

Career Information Seeking Behavior among University Graduates

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Abstract

Career information-seeking behavior is an individual's ability to prepare themselves for education and career as a process of their career development. This study aimed to identify students' perceptions of the career guidance services offered at the university. In addition, this study also aims to determine student behavior in the process of seeking career information. A total of 6,550 graduates from a university were involved as study respondents. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, percentage, frequency, and crosstab. Findings showed that students' perceptions of career guidance services were at a satisfactory level ($M = 4.05$, $SD = .828$), especially the provision of information on employment and career opportunities got the highest satisfaction ($M = 4.19$, $SD = .86$). While the behavior of seeking career information among graduates who have not worked showed that 57.2% of respondents had attended an interview and 42.8% of the respondents had never attended an interview. This study has implications for the services provided by counselling and career centre's in public universities. Further studies should focus on longitudinally design studies by comparing study samples from several different years.

Keywords: Career Information-Seeking Behavior, Student Perceptions, Career Guidance Services, Graduates.

Introduction

Undergraduate's marketability is measured based on employability upon six months of graduation. The target of 80% of graduates working upon completion is one of the university's benchmarks to ensure that the graduates produced can be marketed in the dynamic job market (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2019). Past studies have found that the marketability rate of graduates is an issue that is often debated from time to time. There is a gap of 20-30% of unemployed graduates after six months of graduation.

Based on an analysis by JobStreet.com, shows university graduates who are unemployed due to several factors including (i) unrealistic demand for salaries or facilities; (ii) poor personalities and attitudes; (iii) poor communication skills; (iv) weakness in using English Language; and (v) lack of certain required skills. Unemployed graduates have been identified

as lackness of certain required skills which is a necessity in competing in the job market. Among the skills required in the 21st century are social competence, diversity skills, positive work habits, personal qualities, personality and emotions, and entrepreneurship (Gysbers & Eight, 2009).

Among the factors graduates produced from higher education institutions find it difficult to get in the job market is due to the inability to convince employers in terms of personality, appearance, self-confidence, lack of communication skills, no decision making skills, inability to work in groups, low level of readiness such as not confidence, negative attitudes, no job searching skills and problematic communication skills (National Higher Education Research Institute [IPPTN], 2003; Norida, et al., 2014).

Based on the discussion, it was found that graduates who are unemployed after graduation lack or do not have adequate career readiness during the study period. Career readiness is mediated by an individual's ability to make career decisions taking into account rational considerations involving interests, talents, abilities, family, economy, and health (Sampson, et al., 2012). While an individual's ability to make career decisions is determined by the extent to which the behavior of seeking career information is available to an individual. Career behavior refers to the individual's awareness and ability to have access to career information from various sources such as education/training information, job descriptions, incentives (salary, allowances, bonuses), and promotion opportunities. This information can be obtained from the Career Centre, internet, career handbooks, and so on. Thus, individuals who have sufficient educational, career and social information will be able to make career decisions rationally and be able to take responsibility for the decisions taken (Salim, 2006).

Career Information Seeking Behavior

Obtaining career information refers to an individual's ability in the process of finding career-related information including education/training and job-related tasks. According to Wilson (2000), career information seeking behavior refers to a person's behavior of obtaining information sources from a variety of sources. This behavior involves activities such as information needs, information seeking, evaluating and selecting information and using information for decision-making processes (Mahmud, et al., 2016). Career information is important and helps individuals in making career decisions in addition to education-related information and social information (Salim, 2006).

The ability of an individual is not only limited to obtaining career information, but the next process involves the ability to make career decisions. The career decision-making process involves a cycle of CASVE that occurs, namely communication, analysis, synthesis, valuing and execution. This process occurs in a cycle that requires a person to have sufficient information related to education/training, job duties and social information (Sampson et al., 2013). The ability to make career decisions is related to career thinking that involves feelings, thoughts, attitudes, and expected beliefs (Bullock-yowell, et al., 2013).

The career information seeking behavior is important to assist a person in the career decision-making process. Those with career behavior have a high awareness of the importance of making career planning. Usually, they are always involved in activities related to career development such as attending career carnivals, resume writing workshops,

interview training workshops, career classes and so on. In addition to constantly adding new skills needed in the 21st century such as communication skills, critical thinking, problem solving, and emotion management (Schwab, 2013).

Career Centre Services

The development of students' career at higher education level focuses on career development between educational and employment transitions that are focused on the marketability of graduates. The marketability of graduates is a benchmark for each university to provide a source of knowledgeable and competent workforce in a particular field. In addition to aspects of the teaching and learning curriculum that meet the job market, then support factors such as counselling and career services are very important to help students prepare for the world of work.

