

IMAGE OF TECHNICAL EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PARENTS AND TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is to understand the perception of the image and pride of working in the technical and vocational fields from the perspective of parents and teachers in secondary schools. This study was conducted in two zones, namely North (Kedah) and central zone (Selangor). Two schools were chosen from each zone, one from the city (Kajang) and the other one from rural (Dengkil), which are sufficient to obtain the views of parents and teachers. Purposive sampling was selected for the focus group discussions in schools with the participation of PTA members, i.e., parents, teachers, career counselors teachers. The results showed that there were two main themes, namely, positive and negative image of technical education and vocational training among parents and teachers. However, the negative image remained resilient among parents and teachers, especially in deciding on career paths in technical and vocational fields. The researcher also identified several new issues, for example, wastage of manpower in the country, among them due to the weak prerequisite set in selecting students in technical and vocational education system; Students who do not meet the Malay Language (Bahasa Melayu) prerequisite are unable to continue studying skills at higher certificate level. Students of Islamic studies and Arabic Language, students with academic excellence and girls who are interested in technical education and vocational training should be considered as a highly skilled workforce in the future. Some implications of this study were presented as suggestion in formulating policies to improve the image of technical education and vocational training.

Keywords: *Image and esteem of work, Technical Education and Vocational, Parent, Teachers*

1. INTRODUCTION

Technical education and vocational training have been established for more than three decades in the education system in Malaysia. The establishment of technical schools and vocational training, and technical institutions throughout the country is the government's efforts to introduce technical education and vocational training for young Malaysians to produce skilled workers. Workforce planning for the country are not only dependent on professionals, but also on the work force to be equipped with the knowledge and technical skills and vocational training to enhance the competitiveness of Malaysian workers in the global labor market. To achieve a developed nation status by 2020, the government should be prepared in terms of skilled labor and capital. As a developing country, the government should design a knowledge-based economy that requires a workforce that is competent and highly skilled (Rahim Md.Sail, et al., 2007).

In line with the government's intention to establish Malaysia as an industrialized nation, human resource planning should take into account the ratio of one engineer for three technicians for 20 operators (1:3:20). Globalization has further boosted the adoption of new technology to workers with knowledge and high skills, indirectly changing the demand on the labor structure. The current ratio is for one engineer for 5 technicians for twelve operators (1:5:12), (Jailani Md Yunus, et al., 2006). Workforce development at all levels - operators, technicians, engineers are essential to the success of a knowledge-based economy. However, the government's intention to develop a highly skilled workforce with positive work values has not been in accordance with the planning of the Ministry of Education for secondary schools conducting vocational curriculum. Secondary schools which operate vocational training programs continue to have a negative image among parents and teachers in respect of the career paths in technical and vocational fields.

Not only in Malaysia but also in the United States (Wancott, 2000), technical and vocational education has a low image problems among parents and teachers. There are some myths and realities identified about technical education and vocational training in the United States. Most people think that vocational education is only for drop outs and special students (Stone, 1993). But the reality is 80% of students in secondary schools will take at least one vocational subject, and one out of eight students from the academic field will take more than one vocational subject (Wancott, 2000). The second myth which is, vocational graduates earn less than the academically - streamed students. According to Stone (1993) many studies have shown that vocational graduates are more likely to be employed and their salary to be higher than graduates of academic programs. The third myth is that more parents encourage their children to pursue a four year program or more of academic courses which would guarantee better future careers. On the contrary, academic graduates are not guaranteed a high income (Gray, 1997). Even welders, mechanics, electrical technicians, healthcare workers, and plumbers have higher demand in the near future (Brady, 1999:41). In early 1990s, the largest sector in the job market was the services sector, rather than the manufacturing sector (Berliner & Biddle, 1996:38) and this has directly or indirectly affected the demand for skilled workers in the field of vocational and technical.

According Wancott (2000), the mere mention of vocational education gives a negative image automatically to parents. On the other hand research in Missouri and Oklahoma area

showing that 91% of respondents / population agrees schools should give greater emphasis to the subject of skills relating to the current job market, such as ICT, mathematics and science. Positive attitudes towards vocational education as preparation in a challenging career, high income (salary) and path for continuing education and career with more job security portends a new trend in the labor market of the new millennium (Wancott, 2000).

At one time, people in Malaysia considered the image of Vocational Secondary School (VSS) as for the bad boys, second class, blue collar, and so on, but the reality is now otherwise since vocational schools are seen as a conduit to prepare students for careers in the future. This perception has changed and the number of vocational graduates finding employment upon completion of training and their salaries are comparable to graduates pursuing academic training and a similar increase in opportunities for graduates of the vocational career path is much more promising than for academic graduates (Kang and Bishop , 1986). Campbell et al. (1987) found that vocational graduates were 14.9% more likely to be in the labor force and were paid 9% more per month than academic graduates. This study showed that vocational education had a positive effect on earnings because vocational concentrators worked longer hours and also showed that, in order to reach these higher earnings, it was very important for the vocational graduate to enter a career related to the vocational education (Mane, 1999). On the other hand, majority of students in Malaysia are less interested in entering vocational schools because they still regard that the school houses students who drop out of purely academic programs per se. (Utusan Malaysia, 8 April 2010). While Ahmad Esa finds that peoples' perception placing the vocational stream students as second class or dropouts should no longer exist. This is because students in the vocational stream are chosen based on their talents and interests, not the results of the examination (Utusan Malaysia, 13 April 2010).

