



# Gender Analysis of Work Readiness among Vocational Students: A Case Study

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**Abstract:** There are number of skill levels mentioned in previous study that less emphasised on the major element required for semi-skilled workers. Therefore, this paper aimed to determine the level of skills readiness of Kluang vocational college's students that apparently will work as semi-skilled worker in industry. This study was used quantitative research method through survey using questionnaires as the instrument to get the data and information for answering the research questions. A sample of 155 (85 Male and 70 female) students of final year diploma students from various technology courses were selected based on purposive sampling method to complete the questionnaire survey given. A questionnaire that consists of six constructs was developed and the administered to obtain information. Data was collected and analysed descriptively using SPSS (Statistical Package for The Social Sciences). During data analysis, descriptive measurement was conducted and Independent T-Test test was used to analyse the differences between female and male student toward in their work readiness. Besides, the validity was made to ensure the questionnaire can be used. Content validity, face validity and construct validity were used in this study to make sure the instrument's validity. Moreover, the pilot study was carried out to obtain the reliability of the questionnaire. Based on the analysis that has been made, Alpha Cronbach value was 0.95 categorized as a high level. Findings showed that there was a significant difference between male and female students on work readiness. The level of readiness among students as promising as referring to the high level of attitude, thinking skills, leaderships, teamwork, problem solving and communication skills. Furthermore, the students need to acquire at least foundation skills in their courses in order to be success in any job along the career pathway, students need to acquire specific occupational skills that allow them to differentiate themselves in a competitive job market.

**Keywords:** Attitude, employability skill, readiness, semi-skilled workers, TVET

## 1. Introduction

Human capital development is a critical factor in generating and sustaining Malaysia's economic growth. Referring to the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 prepared by Ministry of Higher Education, the government is focusing on four key areas: improving the labour market efficiency to boost economic growth, transforming TVET to meet industrial demand, reinforce lifelong learning for skills upgrades and increase good quality of the education system for improving student outcomes and institutional excellence. Therefore, in order to achieve this goal, government need to focus on improving a high educational qualifications to support the development of knowledge and innovation, improvement of technical and professional skills and increment of productivity.

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In today's global economic competition, the success of a country depends largely on the knowledge, skills and competencies owned by the people. However, there are still some issues with unemployment in the area of marketability (Rahim, 2015). Results from the Department of Statistics, Malaysia (2016) has stated that the unemployment rate is 3.4 % of the total number of Malaysians in December 2015 and it has been in static mode until the beginning of 2016. In skills area, there is a mismatch between the production and demand which caused from the inability of our institutions to produce quality graduates (Tan, 2012). According to Parey (2016), vocational training institutions failed to provide the required skills that are needed by employers. A study conducted by Hurrell (2016) also found that most of technical graduates are still unemployed due to a lack of employability skills compared to technical skills. Rajadurai (2018) also stated most technical and vocational graduates were lack of soft skills competency required by employers. Supported by The Economic Planning Unit of the Prime Minister's Department which is in tracer studies by the Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia revealed that up to 25% of graduates remained unemployed after six months they graduated due to the lack of employability skills (Cheong, 2016; Finch, 2016). Therefore, it is important for graduates to require technical skills and employability skills in order for them to increase their chances to get jobs in industry (Bryson, 2018; Hanapi, 2018).

The desire to become a developed country is a dream for all nations in the world. However, that dream must be in line with the country's achievements and capabilities to fulfil all the necessary aspects of every developed country must have. Non-technical skills are skills that cannot be underestimated by skilled workers (Zolkifli, 2016). Most employers in Malaysia found that technical and vocational graduates acquire sufficient technical skills, but they are still less competent in terms of non-technical skills such as communication skills, critical thinking (Hanapi, 2018; Zolkifli, 2016) and problem solving (Cheong, 2016). In addition, Dasmani (2011) notes that other factors that lead to graduates' technical issues are lack of practical training and work experience. According to Abbasi (2018), employers from the electronics sector require employees with good communication skills as well as their personal skills.

