

WORK ESTEEM AND RE-BRANDING OF TECHNICAL EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PARENTS AND TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

Several issues were raised from previous studies of technical and vocational education: low pay, no clear career path, unable to get admission to university, and finally TEVT were perceived to be for school dropouts and special needs students (the disabled). Although various efforts have been undertaken by several agencies to encourage TEVT but the public, students and parents still prefer academic education rather than vocational education. Why does this phenomenon still exist despite the publicity given by many agencies? Do parents, students, teachers and school counsellors, and other various related parties understand the system and benefits of skill training? The main purpose of this article is to explore work esteem and re-branding of TEVT from the perspective of parents and teachers. Qualitative study was conducted in two zones, namely, the north (Kedah) and central zone (Selangor) and two schools were chosen from each zone; one school in the urban setting and one from the rural setting. A total of 10 parents and 27 teachers were informants of the study using focus group discussions for data collection. Results showed that there was a positive response from parents and teachers about the work reputation potentials and benefits, re-branding of TEVT has improved acceptance by teachers and parents. Technical and vocational fields are no longer targeted for weak students; on the other hand this study has shown that parents believe that girls also can become successful mechanics. Parents and teachers are beginning to encourage students to pursue their field of interest, and no longer judge them based on test results per se to take up tertiary education. The path of TEVT can lead to university level as well to continue abroad. There are suggestions that opportunities should also be given to students studying Arabic or Islamic studies to pursue TEVT. Openness to TEVT by parents and teachers can improve the image, work esteem and the re-branding of its career path to fulfil the needs of skilled worker in an industrialized nation in 2020. Some implications of the study are submitted to policy makers to take proactive steps in generating and enhancing the promotion of technical and vocational training.

Keywords: Teachers, Parents, TEVT Apprentices, Re-branding, Work Esteem

1 INTRODUCTION

Work esteem and re-branding are two elements that can change the mindsets of parents, teachers and students improve the image of TEVT (TEVT) in contributing to the development of the national human capital. Enhancing the image and work pride of TEVT is in line with the country's industrial and human capital development requirements to produce more knowledgeable and skilful students to meet local and global job markets. Work esteem refers to the sense of enjoying work, perceiving work as internal rewards (intrinsic) and as a force of innovation and creativity to enhance personal development and career (Sabitha Marican, 2005). Re-branding of technical and vocational fields entails changes in image and work pride manifestation of the apprentices and industry workers, working environment, advanced facilities and equipment provided by industry and appropriate remuneration. All these factors may improve job satisfaction and image in technical and vocational fields.

However, the study on image and work esteem in TEVT conducted by Khadijah Alavi et al. (2010) found that parents and teachers have more negative image compared to positive image perception towards TEVT. A similar research in Singapore by Law Song Seng (2007) found that the community had a negative view and consider of TEVT "most unimpressive" in most developing countries. Parents in Singapore hope and wish their children further their education at university level. Such hopes and aspirations create an unrealistic expectation and add pressure to the school. Similarly in Hong Kong, academic knowledge is viewed better than TEVT where candidates with good academic qualifications from universities are given higher paid positions. There are three rooted prejudices to explain the stigma of this notion: TEVT is for the "dullards"; TEVT does not put on the right track to university level; and TEVT has no economic value (Rauner, 2006). In general, most researchers have found that graduates of academic lines are promised higher incomes than those on TEVT. TEVT is also seen as "second choice for those who do not have high aspirations" (Blaug, 1973 and Oketch, 2007). Besides, Ramlee (1999) found that graduates from TEVT background in Malaysia are interested in white collar jobs than blue collar jobs. Moreover, parents expect their children to have careers in white collar jobs than blue collar jobs. Nonetheless teachers and employers indicate that the community has a negative view of graduates from TEVT. A study by Psacharopoulos "to vocationalise or not to vocationalise?" found that developing countries tend to invest more in academic education than TEVT because the costs of operating technical and vocational courses are high, and are not commensurate with the financial returns (Psacharopoulos, 1987). A study in Colombia and Tanzania showed that technical and vocational courses do not prepare students for employment (Psacharopoulos and Loxley, 1985).