2 RESEARCH PROBLEMS

Image of technical education and vocational training have a significant impact on students who wish to pursue a vocational program. Parents and school counselors are individuals who facilitate and influence the students in making decisions about further education in technical and vocational fields. Although various efforts have been undertaken by the Ministry of Education and a number of the government-related agencies to disseminate information on technical education and vocational training to the public, the first choice of students and parents is still the academic education compared with vocational education. Why does this phenomenon still exist despite the agencies having carried out publicity? Do parents, teachers and school counselors, and various related parties understand the system of vocational education and the career opportunities it provide? There are also students who are not interested in the academic field, and more inclined to "*hands-on*" education, they should be directed to other areas such as vocational fields so that they remain the country's human capital, equally able to contribute to national development in the future. Hence, it is important to ensure that parents are aware and understand the nature of technical education and vocational training in Malaysia. Negative perception of vocational training should be explored from the stakeholder's interest. Stakeholders comprise parents, teachers and school counselors.

3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What is the image of technical education and vocational training from the perspective of parents, teachers and school counselors?
- To what extent perceptions of parents, teachers and school counselors enhances the esteem of working in technical and vocational fields.

4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main purpose of this study is to identify the perceptions of parents and teachers on the image and esteem of working in technical and vocational fields. In particular, this study attempts to understand:

- Perceptions of parents and teachers towards technical education and vocational training.
- Acceptance of parents and teachers on the esteem of working in technical and vocational fields.

5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Population and Sampling

This study used purposive sampling. The sample respondents are parents, teachers and school counselors as they can provide views and opinions directly on the image and esteem of working in technical and vocational fields.

5.2 Location of Study

The study was conducted in two zones, namely, North (Kedah) and central zone (Selangor). Specifically, the location of the research was conducted in urban and rural areas because it is one of the sample selection criteria for this study to ensure enough respondents' views and perceptions in the two locations, in Selangor the urban school in Kajang was chosen and the rural school was in Dengkil¹

5.3 Method and Data Collection Process

This study used qualitative methods using focus group discussion (FGD) as a method of data collection from among parents, students, teachers and career counselling as well as regular teachers (members of the association of parents and teachers - PTA). Four groups were interviewed, comprising 6 to 10 people in a group according to the FGD samples criteria

identified by the researchers. FGD interviews were conducted at the school meeting room using generic basis interview protocols based on research questions and objectives. For example the interview protocol was on the image of technical and vocational education from the perspective of parents, teachers, career counselors, income and so on. 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 IC recorder and each discussion lasted approximately 2 hours 30 minutes. Time is precious and should be used as best as possible to get information. FGD moderators should know how to manipulate the questions both verbally and non-verbally to get more information and specific details. FGD interviews were conducted using semi structure interview protocol that included questions about the perceptions of parents, teachers and career counselors, teachers, familiar with the image and esteem of working in technical education and vocational training. The four groups of FGD voluntarily gave circumspect feedback as per their experience and understanding.

5.4 Data Analysis

Interviews were recorded, reported verbatim, compiled and interpreted immediately after the field study. Major themes were derived from analysis of information and research questions. The next level is to find a sub-theme that links the research finding and the research questions through data analysis. Data were compiled by gathering them in the poles, themes and categories to understand the meaning of a phenomenon. Interpretation of data describes the perspective or views of the researchers about the related phenomenon and not to seek the truth. Data were analyzed to find similarities and differences on the research main theme from the four groups of FGD through transcribed reports obtained from related field studies. Through this process, the consent and opinion of the researchers were also obtained while reporting and describing the results of the study. Explicit written findings were combined with the literature review to highlight the main themes and sub-theme presented in the study findings and discussion.

6 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

6.1 Respondents' Profile

The results of this study indicate that in Sek. Men. Keb. UA, Kedah nine respondents between the ages of 30 to 53 years were involved. The majority of respondents have a bachelor level education. They consist of senior assistant teachers and ordinary teachers. Their involvement was not only as teachers but also as parents to their children in school. However, in Sek. Men. Keb. UB, Kedah only six respondents between the ages of 34 to 46 years were involved. The education level of respondents varied from PMR, Diploma and Bachelor's Degree. They were regular teachers, administrative officers and officials representing the school Teacher and Parents Association (PTA).

