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## Student's Career Maturity: Implications on Career Counseling

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### Abstract

This study aimed to examine the level of career maturity and its implications on career counselling programs. It also attempted to determine whether the variables in this study were related to other variables, such as gender, race, stream of study, academic achievement, and family's socio-economic status. Total of 1060 respondents from 106 national type secondary schools in Terengganu were identified as research samples and they were selected through a systematic random sampling process. This survey type of research used a questionnaire and interview protocol. The questionnaire comprised of three sub-scales: (i) Personal information and student involvement in career guidance and counselling programs, (ii) Career Maturity Inventory. The Cronbach's alpha value for career maturity was 0.92. Data was analysed using the descriptive analysis i.e. frequency, percentage, t-Test, mean, and standard deviation. Besides that, inferential analysis such as ANOVA and linear regression was also applied to test the research hypothesis. The result indicates that, in general, career maturity among students ranked from low to medium level. It also found that students' career maturity was significantly different based on gender, stream of study, academic achievement, and family's socio-economic status. However, there was no significant difference between students' career maturity based on race. The report concluded that although career guidance and counselling programs play an important role in the development of the two variables, however, as indicated earlier, gender, stream of study, academic achievement, and family's socio-economic status also played their roles. The findings have important implications on the development of career guidance and counselling programs in schools.

**Keywords:** Career Maturity, Career Guidance, Career Counselling Program

## Introduction

Choosing a correct and suitable career according to an individual's preference is important when ensuring self-wellbeing. Efforts to assist each individual to introspect and gain awareness about careers and opportunities that are available before making career choices should be intensified. Hence, careful planning is crucial, especially from the ages of 15 to 18 years old because at that age range students are at a stage where they are exploring careers (Super, 1971). Therefore, counselling and guidance services in schools should play an important role in assisting students to enhance career maturity.

Choosing the right career has become a problem for upper secondary students, especially those in Form Four, who have not been exposed much to career development or information about careers (Noah, 2002). Most students are still vague about making choices regarding the vocation they would venture into in the future (Hashim & Amnah, 2006). On the average, students these days make career choices according to criteria set by their family, peers or parties that are sponsoring their studies (Hashim & Amnah, 2006). A majority of students would not receive any guidance at all if the career counselling and guidance services are not implemented seriously, formally and effectively (Salim, 2001).

Besides the issue concerning lack of information about careers and knowledge about the source of information, other issues related to scattered information as well as incomplete, outdated and difficult to obtain information is another problem encountered by students, job seekers and counsellors (Amla, Zuria & Salleh, 2007). These issues are a big challenge for career development, especially among students. They need to make early decisions related to career development so that they have enough time to ponder and ensure that the decisions are wise decisions (Amla, Zuria & Salleh, 2007). Hence, awareness about careers should be inculcated from the secondary school age onwards (Yahya, 2006).

In schools, teachers and counsellors can assist students by offering career guidance and counselling as well as advisory service about courses available in universities and institutions of higher learning based on the student's achievements and interests. Discussions with students helps to guide them in choosing the correct courses before they are accepted into a university or college. Hence, opportunities like this are seldom exploited by students and they are usually at a loss (Yahya & Haizuan, 2006).

## Career Maturity

Super (1957) defined career maturity as "the readiness to make appropriate choices when engaged in planned exploration and possessing appropriate occupational knowledge, self-knowledge, and decision-making knowledge". Readiness here refers to the level of career development in a person. Super's career development model presumes that each level of development exhibits an appropriate career behaviour. Hence, career maturity refers to compatibility between the individual's career behaviour and the presumed career behaviour for a particular age level. The greater the compatibility with the presumed behaviour, the higher the individual's level of maturity according to the career development aspect. An individual's level of

career maturity could be determined by comparing the individual's career development with that of others in the same age group (Nasir, 2005).

Career maturity is said to change according to time and an individual's career maturity exhibits several characteristics such as capability, knowledgeable, efficiency, skilfulness, adaptability, highly motivated and having a successful career. It was found to be related to the ability to make realistic choices as well as combining self-concept with a vocation (Super, 1957).