The negative perception on TEVT has seen remarkable changes with the increasing use of technology in daily work. Rapid progress and technological advancement has increased the demand for graduates of TEVT and knowledgeable and highly skilled labour force. TEVT has gone through many changes over the years, in comparison to the 60s where the TEVT faced serious negative image due to the limited skills or knowledge depicted in the curriculum (Md Yusof and Ramlee, 2009). On the other hand, Tilak (2002) found that TEVT provided economic solutions to developing countries. According to him, diversity in education can overcome the financial crisis in the provision for higher education and reduce the unemployment rate among college and high school students. In the 21st century, TEVT

has caught the attention of the international audience after a long history of debate over whether or not TEVT be funded by researchers and practitioners at international level (UNICEF-WBI, 2008). Hence with the increasing awareness among Malaysians about the importance of TEVT in national development of an advanced economy and the increasing recognition of international community, this paper discusses the work esteem and job pride with a career in TEVT as perceived by stakeholders, especially parents, teachers, career guidance teachers and apprentices. These stakeholders have provided some useful recommendations to re-brand TEVT in enhancing the image of careers in technical and vocational fields.

TEVT plays an important part in equipping youths with the skills required in the labour market, reducing unemployment, increasing incomes and reducing poverty (Oketch, 2007). According to A.R. Abdul Aziz et al. (2008) during the period of good economic growth, an apprentice with the relevant skills need not wait long to get a job, especially in the areas of electricians. Vocational graduates in Malaysia seem to have better marketability compared to academic graduates (Ramlee Mustapha and Greenan, 2002). According to Mohd Yusof and Ramlee Mustapha (2009) there is a tough competition for jobs between local graduates, overseas graduates and foreign workers. Although job vacancies are in direct proportional to the job offers, employers prefer knowledgeable and skilful workers (IPPTN, 2004).

However, image and work esteem have great impact indecision among making students who wish to pursue a vocational program. Parents and school counsellors are individuals who assist and influence students in making decision to further their education in vocational training. Although various efforts have been undertaken by several agencies to disseminate information on benefits and potentials about TEVT to the public, students and parents still prefer academic education to vocational education. Why is this phenomenon still persistent despite the publicity given by many agencies? Do parents, students, teachers and school counsellors, and various related parties understand the system of vocational education? Aren't there sufficient promotion arranged? Aren't there enough "success stories" of those doing TEVT brought to light by local media? Hence, it is important to make parents understand and be aware of the benefits and potential of TEVT in Malaysia. The proposed improvements to TEVT should be outlined by students, parents, teachers, school counsellors and apprentices.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The main purpose of this study was to identify the perceptions of parents and teachers towards work esteem and re-branding of TEVT undertaken by various stakeholders. Specifically, the study was undertaken to understand parents and teachers perceptions on work esteem of TEVT in fostering interest among its stakeholders.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used qualitative methods and purposive sampling techniques were employed to identify and select the sample. The sample consisted of nine parents, 25 teachers and three school counsellors who as stakeholders could directly gave their opinion on work esteem and the image in re-branding of TEVT. The study was conducted in two zones, namely, North (Kedah) and central (Selangor). For each zone there were two study areas; one in urban and the other in the rural area, for example, in Selangor the study was carried out in an urban school (Kajang) and at a rural school (Dengkil).

