

## ENHANCING WORK READINESS: A REVIEW OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF ADOLESCENTS IN MALAYSIA

Poh Li Lau<sup>1</sup>  
Diana-Lea Baranovich<sup>2</sup>  
Kwan Eu Leong<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1, 2</sup>Department of Educational Psychology and Counselling, Faculty of Education, University of Malaya, Malaysia;  
<sup>3</sup>Department of Mathematics and Science Education, Faculty of Education, University of Malaya, Malaysia

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**Abstract:** *Work is an important aspect in life. Each individual wants to have a suitable job according to interest for life satisfaction. The work readiness is a new concept introduced. Work readiness is the key to linking individuals and success to transform the entry level workplace through a focus on value-creating relationship. However, this essential concept has not been given much attention in Malaysia. Therefore, this paper reviews the concepts of work readiness, career and career development, especially their relevance to adolescents in Malaysia. Also, this paper highlights the significance of future research on work readiness and career development among adolescents in Malaysia.*

**Keywords:** *Work readiness; Career; Career development*

### Introduction

The world of work in the 21st century is experiencing significant fluctuations (Parker, 2008). Dynamic forces that comprise globalisation, economic downturn (Miller, 2009), and market uncertainties (Kalita, 2009) are impacting the individual and workplace (Friedman, 2005). A 2004 Central Bank of Malaysia survey on 312 companies concluded that 77.6% of the respondents found Malaysian graduates lacking in the required skills to function effectively at the workplace. This shortcoming has been one of the debated issues among academia in Malaysia. Besides that, Malaysia needs a market-driven education system to produce 'work ready graduates' (Ng Poh Yen, Abdullah Shamsul Kamariah, Nee Pai Hw & Tiew Nga Huong, 2008). The focus on producing a 'work-ready graduates' should be on graduate attributes geared toward empowering graduates to thrive in the 21st century workplace and to function as productive and responsible citizens. Work readiness is a new concept. However, this essential concept has not been given much attention in Malaysia.

### Work Readiness

In a knowledge-based economy, graduates must bring more than technical knowledge to the job. According to the Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997) the primary purpose of higher education is to prepare students for the world of work. Graduates need to be given opportunities to develop

generic attributes besides disciplinary knowledge. These generic attributes include communication skills, problem-solving skills, computer literacy, information literacy, ability and willingness to learn, and teamwork. According to Caballero and Walker (2010), work readiness can be defined as the extent to which graduates are perceived to possess the attitudes and attributes that make them prepared or ready for success at work. The extent to which graduates are work ready is seen as indicative of potential job performance, success or promotion and career advancement (Atlay & Harris, 2000; Casnor-Lotto & Barrington, 2006; Hart, 2008).

Work readiness is also a work-related skill that young people and adults need in order to be successful as entry-level workers in business or industry or in any informal sector. It is referred as graduate employability or possession of necessary skills required to secure employment. The term work readiness and graduate employability are used interchangeably. Employability skills are also known as job readiness skills (Shafie & Nayan, 2010).

Meanwhile, Hillage and Pollard (1998) defined work readiness as an individual's ability to gain initial employment, maintain employment, move between roles within the same organisation, obtain new employment if required and (ideally) secure suitable and sufficiently fulfilling work. Harvey (2001) states the importance of being better prepared for the world of work and emphasised the importance of enhancing student capacity for employment. Psychological well-being is about lives going well; it is the combination of feeling good and functioning effectively (Huppert, 2009).

### **Career and Career Development**

Careers are unique to each person and created by what one chooses or does not choose. They are dynamic and unfold throughout life. They include not only occupations but prevocational and post vocational concerns as well as integration of work with other roles: family, community, and leisure (Herr et al., 1996). Career development is the total constellation of economic, sociological, psychological, educational, physical, and chance factors that combine to shape one's career (Sears, 1982). Brown (1997) added the concept of culture as one other component in the definition of career development proposed by Sears (1982). Patton and McMahon (1999) highlighted the importance of society and environment along with individual differences in career development.

