to high stress due to multiple tasks, mental fatigue, tight deadlines, and excessive work outside the office. The statement is acknowledged by Bermejo et al. (2017) who reported the relationship between health, stress, and fatigue among workers in the events sector. In light of the situation, recent studies have found that among the employability skills in the events sector that are increasingly becoming the main focus are the ability to deal with uncertainty and disruption, resilience, adaptability, agility, openness, and flexibility (Succi & Canovi, 2019; Werner et al., 2022).

Currently, Malaysia's business events sector holds significant economic weight and is expected to become an important driver of the country's GDP (Fokus Malaysia, 2023). The current projections show that by 2030, business events and conferences are set to generate an economic impact of approximately RM42.12 billion. Fokus Malaysia also stated that Malaysia's willingness to host consecutive international business events will attract approximately 5.9 million delegates over the next seven years. This surge is expected to

create approximately 25,833 job positions across the country and offer more job opportunities for graduates in the field of event management after graduation.

Responsibilities of Industrial Training Employers

The 2022 Malaysian Community College Industrial Training Guidelines have outlined several responsibilities that must be conducted by industrial training employers or supervisors when providing training to students. These responsibilities include guiding and interacting with students in their respective fields of expertise, offering guidance on compliance with health and safety regulations, preparing Industrial Training logbooks, monitoring attendance, and ensuring students' welfare throughout the industrial training. Additional responsibilities include fostering students' interest in training, explaining career prospects, implementing and completing student evaluations based on the evaluation items, submitting completed student evaluation documents to the respective community colleges within the specified timeframe, and reporting students' problems to the community college management.

The industry also plays a role in instilling self-confidence into students under training to sustain their positive attitudes towards their jobs. It includes the provision of incentives or stimulants in the form of advisory services, allowance payments, and appropriate facilities (JPPKK, 2022) that can create a sense of security and confidence towards the employers. Meanwhile, the government, through the 2022 Budget, has been urging the private sector to pay graduate apprentices aged 18 to 30 years who undergo industrial training an allowance of RM900 per month for a period of six months. Meanwhile, students who undergo practical training in public agencies are given a daily allowance of RM15 for a maximum period of three months (Idris, 2021). Such matter is also emphasized by the 2022 Malaysian Community College Industrial Training Guidelines (JPPKK, 2022). Previous research reported that many companies use industrial training as a platform to hire future employees (Yusof & Mohiddin, 2018). This denotes the benefits of industrial training as a cost-effective source of efficient help, highly motivated current employees, and opportunities to nurture future employees (Ahmad et al., 2018).

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design by utilizing a case study approach within the Events Operations Certificate (EOC) program. The participants were selected through purposive sampling involving two groups: EOC graduates and industrial training employers. According to Creswell (2012), purposive sampling is fitting for qualitative research as the chosen samples can provide the desired information for the researcher and explore the development and journey of an event within the research location. The study involved 11 EOC graduates from a total of 35 who completed their studies in 2020 and 2021. These participants were chosen based on their commitment to provide feedback. The aim of selecting EOC graduates was to explore their experiences during industrial training and its impact on their employability after graduation.

The study also involved three experienced employers who mentored EOC graduates during their industrial training. As the respondents were industry professionals, primarily members of various companies' management teams, consistent reminders were sent via email and phone calls. Initially, the researcher approached a total of 10 respondents, but only three confirmed their participation in the study. Their involvement aimed to explore their experiences in training EOC students during industrial sessions to ensure the effectiveness of this training in enhancing students' employability post-graduation.

The main instrument of a qualitative research is often the researcher him/herself (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Mokhtar & Jamil, 2021) who is responsible for conducting all data collection and analysis procedures until a product rich in description is produced (Merriam, 2009). This study employed the use of an interview protocol where the data was collected through semi-structured questions prepared in advance. The interview sessions were conducted face-to-face and online depending on the convenience and availability of the participants. The data was collected from February 10, 2022 until March 2, 2023. Each interview session lasted between 20 to 30 minutes. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with all graduates and two industrial training employers while one employer was interviewed online via a phone call. To facilitate meaningful contributions from participants, the researcher held a briefing regarding the research topic, objectives, and research questions. The main questions addressed during the interview are as follows:

1. How does industrial training contribute to enhancing the employability of EOC graduates post-graduation?
2. To what extent does industrial training impact their employment prospects?