The study used qualitative method with focus group discussion (FGD) being chosen as the main data collection method among parents, teachers and career counsellors as well as regular teachers who are PTA (Parents Teachers Association) members. Four groups were interviewed, each FGD comprising of six to 10 people, who were chosen according to the criteria specified by the researchers. FGD interviews were conducted in the school meeting rooms. All respondents were asked to fill out a brief form on their demographic profiles including age, sex, education level and occupation. FGD discussions were recorded using a camcorder (IC recorder) and each discussion lasted approximately 2 hours and 30 minutes. Moderators had to be tactful in using verbal and non-verbal queries to get more information and details. FGD interviews were conducted using semi structured interview protocols asking parents, career guidance teachers, school counsellors and regular teachers their perceptions on the work esteem and image of re-branding of TEVT for the stakeholders. The four groups of FGD voluntarily gave circumspect feedback as per their experience and understanding.

Interviews were recorded, reported verbatim, compiled and interpreted immediately after the field study. Major themes were derived from the research questions. The next level was to find sub-theme linking the study findings to data collection, research questions, and data analysis. The data were organized in meaningful themes and categories to understand the meaning of a phenomenon. Data interpretation was carried out to reflect the perspective or view of the researchers and not probing the truth. Data were analyzed to find similarities and differences with the main theme of study from the four groups' (FGD) transcribed reports obtained from field studies. Through this process, a consensus among the researchers was attained while reporting and describing the results of the study. The explicit findings from written reports were combined with literature reviews, and presented by themes and sub themes in the major findings and discussions.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Respondents' Profile

The nine respondents from Sek. Men. Keb. UA in Kedah, who participated in the research were between 30 to 53 years old. The majority of respondents have a bachelor's degree. They were senior assistant teachers and regular teachers. They were teachers as well as parents to their children in the same school. On the other hand, there were six respondents from

Sek. Men. Keb. UB, Kedah and they were between 34 to 46 years old. Their education level varied from PMR, diploma to bachelor degree. They were regular teachers, administrative officers and officials representing the school Parent-Teacher Association (PTA).

There were 10 respondents from Sek. Men. Keb. CT, Kajang, Selangor who participated in the focus group discussion. Their ages ranged from 29 to 55 years old. Almost all the teachers in this school have bachelors or masters degrees. Most of the respondents were regular teachers except one who is the guidance and counselling teacher. Then again, in Sek. Men. Keb. DT, Selangor there were 12 teachers involved in the focus group discussion. Their ages ranged between 29 to 54 years and having SPM, bachelors and masters qualification. They hold various positions, i.e. graduate assistant service officers, regular teachers, life skill teachers, guidance and counselling teachers and administrative assistant. The samples were teachers and parents who have children in the schools chosen for the study.

The selection was intended to understand the perceptions of parents and teachers about the image of TEVT. Due to the difficulties in obtaining parental involvement because of busy work schedules, this study had selected teachers, laboratory assistants and other school staff whose children were in Form 4 at the schools to be involved in data collection.

Table 1: Respondents Profile

SEK. MEN. KEB. UA			
Respondent	Age	Education Level	Occupation
A	30	Bachelor Degree	Assistant Teacher
B	43	Bachelor Degree	Assistant Teacher
C	50	Bachelor Degree	Teacher
E	42	Bachelor Degree	Teacher
F	53	Bachelor Degree	Teacher
G	38	Bachelor Degree	Assistant Teacher
H	42	Bachelor Degree	Teacher
I	49	Bachelor Degree	Teacher
J	45	Bachelor Degree	Teacher
SEK. MEN. KEB. UB			
A	46	Bachelor Degree	Teacher
B	46	PMR	Teacher
C	34	PMR	Teacher
D	37	Bachelor Degree	Teacher
E	41	Bachelor Degree	Administrative Assistant
F	46	Diploma	Bank Officer
SEK. MEN. KEB. CT			
A	40	Bachelor Degree	Teacher
B	45	Bachelor Degree	Teacher
C	43	Masters	Guidance & Counselling Teacher
E	39	Bachelor Degree	Teacher
F	29	Bachelor Degree	Teacher
G	29	Bachelor Degree	Teacher
H	55	Bachelor Degree	Teacher
I	51	Bachelor Degree	Teacher
J	44	Bachelor Degree	Teacher
K	40	Masters	Teacher
SEK. MEN. KEB. DT			
A	44	Masters	Graduate Services Officer
B	54	Bachelor Degree	Teacher
C	53	SPM	Laboratory Assistant
E	43	SPM	Administrative Assistant
F	49	SPM	Administrative Assistant
G	42	Masters	Guidance & Counselling Teacher
H	54	Bachelor Degree	Teacher
I	45	Bachelor Degree	Teacher
J	52	Bachelor Degree	Teacher
K	39	Bachelor Degree	Teacher
L	38	Bachelor Degree	Life Skills Teacher
M	29	Masters	Guidance & Counselling Teacher

