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Issues and Challenges in Career Counselling in Higher Education

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Abstract

Career readiness of university students refers to the ability to make career decisions influenced by external factors such as family, organization, social and economic. Career decision-making ability among university students is important as an indicator of graduates' employability skills. This concept paper discusses the issues of career readiness as well as the factors that contribute to low career readiness among university students. The results of the analysis from the graduate marketability study report, previous studies and related references found that there are two main issues, namely the graduate marketability rate is still low for certain study programs and issues related to salaries earned by graduates are not commensurate with their qualifications. Career readiness is a psychological predictor factor that needs to be considered to help students have the skills needed in future careers. In the context of career counselling, the implications for career counselling and guidance; focus on the dysfunctional career thinking; the appropriateness of career interventions based on the needs of students; and evaluation and monitoring of structured career development programs. Suggestions for improvements to career development programs need to be made to provide effective career psychology support to students.

Keywords: Career Counselling, Career Readiness, Dysfunctional Career Thinking, University Students

Introduction

Graduate employability is measured by the extent to which university graduates get employment after graduation. The measure of graduates' employability is a benchmark for universities to ensure that graduates that are produced meet the needs of the market and graduates are employed upon graduation. Therefore, national policy is influenced by the benchmarks set by the university in producing competent and highly skilled graduates. The employment factor among employees with higher education qualifications to fulfil the job market in the 21st century is very important to ensure that the country is on track to achieve as a developed country. Various policies have been introduced from time to time to increase the graduates' employability to ensure the country's transformation agenda can be achieved. One of the policies is to improve higher education capability to produce competent and high skilled graduates (Sirat, 2005).

The university's challenge today is in line with the current needs to provide students with skills that suit their interests, abilities, and talents, improve their decision-making skills and information-seeking skills, and interpersonal relationships (Salim, 1996). These factors are elements that can measure students' career readiness in the process of making career planning. Career readiness is an individual's ability to make appropriate career choices while taking into consideration aspects that impact career development such as family, organisation, social, and economic factors (Sampson et al., 2013). According to Gysbers (2003), identified six career readiness skills: social competence, diversity of skills, positive work habits, personal qualities, personality and emotions, and entrepreneurship. However, Bullock-yowel et al (2013) state that career readiness is a cognitive strategy such as the ability to make interpretations, problem-solving and decision-making ability.

Dysfunctional Career Thinking

A person's belief system is either good or negative, affecting career decision making. Negative beliefs impede information processing in making career explorations, and cause job-seeking behaviour to decline (Reardon, et al., 2006). Career problem solving is a rational process involving a person's picture of one's true self and ideal self. If the real self and the ideal self are rational, then the career decision -making process will be realistic. Negative career thinking, on the other hand, is characterised as thinking about assumptions, attitudes, behaviours, beliefs, emotions, strategies, or tactics connected to problem-solving and career decision making (Sampson, et al., 2013). This gap causes negative thinking, which disturbs or hinders individual from making decisions, particularly regarding their careers. A logical process implies that a person may define a career via the process of learning (Peterson, et al., 1996).

Career thinking that encompasses feelings, thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs expectations influences decision-making ability of individual (Bullock-yowell et al., 2013). Negative career thinking is an individual's dysfunctional thought that will affect career decision-making and problem-solving abilities. Individuals with low career decision-making efficacy tend to have negative career thinking. Thus, by identifying negative career thoughts help in planning appropriate intervention strategies (Sidiropoulou-Dimakakou et al., 2012; Thrift et al., 2012).

Figure 1, explains the information processing pyramid model which has three domains namely, (i) Knowledge Domains; (ii) Decision-Making Skills Domain; and (iii) Executive Processing Domain. This model assists the process of exploration in one's career development which involves rational thinking (Sampson, et al., 2013)

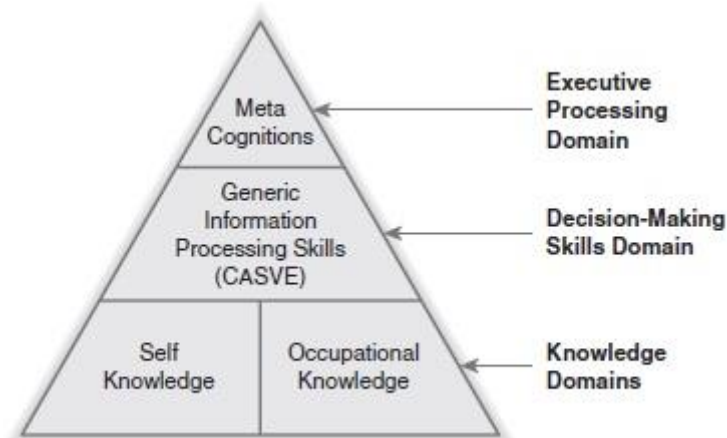


Figure 1: Cognitive Information Processing Model
(Source: Sampson, et al., 2013)

