

# The Competitiveness of SMK and Diploma 3 Graduates of Hospitality at the Entry Level and Employability Skills in Developing Career Pathways

*By Femmy Indriany Dalimunthe*



## **The Competitiveness of SMK and Diploma 3 Graduates of Hospitality at the Entry Level and Employability Skills in Developing Career Pathways**

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### ABSTRACT

Along with the development of the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015, Indonesia is required to generate professional human resources in order to compete with other countries, particularly subject to competition in the services sector. Hotel is a product in the hospitality industry that have an important role in the tourism business. Intense competition in the hospitality industry demand the hotels to provide the best service to the customers. Vocational education has a function to prepare a professional and competitive workforce in the industry. The hospitality graduates will be able to fill the existing organizational structure in accordance with the educational background. The Presidential Decree No.8, 2012, Article 5 states that equalizing learning outcomes generated through education with the level of qualification at KKNi. KKNi is intended as a description of outcomes that must be mastered by graduates of vocational education, higher education, vocational training institutions as well as independent study. Graduates of Vocational and D3 of hospitality began their career in the hospitality industry by filling the positions in the organizational structure. In a few of star hotels in Medan, North Sumatra, hospitality graduates of vocational and D3 have competitive power in a very thin difference. Their entry level almost similar to the same position as well as employability skills and technical competence are almost equal that will provide a gap between the educational background of the career pathways that exist in the world of hospitality. It is very wise if there will be collaboration between the hotel industry, the educators, community leaders, and high-level policy makers in generating strategies to enhance the competitiveness of human resources professionals in the hospitality and placed in accordance with the level of education based KKNi.

## 1. Introduction

Asean Economic Community (AEC) has already begun in early 2015. This will be a highly competitive among Southeast Asian countries, namely Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam in the field of economy. Commodity entry and exit of goods, services and capital between countries is valid so that competition in the industrial sector increasingly stringent. Based on the above, Indonesia is required to compete in all sectors, one of the sectors is that engaged in the tourism. MEA provides the opportunity and the chance to develop the tourism sector, in line with the improvement of international tourism, especially with ASEAN. This will encourage and increase the level of foreign tourist arrivals from Asean and outside the ASEAN member countries, including Indonesia. These opportunities also pose some challenges that might occur in the era of the MEA, namely how to improve the Human Resources (HR) of competitive excellence, and competitive in all sectors of industry and services at a competitive level ASEAN region, for the development and improvement of human resources equivalent to the regional level, such as ASEAN and internationally in the field of tourism continues to be done. Hotel is one of the contributing factors in tourism that has an important role in developing tourism infrastructure. Hotel as one type of accommodation that is directly involved in the provision of services of lodging, food and beverages and other facilities, is expected to give satisfaction to everyone who uses these services. Hotel requires workers who are professional and loyal to provide the best service and able to survive in this competitive era.

In line with *Kualifikasi Baku Jenis Pekerjaan Indonesia (2002: x-xi)*, the professional skill level is measured by the number of years of formal education, training and relevant experience that are usually required to fulfil the set of goals satisfactorily. Details of formal education are as follows: complete primary school, junior, senior, D1, D2, D3, S1, graduated D4, S2, and S3. In defining the scope of work on the base class type, KBJI uses education as a basic skill requirements. At the base class 0 and 1 does not require skill requirements. Group 2 requires minimal skill requirements equal S1. Most types of work in the base class 3 requires minimal skill requirements D3. Most types of work in the principal categories 4,5,6,7, and 8 require minimal skill requirements equivalent graduating junior and senior. A period of training and experience in the workplace sometimes is also required to complete the formal requirements. This period can be seen as a complement to formal training in some cases replace most expertise. Most of the base class 9 requires no skill requirements.

Based on the above, graduates of SMK and D3 in Hospitality for hotel operations such as the field of front office, housekeeping, and food & beverage should not have the same competence. This is because the D3 is the academy level that it is no longer a middle level vocational education, but it is a higher education. D3 Graduates in hospitality is expected to fill the supervisor level. But in fact, the graduates of vocational and D3 is considered to have the same competence for field operations and has the same entry level in their career started. Although it's early career started at the same level positions, a graduate Diploma 3 should only last a minute in the level of rank n file, then move up or promotion to a supervisory level or the next level in accordance with the profession career pathways. The purpose of this paper is to contribute ideas in the form of exposure conceptually based on critical analysis of the researchers in the development of SMK and D3 graduates' career pathways, so that there is clarity of self-development in the future.