4.2 Perception of Parents and School PTA members on Work Esteem and Re-branding of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET).

Parents and guardians have made some recommendations on the work esteem and re-branding of TEVT through the school PTAs. These views were predominantly from the two schools in Kedah. There were not many suggestions from the schools in Selangor on improving the image and work esteem and re-branding of TEVT.

Parents and guardians were of the opinion that students were motivated to enrol in TEVT out of their own interests. If students were interested, parents were only to encourage them. Parents were the main driving force in motivating their children to take up technical and vocational fields. Parents should have the knowledge and the latest information on TEVT offered in the country. A parent gave the following comment:

It's good that the school inspires students according to their field of interest, well if we can support that. How we look at technical and vocational fields, does not matter, as the teacher said, even a chef can acquire fame.

(Wahab, UB)

However, a student's interest alone does not suffice. This interest must be supported by facilities and opportunities provided for TEVT. For example, according to parents and teachers one the school in Kedah: the facilities and opportunities for schools with vocational subjects is not adequate for students to undertake technical and vocational training. The comment by the parent is as follows:

But the opportunity at school is very limited. For example, there are not many vocational subjects (MPV), in schools. Here, it's only at Kepala Batas. Supposedly should be expanded, offered in schools and given adequate funding. Like this school, it has the capacity for technical and vocational, and engineering, however till now there's no engineering drawing. So, such opportunities are important.

(Ahmad, UB)

Ahmad shared the same view that parents were now very open to TEVT and they welcomed any opportunities in TEVT. It was important to give students the opportunity to pursue their interests. For example, Mr Ahmad noticed that job opportunities in hotel line were vast and widespread; the media should play a role in providing encouragement and information about the various technical and vocational fields. He said:

It's not a matter of whether the father likes it or not, old idea.... Now we want to see what opportunities are there and how our children can benefit from academic field first followed by technical fields, as I mentioned earlier, like the hotel line... Are these opportunities publicized? So, the media must play a role.

(Ahmad, UB)

This notion was supported by Mr. Shukri who claimed that careers in technical or vocational fields were still placed at lower level. He suggested that TEVT combined with the knowledge or skills in the field of entrepreneurship could enhance the image and esteem in technical and vocational careers in future. His comments were as follows:

...even in the same field a foreman can be turned to young entrepreneurs by just changing the term. Sometimes the term is able to change and give confidence to the community. For example, this driver, if he drives in sea he's called pilot, after all he's just driving. So, we should change the term foremen to entrepreneurs. These entrepreneurs are often awarded, so the image of being businessman can help upgrade self image. For parents those who run small businesses are called tauke, but a kuli (employee) is still called 'kuli' even though he gets high pay.

(Shukri, UB)

Technical and vocational schools had more male students than female students. There were some opinions expressed regarding to technical and vocational schools being male dominated. Parents had no objection if their daughters were to be mechanics. Here is the response from a parent who has all daughters:

Although I have no son, but if my daughter is interested to be a mechanic, I have to let her go. I cannot stop her.

(Wahab, UB)

I have a daughter. But I agree if she joins technical and vocational fields.

(Zaitun, UB)

Some parents view that children who excel academically can venture into the field of TEVT. Parents have no objections, according to Mariam:

If my child ... with 8 A's... I'm ok. I leave it to the child.