All interview sessions were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interview guides were designed for both graduates and employers, respectively. It contained questions that were adjusted according to the context of the two groups of participants. The data analysis immediately commenced once the interview transcription process was completed. Thematic analysis was used to process and manually analyze the interview data by coding and identifying recurring themes.

An instrument's credibility depends on its reliability and validity. Hence, Meriam and Tisdell (2016) stress on the need for various strategies, such as audit trails, member checks, peer review, sustained engagement, continuous observation, and triangulation. Several strategies were implemented in this study. First, member check was done by returning the interview transcripts to the participants for validation, thus aligning the recorded content with the actual interviews. Second, the data collection process spanned across 12 months to ensure prolonged engagement. Third, multiple stakeholders were involved in data collection via triangulation. Lastly, the researcher actively participated in the study.

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of industrial training in enhancing the employability of Event Operation Certificate graduates post-graduation. This section presents the results and findings derived from the interviews with the EOC graduates and industrial training employers. The researcher approached 35 EOC graduates who graduated in 2020 and 2021 along with 10 industry experts experienced in training EOC students during industrial programs. However, only 14 respondents participated in the interview phase. Table 1 exhibits a summary of the respondents' profiles.

Table 1

Respondents' Profiles

Respondents	Year of graduated	Gender	Age (years)	Current Status
GRA1	2020	Female	23	Working
GRA2	2020	Male	23	Working
GRA3	2020	Female	23	Working
GRA4	2020	Female	23	Working
GRA5	2020	Male	23	Working
GRA6	2021	Male	22	Working
GRA7	2021	Male	22	Working
GRA8	2021	Female	22	Studying
GRA9	2021	Female	22	Studying
GRA10	2021	Female	22	Working
GRA11	2021	Female	22	Studying
EMP1		Female	40	Industrial Training Employer
EMP2		Male	36	Industrial Training Employer
EMP3		Female	46	Industrial Training Employer

Findings from the Graduates:

This study employed thematic analysis to uncover the essential themes shaping the findings and discussions, thus gathering perspectives from EOC graduates involved in industrial training. The approach aligned with the research questions tailored for EOC graduates, namely: (i) What are the primary tasks assigned to EOC graduates during their industrial training in event management companies? (ii) What are the new skills that you acquired during your industry training that differ from what you learned in college? and (iii) What challenges exist during the industrial training period? The following section presents a discussion of these themes along with excerpts taken from the graduates' responses.

Accounted tasks during industrial training

All EOC graduates who underwent industrial training in event management companies stated that most of the tasks given by employers were related to negotiations with various parties, such as customers, suppliers, government officials, journalists, non-governmental organizations, and facility or hall owners. The findings of this study showed that the duties accounted by employers to EOC graduates cover a wide array of aspects and they are not specific to one division or operational unit only. The following are two excerpts taken from the EOC graduates' responses:

"In addition to taking customer orders, there are also times when I accompany other staff to set up the podium, make decorations, help lift equipment such as tents, stages, speakers and more. I also had to set up the DJ Set, spotlight, PA system and lighting in the hall. After that, I also had to set for the VVIP dining area as well." (GRA1)

"During my industrial training, I had to handle a lot of technical aspects such as stages, tents, audio equipment, lighting, making videos, photography and many more. There is also that... I am asked to design, but not always. Once in a while I also have to contact the client

because the employer tells me to. If not by phone, I have to email the client to give information. I indeed have a lot of work to do, but more of it is technical.” (GRA2)

Meanwhile, one of the graduates stated her dissatisfaction with the tasks given by the employer because it steered away from the actual job in the events industry. However, she admitted that it was due to her mistake of failing to make the best judgment when choosing a company for industrial training:

“During my practical time, I didn't have much work related to events because the industrial training place told me to sit in a boutique and wait for customers like that... I have to get information and reservations like that.” (GRA3)

New skills acquired during industrial training

The graduates stated that technical and digital technology were among the new skills acquired from industrial training, which were under-applied while in college. They also admitted that many of the equipment used in the industry were different from what they found in college. Three graduates said that some of the equipment available in the industry was totally new to them:

“I didn't say that I didn't study in college, it's just that when I entered the industry, I found out that there are other types of equipment that are used to setup events, for example the lighting setup on the stage, the DJ equipment set, and many more, so I learn a lot of new things at industrial training place.” (GRA4)

Furthermore, the newly acquired skills are not limited to physical equipment but also involve digital technology skills that are increasingly popular among events industry players, such as virtual and hybrid event organizers. One respondent said:

“.. There are a lot of new skills on how to design using Adobe, make quotations for customers like that... sometimes I have to learn how to set up to create a hybrid event, which means it combines physical and virtual um.. I didn't know anything before this- what about the OBS software, streamyard all that.. there is a very sophisticated technology there um.. .. I see all kinds of software that they use.” (GRA5)

The graduates further revealed that media handling skills were a new experience because they had never been involved in events with press conferences. They stated that the guidelines and checklists for managing media were not much different from what they learned while studying; however, they never had the opportunity to implement it while in college. One respondent explained:

“When I was studying, the lecturer did teach on the need to prepare a press kit if there was an event that involved a press conference, but I never actually practiced it, so when I went to industrial training, I had to do all that because my employer asked me to be in charge of the media, so that's one It's a new thing to do all that.” (GRA6)

Challenges During Industrial Training

The main challenge faced by many EOC graduates during their industrial training is related to time. Undoubtedly, the nature of work in the field of events is bounded by time that demands all staff to spend most of their time at work even at odd hours. The uncertain and long working hours also jeopardize their time with family and limit the opportunity for other social activities. The respondents said:

"I think there are many challenges. Rest time has to be sacrificed, um.. time with family, for example, it's hard to meet and gather with everyone aa.. because I usually have to work on Sundays.." (GRA7)

"For me, the challenge is when um.. there is a lot of work to be done immediately and often come back late. All work has to be on time, because this event has a due date that needs to be followed.." (GRA8)

Many of the graduates also faced physical fatigue that they had never imagined before. This is because the experience of handling events as part of the academic requirement in college greatly differs from handling real-life events. According to them:

"Another challenge I think is physical, because my body is really tired, when the event is back to back, sometimes I don't come home for several days, so I have to spend the night at the event place.. I used to do events in college, but the challenge is different." (GRA9)

Apart from the challenge of time and fatigue in performing given tasks during industrial training, graduates also cannot escape from communication-related challenges. They realized that poor English proficiency is a major challenge in dealing with customers and other stakeholders in events. Nevertheless, such weakness does not mean that they were not given the opportunity by the employers to negotiate with related parties. Some graduates praised their employers who gave numerous guidance and encouragement for them to practice English in daily conversations.

"For me, it's a bit challenging, um.. to speak in English, wow.. I'm afraid, I'm worried every time I want to meet or call customers, suppliers because they mostly use English when speaking.." (GRA10)

The study also found that aside from physical strength, graduates must also be mentally prepared to deal with the pressure whilst undergoing industrial training. Undoubtedly, the actual working atmosphere in the events industry greatly differs from the training that they received at the community colleges. Some graduates consider it a new challenge, while some wish not to pursue a career in the field of events as a result of the difficult experiences that they went through during industrial training. They believed that the pressure of working in the field of events was beyond their expectation.