There were 10 respondents from Sek. Men. Keb. CT, Kajang, Selangor who participated in focus group discussions. Their age ranged from 29 to 55 years old. Almost all the teachers in this school have Bachelors or Masters degree. 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 focus group discussions. Their age ranged between 29 to 54 years with SPM, Bachelors and Masters qualification. They hold various positions, i.e. graduate assistant service officers, regular teachers, life skills teachers, guidance and counselling teachers and administrative assistant. Sample selection criteria are teachers and parents who have children in the school identified. This selection is intended to reflect the perceptions of parents and teachers about the image of technical education and vocational training. Given the difficulties in obtaining parental involvement because of busy work schedules, this study had selected respondents from teachers, laboratory assistants and administrative officers whose children were in Form 4 at the school involved in data collection.

Table 1: Respondents' Background

School	Respondents	Age	Education Level	Jobs
SEK. MEN. Keb. UA	A	30	Bachelor	Teacher Assistant
	B	43	Bachelor	Teacher Assistant
	C	50	Bachelor	Teachers
	E	42	Bachelor	Teachers
	F	53	Bachelor	Teachers
	G	38	Bachelor	Teacher Assistant
	H	42	Bachelor	Teachers
	I	49	Bachelor	Teachers
	J	45	Bachelor	Teachers
	SEK. MEN. Keb. UB	A	46	Bachelor
B		46	PMR	Teachers
C		34	PMR	Teachers
D		37	Bachelor	Teachers
E		41	Bachelor	Administrative Assistant
F		46	Diploma	Bank Officer
SEK. MEN. Keb. CT	A	40	Bachelor	Teachers
	B	45	Bachelor	Teachers
	C	43	Masters	Teacher Guidance & Counseling
	E	39	Bachelor	Teachers
	F	29	Bachelor	Teachers
	G	29	Bachelor	Teachers
	H	55	Bachelor	Teachers
	I	51	Bachelor	Teachers
	J	44	Bachelor	Teachers
	K	40	Masters	Teachers

	Respondents	Age	Education Level	Jobs
SEK. MEN. Keb. DT	A	44	Masters	Services Officer Pen. Graduate
	B	54	Bachelor	Teachers
	C	53	SPM	Laboratory Assistant
	E	43	SPM	Administrative Assistant
	F	49	SPM	Administrative Assistant
	G	42	Masters	Teacher Guidance & Counseling
	H	54	Bachelor	Teachers
	I	45	Bachelor	Teachers
	J	52	Bachelor	Teachers
	K	39	Bachelor	Teachers
	L	38	Bachelor	Life Skills Teacher
	M	29	Masters	Teacher Guidance & Counseling

Table 2: Main components of image perception among Parents and Teachers

Domain	Themes	Subtheme
Views of parents and teachers on technical education and vocational training	Positive image	<input type="checkbox"/> Motivation from teachers to students - success stories <input type="checkbox"/> The role and influence of parents - less exposure <input type="checkbox"/> Opportunities to further higher level education <input type="checkbox"/> Second chance - if did not excel in academic
	Negative image	<input type="checkbox"/> Type of work not glamorous / <i>low profile</i> . <input type="checkbox"/> Bad company in vocational schools / discipline problems. <input type="checkbox"/> Parents do not understand the careers future in vocational fields. <input type="checkbox"/> Educate parents who disregard careers in vocational field for their children. <input type="checkbox"/> There is no motivation to teachers and career counselors at the school. <input type="checkbox"/> Vocational education is associated to academically weak students and those who have disciplinary problems. <input type="checkbox"/> Parents and teachers emphasize more on maths and science than skills. <input type="checkbox"/> Minimal facilities available in the workshops, networking with industry / enterprise. <input type="checkbox"/> Skilled and experienced MPV teachers- still use the traditional pedagogy.

6.2 Positive Image Perception among School Teachers and Counsellors

Perceptions of vocational education have two images, namely, positive and negative images. Teachers and parents with positive image, view that the interest in vocational education depends on the capabilities and interests of the children. One respondent said that:

I do not mind if my child is interested in this field, as long as they are interested, it won't be a problem. If he can be a useful man to the nation and the country I am quite proud.

(Teacher Zarina, DT)

I do support this vocational field and we should uphold it. I agree. Nevertheless, we have to acknowledge the ability of our children as well.

(Madam Intan, DT)

Both teachers said that student with academic excellence can also enrol in vocational education. They view that the interest in a field of study is more important than just based on academic excellence. Also teachers should encourage students to be involved in vocational education, Habibah, DT: a teacher says,

... When vocational education is being mentioned, it's normally for those who are weak in academic. In terms of skills, they prefer the venture in vocational training to reading. It's really a good field. So even parents can decide now, if their child is not so academically inclined, this is a good option.

Teacher Habibah opines that teachers and parents should promote vocational education opportunities to students. The emphasis on interest in a particular field of study is important and not only on academic achievement. The current education system in school does not allow students to choose areas of study according to their interests and skills.

