

## Career Decision-Making Difficulty in Relation to Ethnicity, Gender, and Academic Achievement among Final Year Students in a Public University in East Malaysia

Nurul Syukriah Binti Abdul Wahab, Guan Teik Ee

Faculty of Psychology & Education Universiti Malaysia Sabah Jalan UMS, Kota Kinabalu, 88400, Sabah

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### Abstract

Making decisions about careers can be a daunting task for university graduates. This study was conducted among 242 final year public university students in East Malaysia to investigate the differences between difficulty making career decisions and ethnicity, gender as well as academic achievement. A Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire was administered. ANOVA was used to analyse difficulty making career decisions in relation to ethnicity and academic achievement. While *t*-test was used to analyse the difference between gender and career decision-making difficulty, The findings showed there was no significant difference in career decision-making difficulty relating to Malay, Chinese, Indian and Sabah and Sarawak indigenous groups,  $F(3, 238) = 1.83, p > .05$ . The findings also showed that there was no significant difference between gender and career decision-making difficulty,  $t(242) = .08, p > .05$ . However, there was a significant difference between career decision-making difficulty and academic achievement,  $F(3, 238) = 3.80, p < .05$ . It is recommended that the universities' Counselling and Guidance Division of Student Affairs Departments play a more pivotal role in providing students with specialised guidance to help them overcome the inherent difficulties in choosing a career.

**Keywords:** Career Decision-Making Difficulty, Gender, Ethnicity, Academic Achievement, University Graduates

### Introduction

Making the right career choices is essential because with the right career, people will find psychological and financial fulfilment. However, choosing a suitable career is not an easy task, and many people, especially students who are about to finish schooling, encounter difficulties in determining the suitability of the desired career. Zairosławanee (2014) states that young people often experience confusion in making career decisions with the transition from school

to work. They face a real dilemma in determining which career suits them, and become indecisive and uncertain.

Students at the tertiary level, despite having acquired knowledge and gone through various experiences through several levels of education, still experience difficulty in determining the desired career. In addition, fierce competition among undergraduates makes it necessary for them to always be competent and maintain academic achievements to guarantee success in the future. Even so, there are many other difficulties that exist from an environmental perspective and available job opportunities that can indirectly affect the final choice of students towards a profession.

Fadzilah (2006) says that young adults, especially graduates, generally face difficulty in making career decisions, and that preparation for employment needs to be guided by more experienced people such as counsellors. It becomes more complicated when graduates themselves show total unpreparedness in finding a suitable job. In addition, the array of career fields today is more complex due to the rapid progress of job specialisation globally. As a result, choosing a career that is not in line with preferences and abilities will lead to more difficulties in life later.

### **Statement of Problem**

The difficulty in choosing a career refers to any form of obstacle that exists for an individual in making a career decision. Certainly, every graduate who has completed their studies at an institute of higher learning hopes for a career that matches their field of study. But the reality is that not all graduates are well-informed or successful in getting the job they want due to the many constraints and obstacles. There are three main challenges that cause difficulty in choosing a career, the first of which is that some students may have interest in various fields and so do not know which line of work to go into as their interests are not clear, while others do not have any interests at all. Second, students do not know their own strengths, such as their aptitudes and personalities. Third, students lack fundamental knowledge and information about careers (Zairoslawanee, 2014). In view of this, Rohany (2003) states that students need professional counsellors to help them to choose, plan and solve career problems. Choosing the right career is vital because it will affect one's standard of living in the future (Masriani, 2001). Therefore, a person needs to fully overcome existing obstacles in career decision-making, and this can possibly be done through proper career counselling processes.

For students who do not have a clear direction or goal regarding their career, the process of making a career decision is made more difficult. Therefore, it is not surprising that there are still many graduates searching for work after graduation. Abdullah (2001) in his study, states that young adults who are about to finish schooling will become more anxious, especially those who are not able to make good judgments about their own interests, abilities, skills, strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, choosing a career has become a major problem that involves three things, namely the failure to know oneself, to know the world of work and to match oneself with a job (Sidek, 2002).