Counselling and career services to university students are placed either under the portfolio of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Student Affairs or the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Industry and Community Affairs. However, its function and role are the same, which is to carry out student career development services to increase the marketability of graduates. Typically the types of career counseling services offered at university involve activities such as career counseling, career guidance, career carnivals, resume clinics, career profiling, interview training, career talks and others. These activities aim to develop the potential of students as they prepare to enter the working world. Career readiness refers to an individual's ability to understand themselves (interests, talents, and abilities) in addition to knowledge of a particular training or occupation as well as the ability to make career decisions (Reardon, et al., 2006). The ability to make career decisions involves the skills of students to understand the problems or obstacles faced including issues related to family influence, current economic status, organizational policies and job offers (Mahmud et al., 2019).

Therefore, to develop the potential of university students requires the role of all parties, including career counseling. Career counseling services need to focus on the career development of students in a focused manner by using two main approaches, namely preventive and intervention. A preventive approach aims to prevent such as running awareness programs on the importance of making career planning during the first year of study. While the intervention approach aims to treat or overcome an issue or career problem faced by students such as counseling, guidance, consultation, coaching and mentoring (Reardon et al., 2006). With the comprehensive career development of students at all levels of study from the first year to the final year of study, this may help to improve student's career readiness and directly improves the graduate's employability

Objective

1. Identify students' perceptions of career guidance services in public universities.
2. Identify career information seeking behaviors among unemployed graduates.

Methodology

The survey study design using Tracer Study 2018 questionnaire was applied in this study. Tracer Study is an online system that must be completed by graduates during the convocation. It aims to get a true picture of the job availability rate among graduates, find out the issues concerning employment and obtain feedback related to several important aspects

of the institution (infrastructure, education system). The information obtained was used to assist the government in formulating policies related to the marketability of graduates.

Tracer Study was started with the initiative of the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) which carried out the first destination study with all public universities and polytechnics. Next, the study was coordinated by the Department of Higher Education and it was proposed to use a uniform instrument. In 2006, Tracer Study 1 was used online at all public universities and polytechnics during the convocation. Meanwhile, Tracer Study 2 has been started and graduates need to update their employment status continuously after 6 months of graduation.

This study has selected a total of 6,550 graduates from one public university who updated their status in Tracer Study as the study sample. The Tracer Study 2018 questionnaire was used as an instrument, and only Part D: Not/Not Working and Part E: Your Experience While Studying at an Institution were used for research purposes. The data collected were analyzed descriptively.

Findings

The findings of the study were categorized into two parts, namely a descriptive analysis of students' perceptions of career guidance services in public universities and career information-seeking behavior among graduates who have yet to work.

Employment Status of Graduates

A total of 92.9% or 6,550 out of 7,047 graduates who graduated from a public university in 2018 participated in this study. A total of 32.9% or 2,318 respondents were male, while 67.1% or 4,729 respondents were female. Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents by gender.

Table 1

Distribution of respondents by gender.

Gender	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Male	2,318	32.9
Female	4,729	67.1
Total	6,550	100

The graduates' employment status was divided into 5 categories, namely employed (62.6%), furthering studies (4.1%), improving skills (1.2%), waiting for placement (7.7) and unemployed (24.4%) (Refer to Table 2). During 2018 year, the marketability rate of graduates was 75.6%, and it was a combination of 4 categories, namely working, furthering studies, improving skills and waiting for placement.

Table 2

Marketability status of graduates in 2018

Work status	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Working	4,100	62.6
Further study	271	4.1
Improving Skills	79	1.2
Awaiting Placement	501	7.7
Not Working	1,599	24.4

Total	6,550	100
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Graduates' Perceptions of Career Guidance Services

A total of 85.5% of respondents have never used any counseling or guidance services, while only 14.5% of respondents have used the services provided by the university (Refer to Table 3).

Table 3

Usage of advisory or guidance services by graduates.

Usage of Services	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	948	14.5
No	5,602	85.5
Total	6,550	100

Graduates were also asked to assess perceptions of career guidance services using a five -point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Very Unsatisfactory) to 5 (Very Satisfactory). Overall, respondents' perceptions of the services provided were at a satisfactory level (M = 4.05, SD = .83) (Refer to Table 4).

Table 4

Mean and standard deviation of respondents' perceptions towards career guidance services.

Mean	N	Min	Max	Mean	Standard deviation
Perceptions towards career guidance services in universities	5,991	1	5	4.05	0.83

However, the results involved all aspects, such as information on employment and career opportunities (M = 4.19, SD = .86), assistance in attending interview skills (M = 4.07, SD = .91), assistance in preparing to apply for a job (M = 4.11, SD = .91), assistance in obtaining employment (M = 3.96, SD = .96), assistance in furthering studies (M = 4.11, SD = .89), on-campus employment opportunities information (M = 3.88, SD = 1.01), and the process of on-campus recruitment by employers (M = 3.89, SD = 1.03) are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Graduates' perceptions of advisory or guidance services involving all subscales

