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Probing the Relationship between Soft Skills and Career Adaptability among Vocational College Graduates

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ABSTRACT

In today's era, the demand for a workforce with the right skills required by employers is very high. Students must equip themselves with additional skills beyond academic achievements and must adapt to the skills required in the workplace before they graduate. This study examines the relationship between soft skills and career adaptability among vocational college graduates. The study interprets the crucial factors and skills influencing career adaptability and success in employability among Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) graduates in the future. The researchers used a correlation study design to explain the relationship between soft skills and career adaptability. This quantitative study involves vocational college institutions in Negeri Sembilan, specifically those majoring in the Electronic Technology field and programs. About 120 graduates were chosen as sample respondents in this study. The survey method used a questionnaire to gather feedback from graduates identified in this research. The researchers used IBM SPSS Statistics to analyze the information obtained using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings show that the level of soft skills among vocational college graduates is moderate to high. Career adaptability also depicted a similar pattern at a high level. There was a strong and significant correlation between soft skills and career adaptability, and teamwork skills are a dominant factor in explaining the career adaptability of graduates from vocational college.

Keywords: Career adaptability, graduate, soft skills, vocational college.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization and the k-economy are often associated with job demands and the diversification of individual skills. A degree certificate is no longer the primary attraction for employers and the job market in selecting graduates; instead, a combination of soft skills, also known as non-technical skills, is prioritized (Azmi et al., 2020; Puad & Desa, 2020; World Economic Forum, 2020). Most employers today require workers with technical skills and non-technical skills to handle various tasks effectively, enhance company productivity, and remain competitive (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2021). Knight and Yorke (2003) state that non-technical skills are recognized as mental agility that enables individuals to adapt to their surroundings, personal desires, and emotional and spiritual resilience to appropriate actions. The alignment of technical and non-technical skills in students will undoubtedly enhance their employability in the industry.

Career readiness can explain whether an individual is prepared to enter their chosen field. The responsibility of vocational colleges is to provide education and training aligned with the skills needed by the industry. The major challenge is ensuring that trained students are ready to enter and explore job fields consistent with their skills, similar to graduates from other educational institutions in the country. However, employers today are often dissatisfied with the communication skills, interpersonal skills, critical thinking, creative problem-solving, and entrepreneurial skills of graduates from various institutions (Ling & Kee, 2020). Graduates and educational institutions should take this issue seriously to make necessary improvements and thorough preparations so that students are truly ready in all aspects to enter the job market in the industry.

Industrial Revolution 4.0 emphasizes high-tech and high-capability characteristics through robotics operated by

robotic labor, requiring specific observation and management by human workers. This scenario provides significant opportunities, particularly for technical graduates from vocational colleges, to find employment that matches their knowledge and meets industrial needs. Generally, graduates face criticism for underperforming when entering the workforce (Zahari & Omar, 2021). Therefore, TVET graduates must possess soft skills to secure suitable jobs in their respective careers and adapt to competitive and challenging workplace requirements. The researchers set out to investigate the association between soft skills and career adaptability, thus interpreting factors that influence career adaptability among future Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) graduates.

Role of Soft Skills in Graduate Performance

Soft skills have emerged as critical competencies for successful workplace performance. They transcend technical abilities and encompass interpersonal skills, communication, problem-solving, teamwork, and emotional intelligence. These skills are increasingly recognized as essential for navigating the complexities of modern work environments, where collaboration and adaptability are paramount. Most employers today prefer and prioritize graduates with high soft skills when offering job opportunities rather than those with only outstanding academic achievements. Having excellent academic results alone does not guarantee that a graduate will secure a good job in today's job market, and thus, graduates need to overcome this misconception (Bhati, 2022; Robles, 2012). The Malaysia Education Development Plan Blueprint 2015-2025 emphasizes that educational assessment should not be based solely on academic performance but also on a balance of soft skills such as communication, problem-solving, teamwork, national identity, national unity, leadership, ethics, mindset, and entrepreneurial readiness, aims to produce graduates who are competitive in the digital economy job market (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015). Possessing these skills allows candidates to stand out and be evaluated on a broader range of criteria by employers, offering better and more challenging job opportunities in line with modern advancements.