Issues and Challenges in Career Counselling

Past studies have found that undergraduate students in university experience low and moderate career readiness (Mansor & Rashid, 2013; Jelas et al., 2013; Yon, et al., 2012; Kaur, 2012; Hughes, 2011). Career readiness is a predictive factor to students' ability and capability to prepare themselves with systematic career planning. A person with career readiness is influenced by an individual's ability to make appropriate career decisions taking into account external factors such as family, organization, social and economic. (Sampson et al., 2013; Reardon et al., 2012). The ability to make career decisions are related to career thinking that involves feelings, thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs of expectations (Bullock-yowell et al., 2013). However, negative career thinking is an individual's dysfunctional thinking that will affect the career decision-making process and problem-solving ability. Individuals with low career decision-making efficacy tend to have negative career thinking. Therefore, by identifying negative career thinking can plan appropriate intervention strategies (Thrift et al., 2012).

Overall, it can be concluded that university students' career development can be explained to be a critical phase in the career decision-making process. Apart from the academic achievement factor, career planning is an essential factor that needs to be given attention by them. This situation is understandable that there are psychological factors in career development that can be linked to the ability to make career decisions. The ability to make career decisions can be enhanced through education either formally or informally (Kristin, 2009). Formal education is the application of coursework or program curriculum. In comparison, non-formal education is through career development programs such as career workshops/talks (resume writing, attending interviews, job hunting, etc.). Understanding students' need in career decision-making can help them plan and develop appropriate career interventions (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2013; Whiston & Blustein, 2013).

Past studies have shown that students are less confident in themselves to succeed in academics and carry out career activities they want to pursue. In addition, respondents' career maturity level, self-career efficacy, and career decision-making ability were at moderate and low levels (Mahmud et al., 2016). Some students experience a lack of confidence in making their own career choices and have poor self-efficacy, causing them to have difficulty visualising the forms of career tasks they would choose.

A thorough study of the Graduate Tracer Study System report between 2006 and 2018 showed an unchanged trend in unemployed graduates after six months of graduation (Ministry of Higher Education, 2019). In addition, there are also graduates who work in fields that are not aligned with the education they took in university (Norida et al., 2014). This issue has received the attention of the university and the ministry in finding a solution to address the issue of graduates who are unemployed upon six months of graduation. Among the factors why the output of higher education institutions is difficult to secure a job in the job market is because they do not have the ability to convince employers in terms of personality, appearance, self-confidence, lack of communication skills, lack of decision-making skills and incapable of working in groups (The National Higher Education Research Institute, 2003), low levels of readiness such as insecurity, negative attitudes, no job searching skills and communication skills problem (Norida et al., 2014). In the career development context, graduates who are unemployed upon graduation do not have a high level of career awareness and career maturity (The National Higher Education Research Institute, 2003), have negative career thinking (Reardon et al., 2013; Sampson et al., 2012; Kleiman, 2004; Sidiropoulou-Dimakakou et al., 2012) and low career self-efficacy (Jelas et al., 2013).

Based on those discussions, the current university challenges fit with the current needs, which is to provide students with skills appropriate to their interests, abilities and talents, improving decision-making skills and information seeking skills, and interpersonal relationships. Besides, to determine the well-being and development of a country. This is because a higher level of education and skills are seen as the primary foundation needed to enable a country to compete in the era of globalisation and the knowledge-based sector. Thus, understanding the issues among graduates that affect employability and availability of work shows psychological factors such as the ability to make career decisions and career self-efficacy also affect a person's career readiness. Therefore, appropriate career interventions are needed to improve students' career readiness to fulfil the job market's needs (Greene & Staff, 2012).

It follows that the implications of this study on the needs for the implementation of career development programs in universities require the following (i) conduct a study of current issues or phenomena; (ii) application of counselling and career counselling theory in the development of modules; (iii) test the validity and reliability of module/instrument; (iv) implement modules based on the suitability of population or target; (v) make a continuous evaluation of each activity in the module; and (vi) make continuous improvements to the module/instrument. These elements are implications to the needs for career intervention needs that can be implemented in career development programs towards university students.

Conclusion

Career readiness is an important element that needs to be considered, especially among university students where the education process between 3 to 5 years in university will be evaluated after graduation with the extent to which employability and job availability can be used as a benchmark to the quality of a university. Several government policies focusing on becoming a developed country by 2020, such as ETP, GTP, RMK10 and RMK11, PSPSTN and Malaysia Higher Education Blueprint 2015 – 2025, needs to increase competent workforce that contributes to the national economy. Psychological factors such as dysfunctional career thinking can be given attention to help students improve their self-confidence in the process

of planning a systematic and structured career planning. This variable is a predictor to increase students' career readiness if appropriate interventions for students' needs are implemented.

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