6.3 Positive Image Perceptions among Parents

Encik Suhaimi, PTA representative Sek.Men. Keb. UA, holding a positive perception on the image of technical education and vocational training said that the technical schools are divided into two one for better students and the other for weak students. For example the field of Engineering Science is designed for better students and Carpentering (IKM) for less intelligent students. Both schools are important for providing opportunities for students to pursue their own interests and according to their academic achievement. According to Norizah, most students choose technical education and vocational training after their PMR examination.

Students' interest in a particular field of study can provide an impact, as one of the UA School PTA representative in Kedah found that low academic achievers who were absorbed into vocational education performed successfully in *hands-on task*. He shared the experience of the successful students of vocational education as follows:

My Husband who is a teacher of repairing household domestic pipes in Butterworth had students who were weak academically, for they cannot even read. But in the SPM exam the following year, his parents were grateful that he could repair pipes which goes to highlight the benefits of a vocational training. So I believe in the vocational field.

(Roslinda, UA)

Positive image of vocational education caught the attention of some representatives of the PTA whose views as a guardian were that:

As a guardian, if we see our children excelling, automatically we will be inclined towards academic field otherwise technical education is a good option. I was chatting with a teacher from IKM, MARA and he said that if my son can be sent to IKM and be with the lesser motivated students there and he excels among them who dont perform, chances are he will have the opportunity to go to Japan, and eventually earn a higher salary.

(Khairul, UA)

Technical education and vocational training is a new field and has not received extensive exposure among parents and teachers. According to one respondent:

Technical education and vocational training may be new and may not be as impressive yet. Half of the technical schools and vocational training centres are more specific that is really focused in terms of career. Ordinary schools may not reach that level because they do not have specialist teachers so I think the teacher handling this must be an expert in that field of work, and then the technical or academically inclined children can concentrate better.

(Wahab, UB)

Many parents and teachers have a low opinion of vocational education, however students who are interested in and excel in the field of technical education have the opportunity to further their education overseas to countries such as Japan and earn a good income later. According to Fatiah:

For me, exposing the parents is important. 2or3 years ago we went to hear a briefing by the director of MARA himself on this matter. When the director spoke about the opportunities to

students in IKM, he said if they knew about the available chances they surely would take it but sadly, they are not aware of it. Only the mediocre students, as usual, registered. Students from the IKM have become businessman and such and she said even as a director of MARA she does not drive a Mercedes Benz although she is now approaching pensionable age. She said if any dignitaries come, she would call her students to lent their Mercedes.

Researchers could interpret the views of Fatiah as relevant where there is no serious and comprehensive exposure to the "success stories" of stakeholders to improve the image of technical education and vocational training in job opportunities and future career of the students. Lack of disclosure about the future career prospects of students in the field of technical education and vocational training will have a negative impact on the perception of parents and teachers.

6.4 Negative Image Perception among School Teachers and Counsellors

Overall teachers and parents still have negative image of technical education and vocational training. The research question posed was whether good students are encouraged by teachers and parents to pursue further education in technical and vocational training? Teachers and school counselors too have a negative perception towards the career achievement in the field of technical education and vocational training. According to one of the teachers and PTA representatives:

It is true that the influence of parents is strong, and although I am comfortable with my status now, I do want my child to have a better future than me. To me, an academic qualification is more important and that must come first, only then should they choose their preferred course. ...

(Teacher Norlia, UB)

In addition, another teacher said that parents do not understand and prevent the students from pursuing the field of technical education and vocational training. He stressed that parents have a negative perception of practical or *hands-on training* in the field of agricultural science, as follows:

It's true. They feel that agricultural science only produce farmers. They have a narrow view on agriculture. Actually agriculture farming is a broad area. So, the guardians do not know. Let's say the child is in agricultural science, they would say "ish, are you going to be a farmer or a gardener?" Not only agricultural science, technical and vocational education are also viewed as such. They feel that if the child scores 4 A's or 5

A's, most parents would not allow their children to enrol in technical stream.

(Madame Amalind, UB)

A teacher from a school in Selangor has similar view to the teacher from Kedah who commented that the community view technical education and vocational training as inferior. Parents tend to give emphasis to mathematics and science subjects as compared to the living skills subjects, stated as follows:

The public views vocational subjects rather poorly. This alienates the teachers teaching the subject too. We feel neglected. Mathematics and science subjects take precedence and we have no choice but to teach the subject since it is being offered in schools. In all honesty, I don't feel excited about teaching that subject.

(Madame Zarina, DT)

Despite various efforts in creating awareness and exposure especially for the Malay and Indian students in Sek.Men. Keb. DT Selangor to get into the field of technical education and vocational training, the negative perception of the parents seems to have a significant impact on students. One teacher lamented that their efforts are not well received by parents in improving the image of technical education and vocational training.

DT school teachers were very disappointed with one parent who prevented his child from doing technical education and vocational training. For all that, the father of the student himself was a former student of technical education and vocational training. The teacher described the situation as follows:

I met and spoke myself to the parents of a student. That student has serious discipline problem. So, for the benefit of the student we advised him to send his child to Giat Mara after Form 3, but he refused citing he has transport problem and the non normal school hours as not being accommodating. We did tell him that his son is more interested in the vocational training but to no avail.

