

A Conceptual Paper of Career Self-Efficacy and Career Readiness among Secondary School Students

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Abstract

Malaysia's education system had been focusing on students' development which involve academic and career readiness. Career self-efficacy is expected to play a role in nurturing student's ability and confidence within career decision-making. While this concept paper is published to explore the relationship between career self-efficacy and career readiness among secondary school students, it is also discussing the concepts behind it and findings from previous research. The implication of the study will provide guidelines for Ministry of Education Malaysia to empower career self-efficacy among students and support student's readiness for workforce or higher education. By understanding the importance of career self-efficacy, students will be fostered with resilience to overcome the barriers in career development.

Keyword: Career Self-Efficacy, Career Readiness, Secondary School, Student, Malaysia

Introduction

Education and career stand as benchmark in evaluating social progress. The measured progress describes the individual life quality (Hani Nazirah et al., 2024). Thus, pursuing higher education and having the career readiness becomes the two causal elements that crucial to Malaysian Certificate of Education graduate's students. Career readiness prepare the students for future career. Obtaining career readiness help students throughout their career development. In higher education, knowledge and skill that is vital to student's career choice are taught to assist career development. Besides that, school counsellors play significant role

by exposing various career to the students which align with their interests, knowledge and skills. In line with that, students are able to determine the suitable career fields for them.

Career self-efficacy is the key to career readiness. According to Hariyanti et al. (2019), self-efficacy is the individual belief on their abilities to achieve the targeted goal. Therefore, career self-efficacy is referred as the ability of understanding yourself by identifying the career interest, talent, competency, potential, inclination and career desires (Nur Azeera & Mohd Izwan, 2022). Bandura (1986) asserted that those belief will later influence the motivation and behavior to achieve the career goal.

On the motivational side, students with positive self-efficacy will have confidence and strong determination to success (Hariyanti et al., 2019). To become a career-ready person, self-confidence is needed to convince yourself that you are able to overcome challenges (Marshall et al., 2020).

From the behavior perspective, self-efficacy help shaping proactive attitude in students. Doganulku and Korkmaz (2023) stated that proactive attitude contributes to individual career development as people with it tend to take action which can boost their career progress. Li (2020) mentioned that proactive attitude is referred as initiative action that someone took to get the expected outcomes in future. The initiative action involves the ability to predict the challenges or opportunities, making changes to upgrade themselves by referring to related environment or organization without waiting for something to happen later. Thus, proactive attitude is essential in decision-making that including proper training and career path. Initial planning helps student to decide the future career because that career choice will become a responsibility and establish the future (Hani Nazirah et el., 2024). Therefore, this paper will further review the role of career self-efficacy and its relationship with career readiness.

Literature Review

Career Readiness

While Social Cognitive Theory posit that a person was a product of dynamic interaction between external environment, internal subjectivity factor, past and current behavior (Bandura, 1986), Social Cognitive Career Theory later added the specific dimension of career, interest and contextual factors (support or environmental barrier) which can affect the career decision-making (Lent et al., 1994).

Career readiness points to the individual readiness to engage in career (Noor Mala & Azman, 2019) after being through career exploration, planning and decision-making (Maznizam & Abdullah, 2016). Izwan et al. (2016), argue that career readiness is the psychological factors that combining cognitive, emotion and behavior, which further impacting the career planning, exploration, selection, maturity and decision-making. Based on them, career readiness also influenced by external factors like family, economy, social and organization. Super (1980) asserted that one's career phase is considered as career-ready when they have passed the exploration, planning and decision-making related to the career development. At the same time, the readiness can also be evaluated from their competencies and attitudes.

According to Azhenov et al. (2022), career readiness is built on career planning, personal belief, attitudes, motivation, feelings, abilities, behavior and action; which all needed to

succeed the career development. Besides that, there are six skills related to career readiness that a person needs to master which is social competency, various skills, positive attitude toward work, emotion and personality and entrepreneurship (Mohd Izwan et al., 2020). Longitudinal empirical research by Hirschi and Lage (2007), recognized four factors that can influence career readiness which is career determination, career planning, career research and vocational identity. According to them, each factor levels are capable to impact positively or negatively on career decision-making and career life, neither to student nor higher education graduates. As a result, they may miss out the career opportunities and unable to get the career-related experience. Systematic literature review of 20 years by Rachmawati et al. (2023), identifies internal and external factors related to career readiness. Internal factors are likes attitude and personal belief, personality trait and emotion, career identity and path while external factors are career development and planning, skills and competency, career action and behavior.

Skorikov and Patton (2007), insisted that career readiness is crucial to secondary school student because it is part of career choice commitment that individual need to face along the late teenager phase to adulthood. Within the transitional phase, ones are capable to decide the right future career choice and workplace (Azhenov et al., 2023). By that, students are required to aware of their interests, skills and abilities (Tang, 2019).