Soft skills among graduates are needed to ensure their ability to secure suitable jobs that match their qualifications and the need for competent workers in various fields to remain productive (Samad, 2014). Every job requires specific expertise and skills to enhance job performance and achieve the goals set by employers for better work outcomes. In today's era, every field requires skilled professionals to lead tasks and ensure smooth operations to meet the production standards desired by employers.

Mastering soft skills is crucial among graduates as it is necessary for their resilience in securing employment in a dynamic and global job market influenced by rapid technological changes (Othman, 2017). At the grassroots level of their institutions, students should be equipped with soft skills. These soft skills should be included in their learning syllabus, as they are the foundational element for acquiring knowledge and practicing during their industrial training upon reaching higher levels of education. Graduates must ensure that their soft skills are well-developed to become the preferred choice for employers in today's highly competitive labor market (Mat et al., 2017). Employers require trained and highly skilled workers with various employability traits to help propel their company globally. Employers highly seek such employee traits, which are in demand when searching for suitable candidates.

Communication skills are the ability to interact or serve as a medium of exchange with others (Dazali & Awang, 2014). These skills encompass writing, reading, arguing, listening, communication ethics, and the use of technology. Salim (2012) defines communication as the verbal and non-verbal exchange of opinions, ideas, or information. Effective communication skills involve proficiency in both Malay and English languages. Communicating well is an advantage for graduates entering the workforce, as it enables them to interact with others in a harmonious environment and convey information clearly and effectively. This is supported by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (2021) and Mohamed et al. (2021), who found that graduates with solid communication skills find it easier to secure employment. Effective communication skills include (1) the ability to convey ideas verbally and in writing effectively and confidently, (2) possessing active listening skills and consistently providing feedback, and (3) the capability to make presentations confidently and appropriately.

According to Anderson (2021), public institutions of higher education need to adequately prepare students in

communication and English language proficiency, making it difficult for them to find jobs. Additionally, issues may arise in communication between speakers and listeners due to weaknesses and difficulties in mastering a language when conveying messages.

Effective communication is a key component of interpersonal skills, which involves the clear conveyance of information, active listening, and the interpretation of feedback (Messaoudi, 2021). Research indicates that strong communication skills correlate significantly with workplace performance, facilitating better teamwork and conflict resolution (Hirudayaraj et al., 2021). Furthermore, employers increasingly prioritize these soft skills, often finding them more challenging to source than technical skills (Robles, 2012). This trend underscores educational institutions' need to integrate soft skills training into their curricula so as to prepare students for the workforce demands (Stewart & Preiksaitis, 2023).

Problem-solving skills are the ability to use reasoning to address and resolve issues (A. Jalil & Esa, 2012). These skills also involve the capability to identify problems and opportunities, analyze key aspects of the given problem, and develop strategies to solve it (Ahmad & Tan, 2020; Chan, 2019). Tshewang and Wangdi (2021) state that critical and creative thinking skills are necessary to achieve effective strategies for problem resolution. Critical thinking and problem-solving skills involve thinking critically, creatively, and innovatively and applying new understanding and knowledge (Liana et al., 2022). In addition to excellent academic performance, graduates also need to possess high problem-solving skills. The complexity of a project often arises from a lack of problem-solving skills in the person managing the project (Masud, 2013). Graduates' critical thinking skills are also moderate. This is due to the shortcomings in university teaching and learning processes. According to the Malaysian Soft Skills Scale (my3s) in the study by A. Jalil & Esa (2012), graduates' critical thinking and problem-solving skills still need improvement despite various initiatives to address this issue.

Problem-solving is a vital soft skill that efficiently identifies, analyzes, and resolves issues. This skill is applicable across various job roles and is essential for adapting to new challenges and environments (Teychenne et al., 2017). Effective problem-solving encompasses analytical thinking and creative solution generation, allowing individuals to navigate complex work situations and make informed decisions (Messaoudi, 2021). Research indicates that problem-solving skills are often developed through experience and are critical for career adaptability, enabling individuals to respond effectively to unexpected challenges (Johnston, 2016). Furthermore, integrating problem-solving training in educational programs has enhanced students' employability and readiness for the workforce (Stewart & Preiksaitis, 2023).