“To be honest.. when I went to industrial training, it was a bit of a culture shock, after industrial training, I accepted the job, but I only managed to survive for eight months because I was tired, and the salary was very low, aa.. and now I'm looking for another job at the clothing store around here.” (GRA11)

Findings from the Industrial Training Employers:

This study also employed thematic analysis to uncover the key themes shaping the findings and discussions based on perspectives from industrial training employers. The approach aligned with the research questions and objectives, namely: i) What are the specific tasks and responsibilities commonly assigned to EOC students during their industrial training?, (ii) What are the specific employability skills emphasized or prioritized within the events industry during industrial training programs?, and (iii) How does industrial training in the events industry contribute to the career prospects of trainees upon completion of their programs? The questions discussed earlier were looked into and the findings from this investigation are outlined in this section.

Job scope of event trainees

The findings showed that conducting negotiations is one of the main tasks assigned to students during industrial training. All three employers admitted that it was an important task emphasized from the students' admission until the end of training. The employers said:

“Starting with aa.. the basic things which are first communication with customers, how to possibly sell or promote an event.” (EMP1)

“.. we will train them in terms of aa.. event management means in terms of to deal with customers.” (EMP2)

One employer stated that communication skills that are applied in the events industry extend beyond the normal communication learned in class, such as public relations, and incorporate the communication of business or corporate events. According to her, despite receiving prior training, many students cannot speak well in both English as well as the Malay language. She explained:

“Many students now communicate using improper language that is not suitable for communication in the industry and even the office, so I give them early exposure on how to use the business event language.” (EMP3)

Another employer emphasized the need to introduce students to the concept of events. The employer believes that having a strong fundamental knowledge will allow students to better understand the events industry's way of work without steering away from the outlined procedures. She said:

“when students understand the concept of events, they will understand the procedures, all companies have SOP or aa.. procedures and policies that can be followed.” (EMP1)

Furthermore, employers will ensure that each student is given sufficient training in recognizing and operating technical equipment to reduce safety risks. They also provide opportunities for students to produce various designs according to their own creativity for promotional purposes and the customers’ needs.

“.. and then we put them in technical, where they will learn how to operate for um.. one equipment system means audio system, lighting system, camera system, audio visual, aa.. graphics and also design.” (EMP2)

One employer admitted of trusting the trained EOC students by assigning them the task of planning the budget for small-sized projects and preparing quotations for their clients. She stated:

“.. when we have made the budget, we will ask him to make a quotation aa.. but the minimum.” (EMP3)

However, this was not practiced by the other two employers where financial and management-related tasks were excluded for the students. She explained:

“Company’s administration and finance matters are not included in their duties, only things involving events.” (EMP1)

All three employers informed that in addition to training students, they are also responsible for monitoring and evaluating their progress either through written reports, meetings, or reviewing the student log books provided by the institution. They will then submit the students' progress report to the institution at the end of the training. Based on their respective duties and responsibilities, such needs not only focus on training, monitoring, and skilling them but also involve social responsibility in which the employers also pay attention to students’ welfare and progress during industrial training.

Employability Skills within the Events Industry

Soft or generic skills and skills related to digital and hybrid event staging are considered to have prominent importance in today’s events industry and in the future. According to the three employers, significant attention is given towards soft skills or attitudes because the nature of the job itself is challenging and involves a lot of social dealings with people. All three employers insisted that:

“For me, there are only two things that I really emphasize, the first is aptitude and the second is attitude..” (EMP1)

“.. in events sector, soft skills are number one, if soft skills are good, like knowing how to communicate, being able to make decisions rationally, so that's what's important..”(EMP2)

“Today's students are fast learners, creative, and IT literate, but some of them can't work under pressure... they can't handle stress and are quick to panic, while for us, that's the most important thing..” (EMP3)

Clearly, the emphasis on attitudes to guarantee employability in the events industry is something that most employers take seriously. Among the attitudes highlighted are punctuality, searching for information, diligence, and independence. Employers also do not rule out the possibility that students who strive to equip themselves with digital technology skills are more easily accepted in the events industry and it is an added value to them. One of the employers explained:

“Now we have moved a lot to virtual and hybrid events, so if students have skills in digital, um.. it's a bonus.. as a value added like that..”(EMP1)

Career Opportunities Fostered by Industrial Training

All employers responded positively regarding the career opportunities that await students after graduation. For them, all students under their training have the opportunity to be absorbed into their organizations either as permanent or part-time employees. However, they should consider certain aspects before making an offer. According to them:

“In this company, we really need people who are really interested because we don't need to do what we are interested in, but we need to be interested in what we are doing aa.. so in my opinion if they are interested they will fully commit to work and make efforts to master.” (EMP1)

In a relatively slow economic situation after the COVID-19 pandemic, students are advised to empower themselves with various employability skills so that brighter opportunities can be seized, particularly following the tight competition for employment. One employer said that students' qualifications are not solely based on their level of academic achievement but also their ability and attitude.

“There are also those who we trained from the beginning as regular crew, but because he is diligent, has a good attitude... and performs well, now he is here as a junior project coordinator.” (EMP2)

Another employer believed that if students are really interested in the event business, it is not impossible for them to become event entrepreneurs at a young age. According to him, they can start a small business with other friends. The employer stated:

“They can become entrepreneurs, maybe not for big events, but start with a wedding planner, start with a DJ first, then manage small events, maybe only two people, so they are not stressed always working under people.” (EMP3)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Industrial training is an important program to ensure the production of high-quality graduates. It can also help graduates to build the foundation of today's global market skills, such as communication and time management skills, high self-confidence, and better self-motivation (Karunaratne & Perera, 2019). The main importance of the industrial training program is to equip graduates with various skills to ensure employability in their respective fields, thus helping them to complete the employment requirements needed in the industry (Ahmad et al., 2018). This study has presented the findings on how industrial training contributes towards enhancing the employability of EOC graduates post-graduation. The experiences shared by graduates during their industrial training underscore the wide array of responsibilities they shouldered, involving negotiations with a diverse range of stakeholders. This exposure encompassed interactions with customers, liaising with suppliers, engaging with government entities, managing media relations, and coordinating venue logistics. However, discrepancies arose among these experiences with certain graduates expressing dissatisfaction when tasks strayed from roles central to event management. Although this issue is seen as marginal, it should not be taken lightly by all stakeholders. This is because graduates' self-confidence will be better built when they are equipped with various skills and experiences (Ahmad et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the research findings illustrate that industrial training not only enhances the acquisition of innovative technical competencies and digital skills that align with traditional academic education but also empowers graduates to explore cutting-edge equipment, nurture adaptability, and broaden their educational perspectives beyond prior limitations. These multifaceted skills, covering technical setup, digital design using software like Adobe, and coordination of hybrid events, are pivotal in preparing graduates for the modern demands of the industry. However, the study also underscores challenges faced by graduates during industrial training, particularly related to time management, physical fatigue, and communication barriers, many of which are attributed to proficiency in the English language. Meanwhile, employers' viewpoints illuminate essential aspects of events industry training, revealing pivotal skills, roles, and potential career paths. Trainees need proficiency in negotiation, communication, and technical skills along with a grasp of event dynamics. Employers prioritize soft skills, adaptability, and tech proficiency, and are open to hiring based on commitment and comprehensive skill sets. Additionally, entrepreneurship remains a viable option and success hinges on blending technical prowess, soft skills, and a proactive approach, thus offering multiple paths for graduates to excel in event management careers. Overall, most employers see industrial training as sparking interest, fostering positivity, and encouraging graduates to venture into event businesses.

Examining the perspectives of both EOC graduates and employers sheds light on the dynamic nature of industrial training. The identified strengths and weaknesses prompt collaborative strategies to enhance graduates' employability, subsequently recommending intensified collaboration programs and ongoing industry engagement. Future research should broaden the scope beyond EOC alumni in Malaysia to understand industrial training's impact on employability among event management graduates across various institutions, ultimately aiding in crafting effective collaboration strategies to tackle unemployment and job mismatch among event graduates.

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