(Madame Hazyani, DT)

The researcher can interpret the father's of view as not encouraging their children to study at Giat Mara and preferring his children to take the SPM because of the shuttle bus service from school to home is easier than to send their children to vocational training centre. Studies in the ordinary school are easier, structured in terms of time, finance and is convenient to parents. Other deterrent faced by parents is the adjustments students have to go through in public training institutions or in industry are described as follows:

Later after the school break, there is this training centre in Klang, which will call students in the last four of the form classes to the skills centre and, they then will give them exposure

to vocational skills. First the Indian students and then the Malay students were given the talk. This exposure was for the benefit of students who are not interested in academic studies and found to be rather weak and disruptive in class. These centres do make this effort every year.

(Madame Habibah, DT)

According to a counsellor from Sek Men. Keb. DT, he is not happy with parents who do not give students the opportunity to enter the field of technical education and vocational training. He felt disappointed with the students and parents who were not obliging when the school had sent 15 academically weak students to the MLVK Banting, Klang, Selangor to follow vocational training. The students were back in school in a week not wanting to pursue further vocational training. The main factors identified by teachers were inability to adapt to the environment, teachers and new friends. Here are some reasons why students withdrew from the technical education and vocational training:

One of reasons being he had difficulty adapting to the environment, new teachers and friends. These students have been with their classmates since remove class days. Hence the separation displaced them and made adjustments frustrating. But in terms of finance there was no problem. Everything was provided. But, no, these students came back to take the SPM examination at their school. He knows he will fail his SPM but that does not bother him. He is used to failing grades. His rate of truancy and absentees from school is also high only coming to sit for the SPM examination after a year having registering on-line. There are three candidates like that. They were away for a year; he was on so-called leave coming only for the exam.

(Madame Habibah, DT)

If they make it through the SPM exam, fine. If after form 3, when the child is not in class, he is absent from the school.

(Madame Hazyani, DT)

Some students are absent to school due to financial problems in families where children are forced to find their own income to support their daily living, school expenses and so on. According to Madame Zaiton, the behaviors of those students are as follows:

Most of our boys in Dengkil work. They are used to having money. When they attend a course, they get only a little money. They rather work as they are paid more mostly in motor shops and food outlets. So why bother going for courses. They would wait for the school bell to ring and within seconds after school they sprint off to work. They have to report to work at 2pm, if they are late they will get a pay cut or the boss may be angry.

He simply told us that work is more important. School tuition classes after school is not well received.

Furthermore, the income they earn is relatively good compared with those attending a course or technical education and vocational training. According to Cikgu Zarina (DT) students who are working their income is RM 500.00 per month. If they are in the evening school, students will work in the morning, that is, from 8 am to 12 noon. On the other hand, and teachers also are not sure and are not exposed to the path of technical education and vocational training. One of his views as follows:

... Now we want to know in order to be in the civil engineering field how many "A's" do they need to have . If the students know the exact results to have, probably they set a goal. Right now it is unclear. Now mistakenly, the student enters the science class. The teachers too want to know what subjects the students need to have for the vocational school training so that the students can be better informed. Then he can make decision as to which specific field he wants to enter for instance air conditioning. In that way no one would be frustrated.

(Teacher Zaiton, DT)

School teachers are not so sure of the qualification in the field of technical education and vocational training. Miss Zaiton emphasized that no clear guidelines were given as to why the technical school in Sepang and the one in Cheras have different criteria for students' intake. She also referred to the "red tapes" that make it difficult for students to enrol in a technical school. From the perception of the parents the discipline of students in technical and vocational education is low compared to other excellent schools. One of the teachers gave their views on the conduct of indiscipline of the students of technical schools as follows:

... those who go to technical school return to school. Half way through the technical school, they quit. We asked them the reasons and they said discipline problems. He has been suspended although prior to going there, he was a disciplined boy and performed well academically. Half way through the technical school and ends up smoking. Why? That worries everyone because in terms of discipline, he is not restricted...

I was invigilating at a technical school once. I was fascinated with the beautiful buildings, facilities, electricity workshop and felt that it was enjoyable to study here. But the students still light fireworks after the last examination. I also see broken benches along the corridors. I couldn't believe that the technical students resort to such vandalism. We have high expectations of them. Their teachers claim that vandalism is everywhere. There are some with long hair during exams.

(Madame Habibah, DT)

At CT School of Selangor it was found that the intake of students in vocational subjects are weak and so indirectly the percentage and subject grades during examination would also be low. But when the vocational curriculum is transferred to ordinary schools, the students achievements were not so low.

When we take weak students surely the image is also affected. Now the vocational syllabus is incorporated into the main stream schooling. It is also set for students who are weak academically, because the ministry wants the academically weak students to have learnt something worthwhile in school than not to have learnt anything at all. This was started in 2004 whereby the vocational schools were converted en-bloc to technical schools. It was assumed that vocational syllabus is for the academically weak students in school, such being the case how can one then raise the perception of such a class to be positive?

