

Impact of Academic and Professional Qualification on the Competitive Advantage among ICT Companies

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Abstract: Previous studies shows that competitive advantage is essential for organizations besides to the employees' abilities that is important to the organization performance. However, the relationships between employees' qualifications and the organisational competitive advantage need more empirical examination. Therefore, this study is an investigation for the impact of quality of academic qualification, and quality of professional qualification on the organisational competitive advantage among the ICT companies in Syria.

Materials and Methods: The target population is the senior management / executives, which include chief officers, vice president positions, and general managers. It is estimated that evet ICT sector companies could have up to 5 senior executives, which makes the target population size is 2615 and the sample size is 335.

Results: The quality of academic qualification and quality of professional qualification are found to have a significant impact on the organisational competitive advantage. For the quality of academic qualification, the P-value is 0.001, T-statistics is 3.047, the Path Coefficient is 0.035, and the effective size score is 0.035. For the quality of professional qualification, the P-value is 0.000, T-statistics is 4.310, the Path Coefficient is 0.155, and the effective size score is 0.036.

Conclusion: This study contributes to knowledge by making an empirical study to test two employees related qualification variables, which are rarely examined in the previous studies. Future work must consider more variables for examination to provide a comprehensive model that based on the knowledge capacity of the organisation. In addition, the model can be examined in different sectors and different environment to make generalisation of the proposed relationships.

Keywords: Academic Qualification, Professional Qualification, Competitive Advantages, ICT, Syria.

I. INTRODUCTION

Individuals, groups, and organizations interact to shape the organizational culture which determines the individual performance within it. An organization is consciously structured to ensure the effective interaction between these entities [1]. It is probably helpful to begin with the phrase "competitive advantage" [2], which might be regarded as the most overused and least understood catchphrase in the field of strategic management, in the words of G. D. Flint. A current ambiguous extension of that phrase is a "sustainable competitive advantage" [3]. Additionally, Porter observes that terms like competitive advantage and sustainable advantage are becoming more common [4]. It has become synonymous with business strategy to seek competitive advantages, but competitive advantages themselves are surprisingly difficult to define [5].

A core responsibility of strategic management is building and maintaining an enterprise's competitive advantage, which should allow its business activities to achieve above-average results [6]. Accordingly, a company's ability to succeed is equated to its ability to create competitive advantages [7]. Although there is an ongoing debate about competitive

advantage, the concept has generally been accepted in management sciences [8]. Cegliński [2] introduced the concept of competitive advantage, which has unquestionable significance for the theory and practice of strategic management in today's world. The term "competitive advantage" is difficult to define, even with the proliferation of scientific literature in the field of strategic management [9].

An impulse that causes someone to act or work in order to achieve a goal is the work motivation quality [10]. Motivating oneself is a result of having a concept called motif which refers to a driving force inside that will drive one to carry out certain actions with the goal of accomplishing a task [11]. Evaluating principal performance enables one to obtain the maximum benefit. Five aspects of quality of work can be assessed: 1) promptness (timeliness in finishing tasks), 2) initiative (aspirations to complete goals), 3) ability (individual ability to complete tasks), 4) communication (cooperation with others), and 5) work quality [12].

Generally, employers consider employees' future job performances based on their academic qualification if employees with a certain level of educational attainment are expected to perform at a specific level [13]. Moreover, academic achievements and background should also be considered as a condition for professional jobs [14]. A qualified employee must be evaluated based on a wide range of factors outside of the workplace, such as networking skills, interaction skills, and personal attributes [15]. A face-to-face meeting is the only effective method to examine these skills [16]. A resume that mainly focuses on candidates' technical and educational skills will be reviewed by an employer and they will then be invited for an interview to evaluate the candidates' soft skills and personalities [17]. It is during this phase that the successful candidates will be determined, who are required to have positive attitudes, suitable personalities, and appropriate backgrounds [18].