According to Brown (2006), career development has been, and continues to be, a major concern of lay people and professionals alike. The professionals have two common concerns: finding ways to deliver career information more effectively and facilitating the career choice-making process. A more specific definition is provided in the Psychological Index published by the American Psychological Association (APA), where career development is defined as "the formation of a work identity or progression of career decision and/ or events as influenced by life or work experience, education, on-the job training, or others factors".

On the other hand, Jepsen (1996) stated that in general, career counselors had some common beliefs about career development which include: (a) the unfolding nature across the life span of careers, (b) the impact that earlier actions will have on later ones, (c) the different career related struggles that occur at different stages of development, and (d) the need to use different career interventions for different stages and for different career-related problems. The career development process is not limited to the period of adolescence; however, this stage is when most individuals make important career and educational choices. Career development over the

lifespan has received much research attention, particularly within the framework of Super's (1957, 1980, 1990) theory of career development.

### **Career Development Theory**

Many theories have been developed to explain the process leading to vocational choice. These theories focus on different aspects of vocational choice. Some focus on the process of its development from preschool years of an individual to adulthood. Well-known theories explaining the developmental process of occupational aspiration and choice include Super's model of career development and Ginzberg's developmental theory.

#### ***Super's Model of Career Development***

According to Super's model, the basic drive for children is curiosity. Curiosity is often satisfied through exploration, an important career development activity that may never cease. The exploratory activity will lead to information acquisition. One important source of information is the key figure or role model who a child may choose to imitate. The key figures of children are parents, teachers and public figures such as athletes, actors and singers, and the people with whom they come into contact in their own community, such as policeman, postman and fire fighter. Hence, the parents' impact on the children's view of occupations. For example, among the fourteen- or fifteen-year-old girls, the mothers can be extremely important key figures; maternal education and mothers' attitude toward women having strong influences on girls' career orientation. During the maturation process, children develop ways to control their own behaviour by listening to themselves and others. To make career decisions, children need to develop a sense of future. This, together with self-concept, will eventually lead to planned career decision making. The self-concept derives from the child's exploratory behaviour, which leads to acquiring occupational information, imitating key figures, and developing interests.

#### ***Ginzberg's Career Theory***

Ginzberg's theory states that children and adolescents go through three career choice stages (Ginzberg, 1972) corresponding to the three broadly chronological life stages of fantasy (from birth until eleven years old), the tentative (from ages eleven to seventeen), and the realistic stage (from age seventeen onwards). Adolescents aged 11 to 17 are in the tentative stage of career development; it is in the preteens that they develop vision of what they would like to become when they grow up. Ginzberg (1972) argued that adolescents progress from evaluating their interest between 11 and 12 years. At this preadolescent stage children develop a vision of what they would like to become in life. Between 13 and 14 years old they begin evaluating their capacities and between 15 to 16 years of age they begin evaluating their values. Their thinking shifts from less subjective to more realistic career choices at 17 to 18 years of age. This is the right time to capture adolescents and guide them into the right career choices as they prepare to join universities.

The theory, however, does not take into account individual differences, but assumes that all adolescents smoothly negotiate this stage without any influences or struggles. On the other hand, some adolescents make mature decisions about careers and stick with them at much earlier ages than specified by Ginzberg (1972), while some 30 year olds have not reached a realistic stage of career choice. In Kenya, many 30 year old individuals enroll for continuing/evening classes to pursue their first degree in their area of interest. The reasons for this vary from the workplace demands for higher qualifications to finding one's identity in career development.

### ***Career Development of Malaysian Adolescents***

Research studies on career development among secondary school students have been done previously in Malaysia. Past researches describe a picture of the level of career awareness and the pattern of career choices among Malaysian secondary school students. Lau (2011) has conducted a survey to investigate career maturity among Form Four students. The sample of the study consisted of 160 high school students in Malaysia. Her results showed that the students have moderate career maturity.