Career Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is the pivotal construct which was introduced in Social Cognitive Theory by Bandura (1977). In this theory, self-efficacy was defined as the ability to carry out the targeted behavior. Ahmad and Hamid (2021), indicated that self-efficacy is the individual ability to face any types of situations and that person must have confidence to face it effectively. According to Waddington (2023), self-efficacy is a construct that focus on individual evaluation of their ability regarding successfully doing specific thing in a particular situation. Overall, self-efficacy is a person thinking rather than doing specific action.

Self-efficacy was mentioned earlier in the contributor factors chain. The chain was assumed to predict one's behavior. Self-efficacy is one of the cognitive aspects beside outcome expectations (Wang et al., 2022). In this theory too, self-efficacy is said to influence behavior directly by impacting outcome expectations which consequently from behavior, affecting the goal setting, barriers and boosting the targeted behavior.

As the Social Cognitive Theory by Bandura (1977) was widely used, later a new theory evolves from it which is Social Cognitive Career Theory by Lent et al. (1994). The career-related theory highlights the role of interest, career choice and performance. In this new theory, self-efficacy was referred to career self-efficacy (Yusoff et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2022). Hackett and Betz (1981), defined career self-efficacy as the individual confidence and belief of their career choice, career decision-making and executing the choice. Moreover, Mohd Izwan et al. (2020) described that career self-efficacy as an individual ability to consider their capacity in organizing and implementing the necessary actions towards achieving the goal.

Career self-efficacy is essential to youth generation. According to Kantan et al. (2021), through career self-efficacy, ones will be able to understand the career objectives and choice. By implication, career self-efficacy helps the individual to encounter various situation

throughout the process of career planning. Furthermore, when the students have higher career self-efficacy, they are capable to explore the career opportunities effectively. After much deliberation, the student will be able to choose their career path for the future.

Relationship between Career Self-Efficacy and Career Readiness

Previous scholars mentioned about the absolute relationship between career self-efficacy and career readiness as career self-efficacy is the predictor factor of career exploration (Chen et al., 2022). In addition, career exploration is also part of career readiness (Azhenov et al., 2023).

Research by Sholikah et al. (2021), on 80 university students of Office Administration program in Semarang State University, Indonesia found a strong relationship between career self-efficacy and career readiness based on Fornell-Larcker (0.786) and HTMT (0.878) analysis. Using bootstrap analysis, direct effect from career self-efficacy on career readiness was detected ($\beta=0.801$). This result means when someone has higher career self-efficacy, they are likely to have higher career readiness too. According to this research, students with career self-efficacy will also have self-confidence in doing career choice task. Due to this, they will also have strong readiness toward their career choice and dedicated in making career decision.

Another research by Makki et al. (2023), on 290 final year engineering students in Malaysia discovered career self-efficacy's significant effect on career exploration. Multiple regression analysis shows a significant positive effect ($\beta=0.587$, $p=0.0000$) between these two variables. This finding explained that there is indeed a strong association between the two variables.

Additionally, research by Baharudin and Chin (2023), on 200 undergraduate students from private university in Malaysia identified a positive and strong correlation between career self-efficacy and career choice consideration ($r=0.678$). According to Lent and Brown (2020), career consideration is crucial in the career development process. Through this consideration, a person will actively involve in career planning to set and achieve the career goal, thus having adequate career readiness.

Next, research by Bunga and Julius on 225 final year school students in SMK N1 Majalaya, Indonesia noted that 62% students have moderate level of career self-efficacy. They indicated that students with moderate and higher career self-efficacy are more prepared in doing career-related task such as problem solving, planning and goal setting. Besides that, findings from this research shows that career self-efficacy is directly associated with career readiness because students with career self-efficacy are keen to set the goal, reviewing career information and solving the career-related issue.

A same type of research carried out by Mohd Izwan et al. (2020), on 1391 undergraduate students from three education cluster in Malaysia found that majority of the students have moderate (37.1%) and high (61.4%) career self-efficacy. Career self-efficacy is the confidence of one's capability in carrying out the career decision so that it will impact the career readiness (Mohd Izwan et al., 2020).

Multiple regression analysis in previous research by Mansor and Tan (2009) on 1229 undergraduate students from four public universities in Malaysia, discovered that female students with low career information and vocational identity have yet to make career-related decision. Career indecisive which involve completing career-related tasks throughout career development will definitely affect the career readiness (Mansor & Tan, 2009).

Despite all the results from previous research showing the association between career self-efficacy and career readiness, the research gap remains. Research gap play important roles in academic research because it shows the insufficient knowledge which had not been covered in that areas of study. By determining the gap, it helps maintaining the research relevance (Ajemba & Arene, 2022; Chand, 2023).

