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Examining Career Maturity among Foreign Asian Students: Academic Level

Mustafa Tekke*
University of Malaya

Faiz Bin Adam Ghani**
University of Malaya

Abstrak

Individu Asia bersifat suka bergantung dan kolektif berbanding individu Barat yang bebas dan individualistik. Pelajar asing dari negara-negara Asia yang memilih kursus yang sama dengan rakan se negara tidak menunjukkan kematangan dalam pemilihan kerjaya dan seterusnya memberikan kesan negatif terhadap pilihan mereka. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji tahap kematangan dalam pemilihan kerjaya oleh pelajar-pelajar asing dari negara-negara Asia di Malaysia berdasarkan tahap akademik dengan menggunakan Inventori Kematangan Kerjaya. Seramai dua ratus dua puluh sembilan (lelaki = 106, perempuan = 123) pelajar antarabangsa dalam pelbagai semester telah melengkapkan Inventori Kematangan Kerjaya dan didapati tiada perbezaan signifikan antara responden dari pelbagai semester akademik dan tahap kematangan kerjaya. Ini mungkin menggambarkan bias tahap pendidikan dalam pembinaan keputusan pemilihan kerjaya. Dapatan kajian semasa didapati tidak konsisten dengan jangkaan teori dan penyelidikan terdahulu bahawa pelajar antarabangsa yang lama mempunyai kematangan dalam pemilihan kerjaya yang lebih tinggi daripada pelajar antarabangsa yang baru. Kajian juga mendapati dapatan kajian mungkin disokong oleh sikap kebergantungan dan kolektif dalam budaya Asia yang menjadikan pelajar-pelajar antarabangsa yang baru mempunyai tahap kematangan dalam pemilihan kerjaya yang lebih tinggi daripada pelajar-pelajar antarabangsa yang lama.

Kata kunci: *Kematangan kerjaya, pelajar-pelajar antarabangsa, pelajar-pelajar asing dari Asia, pelajar baru, pelajar lama*

Abstract

The Asian individuals are dependent and collectivist compared with the western individuals that are independent and individualistic. Foreign Asian students choosing similar courses with their country friends do not reveal their career maturity and also lead to negative effect on their choices. This study aims at examining the level of career maturity of foreign asian students in Malaysia based on academic level by using the Career Maturity Inventory. Two hundred and twenty nine (Male=106, Female= 123) international students studying in various semesters completed the Career Maturity Inventory and it was reported that there were no significant differences between respondents of different academic semesters with regard to level of career maturity, this might reflect an educational level bias in the construction of the career decision-making. The findings of the current study are not consistent with theoretical expectations and prior research that international undergraduate senior students would be having higher career maturity than international undergraduate fresh students. Research emphasizes the reason behind might result from dependent and collectivist Asian culture that leading to fresh international students are higher career maturity compared to senior international students.

Keywords: *Career Maturity, international students, Asian foreign students, fresh students, senior students*

* Mustafa Tekke, Faculty of Education, University Malaya (UM), 59100 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Email: mustafatekke@gmail.com

** Faiz Bin Adam Ghani, Faculty of Education, University Malaya (UM), 59100 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Email: faiz_adam2002@yahoo.com

Introduction

Individuals increasingly gain career maturity through their life span as part of their developmental process. Career maturity has played a major role in the career development of individuals of all ages. It holds true for students choosing their studies in a foreign country. Recently, the study of career maturity among international students has been given attention in countries highly populated by international students. Malaysia is one of the recent developing countries that have been chosen by foreign students.

However, it is suggested that the construct of career maturity or readiness for making age-appropriate career decisions in Asian culture is affected by groups of people, particularly parents and peers (Malach-Pines, Levy, Utasi, & Hill, 2005; Leong, 1991; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Chen & Zimitat, 2006). Additionally, the influence of family and friends was more effective than concerning other factors of intentions to study (Chen & Zimitat, 2006). For example, collectivism is about structuring social experience around collectives such as the family and the peer groups (Hughes & Thomas, 2006). Individualism is about structuring social experience around autonomous individuals. The studies show that Asian individuals are dependent and collectivist if compared to the independent and individualist Western individuals. In this light of above studies, the majority of international students in Malaysia who are coming from Asian countries such as China, Indonesia and Iran may choose their courses by following or modelling their friends and parents. For example, based on data from the international Students Centre Office of University of Malaya (ISCO, 2009), 55 out of 145 Chinese students in University are studying in Social Sciences (Education, Art, and Economy); international students from Middle East countries, particularly Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Iran are forming nearly 40 percent of 120 international students who are studying in Engineering Faculty. Thus, it intends that international students at large in Malaysia being dependent and collectivist may not reveal their career maturity and also lead to negative effect on their choices.