Teamwork is an existing culture that is frequently practiced within organizations. Several factors may influence the effectiveness of teamwork. Teamwork exists to save time and labor through group efforts. Additionally, tasks can be completed more easily because team members can share ideas (Salas et al., 2015). Teamwork impacts a group of workers working together to achieve common objectives and goals. According to Katzenbach and Smith (1993), teamwork occurs when a group of workers with complementary skills works together to achieve objectives that benefit the organization. Furthermore, teamwork helps organizations face competition and challenges from external entities. It also optimizes workers' performance and outcomes, thereby improving work quality.

An organization requires high teamwork to produce desired outputs within targeted deadlines. For an organization to continue competing globally, it must adopt suitable methods, with teamwork as a tool to enhance productivity and service. This practice is still relatively new in the country, and not all organizations are willing to bear the risks associated with establishing teamwork. Therefore, it must be implemented progressively by all workers across different fields within the organization, as success takes time and requires commitment and collaboration from management and lower-level staff to achieve effective teamwork (Wheelan, 2005).

To foster a team spirit, involving all parties, including management and lower-level employees, is essential. Mutual respect among team members and with management must exist within an organization. When this situation prevails, cooperation and team spirit can be practiced. Conversely, issues such as dissatisfaction and conflicts among workers may arise if there is no cooperation among team members, undermining the effectiveness of teamwork. Levi (2016) states that a team is a group of individuals committed to achieving the same goals and capable of working together to achieve quality results.

Teamwork is another critical aspect of soft skills essential for achieving organizational goals. The ability to collaborate effectively requires individuals to work cooperatively, resolve conflicts, and contribute meaningfully to group efforts (Kadir & Deniz, 2016). Studies have shown that teams with solid interpersonal dynamics outperform those with poor collaboration, highlighting the importance of soft skills in enhancing team performance (Robles, 2012). Moreover, navigating diverse perspectives and fostering inclusivity within teams is increasingly recognized as vital in today's globalized work environment (Chaibate et al., 2019). As organizations emphasize teamwork, developing these skills becomes crucial for individual and collective success.

The application of soft skills in the workplace is increasingly recognized as a determinant of career success. Employers report that lack of soft skills can undermine an employee's technical abilities, leading to job dissatisfaction and turnover (Stewart & Preiksaitis, 2023). Moreover, soft skills such as emotional intelligence and adaptability are linked to higher job performance and career advancement (Hirudayaraj et al., 2021; Robles, 2012). As the nature of work continues to evolve, the demand for individuals who can effectively apply these skills in real-world contexts will likely increase, making soft skills training an essential component of career development programs (Haenggli & Hirschi, 2023).

In conclusion, soft skills are indispensable for success in the modern workplace. Interpersonal skills, effective communication, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities are critical for navigating the complexities of professional environments. As organizations increasingly prioritize these competencies, educational institutions, and training programs need to emphasize the development of soft skills to prepare learners for workplace challenges.

Position of Career Adaptability in Career Development

Mark Savickas' Career Adapt-Abilities Model is a significant framework in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) that emphasizes the importance of career adaptability in navigating the complexities of modern work environments. This model identifies four core dimensions of career adaptability: Concern, Control, Curiosity, and Confidence. Each dimension is crucial on how individuals prepare for and respond to career transitions and challenges.

Career adaptability is a psychological construct representing an individual's resources for responding to current and assigned tasks, transitions, and traumas in their work roles' (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). In other words, career adaptability is a psychosocial structure that can influence employees' integration into their work environment and help them manage challenges. According to Savickas and Porfeli (2012), career development needs to be conceptualized based on individuals' continuous self-exploration in the context of changing and unstable work conditions. To be an excellent employee, one must continually keep up with the evolving trends in the job market, adapting to technological advancements, software, and sophisticated machinery.

Career construction theory (Savickas, 2002) proposes four dimensions of career adaptability: concern (being concerned about a career), control (having control over career decision-making), curiosity (having a curiosity about new opportunities), and confidence (performing tasks efficiently). Empirical studies across various cultures confirm that individuals with higher career adaptability show greater job satisfaction (Zacher, 2014), less work-related stress (Johnston et al., 2013), and higher person-environment fit perceptions (Guan et al., 2013). Studies based on the five-factor personality model show the influence of personality on individual success and satisfaction in the work environment.

Career readiness can indicate whether an individual is prepared to enter their chosen field. Vocational colleges are responsible for providing education and skills training to students in alignment with the industry's needs. The significant challenge is ensuring that trained students are ready to enter and explore job fields consistent with their skills, similar to graduates from other educational institutions in the country. However, employers today are often dissatisfied with graduates' communication skills, interpersonal skills, critical thinking, creative problem-solving abilities, and entrepreneurial skills from various institutions (Ling & Kee, 2020; Puad & Desa, 2020).