Based on the model adduced by Super, Form 2 students are at the end of the growth stage, Form 4 students are at the tentative stage, whereas, Lower 6 students are at the transition stage. At the end of the growth stage, the individual's capabilities are related to the qualifications required for a job. At the beginning of the tentative stage, elements such as interests, capabilities, values and opportunities are taken into consideration when choosing a career. Brown, Garavalia, Fritts (2006) stated that at this stage the individual begins to self-explore and get acquainted with the world of careers.

### **Career Maturity Based on Factors**

Previous studies have indicated several variables that could be related to career maturity among students. Variables that have been frequently studied are gender, stream or course of study, academic achievements and the family's socio-economic status.

#### **Gender Factor**

Data that related gender to career maturity had shown mixed results. Some studies found that female students had a higher level of career maturity compared to male students (Arshad, 2001; Ken, 2001; Clara, Andrews, 2002; Patton & Creed, 2003). However, some studies had found that both males and females did not show any significant difference (Annamalai, 2000; Ki-Hak, 2001; She, 2001; Chin, 2003 and Syuhadak, 2004). Notwithstanding, a few studies had stated that male students had higher levels of career maturity compared to female students (Ee, 2004; Yong, 2004; Nasir et al., 2005 and Ling, 2006).

#### **Stream or Course of Study Factor**

In the context of career development, course of study is considered a form of environment that affects a person's development of maturity. The physical, psychological and social environments associated with each course of study is different and presumed to influence a person's thinking and behaviour about career maturity. Based on the findings, some studies have shown the existence of a significant difference between the student's level of career maturity and the stream or course of study factor (Bee, 2000: Andrew, 2002 and Ee, 2004). Whereas, some studies have shown no significant differences between career maturity and the stream or course of study (Chien, 1998; Chin, 2003; Syuhadak, 2004). In the Malaysian education system, Form 4 is a deciding year for students to start a career. This is the year when students are divided according to streams or course of study that would eventually lead them to decide on their future careers.

#### **Academic Achievement Factor**

Based on previous studies, it was found that there is a positive relationship between academic achievements and the student's level of career maturity (Huwa, 2000; Wu-Tien, 2000; Ken, 2001; Arshad, 2001; Patton, Creed & Muller, 2002; Ee, 2004; Ling, 2006). Academic achievement is also a good predictor of career maturity. Only two studies found no significant difference between career maturity and academic achievement or learning performance; regardless of whether the academic achievement was high or low (Creed & Patton, 2003 and Chin, 2003). Ginzberg et al., (1963) also stated that intelligence based on academic achievements has a great influence on a person's vocational behaviour. Academic achievement plays an important role in choosing and developing a student's career.

#### Family's Socio-Economic Status Factor

According to previous studies (Annamalai, 2000; She, 2001; Ee, 2004; Syuhadak, 2004), the family's economic resources or the socio-economic status is directly related to the influence on the student's level of career maturity. Whereas, some previous studies (Huwa, 2000; Ken, 2001; Madavan, 2002; Creed & Patton, 2003; Chin, 2003 and Nasir et al., 2005) found the contrary, whereby there was no significant difference between the student's career maturity and the family's socio-economic status. However, Ginzberg et al., (1963) stated that limitations in reality, such as economic factors, do influence a person's career choice. Hence, the family's SES factor based on parent's income was considered when measuring the student's career maturity in this study. Since the accumulated data could not give a clear picture of the factors related to career maturity, a more systematic study with a bigger sample size could provide a more conclusive picture. Henceforth, a more conclusive study was carried out in the state of Terengganu.

#### Methodology

The study was initiated using the survey method that used questionnaires as an instrument to collect data. The sample in this study consisted of 1060 Form 4 students from 106 National Secondary Schools (Normal and Daily) in the state of Terengganu. The number of students according to gender comprised 530 male and 530 female students. The dependent variable in this study was career maturity. Whereas, the independent variables or free variables comprised gender, stream or course of study, academic achievement and the family's socio-economic status. These variables were chosen after considering the survey in previous studies. In order to obtain data for this study, the questionnaire instrument was divided into three sections;

#### Section A: Personal Information

Section A of the questionnaire was related to information about the respondent. It was designed by the researcher in order to obtain information about the background of the subjects in this study. Among the items found in Section A were gender, race, stream or course of study, form, name of school, district, results of the mid-year examinations, family income, and the student's involvement in career guidance and counselling programs such as talks, counselling, movies, exhibitions or work visits. This information was used as factors in the tested hypothesis.