Kamarul (2006) identified the level of career knowledge and career interest of urban secondary school students. The sample consisted of 200 Form Four students from three urban secondary schools in Seremban, Malaysia. The respondents chosen by a random sampling consisted of 89 males and 111 females, 67 Malays, 65 Chinese, and 68 Indians. Some 101 of these students were from the science stream and 99 from the non-science stream. The instruments used contain three sections; respondents' background, questions on career knowledge, and Self-Directed Search (SDS) Inventory. The findings showed that urban Malaysian students have a low level of career knowledge but they had interest in the social field. Besides, significant differences were found in career knowledge based on ethnic and school streaming. In brief, Malay students had a moderate level of knowledge compared to the Chinese and Indian students who had a low level of career knowledge. The science students had a moderate level of career knowledge compared to the non-science students who had a low level of career knowledge. The results showed that the main sources of career information were magazines, newspapers, television, and other electronic media. The respondents also stated that interest, salary, and ability were the factors they considered in making their career choices.

Career awareness is the individual's awareness of the working world (Gribbons & Lohnes, 1982). In Malaysia, research on career awareness had been conducted by Suradi (1998), Raman (2000), and Clara (2002). The objective of Clara's (2002) study was to investigate career awareness among secondary school students based on gender and academic stream. The instrument used in her study was the Fadale Career Awareness Inventory (1974). The sample of her study consisted of 80 Form Four students. The results showed that there was significant difference in career awareness based on academic streams, whereby students in the science stream had a higher career awareness compared to arts stream students; furthermore, there was a significant difference in career awareness between male and female students in the arts stream where the female students had a higher career awareness compared to the male students. However, the research results showed that there was no significant difference between male and female students in the science stream. In general, the level of career awareness among secondary school students was low.

Raman (2000) replicated the study to identify the students' career awareness level based on the parents' income and the gender factor among the Indian Malaysian students. He conducted a survey study using the Fadale Career Awareness Inventory (1974) on a sample of 160 Indian secondary school students. The findings showed that career awareness among the Indian students, whose fathers were in the technical and professional groups, was higher than that of Indian students whose fathers were not in the technical and professional groups. The findings also showed no significant differences in career awareness based on gender for Indian students. Thus, his findings demonstrated that socioeconomic standing was a strong predictor for career awareness.

Earlier, Suradi (1998) had investigated career awareness among secondary school students in the Klang Valley in Malaysia. Some 23 schools in Kuala Lumpur, Petaling Jaya, Shah Alam, and Klang were involved in his research. Most of the 2035 respondents were among the Form One, Form Two, and Form Four students. The results showed that most of the students lacked realistic career goals; their main motivation to study was to gain knowledge and to get a good job. The results also showed that the students' knowledge on career was limited. Most of them were able to name around 11 to 20 jobs only. The main careers that elicited most interest in the students (in order of importance) were teacher, accountant, lawyer, businessman, engineer, and steward/stewardess. His findings also showed that 5.8% of the students did not have career planning at all and 54.8% mentioned that they had never discussed career matters with anyone. Only 1.7% of the respondents stated that they had discussed career matters with the school counseling teachers.

From the past research on career awareness conducted in Malaysia, it can be concluded that the level of career awareness among adolescents in Malaysia is still low and most of the students lack realistic career goals. Career awareness is important in order to enable individuals to have a realistic career goal and choose a career field that is compatible with their talent, potential, ability, and interest.

A career choice manifests some aspects of self-identity. Super and Crites (1962) found that making a career choice is associated with the various social roles held by an individual, which are in tandem with one's identity schemas of social and psychological constructs such as beliefs, values, abilities and attitudes that are important to the identity of self. Super (1994) viewed vocational fitness as varying in its degree of compatibility according to the extent that one perceives a career choice as compatible or incompatible with one's self-identity. Studies have also been conducted on career choices in Malaysia; among them are studies by Aida Mauziah, Norazura, and Ang (2004) and Rosliza (2007).