Unemployment has become one of many familiar issues among graduates of institutes of higher learning. It cannot be denied that this issue of unemployment exists because there are

difficulties linked to various factors in choosing a profession, such as a career that is not compatible with qualifications, salary that is not commensurate with credentials, lack of communication skills, lack of leadership, not being able to withstand job challenges, no vacancies in the job they seek, few job opportunities, family obstacles and numerous other related constraints. Apart from that, difficulties also occur if individuals are unable to identify their personalities and abilities such that their career choices correspond with their characteristics. There are also graduates who are too choosy about jobs, demand extremely high salaries and are not truly interested in the work offered ( Guan & Suradi 2012). An individual's failure to identify these difficulties will cause them to lag far behind individuals who are aware of these issues. Through awareness of the difficulties in making a career choice, a person will be encouraged to always prepare themselves to meet the demands of the employment industry in terms of physical aspects, academic achievements, knowledge and skills.

In terms of ethnicity, Guan and Suradi (2012) points out that different ethnic groups would have different types of difficulties in making career decisions as different educational instructions at home probably influence their exposure to the job market.

As for gender and difficulty in making career decisions, Normala (2013) found that there was a significant difference between difficulty in making career decisions and gender. The study pointed out that difficulty in making career decisions related to gender was also influenced by academic achievements among male and female students.

In order to prepare oneself to be competitive in the world of work, strengthening knowledge, soft skills and behaviour is important. Knowledge allows an individual to improve himself to a better level. The skills learned, whether formally or informally, also determine success in the field of work undertaken. This is usually obvious from one's academic results. However, based on data from previous studies, Malaysia still experiences a lack of acknowledgment of the difficulty in making career decisions among students, especially for those at the tertiary level who are about to enter the job market. There is still a very limited number of empirical studies on the difficulty in making career decisions in terms of demographic aspects and academic achievement. Therefore, this study is a starting point in investigating the difficulty in making career decisions in relation to ethnicity, gender and academic achievement.

### **Research Objectives**

This study seeks to bring together all the available evidence on difficulty in making career decisions in terms of demographic factors and academic achievement, so as to better understand the phenomenon and to identify how these people can be helped. The aims of this study are as follows:

1. To investigate the difference in the difficulty in making career decisions based on ethnicity.
2. To investigate the difference in the difficulty in making career decisions based on gender.
3. To investigate the difference in the difficulty in making career decisions based on academic achievement.

## Literature Review

One of the reasons why graduates face problems in choosing a career is because they do not have a plan from the very beginning (Guan & Suradi, 2012). This makes them accept any programme that is offered to them in the university entrance application.

For ethnicity, the educational instruction commonly used in the Malay community emphasises the home, prayer hall (*surau*) and mosque. However, modernisation has made Malay society become more open and more involved in the national education system. This makes it possible for them to be on par with other ethnic groups (Anuar & Norhaidawati, 2009).

Children of Chinese ethnicity are not given many opportunities to enter boarding schools. There is also a quota for their admission into public universities. However, generally the Chinese are still able to obtain excellent results as they see a premium value in education. Many Chinese students excel in education. These students are more likely to hold professional positions after graduation. Those who cannot enter universities can still venture into business to make a living.

Indian ethnic groups have empowered themselves to continue to be successful and influential in all fields. Indian families also put emphasis on education to achieve success (Anuar & Norhaidawati, 2009). The Indians who used to live in estates and worked as rubber tappers are now engaged in various professional occupations. The development that exists from various aspects of life in the Indian community in Malaysia has helped them to be accepted and compete in the professional work they are engaged in.

Sabah and Sarawak indigenous people are perceived as being left behind if compared with other ethnic groups. Most of them stay in rural areas with very few facilities, such as education, transportation and Wi-Fi. However, the government is endeavouring to improve education delivery through multifaceted measures such as building schools in these remote areas. Teachers are sent from West Malaysia to the rural schools. Indigenous students who are good at studies are directly accepted into universities like University Malaysia Sabah and University Malaysia Sarawak, in the hope that these students acquire knowledge and skills that will be beneficial to their villages in the future.

A study by Abdullah (2001) found that female students had more problems than male students in terms of difficulty making career choices. Sidek (2002), who conducted a study using the Occupational Interest Inventory, discovered that female students were more likely to choose careers related to verbal and personal-social fields, whereas males were more interested in the use of machines, science and business. Therefore, when job opportunities were not available in their desired career, problems arose.

Whereas a study done by Zainab (2012) found that the difficulty in making career decisions between males and females did not differ significantly. The open job market in an equal environment gives equal opportunities to both genders. Jobs traditionally held by males can also be done by females nowadays.