Section B: Career Maturity Inventory – Revised by Crites and Savickas (1995) - Career Maturity Inventory-Revised (CMI-R).

Section B of the questionnaire used the Career Maturity Inventory – Revised 1995, which was translated into the Malay language. The aim of using this instrument was to collect data concerning attitudes and career maturity efficiency among Four 4 students in 106 national secondary schools (normal and daily) in the state of Terengganu. The attitude and efficiency scales measured the readiness of an individual to participate in activities related to particular careers and also obtain information about the feelings, subjective reactions, skills, and an individual's inclination when making a career choice decision going into the working world.

The attitude and efficiency scales were used to measure the individual's maturity by referring to the attitude and skills in making career decisions (Crites, 1978, 1995 and Nasir, 2005). There were five dimensions in the attitude and efficiency sub-scales found in the Career Maturity Inventory. The career maturity attitude sub-scale refers to (1) Stipulations concerning career choice decisions; (2) Involvement in making career choice decisions; (3) Freedom to make career choice decisions; (4) Orientation towards making career choice decisions; and (5) Compromise when making career choice decisions. Whereas, the career maturity efficiency sub-scale was created to measure how much of a particular information possessed by the individual is related to careers and how much planning skills is needed to make career decisions. The efficiency sub-scale refers to: (1) Knowing oneself; (2) Information about the job; (3) Choosing the objective / job; (4) Career planning, and (5) Solving career problems. The number of items for the attitude and efficiency sub-scales were 25 each, hence, the total number of items for career maturity was 50.

The scoring in the CMI-R measuring tool used the Thurstone Scale, whereby each question has two dimensions, namely "Agree/ Correct" or "Disagree/ Incorrect". The Thurstone scale was built by a psychologist named Louis Thurstone (1928), who believed that people could make judgements and evaluations about themselves from a psychological perspective, as when a person is given two different statements and that person could make a choice as to a statement that is more agreeable (Piaw, 2006). The Career Maturity Inventory had gone through a pilot study process to test the instrument's credibility and consistency, which involved 120 students from Form 4. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the attitude scale in the questionnaire instrument for career maturity was 0.92 and for the efficiency scale was .91.

### **Data Analysis**

The data in this study were processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. One of the statistical tests was the t-Test, which was used to determine the difference in career maturity among students of different gender and stream or course of study. Whereas, the ANOVA (analysis of variance), was used to determine the difference in career maturity among students of different academic achievements and families with socio-economic status. The level of significance of the test was ( $P < 0.05$ ).

### **Findings**

Table 1 shows the results of the overall difference related to career maturity based on gender, stream or faculty of study, academic achievement and family's socio-economic status.

Table 1: Differences in Career Maturity According to Gender, Stream or Course of Study, Academic Achievement and Family's Socio-Economic Status (N= 1060).

CAREER MATURITY				
Factor	Distribution	Number of Samples	Min	Significance
Gender	Male	530	72.5	.000
	Female	530	86.1	
Stream or Course of Study	Science	530	81.0	.000
	Non-Science	530	77.6	
Achievement	High	383	92.0	.000
	Moderate	406	76.2	
	Low	271	66.0	
Family's Socio-Economic Status	High	213	82.1	.000
	Moderate	507	82.9	
	Low	340	72.0	

#### Career Maturity Based on the Gender Factor

The t-Test showed that there was a significant difference in career maturity based on students' gender. The min score for career maturity among male students was (n=530, min=72.5), which was lower compared to the min score for career maturity among female students, which was (n=530, min=86.1), with a significance level of .000

#### Career Maturity Based on the Stream or Faculty of Study

The t-Test showed that there was a significant difference in career maturity based on the student's stream or course of study. The min score for career maturity for students from the science stream was (n=530, min=81.0), which was higher compared to the min score for career maturity for students from the non-science stream (n=530, min=77.6), with a level of significance of .000

#### Career Maturity Based on the Academic Achievement Factor

The ANOVA test showed that there was a significant difference in career maturity among students with different academic achievements with the F value at 501.5. The Scheffe and Tukey Post Hoc tests were used to determine the difference in min scores among students with different academic achievements. According to the data analysis, the min for career maturity among students with different academic achievements, which was at a higher academic achievement category, had the highest min score (min=92.0), followed by a moderate academic achievement with a moderate min score (min=76.2) and the lowest min score for career maturity was for the student's low academic achievement (min=66.0).