(Mariam, UB)

Mr Wahab suggested that the electronic and print media can play an important role in broadcasting TEVT to local communities. The researcher feels that Mr Wahab's view has a strong basis to enhance the work esteem in technical fields by providing a more positive exposure in the community. Campaigning through electronic and print media is an effective tool in disseminating information to people, especially in rural areas. He gave an example of the effectiveness of electronic and print media as follows:

I think the electronic media and the press is important because it's being watched often by kids. If there is no propagation, no awareness, there'll be only academic aspect. The media is important. I see some of the newspapers promote university. I think that's good.

(Wahab, UB)

According to Ustaz Khairul, we must return to the basis of government policy formation, particularly the national education policy in PMR which used to be SRP. If a student fails in the lower secondary level he will be channelled directly into technical and vocational education.

I think we should re-examine the government policies. Currently if a student fails PMR, he can still proceed to form 4. Previously, when a student fails SRP, he will be rerouted to technical and vocational education, he still has a future. For those who are lazy to study, giving a spanner may help, upon reaching home he becomes an auto foreman. Why waste time giving books to those who are not keen on reading them?

(Khairul, UA)

Researchers interpret that Ustaz Khairul expects a change in the education system based on the previous policies, which is, creating more vocational and technical schools. However, in 2010 the Ministry of Education has formulated policies to re-established vocational schools. Ustaz Khairul also recommends a shift in the paradigm of TEVT, not only for students with excellent academic backgrounds or female students, it should be offered to students of Islamic studies and Arabic language as well to further enhance the aspirations of work esteem and the re-branding of TEVT in our country. He gives the example of students learning Arabic having the following skills:

... I have a brother who studied in Arabic school, up to Form 4, his SRP was not that bad, and then my brother directed him to ILP in Ipoh and Alhamdulillah (praise to god) now he is working at HICOM with a salary above RM2000. He intends to pursue a diploma and then teach at the ILP. Opportunities are there for those who are from Arabic school...

(Khairul, UA)

Parents and the PTAs supported greatly the brand image and work esteem of TEVT, having suggestions from various aspects. Parents were concerned with women's involvement in this field as vocational studies have been dominated by men; students with academic excellence are encouraged to pursue TEVT to enhance its image. On the other hand, teachers have made recommendations on promoting TEVT by large-scale campaigns through print and electronic media, talks to the parents, campaigns and so on.

4.3 Perceptions of Teachers and School Counsellors towards Work Esteem and Re-branding of TEVT.

Teachers' encouragement is a supporting agent to improve work esteem and in re-branding the image of the TEVT. Thus, teacher Norasyikin suggested that students who were less

interested in academic line should take up vocational technical courses to pursue their tertiary education. For example, students could take up a diploma in food technology. She suggested the presence of successful personalities such as Chef Wan, would stimulate these students.

... Give a chance to students who are less interested in academic field as cited by the parents earlier ...I meant those who are not doing well in their academic study. It's not that you cannot achieve success, there is another path which is the path of technical and vocational education that can lead you to higher education, think about what interests you. For example, from my informal talk with students, some are interested to be chefs ... so I said go and do your diploma, these fields are available and you can become like Chef Wan.

(Norasyikin, UB)

Teacher Norasyikin proposed that students in TEVT should be exposed to entrepreneurship. Her view is similar to that of Mr Shukri, a parent, who claimed that TEVT would have a better image and work esteem if it was combined with entrepreneurship. Careers in TEVT future could help students to become managers or owners of the business they were interested in. This view could enhance the image and work esteem and re-branding of TEVT. Teacher Norasyikin made the following comments:

I have asked, you want to be a mechanic to what extent?... he said "I want to be the boss." From there we know they are ambitious... so we point out to them that technical and vocational education is not just to prepare them to become a skilled worker but also to become the boss.