Things	N	Min	Max	Mean	Standard deviation
Information on Employment & Career Opportunities	5760	1	5	4.19	0.86
Assistance In Continuing Work	5865	1	5	4.11	0.89
Assistance In Preparing To Apply For A Job	5615	1	5	4.11	0.91
Assistance In Attending Interview Skills	5609	1	5	4.07	0.91
Assistance In Getting A Job	5613	1	5	3.96	0.96
On-Campus Recruitment Process by Employers	5418	1	5	3.89	1.03
On-Campus Employment Opportunities Information	5652	1	5	3.88	1.01

Career Information Seeking Behavior among Unemployed Graduates

A total of 1,598 respondents were in the unemployed category, and 1,566 respondents reported whether they had attended interviews after graduation. Based on Table 6, a total of 57.2% of respondents had attended an interview, while 42.8% of respondents had never attended an interview.

Table 6

Percentage of unemployed respondents who have attended interview sessions.

Interview session	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	896	57.2
No	670	42.8
Total	1,556	100

Among the graduates who have not worked but have attended the interview session, a total of 91.1% of the respondents attended the interview less than 5 times and 8.9% of the respondents have attended more than 5 times (Refer to Table 7).

Table 7

Frequency of attending interview sessions among unemployed respondents.

Frequency	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1 Times	254	28.3
2 Times	322	35.9
3 Times	166	18.5
4 Times	48	5.4
5 Times	26	2.9
More Than 5 Times	80	8.9
Total	896	100

There are several methods used by respondents to obtain job vacancy information that have been shown in Table 8, namely through the Internet, printed media, electronic media, counseling or career centres, Jobs Malaysia, career agencies, friends or family, lecturers, social media and other unlisted methods. Among the most frequently used methods by respondents is the Internet, which is 60.6%. However, electronic media is the least used method by respondents, which is 0.20%.

Table 8

The main method used to obtain information on job vacancies among unemployed respondents.

Method	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Internet	949	60.6
Jobs Malaysia	283	18.1
Social Media	161	10.3
Career Carnival	78	5.0
Friends/Family	30	1.9
Job Agency	18	1.1
Printed Media	18	1.1

Counseling/Career Unit/Centre	11	0.7
Lecturer	11	0.7
Others	4	0.3
Electronic Media	3	0.2
Total	1,566	100

Discussion and Recommendations

The majority of university students have never sought available services at the University's Career Centre while they are on campus. Only a small number have received at least one service at the Career Centre such as job information, interview skills, job recruitment process, and other career information. Those who do not get the services provided at the Career Centre are likely due to a number of factors including not having issues related to their career development; have career issues but do not have the awareness to seek services at the Career Centre; difficulty in accessing career services; and lack of service promotion activities provided. University students' career counseling services focus on their preparation to make career decisions rationally and systematically (Mahmud et al., 2018; Reardon et al., 2006). However, overall, the students' perception of career guidance and counseling services was at a satisfactory level. Anyway, efforts of Career Centre have to be intensified by focusing on the students' accessibility towards services offered so that students realize the service's existence and gain benefits.

Career information seeking behavior refers to an individual's ability to obtain information such as job type, job description, salary/allowance/bonus, promotion incentives, health facilities and others. This information can be obtained from various sources including the Career Center, related websites, career carnivals and related sources (Mahmud et al., 2016). The tendency of students to use the internet as one of the sources of obtaining job information is very encouraging. Students are more interested in accessing information using the internet and this also provides an opportunity for the Career Center in providing employment information by applying resources from the internet.

Meanwhile, there are university students who have been involved at least once in interview training during the period of study. However, there are also students who have never attended any interview-related training. Students who have attended interviews have higher career readiness as the experience can increase awareness and improve communication skills while having self-confidence.

Therefore, this study has implications for the counseling and career services offered in each public university to enhance career development programs for students. There are several implications that need to be refined among them; (i) carry out career development programs through prevention and intervention; (ii) formulate career development programs focused on specific groups; (iii) Provide career information interactively making full use of internet resources; (iv) enhance the knowledge and competence of career counselors with 21st century career knowledge; and (v) conduct research from time to time to evaluate the effectiveness of the services offered.

Conclusion

This study aims to identify students' perceptions of career guidance services in public universities and to identify career information seeking behaviors among unemployed graduates. The results show that the majority of graduates have never used any counseling or guidance services. The results of the study also show that the main methods used to obtain employment opportunities information among unemployed respondents is through the internet, Jobs Malaysia, social media, career carnival and friends/family. Criteria for choosing a job according to priority, include high salary, job security, flexible working hours, convenience, opportunities for promotion, job satisfaction and valuable work experience. However, criteria such as salary are the final choice often suggested by respondents. The findings also found that men were more active in attending interviews than women. The implications of this study have an impact on the functionality of the career centre in university and some comprehensive approaches need to be implemented so that the services offered by the career centre can be fully utilized by students.

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