Students lacking in knowledge about jobs can lead to an inaccurate selection of a career. For graduates who have just finished their studies and have no work experience, choosing the wrong career may bring about personal conflict and at the same time have a negative impact on their lives in the future (Yahya et al., 2005). They will face various work pressures, boredom and may often change jobs.

According to Azizi et al (2010), many popular jobs depend on academic achievement. Academic achievements enable students to obtain a variety of career information. Good achievements mean a better guarantee at making a better career selection. Thus students need to know whether the academic qualifications obtained are suitable for the desired career field. Students who lack knowledge about career requirements will end up making career selections that do not match academic achievements, knowledge and skills.

### **Methodology**

This is a cross-sectional study using the survey method to collect data. A total of 242 final year undergraduate students from one faculty in a public university were recruited for this study using stratified random sampling. There were 5 programmes in this faculty. To ensure the sample is representative of the data, all samples were selected according to the proportion of students in each programme. The population was 505, and though the required number of samples was around 220 (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970), this study managed to get 242 samples. SPSS 22.0 was used for data analysis.

### **Instrument**

Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ) Malay version (Nor ,2006) was used in this study. It has 34 items altogether. This questionnaire aims to identify the difficulties and problems that may exist regarding career selection. Each item is given a scale of 1 to 7, from “does not apply to me” to “fully applies to me.” It takes about 5-8 minutes to answer the questionnaire. According to Nor (2006), the Malay version of CDDQ has good internal consistency. Higher scores indicate more difficulties in making a career choice.

t-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to analyse the data. This study investigates the difference between ethnicity (Malays, Chinese, Indians and Sabah and Sarawak indigenous groups) as well as gender (males and females) in relation to difficulty making career decisions. Cumulative grade point average (CGPA) was used to measure academic achievement in relation to difficulty in making career decisions. CGPA consists of 4 categories, i.e. below 1.99, 2.00-2.99, 3.00-3.66, and 3.67-4.00.

### **Results**

ANOVA was used to investigate ethnicity and difficulty making career decisions. The ethnic composition in this study was Malays 55% (133), Chinese 10.3% (25), Indian 2.5% (6), and Sabah and Sarawak indigenous groups 32.2% (78). Table 1 shows there was no significant difference between ethnicity and difficulty making career decisions,  $F(3, 238) = 1.83, p > .05$ .

Table 1

*Ethnicity and Difficulty Making Career Decisions*

| <b>Difficulty based on ethnicity</b> | <b>Sum of Squares</b> | <b>df</b> | <b>Mean Square</b> | <b>F</b> | <b>Sig</b> |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------|----------|------------|
| Between Groups                       | 3722.19               | 3         | 1240.73            | 1.83     | .14        |
| Within Groups                        | 161303.58             | 238       | 677.75             |          |            |
| Total                                | 165025.77             | 242       |                    |          |            |

t-test was used to investigate gender in relation to difficulty making career decisions. Based on Table 2, there was no significant difference in difficulty making career decisions between genders,  $t(242) = .08, p > .05$ .

Table 2

*Gender and Difficulty Making Career Decisions*

| <b>Gender</b> | <b>N</b> | <b>Mean</b> | <b>SD</b> | <b>df</b> | <b>t</b> | <b>Sig</b> |
|---------------|----------|-------------|-----------|-----------|----------|------------|
| Male          | 103      | 130.28      | 26.07     | 242       | .08      | .94        |
| Female        | 139      | 130.02      | 26.34     |           |          |            |

There were 0.8% (2) students who obtained CGPA 3.67-4.00, 58.7% (142) students who obtained CGPA 3.00-3.66, 37.2% (90) students who obtained 2.00-2.99 and 3.3% (8) students who obtained CGPA below 1.99.

ANOVA was used to investigate academic achievement in relation to difficulty making career decisions. Table 3 indicates that there was a significant difference between academic achievement and difficulty making career decisions,  $F(3, 238) = 3.80, p < .05$  among the students.

Table 3

*Academic Achievement and Difficulty Making Career Decisions*

| <b>Difficulty based on CGPA</b> | <b>Sum of Squares</b> | <b>df</b> | <b>Mean Square</b> | <b>F</b> | <b>Sig</b> |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------|----------|------------|
| Between Groups                  | 7550.720              | 3         | 2516.91            | 3.80     | .01        |
| Within Groups                   | 157475.05             | 238       | 661.66             |          |            |
| Total                           | 165025.77             | 242       |                    |          |            |

**Discussion**

There was no significant difference between ethnicity and difficulty making career decisions, implying that all ethnicities face the same difficulties in making career decision. It is probably due to the equality in education applies to ethnicity in Malaysia. The Malaysian education policy requires students to enter school when they are 7 years old regardless of ethnicity (Shamsul, 2012). This situation proves that the difficulty in making a career decision does not

differ according to ethnicity even though every ethnicity has its own specific culture. The exposure to education given formally or informally at educational institutions has somehow made every ethnicity more or less the same in terms of difficulty in making career decisions.