Previous studies shows that competitive advantage is essential for organizations besides to the employees' abilities that is important to the organization performance. However, the relationships between employees' qualifications and the organisational competitive advantage need more empirical examination. Therefore, this study is an investigation for the impact of quality of academic qualification, and quality of professional qualification on the organisational competitive advantage among the ICT companies in Syria.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Competitive Advantage

Despite the difficulty of defining competitive advantage conceptually, the authors of this article have created one that includes all the latent characteristics of the concept, and it clearly separates competitive advantage from its sources as well as from the concept of superior performance [19]. It should be explained that competitive advantage refers to "the ability to exploit market opportunities and neutralize competition above the industry average" [20]. Based on the definition of Sigalas et al. [20] competitive advantage cannot be observed and consequently is inherently complex [21]. It is conceptually different to define competitive advantage in terms of performance or in terms of its sources or determinants. As a result, 1) sources of competitive advantage, 2) competitive advantage, and 3) superior performance are independent and distinct concepts [22].

B. Quality of Academic Qualification

It is the meaning of Academic Qualification is that it is a degree of qualification that is rewarded to the students upon the victorious completion of a course of study in higher education, normally at the college or university [23].

As a leader, the principal's role is to motivate teachers and employees to work together to meet their responsibilities, provide excellent performance, and work in a responsible manner [24]. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the motivation of the principal impacts the performance of teachers and employees [25]. The quality of their performance is greatly affected by the aspects of ability and motivation [25]. Further, observing principal performance based on the quality of school learning is an indicator of whether a school is delivering high- or low-quality teaching [24]. The performance of a principal plays a significant role in the level of quality of learning [26].

C. Quality of Professional Qualification

The term 'professional qualifications' refers to a group of skills that are often accompanied by training [27]. For the same reason, you will be required to obtain a professional qualification in order to achieve professional status in your chosen profession. For example, if you want to become a qualified accountant or professional engineer [28].

As employees advance from one level to another within an organization, their test scores differ depending on their achievement in their respective disciplines [29]. In addition to employees' abilities to think critically, speak and express verbally [30], achievement can also manifest itself in the form of creativity. Moreover, the competence and capacities of human beings are adaptable and capable of enormous achievements in the learning process [31]. In addition to academic advising and academic committees, professional research groups are included in these non-traditional learning contexts [32]. In order to find out what level of performance is for every organization, we need to realize that performance is not a destination, but rather a journey, and that level of performance is a state [33].

III. CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Figure 1 shows the proposed model that include two constructs; quality of academic qualification and quality of professional qualification, which have a significant impact on the competitive advantage.