Skills adaptability in selecting the right career is crucial because, according to Greenhaus and Allen (2011), a career is a working experience that affects lifestyle and personal well-being. Therefore, career selection is an essential planning step in a graduate's life. It should align with their courses to ensure competence in performing job tasks later. If career selection is not taken seriously, individuals may end up in careers they do not enjoy, making their careers less meaningful. However, local graduates are advised to be more open about jobs after graduation, as a successful career can also be built from entry-level positions. Shaharuddin et al. (2010) state that to obtain the desired career, graduates need to have academic abilities, technical skills, and employability skills. As emphasized in the 11th Malaysia Plan (RMK-11), combining soft skills and workforce competencies is crucial for human capital development to prepare the workforce for 21st-century challenges (RMKe-11, 2019). Therefore, vocational graduates must prepare themselves with these skills and build high self-efficacy to enter the job market.

Concern refers to an individual's awareness of their future career and the proactive steps they take to prepare for it. This dimension is foundational, as it drives individuals to engage in planning and exploration of career options. Research indicates that concern is often the first to manifest, influencing subsequent dimensions such as control, curiosity, and confidence (Murat & Özdemir, 2020). Individuals who exhibit a high level of concern are more likely to engage in career planning and decision-making processes, which are essential for effective career management (Creed et al., 2009).

Control encompasses the degree to which individuals feel empowered to influence their career paths. It reflects a sense of agency and responsibility regarding career decisions. Studies have shown that individuals with a strong sense of control are better equipped to navigate career transitions and uncertainties (Hadi, 2024). This dimension is closely linked to self-regulation, as it involves making informed choices that align with personal goals and values (Bocciardi et al., 2017). The ability to exert control over one's career trajectory is critical in fostering resilience against the challenges posed by dynamic work environments (Wang, 2020).

Curiosity is the dimension that drives individuals to seek out new information and experiences related to their careers. It encourages exploration and learning, which is vital for adapting to changing job markets and roles. Curiosity has been associated with positive psychological traits that enhance career adaptability, enabling individuals to remain open to new opportunities and challenges (Kavas, 2016). This dimension facilitates career exploration and contributes to personal growth and development, enhancing overall well-being (Vela et al., 2018).

Confidence reflects an individual's belief in their ability to succeed in their career endeavors. This dimension is crucial for overcoming obstacles and pursuing career goals. High confidence levels can lead to increased motivation and persistence, which are essential for achieving career success (Hadi, 2024). Research has shown that confidence significantly correlates with career decision-making self-efficacy, suggesting that individuals who believe in their capabilities are more likely to take proactive steps in their career development (Vela et al., 2018; Koto et al., 2019).

In summary, Savickas' Career Adapt-Abilities Model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how individuals can effectively navigate their careers through concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. Each dimension contributes uniquely to career adaptability, enabling individuals to respond to the evolving demands of the workplace and to construct meaningful career paths.

Career adaptability and soft skills are interrelated, with soft skills often serving as the foundation for effective career adaptability. High adaptability often requires strong communication and teamwork skills. These soft skills help individuals navigate workplace relationships and collaborate effectively, which is essential for managing career transitions and pursuing new opportunities. Problem-solving skills enhance an individual's ability to adapt to changes and overcome obstacles. Effective problem-solving enables individuals to address challenges and seize new opportunities, contributing to overall career adaptability. In summary, career adaptability is critical to modern career management, supported by Savickas' Career Adapt-Abilities Model and Career Construction Theory. Soft skills, including communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, enhance career adaptability (Savickas, 2002; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Together, these concepts highlight the importance of both personal and professional development in achieving career success and navigating the complexities of today's job market.

