The Moderating Effect of Socio-demographic Profile to the Influence of Vocational Training on Employability Skills among Selected Retail Bank Employees in the Kingdom of Bahrain

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Abstract- This study was conducted to investigate the moderating effect of socio-demographic profile to the influence of vocational training on employability skills among selected retail banks’ employees in the Kingdom of Bahrain. Despite the straightforward relationship of training and employability skills, the recognized influence of the previous to the latter is still much debated both in practice and in the academic paradigm. This is especially true in terms of whether or not such influence hold at all conditions. Careful review of the literature will show that the number of studies exploring such construct is still much to be desired. The research employed a descriptive research design thru a controlled non-experimental set-up. An adopted questionnaire was used as data gathering tool. The study involved 180 respondents across 5 selected banks in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The study found that age, occupational ranking, and educational level significantly moderate the influence of training on communication skills. In addition, it was also found that the influence of training on ICT Skills is moderated only by gender.

Index Terms- Communication Skills, Employability Skills, ICT Skills, Vocational Training.

I. INTRODUCTION

According to the Central Bank of Bahrain (CBB) published reports (2019), more than 400 licensed financial institutions are based in Bahrain, representing a rich mixture of international, regional and local names. They cover an entire range of financial services, with concentrations in wholesale banking, insurance and asset / fund management. The financial sector is now the largest sector of the economy, accounting for over 27% of the gross domestic product. The Financial Sector is also the largest single employer in Bahrain, with Bahrainis representing over 80% of the workforce.

The report also highlights that the banking sector in the Kingdom of Bahrain is monitored and supervised by the Bahrain Central Bank (CBB), which has been the sole regulator for the whole financial system since 2002. The banking system of Bahrain comprises both conventional and Islamic banks and is the largest component of the financial system, accounting for more than 85% of the total financial assets. The conventional segment comprises 19 Retail Banks, 69 Wholesale Banks, 2 Specialized Banks, and 36 Overseas Bank Representatives. The Islamic segment, which offers a variety of Sharia-compliant products and services, includes 6 retail banks and 18 wholesale banks.

Like most of the banking systems around the world, the banking system of the Kingdom of Bahrain has been transcending from manual to technology heavy operations while still maintaining the need for social interaction. This highlights the importance of training to support the industry’s need for a workforce that is competent both in terms of ICT and Communication skills. While several studies have been conducted to associate Vocational Training and Employability Skills, such as ICT and Communication skills, very little attention is placed on how socio-demographic profile moderates such association or influence.

Most of the recruitment managers or business owners are looking for competent candidates to hire and finding such candidates with employability skills might be difficult and/or time and effort consuming. The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) (2009), has defined the term employability as “combination of knowledge, skills, and attributes that all job seekers should develop to ensure having the ability in order to be in their organizations – which will reflect positively on them, their organizations and economy”.

In addition, vocational training has been considered one of the main elements to enhance employability skills of job applicants. Human resources managers and business owners take into consideration the skills the applicant owns for any particular job in order to recruit the best among bulks of other applicants. According to the study and benchmarking made to fit the purpose, there are two main skills which are considered the most needed skills especially in commercial occupations, specifically: communication (oral, and written) and Information Communication Technology (ICT) skills. Thomas, Piquette, and McMaster (2016) stated that the biggest skills’ gaps reported were in Communication, Interpersonal Skills, ICT Skills, Language, and problem-solving. As having good communication and ICT skills would help the employee in any vacancy he/she would apply for, especially in certain jobs that do not require technical skills, or jobs that need soft skills more than technical ones (commercial vacancies).

Therefore, it is important to understand the purpose of vocational training and identify the main employability skills required to be enhanced by the learner and/or job seekers to fulfill the labor market needs within the Kingdom of Bahrain, as well as understanding the best practices to embed those skills within a training program whether by developing customized programs for particular occupation or general skills required for most of the vacancies. Hence, this study is conducted to assess the moderating effect of socio-demographic profile to the influence of vocational training to the employability skills among the employees in selected retail banks within the Kingdom of Bahrain.
II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on the Human Capital Theory emphasized on the importance of education to enhance productivity and job performance. Sangwan (2017) noted that The Human Capital Theory focuses on knowledge rather than just generic skills to ensure learner success at workplace. Both theoretical and technical knowledge along with the skills are essential to perform effectively at the workplace.

According to the Human Capital Theory, education provides the required knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform better at workplace which would lead to the conclusion that the better educated learner is more successful in labor market in terms of income and opportunities.

Vocational training is an important element to enhance the individual’s employability skills to make him/her have the potential to compete in the labor market and get the desired occupation to be fulfilled. Vocational training is a useful tool by the employer and/or HR manager to bridge the skills gap between the desired and actual skills the learner/employee has, on the other hand vocational training help the employee step up in his/her career within the same organization or in another workplace.

Communication is a critical issue at any workplace to establish and maintain quality work environment, as well as it is important in transferring information and create common understanding between the sender and the receiver within the organization whether it is direct or indirect (Abdu-Oppong, and Agyin-Birikorang, 2014). To ensure the effectiveness of the communication, it is required from both sender and receiver to be aware of their responsibilities and have good listening skills to adhere to the message content or instructions.