In Malaysia, even though we still have “Malay” or “Chinese” villages resided by the said ethnicities, they are in small numbers. Most of the places where people stay nowadays are diverse and mixed in composition of ethnicities. Sabah and Sarawak, located in East Malaysia are even more unique in the sense that intermarriages among the ethnicities is very common and has long been practised in the society. Even though students are from various cultures, they mostly go through the same experiences and learning situations in the same environment, thus making the level of difficulty in making career decisions the same across all ethnic groups.

Difficulty making career decisions is not significantly different between male and female students generally in this study, implying that the difficulties making career decisions are the same for males as well as females. This could be due to the national policy in Malaysia which gives the same opportunities to both genders. Education organisations, whether primary schools, secondary schools or institutes of higher learning, do not discriminate against any gender. All education, guidance and counselling programmes are openly available all students whether male or female. Thus, all the students have equal exposure to any form of education provided including career education.

At university level, career programmes provide exposure and experience to prospective graduates to enable them to choose a suitable career, whether they are males or females. These programmes increase students' awareness of the importance of prospective careers. It helps to avoid wasting manpower in the future. Therefore, through equal exposure and education, the difficulty in making a career decision shows no significant difference between genders. Zainab (2012) points out that an equal environment gives equal opportunities to males and females. These opportunities, relating to aspects of assessing the difficulties in making career decisions, do not differ between genders as evidenced in this study. This study shows that the ability of students in determining career decisions is not related to any aspect of gender.

In terms of academic achievement and difficulty making career decisions, the result of this study shows that there is a significant difference in the difficulty of making career decisions in relation to CGPA. CGPA illustrates academic knowledge possessed by students. It plays an important role in influencing an individual's career decision. Students with good academic achievements have better knowledge and abilities which help them make better career decisions, compared to students who have poorer academic achievements. This study proves that knowledge is vital in facilitating students to make good career decisions. Students also need to fully comprehend their academic qualifications in order to match them to the requirements of the profession they want. Students who lack knowledge about careers will face difficulty in making career decisions. A person who has good academic achievements is more likely to make the effort to obtain information about various careers, apart from having acquired particular abilities and skills.

### **Practical Implications**

A good academic achievement is one of the measures of knowledge. Knowledge about choosing a career affects the difficulty level of making career decisions. In the universities, the Counselling and Guidance Division in the Department of Student Affairs is responsible for providing career awareness and exposure to students to help them overcome any confusion and difficulty in making career decisions. This study implies that the Department of Student Affairs has an important role to play in helping students determine the career that they will venture into later. This career must be aligned with students' abilities, academic achievements, personalities, interests and values. Students should be made aware of the existence of the services provided by the Department to ensure that guidance and specialised assistance are given to help them overcome the inherent difficulties in making career decisions.

### **Conclusion**

This study suggested that there was no significant difference between ethnicity and difficulty making career decisions, and also no significant difference between gender and difficulty making career decisions, suggesting that it is timely to empower the students using the strengths of our own cultures relating to career. According to Siti (2020), how males and females view themselves in relation to career is influenced by culture and social factors. Using the strengths of our cultures in giving career guidance to students will certainly benefit the development of the country, as now the field of career counselling in Malaysia is still largely built on western models.

This study suggested that there was a significant difference between academic achievement and difficulty making career decisions, giving a clue that knowledge is important in relation to career. Knowledge will boost up student self-esteem, indirectly helping them to be bold and have more encouragement in relation to making career decisions.

Making the right career decision will indirectly help to increase the productivity and level of economic vitality of the country. Therefore it is important, especially for final year university students who face difficulty in making career decisions, to receive the guidance they need to make the right choice. The resolution of the difficulty is a crucial step for a successful career in the future.

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### **Corresponding Author**

Guan Teik Ee

Faculty of Psychology and Education, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Jalan UMS, 88400, Kota Kinabalu Malaysia.

Email: [guanteikee@ums.edu.my](mailto:guanteikee@ums.edu.my)



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