Rosliza's (2007) study was conducted at one Maktab Rendah Sains MARA (MARA Junior Science College) in Malaysia. The objective of her study was to determine the personality types of Form Three students aged 15 years and also to identify factors influencing students' career decisions. Besides that, her study was to observe the correlation between personality and career selection of Form Three students. In her study, 180 Form Three students were selected to answer the MBTI (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator). Results showed that students are prone to introvert attitude (66.1%) and were classified as intuitive (77%), feeling (68%) and perceiving (64%). Her study found that parents, ability, and educational background are the three main factors influencing students' career decisions. The overall results showed an association between personality and career selection. However, in her study, she had set the 10 career choices which are doctor, engineer, teacher, accountant, computer programmer, lawyer, entrepreneur, scientist, architect, and surveyor to be ranked by the students but not their career selection outside these choices. This may have caused bias in the results of the study.

Another study by Aida Mauziah et al. (2004) aimed at identifying the personality type and the factors of career selection among secondary school students. The research subjects consisted of 136 Form Five Malaysian students involving 81.6% arts stream students and 18.4% science stream students. The research was conducted in a rural secondary school in Malaysia. The results showed that 51.4% inclined toward the introvert attitude and 48.5% inclined toward the extrovert attitude. It was found that ability was the main factor for career choice among both extroverted and introverted secondary school students. Parental influence was the second factor

for introverted students while the teachers' influence was the second factor for extroverted students in career choices. Idol factor had least influence on career choice of both introverted and extroverted students.

Holland (1973, 1978, 1985, 1997) stated that the career interest in career choice is an expression of individual interest. Personality develops as a result of interaction between inherited characteristics, the activities exposed to the individual, and the interests and competencies that grow out of such activities (Holland, 1997). Thus, interest inventories are, in fact, personality inventories.

In Malaysia, a study investigating the validity of Holland's Self-Directed Search for utilization by Malaysian population was conducted by Amla (1992). Her study aimed at obtaining evidence for the construct validity of the interest inventory (Self-Directed Search) developed by John L. Holland (1971). Her study was undertaken in response to the suggestion that foreign tests be adapted and translated to meet the needs in Malaysian school guidance programs (Amir, 1976). The revised and translated edition of Form E of the SDS (Holland, 1974) was used in her study. The four subscales of likes, competencies, occupations, and self-rating were modified and translated into the Malay language following a back-translation procedure (Brislin, 1970). Her study involved 2231 students of the National University of Malaysia. The study identified four factors from analysis of the entire sample: Factor 1, Social-Enterprising-Conventional; Factor 2, Artistic; Factor 3, Realistic; and Factor 4, Investigative. When separate analysis was performed according to gender, men and women produced different factors. The analysis of men's responses produced five factors; Enterprising-Conventional, Investigative, Realistic, Social, and Artistic; and the analysis of women's responses produced fewer factors, that is, three factors of Realistic-Conventional, Investigative, and Artistic. The factorial structure has proven to be remarkably consistent across different samples and countries, which implies the viability of this instrument for career counseling in Malaysia.

Furthermore, Amla (1998) conducted another study with a sample of 3000 drawn from the secondary school population in Peninsular Malaysia. Her study aimed at examining the factor structure of the SDS. Data were analysed using factor analysis with varimax rotation to produce simple structure analogy to personality types. Factors with loading .4 and above and eigenvalue of more than one were accepted. Analysis of data produced five factors identified as S-E A R K I. When variables such as gender, location and type of schools, field and level of studies, and ethnic background were controlled, it was found that almost all categories generally produced consistent results, namely one composite factor of S-E and four other unitary factors of the same type with almost similar arrangement.

This section has provided a summary of the literature, especially Malaysian studies, related to adolescent career decision making. Overall, the literature suggests that career awareness and career knowledge among Malaysian secondary school students is still low.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, work readiness is the first credential for entry-level workers that incorporates practical readiness as well as academic readiness to carry out the tasks and responsibilities most important to successful performance of entry level work in the 21st century workplace. A well-designed study on work readiness among adolescents is of central importance in order to gain in-depth understanding of career development among Malaysian adolescents besides contributing to the career counselling field.

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