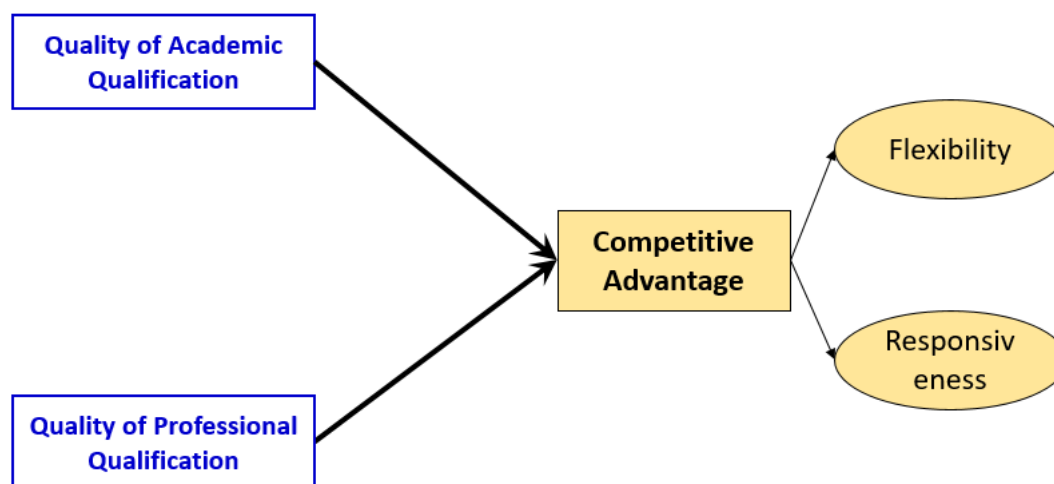


Figure I: Conceptual Model of competitive Advantages

A. Quality of Academic Qualification and Competitive Advantage

The meaning of Academic Qualification is actually that it is actually a degree of qualification that is actually rewarded to the trainees upon the triumphant finalization of a curriculum in college, usually at the university or university [34] [35]. The greater examinations the person have passed the more significant level of scholarly qualification you hold, the higher the position of the college the extra the quality of Academic Qualification will certainly be [36] [37]. While a competitive advantage is what makes a facility's goods or even services beyond each one of a client's various other choices [38] [39]. The term is frequently used for businesses. The approaches work for any kind of association, nation, or even individual in an affordable setting [40] [41]. Based on that, the more the employee are having a higher education the better they will do their assigned tasks and responsibilities. Which will lead to a better competitive advantage generation in workplace [42]–[44]. The researcher expects that Quality of academic qualification will have a significant positive direct effect on IT companies' competitive advantages in Syria. The validity of this hypothesis is supported by other studies, including [45]–[49].

- H1: Quality of academic qualification has a significant relationship with competitive advantages indirectly through employees' performance.

B. Quality of Professional Qualification and Competitive Advantage

In addition to theoretical training, professional qualifications often include practical experience [50], [51]. It is usually intended to assist individuals in improving and developing relevant skills for a particular career path[52], [53]. An indication that you lag the competition in a particular area is known as a competitive disadvantage[54], [55]. The lack of resources that a small firm can utilize to compete in product development and advertising in general puts them at a disadvantage to larger firms in most cases [56], [57]. Based on that, the more the employee are having a better practical and professional qualifications like experience certificates etc. the better they will do their assigned tasks and

responsibilities. Which will lead to a better competitive advantage generation in workplace [58]–[60]. Based on that, the researcher expects that quality of professional qualification has a significant positive direct effect on competitive advantages of IT companies in Syria. According to this hypothesis, other studies have tested similar hypotheses, including [43], [44], [61]–[63].

- H2: Quality of professional qualification has a significant relationship with competitive advantages indirectly through employees' performance.

IV. RESEARCH METHODS

In an empirical research project, the research design is the comprehensive plan for collecting data. It is intended to address the research questions and test the hypotheses. Using a cross-sectional survey design, the research objectives are fulfilled with a single group of respondents completing a well-structured questionnaire – the dependent variable along with the independent variables at the same time are measured in the same questionnaire [64]. To assess the study hypotheses in addition to the regression type of analysis, experimentation is conducted.

The study follows a scientific approach as it begins with identifying the problem, defining it, and formulating a hypothesis. It ends up with confirming or disapproving that hypothesis except for the outcome's interpretation and conclusion. In this process, there are usually some specific stages [65] [66]. The entire study will focus on this particular hypothesis, which will be supported by mathematical and statistical measures. Quantitative research designs can be a valuable tool to disprove or prove null hypotheses [67]. Additionally, the study consists of a survey, as surveys are a common method in business research and allow significant numbers of respondents to be surveyed.

The target population is the senior management / executives, which include chief officers, vice president positions, and general managers. It is estimated that even ICT sector companies could have up to 5 senior executives, which makes the target population size 2615. The researcher used the quota sampling to collect sample from the two groups of employees from small companies and medium and large companies. The total population is 2615 and the suitable sample size based on Morgan and Kerjice [68] formula is 335.

As part of our analysis, SmartPLS is the primary tool used for two types of examinations: measurement model testing and structural model testing. Testing the measurement model involves evaluating the validity and reliability of the dataset and the measurement model itself. Using the PLS algorithm together with bootstrapping, the main results for relations can be analyzed and predicted by using structural model tests.