(Norasyikin, UB)

Nonetheless, Teacher Amalind, a career counselling teacher, performs Holland test on students before they decide which field to join. Her opinion is as follows:

To me, if a bright student wishes to enrol in technical field, I will accept after going through the Holland test. We must know whether the student is realistic, investigative, artistic, social, or conventional. If he is realistic or investigative, I will encourage him. But, if I find he's not really keen on the technical field, or he is the enterprising person, social person I would advise him to take SPM first, academic first before making decision.

(Amalind, UB)

Teacher Amalind found that the media played a major role in promoting TEVT. She emphasizes the following:

..To me the media plays an important role.

(Amalind, UB)

Teacher Amalind's view was further supported by Mr. Wahab, a parent, who said that mass communication tools, such as electronic media and newspapers played a very important role to the secondary school students in particular. The same notion was put forward by Ms Faridah who suggested that the ads on TEVT should be broadcasted during prime time, that is, between 7pm to 9 pm. During this period student usually watched television with their families. Parents could get information about the range of courses offered in technical and vocational fields.

I think the electronic media and the press is important because kids always view them. If there is no such information, or notice, academia will be the only field. The media is important.

(Wahab, UB)

Hope TV ads can publicize the fact. That's much faster. Because kids are always watching TV...During news, or prime time.

(Faridah,DT)

Mr. Ahmad pointed out that Malaysian mass media had its own weakness for being commercialised rather than communal. According to the researcher, Mr. Ahmad hoped to increase the popularity of a career in TEVT through dramas and plays on national TV channels. This proposal may improve the image and esteem of working in the field of TEVT.

What I see, most media is business oriented. Media aims for profit rather than welfare of the community. If we look at the realities of television programmes, none is related to the technical & vocational education.

(Ahmad, UB)

Teacher Norizah shared the same view with Mr Ahmad, that the mass media should publicize important personality or characters that had been successful in the field of TEVT to enhance its image and work esteem.

I think we should change the name. The word vocational connotes second class; parents view that as a lower rank. We should bring to light through the mass media, or give examples of the successes...

(Norizah, UA)

On the other hand, Ms Norasyikin proposed to shift the paradigm of school counselling from students to the parents. To enhance the image and pride of work and re-branding exercise, the teachers and counsellors needed to talk about TEVT to parents and local communities in addition to the dissemination of information through print and electronic media such as newspapers, internet, television and radio.

...wish for upgrading, wish for image re-branding. Though Mrs. Amalind suggested the media should take the initial step, I think the transformation should begin from the school. Counsellors often give talks to students about careers, career opportunities and all of that, right... I think we should address the parents now. We invite them for the talks. If we deliver talks to the students, they will then pass on the information to their parents, who may not be convinced. So, it would be better to give the talk to parents directly, especially those with children in Form 4, so that they will have a better picture of technical and vocational education.

(Norasyikin, UB)

Teacher Norasyikin's suggestion was further supported by Mrs. Fatiah, asserting that technical and vocational education should be made known to students and their parents. Parents and students were worried about unemployment; if the courses they had taken were not marketable the student would lose out. Previous studies showed that the skills and talents tended to reduce unemployment in the country. Fatiah expressed her views as follows:

In order to attract them to technical field, we have to advertise it to parents and students. Due to the recent unemployment, many students came to see me and Mrs. Noriza to select the SPM course, they are worried, and they ask us if they choose the course will they be able to find work?

(Fatiah, UA)

Teacher Norasyikin recommended that career talks should be held to parents who have children in Form 4, to be aware of future careers in the field of TEVT. Furthermore, Ms Habibah suggested that successful personalities in the field of TEVT be publicized to enhance the image and work esteem and the re-branding of TEVT. She said the following:

We make them our idols. We often idolise the stars rather the scholars. The star seemed to be our role models. Malaysians adore artists, if the artists wear red flowers, they will search for red flower, just like Uji Rashid. So, artist becomes the idol. Take Zulkifli for instance, many people do not know him, but he was able to produce automotive products and much more. He was not from university, but IKM. In those days IKM was the last resort ... Students will be able to catch on better if they see the role model by themselves. Students cannot be convinced through narration; they understand better when it is coming from the person himself.