...

(Ms Fei, CT)

According to Teacher Fei again, having changed its name to MPED (Servicing Domestic Electrical Appliances), the image of vocational education has yet to be improved, from the current intake of weak students and those who may not be able to cope with the mainstream education. Despite the name change to MPED, vocational education is still viewed poorly. Changing the name of the subject, a place of learning from vocational school and now to ordinary schools is not enough to change the mindset of technical education and vocational training. One of the teachers faced a few problems in ordinary schools to meet the vocational curriculum, teaching and learning as follows:

I feel our country's education system, when we first had the vocational school for form 3 drop-outs, so to speak was a good move. When they made the change of merging the vocational study into the ordinary school there was not enough facilities. That was the problem, when they asked us to open one more class they did not supply the school in terms of laboratory facilities, budget to operate the extras, no extra building, no room, no workshop. All they said was offer the subjects' period with no provisions given nothing. So open a class and no studying, it is so senseless. MPED should provide a workshop, facilities, provisions, and special teachers. So if we want to create more schools, it is possible. But the ministry must simultaneously provide the necessary provisions.

(Miss Mumtaz, CT)

The researcher found that Sek. Men. Keb. UB has a beautiful graphics laboratory, but do not have students and teachers. However, in Sek. Men. Keb. CT there is many levels of vocational students, but they do not have adequate equipment. The authorities responsible need to look at things like this so that it will all be well distributed.

The difference between ethnic Chinese and Malays can be described as follows:

Unlike the Chinese, while waiting for test results, if they want to be a mechanic they would go to find a job as a mechanics likewise if they want to do business and if their parents own a grocery shop they would help their parents....these Chinese students are different, they dont waste their time unlike the Malay boys who like to waste their time...

(Mr Wahab, UB)

... Experience with some of the Chinese parents when asked said that Chinese students who are weak academically do not need to enter into technical and vocational training schools. They would rather bring the child to the motor workshop, owned by a Chinese, where they can get the skills in 3-4 years after which he is able to repair vehicles or air-conditioner. These boys are there as an apprentice until he is good, then he can start his own shop. These are the views of the Chinese parents. With the Malay students, it is a bit difficult for them to be an apprentice. Mostly they work from 3 pm to 8 pm.

(Suhaimi, UA)

Various problems caused parents and teachers to have a negative perception or image of technical education and vocational training. Several suggestions have been aired by the parents and teachers to improve the image of technical education and vocational training. The Department of Skill Development (JPK), Ministry of Human Resources has conducted a number of "road show" to the schools to expose students on how to follow a vocational route for entry to university. But the negative perception and image are still prevalent in the mindset of parents and some teachers on the feasibility of the students' future career in technical education and vocational training, it is deeply entrenched and difficult to change..

JPK officials have given talks to students on how to enter the university with a vocational background. Now students have a choice. Our problem is that students cannot accept changes. Students know if they are in the technical field, they can opt for a technical degree. In terms of vocational skills, the skills are considered below par.

(Mr Endon, CT)

As a parent, I think most parents do not know that there is a job market for vocational graduates. For example, this particular student does carpentry, so what is the future for him here? If in Australia, he really can make something for himself and earn a living from it. I know of people who have returned from Australia. They said that from learning the living skills in schools in Australia for instance they are taught to make shoes, he really makes shoes. He then can open a shoe store. But in our

country it is not like that. The parents' dont understand. They think vocational studies are for weak student and it is neither beneficial nor profitable. And what is worst is that there is no job market unless entrepreneurship subject is added. Then there is hope and an opportunity to get a job. Maybe he can craft souvenirs too. So he will not stop there. Otherwise the student would be wondering what he is going to end up doing. All these are due to a lack of exposure.

(Miss Hajarah, CT)

Various problems are faced by ordinary schools when the vocational school curriculum was transferred to them. Among the problems faced were the students who were not proficient in the Malay language comprising Malay, Chinese and Indian students from the remove classes. Malay students are said to be less interested in studying and their lazy attitude made them weak in subjects such as Bahasa Melayu. The Chinese and Indian students were proficient to write and read in their native language, but were very weak in Bahasa Melayu. They find it difficult to follow the school lessons in Bahasa Melayu due to their shortcoming in the language. Their intention to further studies at community colleges, Industrial Training Institute (ILP) or GiatMARA is dampen, since they don't pass the Bahasa Melayu paper. Teachers gave some feedback on the changes or steps to be taken to match students' capability to their skills, not by judging them on language skills alone. Some teachers are concerned about students from Chinese and Tamil schools with poor result in the Malay Language, which is a prerequisite to enter community colleges, Giat Mara, ILP, and so on. In fact, some Malay students are also poor in Bahasa Melayu subject and therefore cannot continue their studies after high school. Some teachers feel dismal as the lack of proficiency in the Bahasa Melayu language are preventing students from going into the field of technical education and vocational training.