Based on observations in the hospitality industry, the employer does not see the educational background as something that is important to support one's career. The problems are caused by the employers in hiring someone will do a first employee assessment based on employability skills. They will do the selection test and interview the prospective employees not based on the applicant's educational background have. In fact, the majority of employers found that employability skills of SMK graduates are better than D3 graduates. If this is not addressed, then in the future, graduates of SMK career pathways will be equal to D3 graduates, especially in the entry level of their careers. Thus we need a strategy to improve the competitiveness of professional human resources in the hospitality and placed according to their level of education based KKNL.

## 2. Theoretical Review

Human resources to fill the existing organizational structure of the hotel, especially for hotel operations, recruited from vocational education school and higher educational institutions in the hospitality field. Vocational education has a function to prepare a professional workforce and competitiveness in the industry. Vocational education is the education that is designed to develop the skills, abilities, understanding, attitudes, work habits, and appreciation needed by workers in entering the employment and make progress in a meaningful and productive jobs (Adhikary, 2005). According to Pavlova (2009: 2) tradition of vocational education is to prepare students for working. Vocational education and on the job training is the education that prepares the formation of skills, understanding, behavior, attitudes, work habits and an appreciation of the jobs needed by the community business / industry, overseen by the public and the government or in the contract with the agency and based productive. The above statement explains that vocational education aims to prepare graduates who are ready to use the knowledge and skills and attitudes required by the industry.

According to Law No. 20 of 2003 on National Education System: Article 8 paragraph (3) which states that secondary education that form High School (SMA), Madrasah Aliyah (MA), vocational schools (SMK), and Madrasah Aliyah Vocational (MAK), or other equivalent forms, while according to article 19 paragraph (1) states higher education is an education after secondary education includes diplomas, bachelor's, master's, specialist, and doctoral organized by the college. From the above statement, it can be explained that vocational education is secondary education that prepares students primarily to work in a particular field. Unit forms of education is vocational high School (SMK), which has a wide range of specific competency skills. Higher Vocational education that prepares students to have a job with a certain applied skills, up the ladder diploma 4 that is equivalent to the degree program.

Criteria that must be owned by the vocational education are (1) the orientation is on the performance of individuals in the industry, (2) justification specifically on the real needs at the work field, (3) focus the curriculum on aspects of the psychomotor, affective and cognitive, (4) a measure of success is not just confined to school, (5) sensitivity to the development of the industry, (6) require adequate infrastructure and (7) the support of the community. Based on the above criteria, it can be seen that one of the vocational education criteria is to produce students who have the ability and competence appropriate to the needs of the industry, so they are ready to enter the industry. Institutions of higher vocational education that orient in the field of hospitality and tourism have some courses, such as (1) Rooms Division management, (2) Food and Beverage Management, (3) Food Production Management, (4) Patisserie Management, (5) Hotel Administration, (6) Tours and Travel Management, and (7) Tourism Planning and Marketing Management. Overall these courses have the same vision, namely to produce qualified human resources in the field and is ready to be placed in the industrialized world in accordance with the specific applied skills learned.

The institute is also believed to provide a set of knowledge, skills and professional attitude in preparing students to enter the industry through the teaching and learning process in the form of material competency course and work experience in developing core competency. The education process in the vocational education has a different character with general education, when viewed from the educational criteria, the substance of the lesson, and output. Implementation of vocational education can be done through the following models: (1) vocational schools, (2) internship (apprenticeship), and (3) education and vocational training employment (on the job training). In accordance with the argument of Prosser (1950) that vocational education will be effective and efficient if the learning environment is a replica of a working environment that will be occupied by graduates later.

In addition to the higher education institutions, vocational schools also produce graduates who are ready to work professionally in the hospitality industry. SMK is a vocational secondary school that has the same level with Senior High School. Meanwhile, higher education institutions provide vocational education and training work practices for three years longer than SMK. Therefore, institution of higher education is expected to produce graduates who are professional and ready-made than the fresh hospitality graduates of vocational education school (SMK), in particular on entry level (early career). According Burack and Mathys (1983) career pathways is the path of the first level of a career to get to the last level (the highest), through the stages of work, personal development, experiential learning and promotion. From the above definition can be explained that the career pathways and career advancement of a person is affected from

the beginning of his career (entry level) until he reaches the top or highest level last. According to Hinckley and Hull (2008: 37) that there are seven components that support the career pathways of adults: (1) Personal needs; (2) Academic Skills; (3) Career Focus; (4) Employability skills; (5) Career and Technical Skills; (6) Job entry skills; (7) Advanced skills. From the above statement can be explained that the employability skills is one of the components that support one's career pathways.