The poor mastery of soft skills among the graduates will give an impact to employers in searching for productive and knowledgeable workers. Based on Adnan (2017) the high demand of soft skills by employers are teamwork ability, communication skills as well as the capability for critical thinking and problem solving skills. The demand suggests that those three elements of skills are the key criteria for job searchers in order to get employed. Supported by Hurst (2018) some students are still lacked of soft skills in term of problem solving and communication skills. Moreover, most graduates also less knowledgeable in communication skills, which plays an important component in management. Therefore, graduates need to ensure that they have the appropriate aspect of readiness to position themselves in the realm of work. These skills are fundamental in that they serve as a basis-the foundation-for supporting more advanced skill development.

## 2. Methodology

The research methodology is determined by the design of the study through a survey. This study was used quantitative research method through survey using questionnaires as the instrument to get the data and information for answering the research questions. The questionnaire was used as a research instrument to examine the readiness of students to work as semi-skilled workers. The survey method was selected as the basis of unbiased approach to decision making process. scholar like Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2017) also stated that the survey is comprehensive in nature, which may comment on the issue from various points of views, how easy handling can accumulate and collect data quickly, corresponding to the large sample size, the information obtained directly and able to make decisions collectively.

The population in this study was 155 respondents consisting of male and female students from the final year students in the electrical technology, electronic technology, automotive technology, construction technology, welding technology, industrial machining technology and air-conditioning technology courses at Kluang Vocational College. These students will meet industry demand after this and the industry needs holistic students who are nimble problem solvers. In the context of teaching and learning, trouble remembering facts and explaining fact of course is a pretty common problem that are faced by this students, especially for those who are weak academically (Hashim, 2017). The sample used was purposive sampling. This is because the purposive sampling is judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling to get meaningful data for this study. It is used to focus on the particular characteristic of a population, which is student's background.

Besides, in this study, the validity was made to ensure the questionnaire can be used. Content validity, face validity and construct validity were used in this study to make sure the instrument's validity. Moreover, the pilot study was carried out to obtain the reliability of the questionnaire. Based on the analysis that has been made, Alpha Cronbach value was 0.95 categorized as a high level.

### 2.1 Instrument of Study

The instrument used in this study was questionnaires. The questionnaire consists of 3 parts which are Part A, B and C. Part A is the respondent demographic information. The researcher used average mean from descriptive statistical analysis to analyse part A with respect to gender and semester of study. For Part B and C contain the components of respondents' readiness measurement. A total of six constructs was developed such as attitude, leadership, communication, teaching skills, teamwork and problem solving. Each of the construct consists of five items that need as the measurements. In

addition, this study, data obtained from the questionnaire were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 22.0. Level of readiness among respondents is measured based on the mean score interpretation as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1 - Mean score interpretation**

Mean Score Range	Interpretation
1.00 – 2.00	Low
2.01 – 3.00	Medium
3.01 – 4.00	High

## 2.2 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics in the form of averages and percentage distributions described the students were explored for Part A in the questionnaire. Part B and Part C, the descriptive statistics the mean and standard deviation table. Furthermore, independent T- test was used to analyse the hypothesis of the study, which is there was a significant difference between the gender and the level of readiness of the respondents to work as semi-skilled workers. In order to determine the relationship of level of readiness of work between male and female final year diploma students, Independent T-Test test to measure the hypotheses constructed. The Independent T-Test was used in this analysis aimed to compare the difference between two independent groups when the independent variable consists of two categorical, independent groups. For example, in this paper, the independent variable that meet this criterion include gender (two groups: male and female) and the readiness level (high, medium and low).

## 3. Results

Table 2 shows a total number and percentage of respondents according to gender in Kluang Vocational College.

**Table 2 - Number and percentage of respondents by gender**

Gender	Number	Percentage (%)
Male	85	55
Female	70	45
Total	155	100

Table 3 shows the number and percentage of respondents according to their semester of study. Total of 89 respondents (57%) are in their 8th semester and balance of 66 respondents (43%) are in their 7th semester.