METHODOLOGY

This study was designed as correlational research to explain the relationship between soft skills and career adaptability among vocational college graduates. It employed a survey method and a quantitative approach. The four vocational colleges in Negeri Sembilan were included in the research: Kuala Klawang, Juasgeh, Ampangan, and Port Dickson Vocational Colleges. These four vocational colleges are the only ones offering electrical and technology programs in the state. The study population consisted of vocational college graduates who specialize in the electrical technology field and programs. 120 graduates were selected to respond to the questionnaire. The study was conducted using a descriptive survey. Respondents were selected based on stratified and proportionate random sampling. The questionnaire instrument is divided into three sections. Section A includes demographic information about the respondents. Sections B and C contain questions on soft skills and career adaptability variables. All questions are standardized in their response format, which makes it easier for respondents to provide answers based on their assessments using a Likert scale.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The respondents consist of 120 vocational college graduates in Negeri Sembilan. Table 1 shows the overall data profile of the respondents collected for this study. In this study, 65% of male respondents and 35% of female respondents participated, indicating that males outnumbered females. For vocational colleges, Kuala Klawang Vocational College recorded respondents (22.5%), Juasgeh Vocational College respondents (27.5%), Ampangan Vocational College respondents (24.2%), and Port Dickson Vocational College 31 respondents (25.8%). This shows that Juasgeh Vocational College had the highest number of respondents, while Kuala Klawang Vocational College had the fewest. Regarding family income, 76.7% of respondents reported a family income of less than RM 4850, while 23.3% reported an income of more than RM 4850. These findings show that most respondents come from families with an income of less than RM 4850, compared to those with more than RM 4850.

Table 1: Demography of Respondents (N=120)

Demography		Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender			
	Male	78	65.0
	Female	42	35.0
Vocational College			
	Kuala Klawang Vocational College	27	22.5
	Juasgeh Vocational College	33	27.5
	Ampangan Vocational College	29	24.2
	Port Dickson Vocational College	31	25.8
Family Income			
	Less than RM 4850	92	76.7
	More than RM 4850	28	23.3

Level of Soft Skills

This study has three components of soft skills: communication, problem-solving, and teamwork. These three components are essential for effective interaction in personal and professional environments, fostering productivity and positive relationships among vocational college graduates to succeed in their careers and the

workplace. These skills can also play a crucial role in personal and professional development. Table 2 presents the findings for communication skills for this study. The results show that each statement falls within moderate to high levels. This is reflected in the mean scores, ranging from 3.25 (lowest mean value) to 3.91 (highest mean value). The statement with the highest mean score is "I can provide written feedback," with a value of 3.91, followed by "I can negotiate to reach an agreement," with a mean score of 3.80, and "I can present well," with a mean score of 3.76. Conversely, the statement with the lowest mean score is "I can express ideas verbally," with a mean score of 3.25. Overall, communication skills are moderate, with an overall mean score of 3.64. This pattern is similar to studies by Bakry et al. (2020) and Omar et al. (2023), indicating vocational college students have high and positive perceptions of their communication skills.

Table 2 depicts the findings for problem-solving skills as well. The results indicate that each statement falls within moderate to high levels. This is evident from the mean score achievements, ranging from 3.43 (lowest mean value) to 3.94 (highest mean value). The statement with the highest mean score is "I understand the problems encountered," with a value of 3.94, followed by the statement "I can plan to solve the problem," with a mean score of 3.85, and the statement "I am able to find various reference sources to solve the problem," with a mean score of 3.83. Meanwhile, the statement with the lowest mean score is "I can understand explanations given based on the problem presented," with a mean score of 3.43. Overall, problem-solving skills are high, with an overall mean score of 3.75. The findings on problem-solving skills are aligned with the results from Bakry et al. (2020), which show that vocational college students perceived problem-solving skills during their study in the institution.

Table 2 also presents the findings for teamwork skills of this study. The results indicate that each statement falls within moderate to high levels. This can be seen through the mean score achievements, ranging from 3.57 (lowest mean value) to 4.00 (highest mean value). The statement with the highest mean score is "I always help solve problems," with a value of 4.00, followed by the statement "I can coordinate meetings effectively," with a mean score of 3.97, and the statement "I am able to ease tensions in the group," with a mean score of 3.94. Meanwhile, the statement with the lowest mean score is "I can provide relevant information and opinions," with a mean score of 3.57. Overall, teamwork skills are at a high level, with an overall mean score of 3.83. The findings are aligned with the results from Bakry et al. (2020) and Omar et al. (2023) that vocational college students perceived teamwork skills as part of their preparation before entering the job market.