Secondary school students in CT are from Tamil and Chinese schools. I have no idea what they have studied in the primary and secondary school because they still cannot read and write in Bahasa Melayu. On top of that, at present, after form 3, whether they pass or not, these students are allowed into forms 4 and 5. That is alright but to get an SPM certificate he still must pass the Bahasa Melayu paper. Even I have to have a credit in the Malay Language. Every student must pass the Bahasa Melayu paper. I am the Bahasa Melayu teacher. We don't simply put students in the weak class. Because if he were to be in my best class he cannot cope. So these students are more suited for skills training.

(Madame Nuraini, CT)

My students if in terms of MPED they can manage. If academic yes. If they want to further to any community college, they don't qualify to enter because most of them will fail their Bahasa Melayu paper. Of the 29 students, I feel only one would pass, although majority of them are Malay students. So he cannot go anywhere.

Bahasa Melayu is important, be it ILP or Community Colleges. After SPM they are stuck in a rut.

(Miss Halimah, CT)

ILP requires credit. Unlike community college, failures cannot apply for ILP. Just like the requirements to enter the IPT. Which means here, ILP is for people who can learn and are interested in the hands on experience.

(Mr. Endon, CT)

If the students choose to go to technical secondary school, students will learn technical skills but if they choose to go to vocational schools they only learn vocational skills. These are the very weak students who cannot read and write. They are better off acquiring 100% skills training. For example the community college, is especially for the weak students who do not know anything, likewise for GiatMARA. But there are also limitations - it is only for Malay students. Indians and Chinese cannot apply. So there are limitations. Students who are interested to study face problems. For example, the community college has 80 thousand applying but only 8 thousand will be offered places.

(Madame Mumtaz, CT)

An opportunity for further education in vocational or technical field is still limited. Although many students are interested in the field of skills training, lack of exposure of technical education and vocational training and the limited opportunities for further education and career to guarantee a bright future for students, have negative implications among parents and teachers to improve the image of technical education and vocational training.

6.5 Negative Image Perception among Parents

Parents have a negative image of technical education and vocational training as they associate the field with lower ability learners and a career path to "low profile" job. Some respondents gave the following response:

The children, if we ask them to go anywhere they will go, but sometimes teachers and parents themselves do not want their children to go there because it appears third class. I wouldn't want my son who got 9A's to go to vocational, it seems inappropriate. All the teachers and counsellors will guide our children to academic or technical field. We tend to belittle them if they attend vocational schools.

(Suhaimi, UA)

According to Shukri, as the PTA representative for Sek. Men. Keb. UB he finds that the views of parents and teachers is influenced by the Ministry of Education's emphasis on academic at one time. He is of the following opinion:

Thus, a negative perception runs through the minds of parents whose children want to enroll into technical school. Actually being in the technical sector is good for it is this that fuels energy to the industry, focusing on skilled labour. Academics only focus on thinking skills, but there is no application. So we must enjoin the energy and ideas. The vocational nature emphasises on work schedule and work skills. If you do not plan to combine these two sets of skills, the students will not be employable. That is my opinion. So, the two should first combine at the beginning itself when such negative perceptions are aired.

(Shukri)

Shukri's views towards the negative image is more focused on the types of jobs entered into by an apprentice who has the "low profile" image, such as a low grade mechanics, further fuelling negative feedback on technical education and vocational training. Most respondents gave a negative response that the field of vocational careers will provide poor returns compared with the academic routes.

Previously, just mention vocational and chances are parents will not agree to send their kids there. The negative feedback is that they can only be mechanics and do labour work. Nowadays student from vocational can be technicians, if they take courses at ILP. For example, when I was in schools, industrial areas were not so rampant and so the new ILP only existed in the 80's. I think only Penang in the north while the south was moving towards technical field, so there arose a negative perception from the community. I was also like that because I was instructed and brought up like that. So, if vocational is mentioned I am not interested as it is for grade S, and has a very low image.

Negative image as described by parents and teachers greatly influenced the students' career path or field of study in vocational subjects. The types of work available for them do not show a positive sign in terms of the salary and status. Teachers focus more towards science and math education compared to skills. Teachers and counsellors have less exposure on the importance of technical education and vocational training that can enhance the development of the nation by producing more energetic, efficient and highly skilled labour.

7 SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

This paper has two main purposes: first, to understand the perceptions of parents and teachers on the image of technical education and vocational training, and second, explore the acceptance of parents and teachers on the esteem of working in technical and vocational

fields. The study findings showed that there are two major themes that can be identified, namely, positive and negative image among parents and school teachers of technical education and vocational training. On the other hand, work esteem in technical and vocational fields have a slight boost, for the parents and teachers believe students can further their education at a higher level and can get better rewards with the skills they have, compared to the academic route.