McCaffrey (1980), however, conducted a survey over a group of freshman, seniors and graduate students at the University Of Georgia to determine whether the gender and academic classification were factors related to career maturity. It was found that freshman had significantly lower maturity than did seniors or graduate students. Simultaneously, early work with the Career Development Inventory (Super, Thompson, Lindeman, Jordan, & Myers, 1981) found significant differences in career maturity scores between Grades 9 and 10, and between Grades 11 and 12 (Super et al., 1981). Other works with career maturity have also shown that students in higher grades have higher career maturity scores than those in lower grades (Neice & Bradley, 1979; Post-Kamer, 1987; Wallace-Broschious, Serafica, & Osipow, 1994).

Level of education means academic grade was found to have a moderate indirect effect on career maturity, consistent with the results reported by McCaffrey, Miller, and Winston (1984) for a sample of university students. As students progress through their university experiences, they may exhibit more mature attitudes in their career behaviours. According to Crites (1971), career maturity is developmental; it would be expected that experienced students express higher levels of career maturity than inexperienced students.

However, researchers have commented that career maturity may be more carefully differentiated by grade rather than age because of the influence of the education life as the primary agent of the development of career behavior (Watson & Van Aarde, 1986). However, Powell and Luzzo (1998) demonstrated that there is no relationship between age or grade and level of career maturity. These authors suggested that a uniform program of career development activities at the school to contextual factors, such as perceived occupational opportunity and exposure to occupational alternative may be more influential in career development than age or grade.

It is widely agreed that many international students do not return to their home country on completion of their degrees. Johnson and Regets (1998) reported that more than 60 per cent of particularly foreign doctoral students planned to stay in United States after completing their degrees. Therefore, senior students have to either decide to continue to stay in foreign country or go back to home country, leading to keep up with uncertainty situation. It is a factor which is related to the home country where students are not able to find a fit occupation. Studies show that students who postponed returning to their home country after completing their degrees have formed personal and professional ties in the host country (Alberts & Hazen, 2005). To a certain degree, this experience complicates the issue, increasing the number of factors that must be evaluated in making decisions of whether to stay in the host country or return home. It, thus, may cause to have a problem for graduate students with career decision making in a foreign country.

Research Method

The subjects of this study consist of 229 International students from the following faculties in a public university in Malaysia: the Faculty of Computer Science and Information Technology (17%), Faculty of Malay Studies (12%), Faculty of Engineering (11.8%), Faculty of Science (10.9%), Faculty of Education (10.9%), Faculty of Business and Accountancy (10.0%), Faculty of Economics and Administration (7.9%), Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (7.4%), Faculty of Islamic Studies (3.9%), Faculty of Built Environment (3.1%), Faculty of Language and Linguistics (2.2%), Faculty of Medicine (1.3%) and the Sports Centre (0.9%). There were 106 (49.3%) male and 123 (53.7%) female students, consisting of 64 (27.9%) Semester 1, 34 (14.8%) Semester 2, 60 (26.2%) Semester 3, 17 (7.4%) Semester 4, 51 (22.3%) Semester 5, 1 (0.4%) Semester 6, 1 (0.4%) Semester 7 and 1 (0.4%) Semester 8. Of the 229 international students participating in this study, 64 (27.9 percent) were studying in the first semester, 51 (22.3 percent) were in the fifth semester. Respondents who study in Semester 1 are considered as a freshman while respondents who study in Semester 5 are considered as a senior. Based on region of origin, there were 85 (37.1%) from South & Southeast Asia, 66 (28.8%) from Eastern Asia, 52 (22.7 %) from Middle East & North Africa and 26 (11.3%) from Africa.

The research instrument used in this study was the Career Maturity Inventory-Revised (CMI-R) developed by Crites in 1978 and revised in 1995. CMI is an effective instrument which attempts to identify level of career maturity of international students. Savickas (1984) found the CMI Attitude scale to be the most popular of all the career decision-making measures.

Recently, a revised form of CMI was published (Crites, 1995; Crites & Savickas, 1995). The revision was designed with the aims to:

- a) reduce administration and testing time
- b) extend CMI to the adult level, including postsecondary students and employed individuals
- c) eliminate the original Attitude Scale and Competence subscales
- d) prepare the CMI for a variety of scoring and data analysis purposes.

The revised version (Crites & Savickas, 1995) was redesigned to include the additional facet of competencies that are necessary to make a realistic career choice. The revised version includes 25 items for each of the two (Attitude and Competence) scales.

Porter (1999) reported a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .81 on the attitude scale, and a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .66 on the competence test. In this study, Cronbach's alpha was used to analyze the internal consistency of the CMI revised scale (Alpha= 0.81). The test-retest reliability for the Attitude Scale was reported at .72, while the internal consistency was reported to range from .72 to .90.

With regard to validity, numerous empirical studies support the validity of Attitude Scale Form (Busacca & Taber, 2002; Levinson, Ohler, Caswell, & Kiewra, 1998; Rojewski, Wicklein, & Schell, 1995; Stowe, 1985; Westbrook, Sanford, & Donnelly, 1990). A recent study conducted by Bucassa and Taber (2002) found to moderate construct and criterion validity for the CMI (Crites & Savickas, 1995).

