The Effects of Career Readiness Course on Students Career Decision Self-Efficacy During Covid 19

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Abstract

COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in reduced employment opportunities and increased competition among graduates where the labor market today is undergoing a transformation towards more advanced use of technology in the employment sector which graduates should also prepare themselves with a range of additional skills so that they can compete in the increasingly competitive and challenging job market. Career readiness course is an important initiative that helps students to obtain necessary skills needed in the transitional period from education to work, which involves the process of career planning, goal selection, and decision making. This research was aimed to study the effectiveness of career readiness course on the career self-efficacy among undergraduates who have enrolled into this elective course. This was quasi-experimental research that studied the difference on career self-efficacy before and after participating in this course on the same group. The content of this course consisted of resume writing, job application, and interview tips. All of these contents were designed based on the combination of Cognitive of Information Processing Theory (CIP) and Constructivist Theory. This course had been conducted for 14 weeks and encompassed a variety of career activities, including mock interview, establishment of career profiling, self-reflection, online opened discussion, industrial sharing and resume clinic, which aimed to helped students in acquiring occupational information and skills, applying the skills into the practices, and establishing the career profiling. The effectiveness of career self-efficacy was measured by using comparing the scores of Career Decision Self-Efficacy-Short Form (CDSE-SF) before and after joining the course. A total of 179 undergraduates who have enrolled in this class had been selected as the respondents. The results of pre-test and post-test showed that there was a significant difference in term of career self-efficacy t (179) = 8.90, p < .05. The implication of this course was used as a source of reference to design related career program that can enhance the graduates' career readiness, which would eventually increase the rate of graduate employability. This course was suggested to become the compulsory subject for all undergraduates in order to equip them with proper knowledge and skills related to their job readiness.

Keywords: **career readiness course, career readiness, career self-efficacy**

INTRODUCTION

The pandemic of Covid-19 is a worldwide issue that began in 2020 and has adversely affected national and international employment. This issue also created economic impact on different industrial sectors as the physical activities and interstate travel had been widely restricted in order to control the outbreak of infections, which had impacted the employees, families and students. According to Department of Statistics Malaysia (2022), the youth unemployment rate for ages 15 to 24 increased to 13.1% in March 2022 from 13.0% in February 2022, registering 361,000 youth unemployed. Meanwhile unemployed rate for youth aged 15 to 30 years only

dropped by 2.2% from 513,700 to 502,400 unemployed youth. Young people are leaving school more qualified than ever before, yet many are finding it difficult to compete for available jobs and are increasingly vulnerable to unstable employment (Mann, Denis & Percy, 2020). Indirectly, it affected the graduating students in the career perspective as the career opportunity had been drastically reduced due to high unemployment, especially among affected sectors. Sadly, the graduates not only need to compete for employment with each other but also with those who have been laid off during the pandemic. Impact of Covid-19 has changed the global employment landscape which most industry and company management shifted to online communication in business dealings (Ahmad Kamel et. al, 2020). Employability enhancement intervention is important at university level for students (Hisham et. al, 2020; Yusof & Jamaluddin, 2015). Therefore, the university was initiated to implement several actions in increasing the graduate's employability and preparing the students to be more competitive and outstanding after the graduations.

According to Bates, Rixon, Carbone, and Pilgrim (2019), the current professional environment for graduates is extremely turbulent due to the unpredictability of corporate restructures, technology and advances, outsourcing and remote working. Universities plays a crucial role in helping students to seek for opportunities in developing transferable employability skills by embedding the demanding skills in the curriculum (e.g., communication skills, teamwork, and complex problem solving) and incorporating opportunities for work experience (e.g., internship placements, mobility program, industrial exposure) (Bates et al., 2019). The previous studies found that university students who were committed to incorporate the transferable professional skills into their study are having better ability to adapt and demonstrate presentable career behaviors, which can enhance their graduate's employability (Clements & Kamau, 2017).

Besides that, the previous studies proposed that undergraduates in university are generally possessing low and moderate levels of career readiness, eventually lead to occurrence of low employment rate (Mansor & Rashid, 2013; Mahmud, 2017a; Mahmud et al., 2018; Mahmud et al., 2019). Career readiness is significantly influenced by the individual's ability in making appropriate career decision by considering the external factors affecting career development, including family, organization, social and economy (Sampson et al., 2013). Additionally, career readiness helps students to reflect on their ambitions, interests, qualifications and abilities. At the same time, individuals with high level of career readiness are more capable to acquire, organize, and apply the information about the labour market and other educational opportunities in career development (Sampson et al., 2013). Therefore, the comprehensive career readiness module is designed to teach individuals in planning and making decisions on work and learning-related activities.

In Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, was initiated to construct and provide Career Readiness Course to the students since 2017. It was one of the elective courses registered under the UKM Citra Elective Program Courses, which was aimed to help undergraduate students to acquire occupational information, apply the learned skills in job application, and construct personal career profiling. Besides that, this course acts as the platform to disseminate updated career information and opportunities to the students. The information would be disclosed through industrial sharing and hands-on practices, which are conducted by the expertise from different industrial sectors. This course also emphasizes on assisting students to construct career planning and decision. It is very important to assist the students in conquering the real-world challenges. Thus, this course incorporates the required soft skills in the contents and activities.