**Table 3 - Number and percentage of respondents by semester of study**

Semester	Number	Percentage (%)
Semester 8	89	57
Semester 7	66	43
Total	155	100

### 3.1 Analysis of Attitude, Leadership, Communication, Thinking Skill, Teamwork and Problem-Solving skills

Level of work readiness as semi-skilled workers among final year diploma vocational college students was presented. These include attitude, leadership, communication and interpersonal, thinking skills, teamwork and problem-solving skills. Findings were shown in Table 4. Based on Table 4 above, level of readiness among final year diploma vocational college students to work as semi-skilled workers is high for attitude construct with a mean score ( $M = 3.41$ ,  $SD = 0.49$ ) compared to other construct of readiness. In this construct, majority of the respondents are reported to always working hard in carrying out daily tasks with mean score ( $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = 0.50$ ). Meanwhile, other items are also at high level. Whereas, item to measure respondent's optimistic in completing the work was found to have the lowest mean score ( $M = 3.32$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ) in the attitude construct.

Furthermore, in term of level of readiness among the students, the lowest mean score is Thinking Skills with mean score of ( $M = 3.16$ ,  $SD = 0.50$ ). In this construct, item with highest mean score is to be able to give solution or ideas to a problem with mean score ( $M = 3.30$ ,  $SD = 0.65$ ). While the lowest mean score of the items is to be able to produce a new and thoughtful idea ( $M = 3.00$ ,  $SD = 0.61$ ). Besides, leadership construct shows a high mean score ( $M = 3.26$ ,  $SD = 0.30$ ). In this construct, item with highest mean score is to be able to accept the opinion of the group members open heart with mean score ( $M = 3.41$ ,  $SD = 0.49$ ). While the lowest mean score of the items is to always give encouragement to classmates with mean score ( $M = 3.08$ ,  $SD = 0.33$ ).

**Table 4 - Level for attitude, leadership, communication, thinking skill, teamwork and problem solving**

Construct of Readiness	Score Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
Attitude	3.41	0.49	High
I am strive to do daily tasks	3.50	0.50	High
I am keen on improving technical skills	3.44	0.63	High
I am committed when given any assignment	3.39	0.59	High
I am able to finish the job well.	3.38	0.54	High
I am optimistic in completing the ultimate work	3.32	0.63	High
Leadership	3.26	0.30	High
I can accept the opinion of the group members open heartedly	3.41	0.49	High
I wisely distribute my group assignments fairly	3.36	0.52	High
I can give guidance to my friends	3.26	0.44	High
I often create a spirit of cooperation within the organization	3.17	0.54	High
I can give encouragement to my classmates	3.08	0.33	High
Communication	3.28	0.31	High
I can communicate well by oral	3.38	0.54	High
I can express convincing opinion to others	3.31	0.50	High
I am able to interact well regardless of age	3.30	0.50	High
I am confident in delivering information in front of the class	3.24	0.47	High
I can give clear instruction.	3.15	0.43	High
Thinking skills	3.16	0.50	High
I can respond by giving solution/ideas to problem	3.30	0.65	High
I literally not bored in thinking a creative idea in life	3.26	0.69	High
I am always looking for an alternative in improving work performance	3.16	0.59	High
I have the ability to improve assignment given	3.06	0.67	High
I am able to produce a new and thoughtful idea	3.00	0.61	Medium
Teamwork	3.30	0.49	High
I can exchange ideas among my friends	3.38	0.70	High
I regularly help friends who have difficulty completing assignments	3.29	0.60	High
I am able to ensure that teamwork goals are met	3.29	0.46	High
I am able to establish close cooperation among my fellow members	3.26	0.60	High
I am able to contribute my expertise to group work	3.26	0.67	High
Problem solving	3.32	0.51	High
I am committed to solving the problems that arise	3.45	0.65	High
I am able to find an alternative to problem solving	3.40	0.67	High
I am responsible for the actions that have been taken	3.35	0.65	High
I was able to weigh the validity of the information before making a decision	3.22	0.57	High
I am regularly confident in making any decisions.	3.17	0.59	High