The following materials were delivered by hand to 229 International students: a) the short-form questionnaire b) Career Maturity Inventory. Questionnaires were either collected by hand or collected by the librarian because some students passed the questionnaires to the library of University. Most of the participants completed the questionnaire within 45 minutes.

Result and Discussion

The mean scores were used to determine whether the international students in public University were high mature or low mature in career. The highest attainable score on the CMI is fifty (50) while the lowest possible score is zero (0) so that the mean score is twenty five (25) which means that an individual is considered as a career mature individual, if they obtain a score of above 25. With regard to CMI-Attitude and CMI-Competency, the mean scores were used to measure the level of career maturity of foreign students. The highest attainable score in CMI-Attitude and CMI-Competency is twenty five (25); on the contrary, the lowest score is zero (0) so that the mean of scales is twelve (12), hence the score obtained above this mean was considered as a high mature in CMI-Attitude and CMI-Competency and those with scores falling below are considered as low in maturity.

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of the scores made by all the respondents on the CMI. The total score of respondents had a mean 31.32 with a standard deviation of 5.20 in Career Maturity Inventory (CMI). As shown in Table 1, the mean of total group of respondents was 15.23 with standard deviation of 3.29 in CMI-Attitude. With respect to CMI-Competency, the total group of respondents had a mean of 15.89 with a standard deviation of 3.06. Based on the data in

Table 1, it can be inferred that international students who are studying in a public university are slightly above the mean in Career Maturity.

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation of Foreign Students in the CMI, CMI-Attitude and CMI-Competency

Scale	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
CMI	229	31.32	5.20
CMI-A	229	15.23	3.29
CMI-C	229	15.89	3.06

Note: CMI= Career Maturity Inventory, CMI-A= Career Maturity Inventory-Attitude, CMI-C= Career Maturity Inventory-Competency

Table 2. Means and standard deviations of fresh and senior groups by career maturity

Region	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>t sig</i>
Fresh students	64	33.00	4.78		
Senior students	51	31.76	4.84	-1.364	.175

* Significant at the .05 level

As shown in Table 2, no significant differences were found in this study. The mean of senior students who are studying in semester one is not significantly different from the mean of fresh students who are studying in semester five in terms of the level of career maturity, $t(113) = .175$ $p > .05$. Thus, there were no significant differences between fresh students and senior students in career maturity.

However, difference between senior and fresh international undergraduate students is not consistent with other previous studies (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996; Post-Kamer, 1987) that fresh students would be lower in career maturity than senior students. Contrary to what career maturity theory and research indicated, academic level does not appear to be linked to career maturity and including career maturity attitude and competence. Furthermore, even though it was reported that there were no significant differences between respondents of different academic semesters with regard to level of career maturity, this might reflect an educational level bias in the construction of the career decision-making. However, the current study is consistent with the study by Powell and Luzzo (1998) which found no relationship between age or grade and level of career maturity.

Consider also that Powell and Luzzo (1998) demonstrated that there is no relationship between grade and level of career maturity. Furthermore, it is important that cultural variable in Asia is related to career commitment. Brown (2004) suggested that strong involvement of the family in directing children and adults had been viewed as reflecting the collectivistic culture of Asians, Latinos and Mexican-Americans. Hence, those studying as fresh students may be affected by parents and peers, leading to display high maturity in major selection. However, as international senior students started to recognise occupational opportunity and progress in host country through their university experiences, they would feel undecided with their major because of influence by other factors such as the career opportunity and major satisfaction, leading to low level in career maturity. Research should continue to explore the reasons behind lower career maturity among international Asian senior students and also examine the reasons behind higher career maturity among international Asian fresh students.

Conclusions

Theoretically, this study has implications for the validity of the career construct for international undergraduate students. The results of this study show that career maturity does not appear to be a useful construct for international undergraduate students, particularly for international students from Asia. Although finding is high career maturity among international undergraduate students, the ethnic group differences were accounted for by cultural variables. It remains questionable whether high career maturity transforms positive vocational outcomes in Asian culture. The extant research on the career maturity of foreign undergraduate students has been predominantly conducted on mostly students from Asian regions who were studying at the one public university. Therefore, although this study replicated high career maturity of international undergraduate students, and that cultural variable seems to be the most salient factor in the prediction of career maturity, it is uncertain whether these findings

can be generalized to other Universities having international undergraduate students in Malaysia and other countries.

With regard to counselling implications, person's using CMI-R and other career development inventories should be cognizant that the inventories may not address or incorporate the salient cultural perspectives, making it difficult to ascertain the meaning of the results for culturally different persons. For different level of academic grade, senior students need more career guidance than fresh students because senior students are expected to have higher maturity in career, so they should be a concern of counselors. Furthermore, if international students from Asia have decided to pursue an occupation based on parents or peers, the counselor should be respectful of that decision.

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