Therefore, this research aimed to study the effectiveness of this course in enhancing career-self efficacy among undergraduate students. This research also investigated the level of career self-efficacy among undergraduates student before and after attending the entire course.

Career Decision Self Efficacy

Based on Theory of Social Cognitive, career self-efficacy is defined as an individual's confidence on managing and performing cognitive, behavioral and social skills in order to accomplish desired career goals (Bandura, 1986). Career self-efficacy plays the influential roles throughout the process of making career decision (Komarraju et al., 2013; Kristin, 2009; Sidiropoulou-Dimakakou et al., 2012). Commonly, individuals with low level of career self-efficacy are more vulnerable to the development of dysfunctional career thoughts. Moreover, they are not confident in making career decisions, and tended to avoid in joining any career related activity (Andrews et al., 2014; Komarraju et al., 2013). In contrast, individuals with the high level of career self-efficacy are more likely to explore career and resolve career challenge. They are capable to select appropriate careers, be responsible to their decision, and participate in a variety of career program and trainings actively in order to prepare themselves to the world of work (Andrews et al., 2014; Kristin, 2009; Sidiropoulou-Dimakakou et al., 2012).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design and Sampling

This was a quantitative and quasi experimental research that aimed to investigate the effectiveness of this course on the career self-efficacy among undergraduates. A total of 179 UKM undergraduates had been randomly selected as respondents.

Instrument

The Career Decision Self-Efficacy-Short Form (CDSE-SF) had been selected as the psychological instrument in this research. It was the self-administered instrument that consisted of 25 items and designed to measure the career self-efficacy among the respondents. CDSE-SF was developed to assess the psychological dimension of Career Decision Self-Efficacy. It possessed good psychometric properties, which had been commonly used by the researchers and practitioners for the purposes of evaluation and research activities in various sectors, including education, management, social services, social policies, and leadership (Akin, Saricam & Kaya, 2014). There are 5 subscales of career self-efficacy, namely accurate self-appraisal, gathering occupational information, goal selection, making plans for the future and problem solving. The 5 Likert scale was used, ranging from 1 (not confidence at all) until 5 (completely confident) (Betz & Taylor, 2001). The score interpretation was illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: *The Score Interpretation of CDSE-SF*

Mean Score	Interpretation
1.00-2.33	Low
2.34-3.66	Moderate

3.67-5.00	High

The previous research conducted by Luzzo (1996) showed that CDSE-SF possessed high validity among the population of Australia students. The researchers also found that there was a significant positive relationship between the Career Decision-Making Attitudes and CDSE-SF (r = .41, p < .05), which represents that student with the higher score of career self-efficacy are more likely to have better attitude in the career decision making. Moreover, Chung (2002) conducted research to study the differences of gender and races on making career self-efficacy and career commitment among undergraduates. The result showed that there is significant different between CDMSE-SF and Career Commitment Scale. Taylor and Betz (1983) also reported that the overall Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for CDSE-SF was .96, and the Cronbach Alpha coefficient for each subscale was ranged from .86 to .89. In Malaysia, Jelas et al. (2014) assessed the reliability of this instrument, which had been published by Ismail (2011). The researchers conducted a pilot study among students (n = 94) from different sectors, and the result proposed found that this instrument was reliable in Malaysia context as its coefficient was .92. Similarly, Mahmud (2017a) also found that CDSE-SF was reliable as its coefficient was .91.

Career Readiness Course

This course had been divided into 14 sessions throughout one semester. Due to the impact of pandemic Covid-19, the entire course had been concluded via online platform (e.g. Google Meet, Zoom).

Table 2: *Contents of Job Readiness Course*

Session	Topic	Aim
First	Introduction to LMCR 3422 Job Readiness	Providing brief introduction and expected learning outcomes.
Second & Third	Results of Tracer Study	Increasing awareness of students on the current graduate employability rates.
	Module of Making Career Decision	Assisting students in making wise career choices.
Fourth – Twelfth	4 industrial sharing related to personal career development, including personal grooming, personal branding, interview tips, and resume writing and video resume.	Educating students regarding the necessary early preparation before applying for a job based on industry's demands.
	4 industrial sharing related to the information of the world of work, such as digital entrepreneurship, job outlook during pandemic covid-19, pathway in government sector and reality in working environment.	Assisting students to be aware and understand the current condition of the world of work.

	Resume Clinic	Teaching students to construct a presentable resume.
Thirteenth & Fourteenth	Course Assessments (Career Profiling & Mock Interview)	Encouraging students to apply knowledge into practice. Helping students to build up a marketable career profile.

Data Analysis

In order to discuss the objective in this study, the descriptive analysis was conducted to study the level of career self-efficacy. Moreover, the t-test analysis was used to measure the differences of career self-efficacy among respondents before and after attending the entire job readiness course.