Table 2: Level of Soft Skills (N=120)

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Communication Skills			
I can express ideas verbally	3.25	1.13	Moderate
I can understand what is heard	3.51	0.93	Moderate
I can provide verbal feedback	3.70	0.83	High
I can present well	3.76	0.94	High
I can express ideas in written form	3.74	0.84	High
I can provide written feedback	3.91	0.82	High
I can negotiate to reach an agreement	3.80	0.86	High
I can communicate in multiple languages	3.55	0.96	Moderate
I can communicate fluently in multiple languages	3.57	0.95	Moderate

Overall Communication Skills	3.64	0.54	Moderate
Problem-Solving Skills			
I can understand explanations given based on the problem presented	3.43	0.87	High
I can make decisions based on explanations given about the problem	3.65	0.71	High
I am able to find various reference sources to solve the problem	3.83	0.69	High
I can provide further explanations when presenting ideas about the problem	3.70	0.79	High
I understand the problems encountered	3.94	0.77	High
I can plan to solve the problem	3.85	0.79	High
I am able to execute the plan that has been made	3.77	0.71	High
I am able to make decisions and provide accurate explanations	3.82	0.72	High
Overall Problem-Solving Skills	3.75	0.46	High
Teamwork Skills			
I can provide relevant information and opinions	3.57	0.86	High
I can quickly identify the situation within the group	3.72	0.86	High
When a problem arises, I can identify what is happening	3.60	0.78	High
I can lead tasks in group work	3.80	0.82	High
I can suggest a direction that is acceptable to group members	3.82	0.80	High
I can be an active listener in the group	3.89	0.78	High
I always give positive feedback in group work	3.90	0.79	High
I am able to ease tensions in the group	3.94	0.75	High
I can coordinate meetings effectively	3.97	0.67	High
I always help solve every problem	4.00	0.79	High
I take responsibility to ensure that tasks are completed	3.80	0.85	High
I can create a friendly and comfortable atmosphere in the group	3.94	0.84	High

Overall Teamwork Skills	3.83	0.48	High
Overall Soft Skills	3.74	0.49	High

Level of Career Adaptability

The researchers measured career adaptability, which encompasses four key dimensions, often referred to as the "4 Cs": concern, control, curiosity, and confidence, as presented in Table 3. These dimensions collectively enable individuals to navigate their career paths effectively and respond to the uncertainties of the employment landscape. These components are commonly associated with an individual's ability to adapt to changing career circumstances and demands. The results indicate that participants in this study consistently demonstrate high levels of adaptability across all components.

Table 3 shows that the mean scores for the concern items range from 3.80 to 3.92, with an overall mean of 3.87. These scores indicate that participants are highly concerned about their future careers. A high score in concern reflects the ability of individuals to plan for the future and perceive the relevance of current decisions for long-term goals. Respondents frequently think about their future careers and have a plan (mean = 3.90), suggesting they are proactive in shaping their career paths. The concern is a critical component of career adaptability, aligning with Savickas' Career Adapt-Abilities Model, which emphasizes the importance of foresight and goal setting in managing career transitions and uncertainties. High levels of concern indicate an individual's capacity to foresee future challenges and prepare for them. Wang et al.'s (2023) and Wikansari et al.'s (2023) findings direct the similar pattern and level of career adaptability that students from vocational colleges perceived as high career adaptability level.

The mean scores for the control range from 3.82 to 3.93, with an overall mean of 3.87, as shown in Table 3. Respondents rated high on personal responsibility, decision-making, and adherence to their beliefs. High control suggests that individuals believe they have agency over their career development. The ability to make independent decisions and take responsibility for one's actions (mean = 3.85) indicates a strong internal locus of control. Such individuals are likely to be self-directed in their careers and capable of navigating challenges. Control is integral to career adaptability, as it involves self-regulation and discipline. Individuals with high control are more likely to persevere in challenging situations. From a psychological standpoint, this dimension correlates with self-efficacy and the belief that one's actions can influence outcomes, aligned with the results from Kvaskova et al. (2022) and Wang et al. (2023).

Next, in Table 3, the mean scores for curiosity range from 3.85 to 4.00, with an overall mean of 3.92, the highest across all dimensions. The high score in curiosity reflects participants' strong inclination to explore their work environment, seek career growth opportunities, and conduct in-depth research before making decisions. The highest-scoring item (mean = 4.00) is "I make in-depth observations about something," indicating that respondents are detail-oriented and thorough in their career exploration. Curiosity in career adaptability reflects the ability to explore new possibilities and investigate various career paths. High curiosity suggests that individuals are open to learning, which is crucial in dynamic work environments. This aligns with lifelong learning, emphasizing the need for continuous skills development and exploration in today's rapidly changing job market (Kvaskova et al., 2022).