On the other hand, the communication and Interpersonal Readiness construct shows a mean score ( $M = 3.28$ ,  $SD = 0.31$ ) which is high. Item that measure the ability to communicate well verbally is with the highest mean score ( $M = 3.38$ ,  $SD = 0.54$ ) in this construct. Meanwhile, the lowest item is the ability to give a clear direction with mean score ( $M = 3.15$ ,  $SD = 0.43$ ). Collaboration and Teamwork construct also at high level with mean score ( $M = 3.30$ ,  $SD = 0.49$ ). In this construct, item with highest mean score is as always exchanged ideas with fellow partners ( $M = 3.38$ ,  $SD = 0.70$ ). The lowest item is the ability to contribute expertise to group work with mean score ( $M = 3.26$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ ).

Moreover, Problem Solving shows a mean score ( $M = 3.32$ ,  $SD = 0.51$ ) which considered as high level of readiness. The highest mean score of the items is able to committed in solving the problems raised ( $M = 3.45$ ,  $SD = 0.65$ ). While the lowest mean score item is always confident in making any decisions ( $M = 3.17$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ )

### 3.2 Analysis of Knowledge, Emotional Intelligence and Experience

The other level of readiness among final year diploma vocational college students to work as semi-skilled workers are represented by three constructs in this study. These include knowledge, emotional intelligence and experience. Results of the data analysis are shown in Table 5.

Based on Table 5, it was found that the level of readiness among final year diploma vocational college students to work as semi-skilled workers is at the highest level in the aspect of Emotional Intelligence construct with a mean score of ( $M = 3.23$ ,  $SD = 0.39$ ) compare to other constructs which is knowledge level and experience construct. Correspondingly, item with the highest mean score in this construct is the ability to control the feelings of anger very

well with mean score ( $M = 3.30, SD = 0.65$ ) While the lowest item is "I'm a smart person in controlling the behaviour of the environment" with mean score ( $M = 3.15, SD = 0.42$ ).

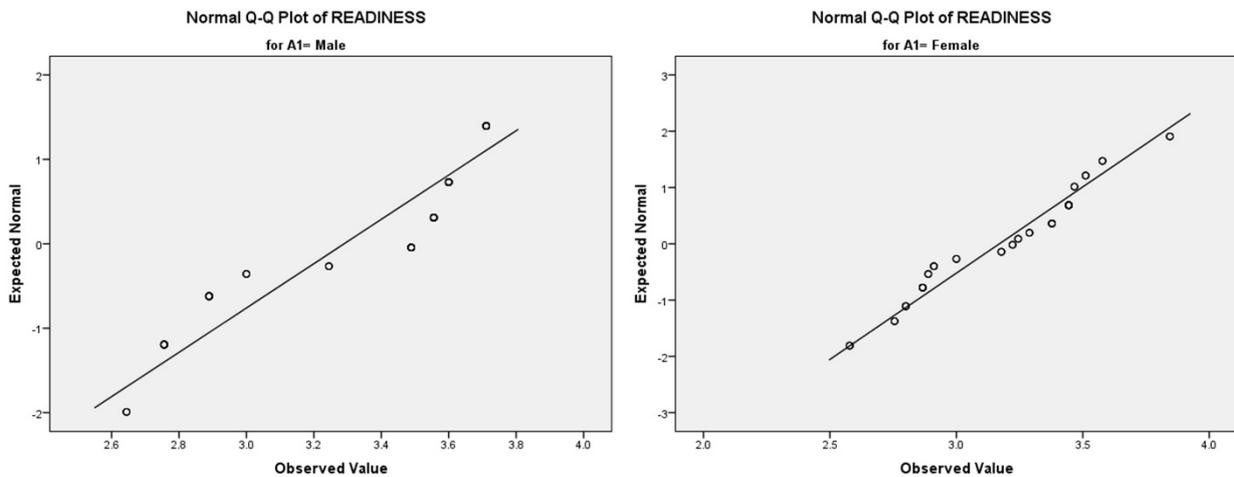
**Table 5 - Level of knowledge, emotional intelligence and experience**