The other variable is the ICT skills which refer to information communication technology, as the digital skills is one of the most important skills the learner should be equipped with in the 21st century to increase the chances of better job opportunities as well as to help in the organizational growth (Pirazda and Khan, 2015).

In a promptly changed world, vocational training is an essential tool for the employees and learners to be capable of implementing and using the technology and develop their skills in this area to get better work opportunities (Bassey & Ushie, 2013). ICT is important to be developed via vocational training and cannot be overstated, it is necessary to train and re-train employees to increase their knowledge about computers and other related equipment.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

The research has employed a descriptive research design utilizing a controlled non-experimental set-up to test the moderating effect of socio-demographic profile to the influence of participation in vocational training to the employability skills of the respondents in terms of communication and ICT skills.

The research is considered as descriptive as it describes the influence of vocational training on employability skills in terms of Communication skills and ICT skills as well as how this influence is moderated by the socio-demographic profile of the learners.

This study has been conducted among the selected retail Banks in the Kingdom of Bahrain, as the Kingdom of Bahrain became one of the most attractive countries for bankers within GCC.

The Kingdom has 400 financial institutions which are basically categorized as convensional and Islamic. The convensional segment comprised 19 retail bank, The Kingdom has 400 financial institutions which are basically categorized as convensional and Islamic. The convensional segment comprised 19 retail bank, 69 wholesale, 2 specialized, and 36 overseas bank representative. While the Islamic banks comprise of 6 retail banks, and 18 wholesale bank.

A convenience sampling design is utilized in this study in accordance to the availability of the respondents to complete the questionnaire. Using a 95% confidence interval and a ± (±) 7% precision value, the researcher has used 180 samples appropriate for the identified population size. A published table is used to determine the mentioned sample (See Also; Abrar ul Haq et al., 2012, 2015, 2016, 2017a&b, 2018a,b, 2019).

The retail banks were chosen based on market share relative to the entire banking sector’s market base. The respondents will only include the rank and file employees and the employees occupying the different levels within their workplace. Each item in the questionnaire is followed by possible responses. Corresponding to each possible response are five scales on corresponding to the respondents level of agreement in all statements representing the identified variables of the study (See Also; Akram et al., 2019; Akram, F. 2017; Akram, Murugiah, & Arfan, 2017; Ashraf et al., 2017; Khan et al., 2015; Mehtab et al., 2012; Qamri et al, 2015; Qasim et al., 2018; Raza et al., 2018; Ullah et al., 2016).

IV. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

A. Level of employability skills in terms of communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator Description</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before communication (verbally and/or non-verbally) I am fully aware how the receiver(s) and how the message might affect his/her reception of the message</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When communicating a message to my colleagues; I intend to be the receiver(s) to understand their perception</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I always make my message precise and straight to the point</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I always use jargons with my colleagues (at different levels) when communicating a message</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I always avoid words that might confuse or lead to an emotional response when communicating a message</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A High level of communication
I consider the message delivery method (over the phone, face-to-face, and in writing) 3.88 0.74 High level of communication

I pay attention to any message and/or ideas communicated with me even if I do not agree 3.86 0.72 High level of communication

I consider what ever I am saying as important as how I am saying it 4.02 0.68 High level of communication

My colleagues rarely ask for clarification for any message I communicate 3.58 0.79 High level of communication

I always share messages verbally (via meetings) 2.88 1.03 Adequate level of communication

Overall 3.74 0.80 High level of communication

The table shows the level of employability skills in terms of communication. As what can be observed from the table, the over-all employability skills in terms of communication is high ($x=3.74$, $SD=0.80$). This would suggest that the respondents have relatively highly capable of conveying ideas through platforms appropriate to the nature of the information delivered.

### B. Level of employability skills in terms of ICT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I always use keyboard shortcuts</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>High level of ICT Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I always keep my documents save electronically</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>Adequate level of ICT Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to provide other colleagues with the needed support to solve some technical issues</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>High level of ICT Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to provide other colleagues with the needed training to use the organization intranet/ application</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>Adequate level of ICT Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can perform my duties using the computer only</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>Adequate level of ICT Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use the computer to send and receive emails only</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>Low level of ICT Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have attended computer-based training within my organization</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>Adequate level of ICT Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am aware of using computer/ laptop before I join my organization</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>High level of ICT Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am using the internet outside my organization</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>Very high level of ICT Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I always share messages electronically</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>Low level of ICT Skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows the level of employability skills in terms of ICT. As what can be observed from the table, the over-all employability skills in terms of ICT is adequate ($x=3.26$, $SD=1.00$). This proves that the respondents have adequate skills necessary to perform task associated to information, communications and technology.