Parents and teachers have a positive image of technical education and vocational training as it provides a broader educational opportunities especially to students who are less interested in academics. Students who are less interested academically can succeed in doing "*hands-on*" work. Besides, parents and teachers also believe that these students can further their education overseas, such as Japan. Students in technical education and vocational training can earn salaries comparable to academic graduate.

However, the study findings show that the negative image remained resilient in the perception of parents and school teachers. Several negative images that can be submitted from the perception of parents is that a vocational career is not encouraging, is belittled and low status in terms of jobs and career paths. While the perception of school teachers is that science and mathematics education have more priority when compared to training education for those who are not interested in the academic field. To achieve developed nation status by the year 2020, Malaysia needs, not only those trained in the academic field, but also those with expertise in other areas of skill. Entry to community college, Giat Mara, ILP and other public training institutions should be simplified, so that teachers can encourage students to pursue skills learning after leaving school, to balance their academic knowledge with high skill, thus directing the nation towards having high skilled work force with high income. Also, some parents and teachers have a negative image on these institutions such as having students with low discipline, where they are known as "breaking tables / chairs" group, skipping school, smoking, playing truant and engage in various social ills.

To enhance the image of technical education and vocational training, one teacher gave the suggestion that the Ministry of Human Resources and the Ministry of Education implement a MoU to disseminate the expertise of the Public Training Institutions to schools with a vocational curriculum. Students will appreciate and be more confident of the technical education and vocational training, with such collaboration.

The researcher also identified the wastage of manpower due to weakness in the intake requirements of students into technical education and vocational training system. Many students, who are academically weak and unable to meet the Bahasa Melayu language prerequisite, are restrained from becoming skilled or semi-skilled workers, whom are desperately needed in the development of national industries. Malaysian education system does not take into account that the weak students who can be channelled to the skills learning. School teachers also hope that the focus on academic subjects and skills can be balanced so that all facilities, including teachers, can be distributed equally to the two areas and can be developed to provide a knowledgeable and highly skilled workforce for Malaysia to achieve its developed nation status. The study also showed that parents and teachers would like the Ministry of Education to provide a broader opportunity for technical education and vocational training for students based on their interest and academic excellence. There is a notable

increase in students', parents' and teachers' awareness towards technical education and vocational training in order to meet the requirement of manpower that are competent and highly skilled and who are able to compete in the global markets.

Table 3: Proposed Operational for Image Enhancement of Technical Education and Vocational Training

Themes	Sub themes	Operational Suggestions
Positive image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Motivation from teachers to students - <i>success stories</i> □ The role and influence of parent - wide exposure □ Opportunities for further education to higher level □ Second chance - if did not excel in academic 	<p>Suggestions from parents and teachers explain that the study should have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Regular motivational programs from teachers to students - <i>success stories</i> □ The role and influence of parent-wide exposure □ Opportunity to pursue higher education - Japan, Germany, Korea □ Second chance - if did not excel in academics.
Negative image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Type of work is not Glamourous / <i>low profile</i>. • Change from good to bad boys / discipline problems • Parents do not understand the future of careers in the field of vocational • Educate parents who reject vocational as their children's career • There is no motivation to teachers and career counselors at the school. • Vocational educations have been meant for academically weak students and with disciplinary problems. • Parents and teachers focus more on math and science than skills. • Workshops equipment facilities, networking with industry / enterprise is less • Teachers with the MPV skill - still use the traditional pedagogy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exposure of the successful career path of MPV through lectures and awareness campaigns among parents and teachers. • Improve workshop facilities with latest equipments. • Increasing <i>hands-on</i> courses among the MPV teachers. • Networking with industry and colleges having MPV courses. • Entrepreneurship courses to the student and teacher with the collaboration of various ministries. • A more conducive learning environment to enhance the professional image on skills. • Promotion of MPV career path through electronic media.

Table 3 highlights some operational recommendations to improve the image of technical education and vocational training. The sub themes are the recommendations made by parents, teachers and school counsellors in enhancing the image of technical education and vocational training. While the operational proposals are submitted by researchers, taking into account the positive impact of interpreting the negative image of technical education and vocational training as described by parents, teachers and school counsellors.

The researcher can conclude that there is no coordination between the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Higher Education, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Rural and Regional Development with the Ministry of Human Resources in coordinating and improving the image of technical education and vocational training. However, school

teachers are of the view that the Department of Skill Development (JPK) has carried out various campaigns to raise awareness among secondary school students to continue to pursue technical and vocational fields. Unfortunately, the perception of a negative image of technical education and vocational training is much embedded and has not changed from the old notch. Efforts by the Ministry of Education Malaysia have become a benchmark to improve the image and esteem of working in technical education and vocational training. The researcher would also like to recommend to JPK in particular and the Ministry of Human Resources to move the four ministries to cooperate and coordinate promotion of technical education and vocational training to achieve the objective to become an industrialized country in the year 2020, as well as having a knowledgeable and highly skilled workforce with positive attitude who can compete in the global market.

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