## 2.1 Defining Employability Skills

Employability skills also known by many other terms such as generic skills, soft skills, key skills, common skills, essential skills, basic skills, necessary skills, competencies skills, and transferable skills. Vocational education is an education that prepares students to work professionally in a particular field. The graduates are expected will be ready and able to work both independently (self-employed) and fill vacancies in the industry. For that, learners are not only required to have hard skills but also employability skills. Employability skills fulfill a crucial role in shaping an individual's personality and complement their technical skills (Schulz, 2008). A graduates who only have technical skills can not be accepted to work in the industry because it does not have the job skills (employability skills). Conversely, a graduate whose only job skills may find it difficult to get a job because he did not know how to do the job properly. Thus, potential employees need both types of skills to compete, get and keep a job (Omar, et al., 2012).

Hinckley and Hull (2008: 41) states that the employability skills or soft skills are components of career and technical education have been identified, defined and implanted into the curriculum since it was introduced by SCANS in 1992. Employability skills including interpersonal relations, cooperation in team, able to think critically, and be able to solve the problem.

Employability skills often referred to job skills or competencies skills. Employability skills are general and across all types of industry, business size, and the level of work ranging from entry level workers to the highest position (Robinson, 2000). Ability to work (employability skills) depends on the knowledge, skills and attitudes, how workers use these assets and how workers demonstrated its ability for companies (STEMNET, 2010)

Billing (2003: 335) states that employability skills are the most desired by the industry that can be taken to various situations, specifically that expertise in problem solving, communication, teamwork and critical thinking. Job skills involves the ability to contribute to the efficiency of work in an organization that is combined with excellent communication skills both orally and in writing and critical thinking, which formed the basis of academic and success in the workplace (Munro: 2007). Employability skills not only include the desired attributes of prospective employees but also the basic needs of an individual to be considered in the work. These skills are necessary to perform their duties efficiently and contribute to the growth of an organization (Bennett: 2006). In line with the above Overtoom (2000: 2) states that the employability skills essential for career success for all levels of workers and to all levels of education.

There are several opinions about the employability skills by sharing dimension. But basically this division has the same indicator or competence. Based on the dimensions, employability skills are part of the soft skills. Soft skills have 23 attributes divided into two parts, namely intrapersonal skills and interpersonal skills (Sailah 2008), while employability skills divided into multiple dimensions namely; the 3-dimensional by the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) and The Conference Board of Canada and 8 competence by the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) (Surono, 2012), Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (acci), and the Business Council of Australia (BCA). Each dimension/competency described by SCANS, the Conference Board of Canada, OECD, AACI, and BCA have an indicator that is almost the same although there are differences in the distribution of the dimensions/ competencies. Comparison of employability skills and the division of the skills can be seen in the table below:

**Tabel 1.** Comparison of employability skills and the division of the skills

OECD, AACI and BCA	SCANS	The Conference Board of Canada
10		
1. Communication	1. Basic skills (basic skills) include skills:	1. Fundamental skills, including skills:
2. teamwork	• Reading	• Communication
3. problem solving	• Writing	• managing information
4. Initiative and enterprise	• Numeracy and mathematics	• Using numbers
5. Planning and organizing	• Talking and listening	23 mathematical)
6. self management	2. Thinking skills (thinking skills) skills include:	2. Personal management skills include skills:
7. Learning	• creative thinking	• Act and behave positively
8. Technology	• Make decision	• To be responsible
	• Solve the problem	• Adapting
	• visualize something	• continuous learning
	• Learning and reasoning	• Work safely.
	3. Personal qualities (quality individual skills) include:	3. Teamwork skills include skills:
	• Individual Responsibility	• Working with others in a team
	• Confidence	• Participating in a project or task.
	• socializing	
	• self-management	
	• Integrity	

### 3. Research Methods

The method of this research is using literary study/conceptual study. In this research, the researchers want to analyze critically the existing theoretical and empirical studies so that can contribute ideas in a conceptual form to clarify the position of alumni SMK and D3 graduates in career pathways according to KKNi.

### 4. Discussion

The studies on the importance of employability skills in the workplace and support the career of an employee have been carried out by the experts. Research conducted by Richens & Mc Clain (2000) by surveying 400 employers on their perception of workplace basic skills and competencies that are required for the employees who are at work and the potential employees. The employers stated that they want entry level workers to possess employability skills rather than technology competencies, and most importantly for these employers (with a rating above 92.6%) are the basic skills, thinking skills, personal qualities skills and interpersonal competencies. A study conducted by Evers, Rush and Berdrow (1998) indicated that the competencies students need to be developed to enhance their employability skills are self-management; communication; managing people and tasks; and mobilizing innovation and change. In the hospitality industry, especially in the city of Medan, the employer has not found yet the SMK and D3 graduates in hospitality that possess the whole competence of employability skills such as listed above, especially when interviewing graduates who will enter the workforce.

