

EMPLOYABILITY AND JOB MOBILITY: CRITICAL SKILLS FOR NEW GRADUATES IN ASEAN

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the level of student employability skill, and identifies factors that influence international mobility. The findings would help forecast employment trajectories of new graduates in the Southeast Asia labor market. The information will be especially useful for seven professional occupations including doctors, engineers, nursing, architecture, accountants, dentists, and surveyors. The sample sizes were 278 new graduates of five occupational programs; nursing, accountancy, engineering, doctor, and surveying, from Burapha University in 2012. The findings revealed that most respondents were male and graduated from engineering programs. We consider the intention of these new graduates to work abroad. The proportion of new graduates who have plans to work abroad and who have not was quite indifferent. Countries which new graduate would primarily expect to work in were Singapore, Malaysia, and Brunei. For graduates, self-assessed employability skill readiness for Southeast Asia labor market, the personal trait ranked first. Moreover, the most influential factor of new graduate job mobility was work experience, followed by higher wages, gaining promotions, life enhancement, and family concerns.

JEL: M 16, M50, M54

KEYWORDS: Employability, Job Mobility, International Mobility, New Graduates, Labor Market, ASEAN

INTRODUCTION

The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) market has been interesting for major countries over the world as a new consumer market due to the wealth of resources and huge quantity of people. Meanwhile, ASEAN has concern with group cohesiveness of 10 countries in the Southeast Asia region; Thai, Laos, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Philippine, Brunei, Myanmar, Cambodia and Vietnam. This concern stems from negotiation power and sharing resource within region. Moreover, these countries committed to the ASEAN Community in 2015 and aim to create a strong socio-culture community, economic community and security community.

In the ASEAN economic community (AEC), the ASEAN Summits have considered and approved the ASEAN single market concept. Under this program, ten countries can move goods, service, capital and skilled workers without inter-trade barriers, such as tariffs and regulations. This agreement will begin in 2020 and would strongly affect Thai workers if the government is not prepared to educate and fulfill people capacity, especially in 7 key professional occupations; doctors, engineers, nurses, architects, accountants, dentists, and surveyors that are the primary job mobility group.

The government, education ministry and academic institutes must concern the readiness of new graduates for AEC. Each year many students graduate from private and public academic institutes. A few of them cannot seek jobs. Thus, the education institutes play important roles in the labor market (Dekker, Grip, and Heijke, 2002) for guiding students on how to apply for job positions and plan their individual career roadmap.

Most new graduate applicants are over educated for their first jobs according to companies (Dekker, Grip, and Heijke, 2002). However, the quality of graduates have been a critical point. Not only is academic knowledge important, but also employability skill and job mobility. This paper aims to explore the level of student employability skill, and identify factors that influence international job mobility. The paper is divided into 5 parts. The first part is the introduction, the second part is a literature review, the third part describes the methodology, the fourth part presents the findings and the last part is a conclusion and discussion section.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employability skills not only are basic skills necessary for getting, keeping, and doing well on a job, but also are attributes of employees that make them an asset to employers. Employability skills are generally divided into three skill sets; basic academic skills, high order thinking skills, and personal qualities that can be teachable by using a democratic approach. For example, teachers and parents should be good models. Students have opportunities to observe and learn workplace behavior that labor markets require. These methods increase student's awareness of values, attitudes and work responsibilities (Robinson, 2000).

However, employability skills may change over time due to the evolution of knowledge, technology, and globalization. In 2011, Ju, Zhang and Pacha identified five employability skill that employers consider:

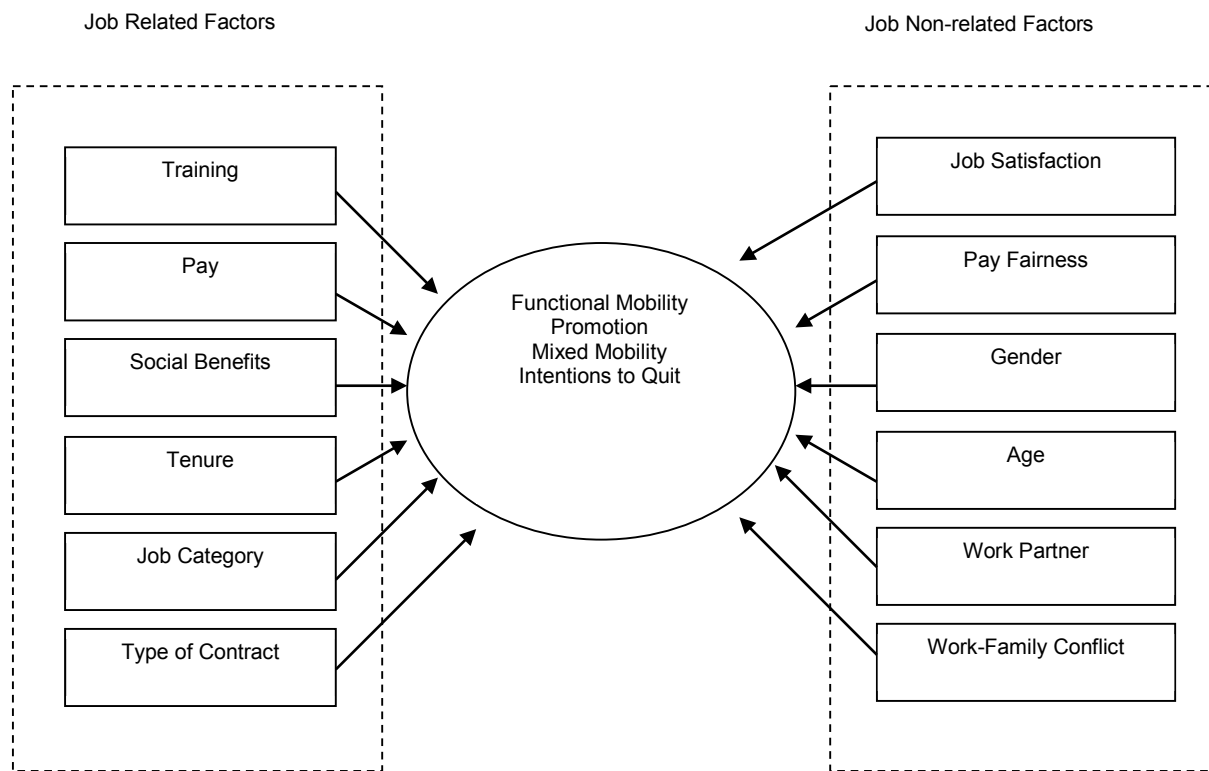
1. Basic skill – refers to ability to read with understanding, ability to listen actively, ability to speak so others can understand, and ability to convey ideas in writing.
2. Higher-order thinking skills refer to the ability to recognize and correct your own mistakes, ability to use critical thinking, ability to apply basic math, ability to solve problems, ability to negotiate and resolve conflict, ability to apply basic computer/technology skills, ability to make plans and work toward goals, ability to advocate for self, and ability to use creative thinking.
3. Basic work skills refers to the ability to be on time, ability to seek help when needed, ability to follow schedules, ability to cooperate with others and be a good team player, ability to stay with a task until finished, ability to work well with people from diverse backgrounds, and ability to monitor quality of work.
4. Social skills refers to ability to show respect for others, ability to use socially acceptable language, ability to accept authority, ability to maintain appropriate personal appearance (e.g., grooming, hygiene, and clothing), ability to accept criticism, and ability to control self and work without direct supervision.
5. Personal traits means demonstrating personal integrity/honesty in work, demonstrating responsibility in work, demonstrating ability to adapt to change, demonstrating motivation toward work, and demonstrating personal interest in work.

Job mobility has no single or widely accepted definition, but in the human resource management field, it refers to the flexibility of people to move to work in another place; such as other regions of the country or provinces, or even other countries. It refers to the freedom of workers to practice their occupation wherever opportunities exist. Thus, in this research, job mobility is defined as international mobility associated with the movement of individuals from one country to another for working or applying for new employment positions (Higher Education Institute, 2010), including move out or within ASEAN.

With regard individuals in early career stages, factors affecting job mobility across borders include cost of living, wage rate, and family concerns. Most workers search for firms that offer them the best opportunities; such higher wages, full time contracts, and job quality over the time of employment. Organizations seek persons who can maximize productivity and profit (Carroll and Powell, 2002). The term job mobility is often used to ask candidates about where they can live. It is a fancy way to let candidates know that moving residence will be beneficial to their career progression and organizational performance. Most companies appreciate pay allowances and expenses related to their movement, and family expenses when living aboard.

Previous research identified many factors that influence job mobility decisions, such as job attractiveness which can be measured by the employee's perceptions about job benefits; such as job category, type of contract, pay fairness, benefit, and training (Carnicer, Sánchez, Pérez, and Jiménez, 2003; Granqvist, and Persson, 2005; Gesthuizen, 2009). Training can be divided into core training and career training. Dekker, Grip, and Heijke (2002) found career training influences mobility positively. Moreover, career opportunities, gaining promotion to a higher job level, influence the decision as well. Gesthuizen (2009) stated that job opportunity impacted job dissatisfaction and job characteristics on mobility.