(Habibah, DT)

This view was further supported by Mrs. Norlia who suggested that parents should know more about careers in TEVT to enhance the image and work esteem and the re-branding of TEVT. Mrs. Norizah has a positive impression towards TEVT and believed that it could transform individuals' lives. She suggested that the introduction of TEVT should start from primary school level. For example, there's young doctor program, there should be young mechanic program as well, in the field of TEVT. Exposure should be given to parents, students and teachers to venture on a career in the field of TEVT.

Now we want them to understand that technical schools are capable of changing their lives, to their advantage. As we note in primary school, there is a young doctor program, so they perceive that only doctors are noble. Why not young mechanic program, there have's opportunity for the program, early exposure can be given to parents and children.

(Norizah, UA)

Information on TEVT should be disseminated through campaigns. According to Suhaimi, the campaign for TEVT should be conducted similar to the PLKN program which was appealing to parents and the community. Great promotion through radio, television, newspapers and various other government strategies had brought success to the training programs. Apart from promoting through the mass media campaign, Suhaimi recommended that students took up training based on the economy of the state they come from, for example Kedah is known for its paddy fields, so it would be beneficial for students to acquire skills related to agriculture. However, the career should be in large scale. There should be fair remuneration and utilization of sophisticated equipment to enhance the image and work esteem in the field of technical and vocational education, be it for farmers or fishermen. Suhaimi's views are as follows:

I see that PLKN had a successful campaign program. Previously, people were reluctant to join PLKN, but after many successful ads, parents were more receptive, and convinced. That's promotions! Its governments. Just like community colleges, they should serve the community. As such, since Kedah has paddy, there ought to be programmes to serve that purpose. Do what is appropriate, for fishermen, fishing skills. If one is in the fishermen communities, he too can earn high income.

(Suhaimi, UA)

Ms Norizah proposed schools to have well equipped laboratories, sophisticated apparatus, and a smaller class size with less than 25 students to enhance the image and esteem of TEVT in the school. These suggestions should improve the image at the school level because the learning approach was more hands-on, unlike the academic stream. Teacher Norizah pointed out that, students who were weak academically could be motivated and stimulated with proper equipment and laboratory facilities within technical and vocational education.

We have the MPV classes that are vocational classes. We provide a block and lab for just 25 students in the class; in addition to taking the normal subjects, they will take MPV subjects as well. Though they are from the backward class, the class is seen more glamorous than others because of the many facilities they have.

(Norizah, UA)

Ms Baidah suggests that TEVT be introduced at lower secondary level, particularly for students who lack interest in academics. Accordingly, Baidah and Norizah (UA), said the following:

Yea ... Technical and vocational subjects, Life Skills for Form 1, Form 2 and Form 3 to help kids who are weak in their study...

That's why I would like to suggest you start as early as Form 1. In fact should already start in Form 1, it would be easier then, they prefer hands on rather than attending classes...

According to Ms Norizah even as a school counsellor, she is not well-equipped with the relevant information on TEVT. The researchers observed that the four schools they visited proved teacher Norizah's point, where there were less dissemination of information on TEVT in our country. She added that the school career counsellors did not know much about the opportunities and careers in technical and vocational education.

We, counsellors get information, but not all-embracing, sometimes as teachers we are not sure ourselves.

(Norizah, UA)

Ms Baidah was only aware of the opportunities and high incomes of vocational education while at university. Her views are as follows:

I did not know at first, and then I realized that vocational education pays well. My relatives are earning 4-digit salary with only having a certificate. So, my parents definitely approve, when my siblings with good academic results want to enrol in that field. My younger sibling works with Proton.