According to Wilhelm et.al. (2002), the employer asserted that too many high school and college graduates who do not possess the skills necessary to contribute productively in their jobs without extensive employer training. Soft skill are important in virtually every profession, especially when a person has reached the level of sales manager or owner of the agency that required him to work with others. According

to Ramlee (2002) some of the graduates of technical and vocational education (TVE) usually master their technical skills but employers normally feel dissatisfied of their employees when it comes to employability skills because they lacked the skills of motivation, communication skills, interpersonal skills, critical thinking, and problem-solving and entrepreneurial skills. Based on the results of a survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, USA, 2002 (survey of 457 leaders), the grade point average (GPA) is not considered important in the industry, far more important are soft skills that include communication skills, honesty and cooperation, motivation, adaptability, other interpersonal competence, with a value orientation that respects the effective performance (fk.uly.ac.id). This is similar to the research conducted by the Association of MBAs worldwide for the graduates of MBA program which was concluded that the soft skills play a bigger role in career advancement. This study was conducted in 2008 and is a continuation of research that began in 2006 (www.on the job trainingjournal.com). From the results of the survey that was conducted the Curriculum Centre of National Education Department revealed that the key to success is 80% mindset and 20% technical skills.

The results of the study above shows that employability skills has an important role in starting one's career, especially at the entry level and is one component that support career advancement in one's career pathways. Kwok (2004) found out that the competitiveness of individuals in the labor market depends not only on their vocational competence but also on whether these individuals have employability competencies that they can continue to expand. Employability competencies must be developed to the extent that individual can find a suitable job and can acclimatize to social, technological and organizational changes (Burgaz, 2008). The employer of hospitality industry in Medan, when selecting candidates, most prefer the soft skills rather than technical skills or educational backgrounds of prospective employees. Based on the above, the SMK and D3 graduates in the hospitality should be prepared physically and mentally in school and are equipped with technical competence and employability skills in order to compete and pursue a career in the hospitality industry.

Schools with a higher education level should focus on the experience, both in the classroom and in the field, which makes the students able to develop these essential competencies. Hee (2008: 21) in his research stated that multitechnical skills, good communication skills, leadership skills and financial skills are the skills needed to work effectively in the hospitality industry. So it is important for the hospitality students and educational providers to identify skills needed by the hospitality industry. If educators know what the industry wants from the new employee, educational providers can focus on changing their curriculum to support the expectations and needs of the industry and increase satisfaction of the hospitality students.

Audu, et al (2013) stated that students should acquire employability skills while they are at TVE institutions or in schools. Employability skills can be learned through classroom instruction, in the field or outside the classroom. These skills are abstract in nature and need a long time to train students in order to fully acquire the employability skills. Employability skills or generic skills, including achievement, a sense of understanding, and the personal qualities that make an individual is willing to work, develop career and success in their chosen occupation (Omar, et al., 2012). Based on the foregoing, it can be explained that the role of education is very important in order to develop employability skills so that a student is ready to enter the industry and compete in the workplace and achieve career success in accordance with the career pathways he wanted.

Harper et al. (2005: 231) in their research found that the role of formal education in the career emphasized that higher education levels appear to make sure the graduates at the beginning of entering the industry will be at the level of assistant manager, while graduates with the lower education level start his career as a supervisor. This explains the importance of an education. Based on the observation conducted by the researcher to several stakeholders in the hospitality industry in Medan, found that the entry level of the early career for the graduates of SMK and D3 in hospitality tend to be the same though the D3 graduates have 3 years longer education. Both at the level of rank n file or worker level basis. Judging from its competence, D3 hospitality graduates also have the competence and performance test results similar to SMK hospitality graduates especially for operational areas, such as receptionist, bell boy, room boy and waiter. In some cases, the hospitality industry in the city of Medan, tend to see the SMK graduates have better employability skills than a D3 graduates.

## 5. Conclusion

The success of a school can be seen from the quality of its graduates. Along with the implementation of MEAs, graduates of vocational schools and higher level has to be competitive in the industry and accepted to work in the industry in accordance with the level of education based KKNi so as not to be the spectators in our own country. The competitiveness of individuals in the industry depends not only on their technical competencies but also on whether these individuals have employability competencies that are needed by the industry. The students should acquire employability skills while they are at TVE institutions or in schools. Employability skills can be learned through classroom instruction, in the field (on the job training) or outside the classroom. Based on the above, it is important for the school and the industry to work together to generate a curriculum that will produce graduates with employability skills and competitiveness in the industry as well as synchronized with the appropriate educational pathways from other countries associated with MEA. Vocational schools and colleges that is supported by the industry must develop a curriculum that is based on Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (KKNi) in order to produce graduates who are competent as required by the industry globally (nationally and internationally) and can be placed to work in accordance with their education level. The collaborations between the educator, industry, community leaders and the authorities (high level policy makers) also necessary in order to implement a career pathways in accordance with the background of education.

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