Lastly, Table 3 illustrates the confidence level in career adaptability—the mean scores for confidence range from 3.65 to 4.00, with an overall mean of 3.85. High confidence suggests participants believe in their ability to handle career tasks and challenges. However, the relatively lower score for the item "I am able to perform tasks efficiently" (mean = 3.65) indicates that while participants are confident, there may be areas where they feel less certain about their competencies. Confidence is essential for career success, enabling individuals to face new challenges and pursue opportunities. High confidence levels are associated with resilience and the ability to recover from setbacks. According to career construction theory, confidence fuels perseverance and the capacity to achieve long-term career objectives. This pattern is equal and aligned with the findings from Wang et al. (2023) and Wikansari et al. (2023).

The overall mean for career adaptability is 3.88, with a standard deviation of 0.58. This suggests that participants exhibit high career adaptability on average, which is critical in navigating modern career challenges. The overall high career adaptability reflects the participants' readiness to face career transitions and uncertainties. Career adaptability, as conceptualized by Savickas (2002), is a key predictor of career success, as it enables individuals to respond to new career demands with flexibility, curiosity, and confidence. This adaptability is increasingly important in an era of rapid technological change and evolving job markets. The results demonstrate a high level of career adaptability among participants, which is encouraging for both individuals and organizations. High adaptability equips individuals to cope with changes, seize new opportunities, and maintain resilience in facing challenges. These findings align with existing career adaptability research, emphasizing the importance of personal agency, proactive career planning, and a learning-oriented mindset in achieving career success (Kvaskova et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023; Wikansari et al., 2023).

Table 3: Level of Concern, Control, Curiosity, and Confidence of Career Adaptability (N=120)

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Concern			
I always think about my future career	3.83	0.75	High
I realize that my choices today will shape my future	3.92	0.79	High
I am always prepared for the future	3.89	0.75	High
I have a plan to achieve my goals	3.90	0.77	High
I am concerned about my career choice	3.80	0.91	High
Overall Concern	3.87	0.57	High
Control			
I can work in an organized environment	3.85	0.93	High
I am able to make decisions for myself	3.88	0.80	High
I am responsible for the actions I take	3.85	0.87	High
I hold on to my beliefs	3.82	0.91	High
I often consider my commitments and workload	3.87	0.86	High
I do what I believe is right	3.93	0.85	High
Overall Control	3.87	0.60	High
Curiosity			
I always explore the work environment	3.92	0.89	High
I seek opportunities to grow in my career	3.95	0.82	High
I investigate first before making a choice	3.90	0.77	High
I make in-depth observations about something	4.00	0.73	High
I research deeply into questions that occupy my mind	3.89	0.86	High
I am aware and informed about new career opportunities	3.85	0.82	High
Overall Curiosity	3.92	0.58	High
Confidence			

I am able to perform tasks efficiently	3.65	0.91	High
I am cautious when taking certain actions	3.81	0.96	High
I enjoy learning new skills	3.92	0.79	High
I can work according to my abilities	4.00	0.81	High
Overall Confidence	3.85	0.68	High
Overall Career Adaptability	3.88	0.58	High

Relationship between Soft Skills and Career Adaptability

Table 4 shows the correlation between the variables. The results obtained indicate a positive and significant relationship between career adaptability and communication skills ($r = 0.521$, $p = 0.001$), problem-solving skills ($r = 0.524$, $p = 0.001$), and teamwork skills ($r = 0.619$, $p = 0.001$). Therefore, each skill impacts career adaptability. This indicates a moderate positive correlation between career adaptability and communication skills. A higher level of communication skills is associated with better career adaptability. The p-value is less than 0.05, showing that this relationship is statistically significant. Therefore, the correlation is unlikely to be due to random chance. Then, there is also a moderate positive correlation between career adaptability and problem-solving skills. Individuals with stronger problem-solving abilities tend to have higher adaptability in their careers. This p-value confirms that the relationship is significant, similar to the communication skills, implying the association is meaningful. For teamwork skills, this is the highest correlation among the three skills, indicating a strong positive relationship between teamwork skills and career adaptability. The more skilled an individual is at teamwork, the better their ability to adapt to career changes or challenges. The low p-value reinforces that this correlation is significant and not by chance.