Figure 1: Model of Labor Mobility (Carnicer, Sánchez, Pérez, and Jiménez, 2004)



In 2002, an OECD report revealed the new graduates were more self-confident. When they decided to apply for job or move to other countries, it depended on their own decision. Mostly, prior factors that related to job choosing were higher wages and work challenge opportunities (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2002: 3). Furthermore, the study of Luis Carnicer et al (2004, 199-219) found that gender and family concern influenced job mobility. Males tend to move to other countries more than females.

Lindberg (2009) studied international job mobility of the startup workers aged between 25-34 years old. Most participants attended student exchange programs when they studied in university. Carroll and Powell (2002), noted new graduates who have been aboard or had prior experience in international mobility, such as in student exchange programs, tend to apply for international jobs more than new graduates who have been elsewhere. Doherty, Dickmann and Mills (2010: 378-400) found that applicants who had been aboard tend to work in other countries more than applicants who had not because the applicants who had never been aboard were concerned about work safety and comfortable living. Meanwhile, Csath (2008) studied international job mobility of Hungarian new graduates in an economic crisis period. He found the surprising result that new graduates need to work in their country even if they were unemployed because of fear to change environments.

METODOLOGY

This study used a survey approach to gather data, and employed simple descriptive statistics; such mean and standard deviation to analyze and describe new graduates' opinion in employability skill and job mobility for ASEAN. The paper employs *t*-tests and ANOVA to compare means between gender and occupational fields.

The populations were new graduates in five occupations; nursing, accountancy, engineering, doctor, and surveying, from Burapha University in 2012. These occupations were 5 of 7 professional occupations identified in ASEAN single labor market. Other professional occupations were not selected because the university has no related occupational programs. There are a total of 908 new graduated in five occupations. The author used Taro Yané function to calculate sample size and cluster random sampling to collect data. The sample size was 278 new graduates as show in Table 1.

Table 1: Population and Sample Size

Occupational Fields of New Graduated	Population	Sample
Nursing	146	45
Accountancy	112	35
Engineering	408	124
Surveying	212	64
Doctor	30	10

This table shows sample descriptive statistics.

The employability questionnaire was developed from employability skills of Ju, Zhang and Pacha (2011). These include basic skills, higher order thinking skills, basic work skills, social skills, and personal traits. There were 36 items in this section of the survey. To measure job mobility, the author developed question items from CHEERs Survey of Borghans and Golsteyn (2010) that consisted of five items. Both parts were five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree).

FINDINGS

There were 665 returned completed questionnaires. The return rate was 73.23%. The respondents were 369 males (55.48%) and 296 females (44.51%). Graduates came from the engineering program (n = 251, 37.75%), followed by nursing program (n = 142, 21.35%) surveying program (n = 139, 20.90%), accountancy program (n = 112, 21.35%), and doctor program (n = 21, 3.15%). Considering intention to work aboard, 301 new graduates have plans to work aboard (45.30%) and 364 new graduates have not planned to work abroad (54.70%) as show in Table 2.

The results in Table 3 report expected ASEAN countries that new graduates would be most mobile to work in the future. The first ranking was Singapore (n = 454, 68.30%), followed by Malaysia (n = 135, 20.30%), Brunei (n = 94, 14.10%) Philippians (n = 91, 13.70%), Vietnam (n = 90, 13.50), Laos (n= 63, 9.50%), Indonesia (n = 45, 6.80), Burma (n = 20, 3.00%), and Cambodia (n = 14, 2.10%).

Table 2: Intentions to Work Abroad

Topics	Number of Employees	Percentage
Gender		
Male	369	55.48
Female	296	44.52
Occupational Field		
Nursing	142	21.35
Accountancy	112	16.85
Engineering	251	37.75
Surveying	139	20.90
Doctor	21	3.15
Intention to work aboard		
Have	301	45.30
Have not	364	54.70

This table shows intentions to work abroad. Respondent Characteristic (n = 665).

Table 3 Expected Job Mobility Countries

ASEAN Countries	Frequencies	Percentages
Singapore	454	68.30
Malaysia	135	20.30
Brunei	94	14.10
Philippines	91	13.70
Vietnam	90	13.50
Laos	63	9.50
Indonesia	45	6.80
Burma	20	3.00
Cambodia	14	2.10

Note: Select more than 1 item (n=665)

Employability Skills and Job Mobility for ASEAN

For this part, new graduates have to self-assess their employability skill readiness for ASEAN. The personal trait ranked first ($\bar{x} = 4.22$), followed by basic work skills ($\bar{x} = 3.93$), social skills ($\bar{x} = 3.67$), higher order thinking skills ($\bar{x} = 3.60$), and basic skills ($\bar{x} = 2.98$). The factors influencing international job mobility of new graduates in by rank was work experience ($\bar{x} = 4.41$), followed by higher wage ($\bar{x} = 4.28$), gaining promotion ($\bar{x} = 4.19$), living life enhancement ($\bar{x} = 4.14$), and family concern ($\bar{x} = 3.99$) as show in Table 4.