First, Sholikhah et al. (2021), have use a small sample size in their research. As a result, it is hard to generalize the findings because it will affect the research reliability and validity as the findings will lower the statistic power and will be overestimated (Daem et al., 2020). Subsequently, the finding is prone to bias (Jimenez-Valverde, 2020). In addition to that, the number of female (81.25%) and male (18.75%) student shows a great disproportionate, resulting in questionable findings applicability towards exploring the differences of career readiness between gender. 60% of the respondents also doesn't have working experience. Thus, the findings of the research cannot be associated with students who has working experience as the career experience can be used to measure the association with career readiness. Furthermore, although the instrument in this research had been examined the structure validity but it was not built on a strong theoretical basis (Sholikhah et al., 2021). Failing to meet this, will result in methodological and theoretical barriers in scientific research. These happen because comparison with other research will be inadequate, declining the former research validity and performance evaluation too (Capano & Engeli, 2021). Thus, the authors suggested the use of other variables to measure their effect on career readiness (Sholikhah et al., 2021).

Second, research by Makki et al. (2023), only focus on university student, resulting in nongeneralized findings to students from other educational institution such as students in secondary school. The significant difference between number of male (63.1%) and female (36.9%) students may lead to inaccurate generalized findings on other institutions too. Gupta et al. (2022) explained that imbalance gender sample will cause unclear relationship between variables, arising doubt and misinterpretation on research findings, yet contributing to misjudgment of developing new policy. Despite that, this gap occurs due to the factor of difference female participation in engineering course which had been the identity of the course itself (Patrick et al., 2024).

Third, research by Baharudin and Chin (2023) only focus on private university undergraduate students, resulting in nongeneralized findings to other groups which are postgraduate students and students from public universities. According to Polit and Beck (2010), the quality and applicability of quantitative research is determined from its finding's generalization. They asserted that finding's generalization will enable evidence-based practice to be used on various population and applicable to other research's methodology. These will help increasing the impact and research association. Nevertheless, there will always exist particular hindrances which is limitation of the study. Ross and Zaidi (2019) stated that reporting

limitation of the study will highlight the transparency of the research because it helps readers recognize the limit and accuracy of the findings. Besides that, limitation of the study contributes to the new research by filling the gap from previous research. The finding's generalization is also controlled by limitation of the study as it puts the research findings on the right context. Hence, assisting in the research findings sharing ethically.

Fourth, research by Bunga and Julius (2023), and Mohd Izwan et al. (2020), are only limited to measuring the level of career self-efficacy among students though basically they insisted that there is indeed a relationship between career self-efficacy and career readiness. This method will lead to disregarding among future researchers about basic relationship between variables such as causal relationship or how certain variable affect another variable (Taherdoost, 2022).

Lastly, research by Mansor and Tan (2009), had determined a weak relationship between academic performance with career indecision. Career indecision is one of the barriers to the career readiness. Previous research found that career indecision is significantly negatively correlated with career readiness (Migunde et al., 2015). This result is interpreted as, when the level of career indecision increase, the level of career readiness will decrease. This happen because when a person is unsure about their career choice, they tend to be less prepared in the career process. Future research had been suggested to utilize other variable as career indecision is assumed to limit the career readiness. Based on findings from previous research, this research is predicted to find a significant and positive relationship between career self-efficacy and career readiness.

Conclusion and Future Recommendation

Overall, this conceptual paper discussed the importance of career self-efficacy in determining career readiness among secondary school student. Research has shown that career self-efficacy is indeed helping students in career exploration, making possible decision and overcoming the challenges in career planning.

Even so, support from school counsellor is crucial in helping students to determine their suitable career path that align with interest and tendencies. As a policy makers, Ministry of Education Malaysia play a huge role in supporting the students' career development. Extensive scrutiny of human capital development will ensure the students readiness from the aspects of academic, living skills and career. Thus, collaboration between all parties can establish students' career readiness throughout the career life and higher education.

This paper offers significant contributions to the field of guidance and counselling by theoretically synthesizing existing research on career self-efficacy and its relationship to career readiness. It provides a comprehensive overview on how career self-efficacy influences career decision-making and planning, thereby fostering career readiness among secondary school students. Through the critique of previous studies, this paper identifies gap in the literature and addresses the need for more context-specific research within Malaysian education system. Furthermore, this research acknowledges the role of Social Cognitive Theory in explaining the concept of self-efficacy which is central to Social Cognitive Career Theory. Social Cognitive Career Theory highlights how career self-efficacy impacts the career decision making and planning, supporting the overall objective of fostering career readiness

among students. Additionally, this paper highlights unique challenges faced by secondary school students in Malaysia contextually by compromising the practical insights for educators, counselors and policy makers on enhancing career readiness program tailored to the need of this demographic. The finding emphasizes the urgency of a supportive school environment, effective counseling and cooperation between all stakeholders in fostering students' career development. Therefore, focusing on this aspect contribute to the development of effective practices and policies aimed at improving career readiness among Malaysian youth.

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