Construct of Readiness	Score Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
Knowledge level	3.16	0.61	High
I am able to understand a new job perfectly.	3.25	0.57	High
I have basic knowledge in technical fields.	3.25	0.79	High
I am able to finish the task quickly.	3.19	0.76	High
I am able to handle my work with a short time.	3.13	0.75	High
I have extensive knowledge on practical skills.	3.00	0.62	Medium
Emotional intelligence	3.23	0.39	High
I am able to control the feelings of anger very well.	3.30	0.65	High
I am able to handle stress while working.	3.28	0.59	High
I am able to control emotions in doing the job.	3.22	0.51	High
I am a patient.	3.16	0.61	High
I'm a smart person in control of the behaviour of the environment.	3.15	0.42	High
Experience	3.03	0.49	High
I have worked experience before going to work.	3.37	0.74	High
I have participated in skill-related activities.	3.07	0.71	High
I used to work when I was free.	2.94	0.46	Medium
I used to work with practice.	2.88	0.65	Medium
I had previously participated in a workshop.	2.88	0.66	Medium

Construct for Overall Respondent Readiness with the lowest mean is *Experience* with mean score ( $M = 3.03, SD = 0.49$ ). In this construct, the highest mean score item is from the "I have worked experience before going into the field of work" ( $M = 3.37, SD = 0.74$ ). While the lowest item is from "I've been to the previous workshops" with mean score ( $M = 2.88, SD = 0.66$ ). Besides, for knowledge construct, the mean score is ( $M = 3.16, SD = 0.61$ ) which considered as high level with the highest mean score item is "I am able to understand a new job perfectly" ( $M = 3.25, SD = 0.57$ ). While the lowest mean score is from the item "I have extensive knowledge on practical skills" ( $M = 3.00, SD = 0.62$ ).

### 3.3 Readiness Level of Semi-skilled Workers According to Gender

Tests for assessing if data is normally distributed was conducted in conjunction with a Q-Q plot as shown in Figure 1 below. The Independent T-Test was suggested in this study aimed to check the either data is normally distributed or not. The scatter should lie as close to the line as possible with no obvious pattern coming away from the line for the data to be considered normally distributed.



**Figure 1 - QQ plot for readiness level of semi-skilled workers according to gender**

Table 6 shows the results of the Independent T- Test based on the level of readiness of female students and male in fulfilling the job market ( $t = 2.072, df = 153, p < 0.05$ ). Since the significant values are smaller than 0.05, the null

hypothesis is rejected and alternative hypotheses are accepted. These results indicate that male students were more ready to work in industry compared to female students based on level of their attitudes, leadership, communication and interpersonal elements, problem solving, level of knowledge and emotional intelligence. However, female students were more ready compared to male students in term of thinking, collaboration and teamwork and experience. The margin of the error in this finding was expressing the amount of the random sampling errors in the survey result, which is able to meet the possible true results. The margin of error is positive whenever the population is incomplete sampled, and the finding measure has varies with positive variance.

**Table 6 - Independent T-Test for level of readiness among gender**

Element	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	Independent T-Test	
				Significant Value	F
Readiness	Male	3.2897	0.38093	0.002	9.491
	Female	3.1702	0.32638		

#### 4. Discussion

Overall, the findings show that the level of readiness of respondents to work as semi-skilled workers is high. In addition, there are also differences in the level of work readiness between male and female in the study. The findings also show that construct of attitude possessed the highest mean values compare to other constructs in readiness. This situation shows that respondents have a proactive attitude in placing themselves in a challenging work environment. Findings from this study are aligned with results from previous researcher, Khandu (2014) claimed that the vocational students have shown a high level of readiness in the attitude aspect. Attitude has become a major element required by employers in selecting workers. Generally, individuals with a positive attitude towards a job are more likely to be hired.