Table 4: Employability Skills for ASEAN

Factors	Mean	SD
Employability skill for ASEAN		
Personal traits	4.22	0.67
Basic work skills	3.93	0.68
Social skills	3.67	0.80
Higher order thinking skills	3.60	0.70
Basic skills	2.98	0.76
Factors influencing on job mobility		
Work experience	4.41	0.63
Higher wage	4.28	0.70
Gaining promotion	4.19	0.71
Living life enhancement	4.14	0.73
Family concern	3.99	0.87

This table shows employability skills for students from ASEAN. (N=665)

Regarding gender and factors influence international job mobility, Table 5 revealed gender and other factors influencing international job mobility was not significant with the exception of gaining promotion. This implies that opinions of male and female were not different.

When we test the occupational fields and factors that influence international job mobility we found occupational fields and most factors influence international job mobility were significant as show in Table 6. The statistic revealed the new graduates who came from different programs have different attitudes about factors that influence international job mobility including higher wages, living life enhancement, and family concerns.

Table 5: Gender and Factors Influencing on the Job Mobility

Factors influencing on job mobility	Male		Female		<i>t</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Work experience	3.89	0.91	4.02	0.85	0.14
Higher wage	4.17	0.72	4.14	0.73	0.06
Gaining promotion	4.33	0.75	4.43	0.59	0.00*
Living life enhancement	4.11	0.74	4.21	0.70	0.21
Family concern	4.24	0.74	4.30	0.69	0.95
Total	4.11	0.54	4.22	0.57	0.54

*This table shows Gender and other factors influence on job mobility. * $p \leq 0.05$*

Table 6: Occupational Field and Factors Influence on Job Mobility

Factors influencing on job mobility		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Work experience	Between Groups	4.743	7	0.678	.894	0.51
	Within Groups	498.219	657	0.758		
	Total	502.962	664			
Higher wage	Between Groups	17.202	7	2.457	4.773	0.00**
	Within Groups	338.227	657	0.515		
	Total	355.429	664			
Gaining promotion	Between Groups	4.387	7	0.627	1.570	0.14
	Within Groups	262.176	657	0.399		
	Total	266.562	664			
Living life enhancement	Between Groups	7.104	7	1.015	2.014	0.04**
	Within Groups	331.022	657	0.504		
	Total	338.126	664			
Family concern	Between Groups	6.927	7	0.990	2.029	0.04**
	Within Groups	320.357	657	0.488		
	Total	327.284	664			
Total	Between Groups	3.565	7	0.509	2.098	0.04**
	Within Groups	159.490	657	0.243		
	Total	163.055	664			

*This table shows occupation fields and other factors that influence job mobility. ** $p \leq 0.05$*

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This paper explores the level of student employability skills, and identified factors that influence international job mobility. The findings would be beneficial to forecast employment trajectories of new graduates in the ASEAN labor market, especially the seven professional occupations examine in the paper: doctor, engineer, nurse, architect, accountant, dentist, and surveyor. The findings show that most respondents were male and graduated from an engineering program. Considering intention to work aboard of new graduates, the proportion of new graduates who have thought about working aboard and who have not was quite indifferent. Countries which new graduate would expect to work by rank are Singapore, Malaysia, and Brunei.

The most important factor that influenced the decision to work in ASEAN countries was work experience. This may be because working abroad would help graduates obtain a world view in terms of working style and general life. The study of Doherty, Dickmann and Mills (2010: 378-400), identified young workers

who work in a foreign country had key a motivation to travel and study the culture and traditions of other peoples.

The lowest rank factor influencing the decision to work in ASEAN was family concern. This may be because young worker have no family responsibilities. The study of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2002: 3), found that new graduates had higher self-confidence. Therefore, the power to decide to apply for a job or move to another place depends on decisions of new graduate themselves. When new graduates assessed their employability skill readiness for ASEAN we found that the new graduates had less basic skills including the ability to use English language as a secondary language.

Further research, should study correlation between attending international exchange programs and factors influencing on job mobility of new graduates, including employment interviews or focus group techniques to find reasons for the decision to apply for jobs in other ASEAN countries.

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