#### Career Maturity Based on the Family's Socio-Economic Status Factor

The ANOVA test showed a significant difference in career maturity among students of different 'family socio-economic status' with a F values of 67.6. The Scheffe and Tukey Post Hoc tests were

used to determine the difference in min score for career maturity among students with different family socio-economic status. According to the data analysis, the min for career maturity among students coming from families with different socio-economic status (either high or moderate levels) was (min=82.1 and min=82.9) respectively, which was almost similar in value. The lowest min for career maturity was for students with a low family socio-economic status (min=72.0).

### **Discussions**

The data analysis on career maturity had produced characteristics similar to that of several previous studies. The analysis for the 'gender' factor was found to support the analytical findings of several previous studies (Arshad, 2001; Ken, 2001; Clara, Andrews, 2002; Patton & Creed, 2003; Turner, Sherri & Lapan, Richard, 2003; Paulsen, Alisa, Betz & Nancy, 2004; Brown, Chris, Garavalia, Linda & Hines, 2006), in which there were significant differences in career maturity among students of different gender. Female students were found to have higher levels of career maturity compared to male students.

The analytical findings related to the 'stream or course of study' factor showed that it supported findings by several other studies (Bee, 2000; Andrew, 2002; Chua, 2002). whereby there were significant differences in career maturity based on the 'stream or course of study' factor. It was found that students in the pure science stream had a higher career maturity compared to students in the non-science stream.

The analytical analysis related to the 'academic achievement' factor supported several previous studies (Huwa, 2000; Ken, 2001; Arshad, 2001; Patton, Creed & Muller, 2002; Chua, 2002; Hon, 2002; Ee, 2004; Ling, 2006), whereby the study found that there were significant differences in career maturity based on the students 'academic achievement' factor. It could be concluded that the student's level of career maturity is influenced by the level of academic achievement. Students who exhibit excellent academic achievements do actually possess a high level of career maturity. Conversely, students with low academic achievements possess a low level of career maturity.

Meanwhile, analytical findings related to the 'family's socio-economic status' factor had supported the findings of several previous studies (Annamalai, 2000; She, 2001; Ee, 2004; Syuhadak, 2004), whereby the findings showed that there was a significant difference in career maturity according to the 'family's socio-economic status' factor. This study also showed that students who come from families with a high and moderate socio-economic status had a min value for career maturity that was almost similar. However, for students coming from families with a low socio-economic status were inclined to possess a low level of career maturity.

### **Implications and Summary**

The findings from this study have several implications on the theory and practice of career guidance and counselling, especially in secondary schools. First, the findings showed that female students with a higher level of career maturity were more academic oriented, more academically successful, more focused and had a higher locus of control compared to male students. Second, programs for developing career awareness and other career programs need to have a strategy



that would have a high impact on a target group with different gender, academic achievement, stream of study as well as family socio-economic status. Third, the findings also showed how different environments, such as family or classroom environments, could have an effect on a student's career development. Besides that, the effect of academic achievement and stream of study could be related to the intellectual development of an individual.

Since female students, students from the science stream, high achievers and those with a high socio-economic background were moderate and were found to possess a higher level of career maturity compared to other groups; hence, all career guidance and counselling programs should consider and differentiate the target groups. Those who have a higher level of career maturity might need support enrichment programs to continue developing the level of career maturity, while those with a low level of career maturity need intervention, rehabilitation and development programs, besides support programs that involve the entire school, including the parents and family.

Hence, counsellors need to be sensitive towards the student's characteristics when planning career guidance and counselling programs. Programs involving teachers should be developed when necessary.

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