In addition, it is found that the level of readiness of male and female students seems to be high especially in communication and interpersonal construct as well as leadership. Communication and leadership construct are crucial in ensuring that diploma vocational college students can perform well in industry and will be demanded by employers in the job market (Ismail, 2015). The findings of this study are also supported by Bharati (2015) stated that communication either in terms of face to face conversation or via modern equipment such as media social or internet is important as it can improve oneself to become a knowledgeable worker. Meanwhile, Jorre de St Jorre (2018) also mentioned that effective communication is important in increasing graduates employability. On the other hand, previous study also stated that leadership is one of the factors that influence communication skills (Boies, 2015). This is because a good leader is one who is able to communicate effectively.

Meanwhile, findings from this study also show that the level of readiness of respondents to work for the construct of thinking skills and problem solving is high. In order to be hired, graduates must have a good thinking skills and problem solving. This is supported by a study conducted by Brown (2015) stating that there is a significant relationship between thinking skills and problem solving in life. According to Hitchcock (2017) thinking skills is an activity that is required by someone in making wise judgments. Therefore, good thinking skills and taking proper considerations are important in solving any task.

In addition, other construct of readiness are the level of knowledge, emotional intelligence and experience. All of these constructs have a high mean score. However among of this constructs, emotional intelligence is the highest mean score followed by knowledge construct. While the lowest mean score is from experience construct. This finding is supported by Jackson (2017) stating that the experience of a student in a job plays an important role in providing them with confidence in their career in the future. The more experience gained, the higher the level of readiness of a student to work as a semi-skilled force (Daniels, 2014). Therefore, experience is seen as important in ensuring that a student is accepted by the employer to work.

This situation is supported by John Dewey's Theory, which states that one's life learning based on experience observations in their lives (Mok, 2012). The more experience they are, the deeper their level of knowledge of something which further increases the level of student's marketability. According to Brown (2015) without enough working experience, this will create complicated problems while performing their duties and responsibilities in any given field. Therefore, students need to equip themselves with sufficient knowledge before stepping into the workforce to produce a workforce that is not only technically proficient, but also intellectual (Dutta, 2015). Additionally, experience elements are also seen as important in handling workplace environment effectively. This is because engagement with career development activities has a significant contribution in improving student marketability (Wen, 2018).

Disclosure and work experience also play a role in helping students with their choice of careers (Barabasch, 2017). Many of the industry's problems include interdisciplinary and involve exciting challenges in unemployed areas. The industry needs people who thrive on such opportunities. They need to be able to work smoothly on teams and to communicate effectively about their work. Thus, teachers and students need to discuss, ask opinion on the subject matter, share opinions on the problems faced while learning the subject through examples and explanations, share input with friends and share their views on different chapters in order to help this student gain proper knowledge (Hashim, 2017).

It is our responsibility, especially to the Ministry of Education, the instructors, parents and students themselves to address the problem.

## 5. Conclusion

Overall, this study has achieved its objective in identifying the relationship between the level of readiness of female and male students in fulfilling the job market. The findings show that there is a gap between the male and female students in fulfilling the job market in which male students dominate the attitudes, leadership, communication and interpersonal elements, problem solving, knowledge and emotional intelligence levels. Meanwhile, the female seems to dominate the elements of thinking, collaboration and teamwork as well as experience. Therefore, each individual should equip him/herselves with the job market requirements to ensure his/her acceptance by the employers and can perform well in the industry. There are many factors that can contribute to the readiness skill, especially the workplace readiness skill which essential to ensure the student has the basic academic, critical thinking to maintain employment rate. It is easier for employees to select the best candidate to their organizations. Furthermore, the students or workers who possess the personal qualities such as leadership, communication, work ethic and good attitudes can be a good impression to the employee and others co-workers.

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