Results and Discussion

A total of 179 undergraduates had been selected as respondents. The percentage of female (78.2%) was higher than the male (21.8%).

Table 3. *Descriptive statistics of respondents based on gender.*

Gender	Amount (n)	Percentage (%)
Male	39	21.8
Female	140	78.2
Total	179	100.0

Based on Table 4, there was significant difference in career self-efficacy before and after attending job readiness course among the undergraduates, $t(179) = 8.90$, $p < .05$. These findings indicated that the job readiness course was effective in increasing the career self-efficacy among undergraduates.

Table 4. *The result of paired samples test for the variable of career decision self-efficacy.*

	Test	N	Mean	SD	t	p
CSE	Post-test	179	4.12	.516	8.90	.000***
	Pre-test	179	3.74	.545		

[1] *** Note: p < .05, CSE: Career self-efficacy

This finding was similar to the research conducted by Mahmud et al. (2017), who proposed that implementation of structural career readiness module was effective in enhancing career-self-efficacy among undergraduate students. A notable finding by Mahmud et al. (2017) proposed that implementation of structural career readiness module was effective in enhancing career-self efficacy among undergraduate students. This was also consistent to the previous research, which highlighted the effectiveness of attending structural training in career self-efficacy (Salleh et al., 2013; Talib et al., 2014; Mahmud et al., 2017b). Hence, the career intervention program designed based on the structured teaching and learning approaches are effective in increasing participants' career self-efficacy. Zhou et. al (2022) study shows that self-perceived employability is important for the development of career sustainability which is important in work engagement in the future. The course was conducted in the form of online learning, which provided a more accessible and user-friendly platform to foster the interactive knowledge exchange between students and speakers selected from different industrial sectors. The students were able to acquire occupational information, construct goal and plans for the future. Distance and open learning become very popular strategy in the new normal setting that able to provide advanced technology system (Harrison, 2020).

Additionally, the course assessments were constructed to foster the development of accurate self-appraisal and problem-solving skills in order to compete in the labour market during the outbreak of pandemic Covid-19. Zhou et. al (2022) emphasize the important of coping skill due to emotional exhaustion which is impact individual's adoption of positive coping. High self-perceives employability individual usually had higher level of positive coping skill which is problem oriented that impacted the negative emotion (Sun et. al, 2019). Past studies have shown that students who show maturity in their career aim have a clear goal about their occupational expectations, abilities to recognize the career opportunities which parallel to their academic ability and securing necessary educational planning to achieve their career expectation (Mann, 2017).

For instance, the students were required to construct a career profiling, including video resume, resume and cover letter, which can be used as the necessary documents in job application. In addition, the students were asked to participate in the online mock interview in a group of 8 – 10 people via online platform in order to acquire real life experience and acquire constructive feedbacks in attending interview. Student required further educational support and opportunities to broaden skills and knowledge on non-technical skills, professional development, and diverse range of disciplines (Miani et. al, 2021).

As a result, the participants were capable to improve career seeking behavior and confidence in performing career-related tasks, such as joining career fairs, seeking job opportunity via job portal, attending interviews and other career related activities, which would eventually empower good practice and acquire constructive career guidance. Career commitment triggered motivation and lead to promising and sustainable career trajectory (Lin, 2020; Zhu et. al, 2020). Therefore, through job readiness course like structural career readiness module educate students how to enhance their career commitment at an early stage before getting into the work field.

CONCLUSION

The effectiveness of a career intervention is largely associated with several aspects, including the appropriate and updated contents, methods, implementation strategies, and continuous assessments on the performance of participants. Career intervention programs designed for the

population of university students are remarkably important to develop a group of professional labor force for the future employment in Malaysia. Therefore, the universities are responsible to prepare the students by equipping them with necessary skills required in 21st century, including critical thinking, problem solving, negotiation and decision making. Thus, they are capable to compete and survive in the labour market, especially during unexpected circumstances, such as the outbreak of Covid-19. Based on the result from this research, one of the initiatives can be implemented by the university is to design the comprehensive job readiness course to the students starting from their first year of study, which included industrial sharing on the personal development, information about the world of work and skills needed in workplace.

Besides that, the career counsellors in the university play important roles in preparing the students to be more employable and mentally prepared for the problems encountered in world of work. The career counsellors are also recommended to design and implement other career interventions based on career theories to the university students. The career interventions are suggested to be conduct in a more personal way, which can help the students to gain abilities in resolving other problems that prevent students from making career decision and plans.

In conclusion, the career self-efficacy is the vital element needed to be developed among the undergraduates in order to improve the graduate employability after graduation especially during the pandemic Covid-19. The effectiveness career intervention can be achieved by enriching the students with soft skills and technical skills such as creativity, communication, teamwork, problem-solving, critical thinking, cultural competency, etiquette, professionalism, and development of resumes as well as video resumes. The job readiness programs would integrate various employability skills among the students by providing them with a competitive edge during interviews, internships, and job placement. Therefore, this course is suggested to be one of the compulsory subject to the undergraduates to improve the level of career self-efficacy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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