C. Moderating Effect of Socio Demographic Profile as Moderator in the Influence of Training on Communication Skills

Two Way ANOVA of the Test Between-Subject Effects of Training, Socio-Demographic Profiles and the Interaction of both Variables to Communication Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Partial Eta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Model</td>
<td>6.527</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.176</td>
<td>12.184</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>1812.970</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1812.970</td>
<td>10152.76</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train &amp; Com.</td>
<td>6.112</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.112</td>
<td>34.230</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender * Train.</td>
<td>.316</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.316</td>
<td>1.772</td>
<td>.185</td>
<td>.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age * Train.</td>
<td>4.009</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.336</td>
<td>8.380</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OccupRanking*</td>
<td>.688</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.688</td>
<td>4.098</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>.023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age * Train.</td>
<td>1.896</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.662</td>
<td>4.284</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>.070</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*significant at 0.05
**significant at 0.01

The table above shows the analysis of Training Effects, Socio-Demographic Profiles and the Interaction of both Variables to Communication Skills. As what can be observed from the table, Training has a significant influence on communications skills, $F=34.230$, $MS=6.11$, $p<0.05$. The partial eta squared value suggests that 16.3% of the variation in communication skills can be explained by training. A previous experiment was conducted by Women in Scotland’s Economy (Wise) Research Centre (2015) to measure the gender differences on vocational training which supported the same hypothesis; that there is no correlation between gender and training. However, according to the research outcomes, females are more likely to prefer the qualitative information while males prefer the quantitative.

The rest of the socio demographic profile, Age ($F=8.380$, $MS=1.336$, $p=0.01$), Occupational Ranking ($F=4.098$, $MS=0.688$, $p=0.044$), and Educational Level ($F=4.284$, $MS=0.662$, $p=0.006$) are significant moderators on the influence of Training to communication skills. A pairwise comparison using LSD for those socio-demographic profiles computed significant is presented below;
This findings support the study of Sangwan(2017), that the Human Capital Theory which emphasizes on the importance of education to enhance productivity and job performance. The Human Capital Theory focuses on knowledge rather than just generic skills to ensure learner success at workplace. Both theoretical and technical knowledge along with the skills are essential to perform effectively at the workplace.

D. Moderating Effect of Socio Demographic Profile as Moderator in the Influence of Training on ICT Skills

The table above shows the Two Way ANOVA of the Test Between-Subject Effects of Training, Socio-Demographic Profiles and the Interaction of both Variables to ICT Skills. As what can be observed from the table, training significantly influences ICT Skills ($F=20.832$, $MS=6.901$, $p<0.01$). In fact, the partial eta square shows that 10.6% of the variations in ICT skills can be explained by vocational training. Cynthia (2014) highlights that there are some characteristics would affect the effectiveness of training in (i.e. age, education, income, and gender). The researcher concludes that there is a weak relationship between training and socio-demographic profile of the 1000 participants from the experiment held in Minnesota (USA) during 2014.

According to the researcher, learning has a greater impact on females, high income participants, and diploma holding participants than other categories, although the difference is not significant. In terms of moderating effect, only gender is significant in moderating the influence of training to ICT Skills ($F=20.832$, $MS=6.901$, $p<0.01$). The rest of the socio-demographic profile, age ($F=1.685$, $MS=0.549$, $p=172$), occupational rank ($F=0.000$, $MS=8.300E-5$, $p=0.987$), and educational level ($F=0.861$, $MS=0.258$, $p=0.425$), does not significantly moderate the influence of training to ICT Skills. A pairwise comparison using LSD for gender is presented below;
As the table shows, female respondents who have not taken vocational training tend to have poorer ICT skills than those who have (MD = -.691, p<0.01). This significant difference is not observed in male respondents. This finding suggests that the influence of Vocational Trainings for ICT is much more significant to female employees; however, age, educational background, and occupational ranking do not moderate the influence of vocational training on employability skills in terms of ICT skills, and that’s why they were not reflected in the table. Kaarakainen, Meri-Tuulia & Antero, Kivinen & Kaarakainen, Suvi-Sadetta. (2017) in their research have proven that there is a relationship between gender and ICT skills Training as per their experiment held in Fenland during the 1st quarter of 2017 among 5455 trainees from different municipalities around the country.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, several conclusions are derived. First, training has a significant influence on communication skills and this influence is moderated by Age, Occupational Ranking, and Educational Level. This concludes that training on communication skills is mostly significant if the participant is young, at entry level position and has lower academic qualifications.

Second, training significantly influences ICT Skills and its influence is moderated by gender. Female employees who have not taken vocational training tend to have poorer ICT skills than those who have. The influence of Vocational Trainings for ICT is much more significant to female employees.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

First, employees should prioritize those who have just joined the organization to attend vocational training courses related to communication skills, as the younger age occupying entry level positions, and holding lower educational degree mostly benefit from the training related to communication skills.

Second, since the final results indicate that female employees have poorer ICT skills, we would recommend the training in charge and HR practitioner in the banking sector to prioritize female employees to attend vocational training related to ICT skills as vocational training related to ICT has more impact on females rather than male employees according to the previous findings.

Third, further researches should be conducted about the moderating influence of socio-demographic profile on employability skills, considering the other basic employability skills required by the labor market and covering other sectors within the Kingdom of Bahrain.

VII. REFERENCES


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