Table 4: Pearson Correlation between Soft Skills and Career Adaptability (N=120)

Correlation	Communication Skills		Problem-solving Skills		Teamwork Skills	
	r	p-value	r	p-value	r	p-value
Career adaptability	0.521	0.001	0.524	0.001	0.619	0.001

Table 5 shows the overall adaptability of the sample. In this model, soft skills explain 68% of the soft skill elements. The R^2 value of 0.462 indicates that 46.2% of the changes in adaptability are due to changes in the elements of soft skills. Based on the findings, the overall adaptability shows a significant relationship with soft skills [$F(3,116) = 33.240$, $p < 0.05$]. Therefore, a regression analysis can be performed, which is crucial for understanding how much adaptability influences soft skills. Regression will provide information on the strength and direction of the relationship between these variables and reveal the specific contribution of each soft skill element in explaining the variance in adaptability. This suggests strong support in the data for a significant relationship between soft skills, such as concern, control, confidence, and career adaptability.

Table 5: Regression between Soft Skills and Career Adaptability (N=120)

	r²	F	p-value
Soft Skills - Career Adaptability	0.462	33.240	0.001

The multiple regression test in Table 6 shows that communication skills and teamwork skills influence career adaptability, as their significance values are 0.001 and 0.001, respectively, $p < 0.05$. This indicates that communication skills and teamwork skills significantly affect career adaptability. On the other hand, problem-solving skills are not significant, as the p-value is 0.418. Therefore, problem-solving skills do not influence

adaptability.

Communication and teamwork skills show a statistically significant relationship with adaptability, meaning individuals with stronger abilities in these areas tend to exhibit higher adaptability. The low p-values (0.001 and 0.001) confirm that these relationships are unlikely to have occurred by chance. Problem-solving skills, with a p-value of 0.418, do not show a significant relationship with adaptability. This suggests that, in this model, the capacity to solve problems does not have a measurable impact on one's ability to adapt. These results highlight the importance of soft skills, particularly communication and teamwork skills, in fostering career adaptability. These findings suggest that improving these skills may enhance an individual's ability to navigate changing environments, while problem-solving may not be as directly influential.

Table 6: Regression between Soft Skills and Career Adaptability (N=120)

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	p-value
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	0.786	0.319		2.464	0.015
Communication Skills	0.265	0.078	0.281	3.402	0.001
Problem-solving Skills	0.088	0.108	0.079	0.814	0.418*
Teamwork Skills	0.469	0.096	0.443	4.907	0.000

Based on the multiple regression test, the resulting equation is as follows:

$$Y = a + b_1.X_1 + b_2.X_2$$

When applied to this context, the Career Adaptability equation becomes:

$$\text{Career Adaptability} = 0.786 + 0.265 \text{ (Communication skills)} + 0.469 \text{ (Teamwork skills)}$$

CONCLUSION

Based on the reported findings, soft skills were evaluated through communication, problem-solving, and teamwork skills. The overall level of these soft skills was satisfactory, contributing to the alignment with respondents' chosen careers. The level of adaptability displayed helps determine how well a career aligns with the individual's traits and aspirations.

The findings support the significant relationship between career adaptability and soft skills. In this context, the soft skills demonstrated are crucial in ensuring individuals make career choices well-suited to their abilities and preferences. These soft skills, particularly communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, contribute directly to career alignment, helping individuals choose careers that fit their strengths and personal characteristics. In conclusion, the study confirms that soft skills significantly enhance career adaptability, which in turn helps individuals make more appropriate career choices.

RECOMMENDATION

The administration of vocational colleges should ensure thorough preparation for their transformation and implementation, including developing improved strategies in collaboration with various stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Education Malaysia, agencies and industries. The administration needs to adopt a paradigm shift, change its mindset, and organize suitable programs to aid the successful implementation of vocational colleges in meeting industry demands. Lecturers at vocational colleges play a crucial role in imparting knowledge and education to students. This study can help lecturers understand the importance of exposing students to real-world

work environments and up-to-date knowledge that meets industry needs. Lecturers must integrate practical experiences and current industry requirements into their teaching to better prepare students for the workforce.

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