Questionnaire has been used in this particular research, which has been adapted from previous studies, as the following.

- Quality of Academic Qualification (QAQ) variable have five questions that adapted based on previous sources [69], [70].
- Quality of Professional Qualification (QPQ) variable have four questions that adapted based on previous sources [71], [72].
- Competitive Advantages (CA) variable have eleven questions that adapted based on previous sources [73], [74].

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Validity and Reliability of Constructs

There have been several methods used to guarantee the measurement model's reliability and validity, including composite reliability, outer loading, convergent validity, and discriminant validity [75] [76]. There were some items removed based on inner loading and cross loading guidelines; therefore, one item was removed. In addition, all other items outside of the main item have an outer loading higher than 0.708; hence, sign reliability can be achieved. As can be seen from Table 1, all values are above the threshold value of 0.70 when measured by Cronbach's Alpha. This in turn makes the dimension model more reliable. In this case, convergence validity is established because the average value of the Variance Extracted (AVE) items is 0.5. Fornell-Larcker criterion is shown in Table 2, which demonstrates that no concerns are associated with discriminant validity.

Table I: Constructs Reliability and Validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE
Competitive Advantages	0.869	-
Competitive Advantages - Flexibility	0.854	0.632
Competitive Advantages - Responsiveness	0.855	0.583
Quality of Academic Qualification	0.908	0.685
Quality of Professional Qualification	0.883	0.739

Table II: Discriminant validity – Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	CAF	CAR	QAQ	QPQ
Competitive Advantages - Flexibility	0.795			
Competitive Advantages - Responsiveness	0.436	0.763		
Quality of Academic Qualification	0.566	0.250	0.860	
Quality of Professional Qualification	0.631	0.283	0.505	0.834

B. Hypotheses Findings

Quality of Academic Qualification and Competitive Advantages

The related hypothesis states that there is positive association between quality of academic qualification and competitive advantages. After doing a data analysis the researcher found out the P-value is 0.001, T-statistics is 3.047, the Path Coefficient is 0.035, and the effective size score is 0.035. Based on that we can conclude that the relationship between quality of academic qualification and competitive advantages is considered as a significant relationship with a positive impact. So that H1 is accepted. Details are illustrated in Table 3.

- H1: Quality of academic qualification has a significant relationship with competitive advantages.

Table III: Findings of relationship QAQ -> CA

Hypothesis	Relation	Status	Sign	Path Coefficient	Effective Size	T- statistics	P- Value
H2	QAQ -> CA	Accepted	Positive	0.105	0.035	3.047	0.001

Quality of Professional Qualification and Competitive Advantages

The related hypothesis states that there is positive association between quality of professional qualification and competitive advantages. After doing a data analysis the researcher found out the P-value is 0.000, T-statistics is 4.310, the Path Coefficient is 0.155, and the effective size score is 0.036. Based on that we can conclude that the relationship between quality of academic qualification and competitive advantages is considered as a significant relationship with a positive impact. So that H2 is accepted. Details are illustrated in Table 4.

- H2: Quality of professional qualification has a significant relationship with competitive advantages.

Table IV: Findings of relationship QPQ -> CA

Hypothesis	Relation	Status	Sign	Path Coefficient	Effective Size	T- statistics	P- Value
H3	QPQ -> CA	Accepted	Positive	0.155	0.036	4.310	0.000

VI. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

Organisations to have an outstanding performance in term of competitive advantages must have the suitable resources. Employees are the key advantage of the organisation, and the organisation proficiency is related to the employees' quality of academic qualification and employees' quality of professional qualification. Therefore, the quality of academic qualification, quality of professional qualification is found to have a significant impact on the organisational competitive advantage. This study contributes to knowledge by making an empirical study to test two employees related qualification variables, which are rarely examined in the previous studies. Future work must consider more variables for examination to provide a comprehensive model that based on the knowledge capacity of the organisation. In addition, the model can be examined in different sectors and different environment to make generalisation of the proposed relationships.

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