(Baidah, UA)

Image, work esteem and re-branding of TEVT, given wide exposure and promotion, may have a place in the hearts of parents and school teachers. However, the various agencies should promote career and employment opportunities of TEVT to assure the future of

students and apprentices. Some parents and teachers had said that TEVT can change one's life is indeed a very positive response in enhancing personal and community development.

5 SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

From the parents' perception on work esteem and re-branding of TEVT, the researchers deduced that if students who joined TEVT managed to get employment immediately after their graduation, and were successful in their careers, it would increase parents' and students' confidence and was a clear evidence of the advantages of TEVT. Technical and vocational fields are no longer restricted to boys or weak students. The study showed that parents believed that girls were capable of becoming successful mechanics. Parents and teachers encouraged students to pursue their education based on their interest and not mainly on their exam results. There were also suggestions that students who studied Arabic or students of Islamic studies should be given the opportunity to take up TEVT. Being open is another positive image of TEVT, and the government should make good the proposals from parents to increase the work esteem and re-branding of TEVT to prepare the human capital needs of a developed nation in 2020.

The study also reported that many parents and teachers still had negative perceptions towards TEVT. However they had given many constructive suggestions which could be carried out by the relevant stakeholders, in order to improve the image and work esteem and re-branding of TEVT. Some of their proposals are given in Table 2.

Table 2: Parents and Teachers Operational Suggestions on TEVT

PARENTS	TEACHERS
Always motivate children to take up TEVT as an alternative career that has huge potential in the near future.	Motivation from teachers to students in primary and lower secondary schools on the initial exposure to skill courses.
Facilities and well equipped laboratory equipment.	Talks on potential career opportunities in technical and vocational to career counselling teachers.
Integrate vocational education with entrepreneurship.	Promotion via electronic media, print media, campaigns and so forth.
Promotion through print and electronic media.	
Shift of paradigm with enrolment of female students, academically excellent students, Islamic studies students or Arabic language students in TEVT.	Include entrepreneurship curriculum in TEVT. Emergence of successful personalities in the field of technical and vocational education.

The formulation of this qualitative study was in parallel with the quantitative findings which focused on the comparison between students and apprentices' perception on the image and esteem of working in TEVT. Findings of Hair Awang et al. (2011) suggested that school students and apprentices agreed TEVT could be pursued by all students; students from the religious stream schools, students weak in their studies, students who lacked interest in academics, as well as students who did not meet the entry requirement. Both groups of

students and apprentices disagreed that TEVT was meant for students with problems or had juvenile cases, students of low quality or for students who did not wish to pursue university education. (See Table 2 and Hair Awang et al., 2011).

Researchers' interpretation of this study had the same view as Hair Awang et al. (2011) and some parents in the PTA and teachers who indicated that the low image and esteem of working in the field of technical and vocational education was the public opinion of the last era. In the current era, parents and teachers expected the government to improve the image and esteem of work by re-branding careers in technical and vocational education. The re-branding that was expected by parents and teachers was to improve the image of apprentices' and industry workers' personal appearance, the working environment, advanced facilities and equipment available in schools and industry, and appropriate incentives. Most previous studies showed that the image and esteem of working in the field of technical and vocational education at present had a relevance to the future development of the country (Wancott, 2000; Nattavud Pimpa, 2007; Ahmad Esa, 2010; Hair Awang et.al, 2011). The findings were in line with the mission and vision of the government that is, heading towards knowledge-based economy which required a competent and highly skilled workforce. The society acknowledges that TEVT can change their living standards.

The research suggests that trainers should take proactive steps in generating and enhancing the promotion of TEVT. We suggest that the programme providers publish printed material in "road mapping" form or brochure to disseminate information about course offerings in TEVT by government agencies and private agencies. The teachers have suggested the production of materials in vernacular languages to increase enrolment among the Malay, Chinese and Indians communities in technical and vocational training. Education is a crucial component in the advancement of human resource in order to develop human capital for the country's New Economic Model (NEM).

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