Self-Esteem, Social Support and Career Decision-Making among Technical Engineering Students

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Abstract: Malaysian graduates normally lack soft skills such as self-confidence, positive attitude, job search skill and communication skill. The 68,473 Malaysian graduates were unemployed in 2013. Based on a report by MOHE in 2013, 25% of graduates fail to find work after graduation. The National Higher Education Research Institute (IPPTN) found that graduates are unable to be employed because of their weaknesses. The 84 technical engineering students (28 males and 56 females) from Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka were involved in the study. The objectives of the study are to study the relationship between self-esteem and career decision making as well as to identify the relationship between social support and career decision making among technical engineering students. The instruments that used in this research were the Rosenberg self-esteem scale, interpersonal support evaluation list and career decision-making self-efficacy scale. The relationship between self-esteem, social support, career decision-making and was validated using the structural equation model. The findings show that there are significant relationships between self-esteem and career decision-making as well as between social support and career decision-making.

Key words: Self-esteem, social support, career decision-making, technical engineering students, models

INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia reported that 68,473 graduates were unemployed in 2013. Based on this report, 25% of the graduates failed to find work after graduation. The 2011 Graduate Tracking Study by the Higher Education Ministry revealed that around 40,000 graduates in Malaysia were unemployed and about 28,000-34,000 graduates failed to secure employment from the year 2008 to the year 2010. The National Higher Education Research Institute (IPPTN) found that graduates are unable to be employed because of their weaknesses in mastering the English language including communication skills (both oral and writing); generating interpersonal relationship skill; instilling motivation; and overcoming attitude problems such as unable to work as a team, refused to learn, were selfish, were overly selective of jobs and asked for a high salary. A survey on jobstreet.com by Simon found that fresh graduates nowadays have unrealistic salary demands. The 64% of the respondents felt that the top reason why fresh graduates were rejected after the interview sessions was because the candidates were asking for unrealistic salary or benefits. The 60% of them were of the opinion that the fresh graduates had bad character, attitude and personality, followed by 56% of them indicating that the fresh graduates had poor command of English language. The 52% of them also felt that fresh graduates lacked good communication skills while another 38% said that fresh graduates tend to be too choosy about the job.

Today's workplace shows that technical skills are inadequate to keep individuals employed as the general consensus among employers indicates that the main problem with graduates is the lack of the soft skills needed for productive performance (Robles, 2012). Malaysian graduates normally lack soft skills such as self-confidence, positive attitude, job search skills and communication skills (Abdullah, 2014). According to Hasan *et al.* (2008) students do not have confidence in expressing their opinions. Although, they have lots of ideas, but their levels of confidence is low. In addition, students are not brave enough to speak or communicate in English.

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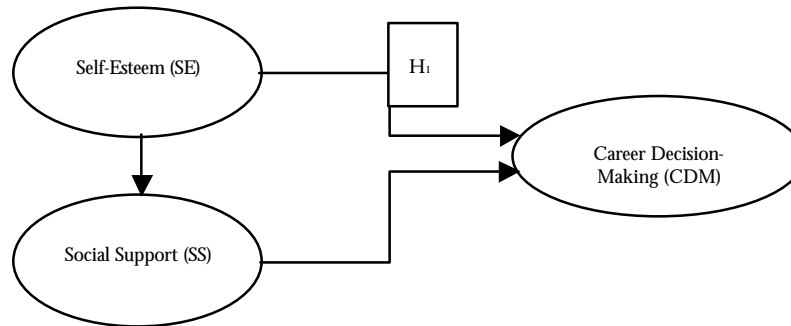Malaysia

Fig. 1: Theoretical framework

Decision-making is one of the domains that needs to be developed by students and it is also one of the three aspects of students' self-development that needs to be considered in order for us to achieve Vision 2020 in Malaysia. The career selection process is a very complex process and it involves a wide range of applications such as knowledge, skills and experiences related to career decision-making. Therefore, one important aspect in the career-related decision-making process is information regarding the profession concerned. This study aims to examine the relationship between Self-Esteem (SE), Social Support (SS) and Career Decision-Making (CDMSE) among technical engineering students.

Objectives of the study:

- To study the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making
- To identify the relationship between social support and career decision-making

Hypothesis of the study:
- Self-esteem influences career decision-making among technical engineering students
- Social support significantly influences career decision-making among technical engineering students

Theoretical framework: The proposed theoretical framework is based on the scope of the study and theories that are related to the research. This framework is constructed based on Holland's Theory of Career Choice, Ann Roe's Theory of Career Choice and Development and Super's Career Development Theory. Based on Fig. 1, the present study investigates two factors namely Self-Esteem (SE) and Social Support (SS) towards Career Decision-Making (CDM). In the context of this study, the theoretical framework compromises of the overall relationship between Self-Esteem (SE) and Career Decision-Making (CDM) as well as the relationship between Social Support (SS) and Career Decision-Making (CDM).

Literature review
Relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making: Numerous studies have been conducted to examine the relationship between self-esteem and career decision making. Previous studies have also focused on self-esteem and its relationship to academic achievement and gender (Abdullah, 2012; Ali and Shah, 2013). Research has indicated that self-esteem is related to career decision-making self-efficacy (Abdullah, 2012). Ali and Shah (2013) examined the difficulties of career decision making among students and results indicated that 16% of students with low self-esteem have higher difficulty in making career decisions. This research also found that women have lower levels of self-esteem than men.

Leah found a relationship between self-esteem and career choices amongst African American high school students. The result shows that self-esteem has a relationship with career choices among students ($p = 0.033$, $p<0.05$). Reno conducted a survey on self-esteem and career decision-making among 609 Latina American female college students of California State University. This research focused on the relationship between the level of self-esteem and career decision-making among female students. The result showed a positive correlation between the level of self-esteem and career decision-making among Latina American female college students.

Studies have been conducted on self-esteem and career decision-making. For example, research has indicated a relationship between students' global self-esteem and career indecision, a personality and career decision-making as well as the influence of social psychology on career choice (Abdullah *et al.*, 2014; Guranda, 2014; Korkmaz, 2015; Greculescu *et al.*, 2014).

Relationship between social support and career decision-making: Many studies have been conducted to examine the relationship between social support and career decision making. For example, previous studies have focused on parenting styles, social status, parental expectation, cultural values, parents impact, social comparison, parental attitude and family support (Sovet and Metz, 2014; Li *et al.*, 2015; Leung *et al.*, 2011; Pappas and Kounenou, 2011; Gushue, 2006; Dogan and Kazak, 2010).

Chen and Liew focused on factors that influence career decision-making among graduating students from Malaysian private higher educational institutions. This research found that there is a positive relationship between parental authority and Career Decision-Making Difficulties (CDMD). Other than that, research on parenting style and career decision-making among French and Korean adolescents (Sovet and Metz, 2014) found that male students will have difficulty in making career decisions with a permissive and authoritative parenting style while female students will have difficulty with the authoritarian parenting style. The results show that there is a positive correlation between parenting style and career decision making among students.

A study on 98 postgraduate students from Beijing University indicated the ability to make effective career decisions by students is influenced by the choice of the people around them such as their peers rather than their background and abilities (Li *et al.*, 2015). Other than that, Dogan and Kazak (2010) investigated the relationship between student's decision making skills and parental attitude. Their study revealed that parents influence the decision-making process among students and the democratic parenting style is more effective in influencing the decision making process. Besides that, researchers have also found a relationship between social influence and career decision-making, parental personality and career decision-making, cultural relationship with career decision-making difficulties, family and career decision, influence of parental occupation on occupational choice and the relationship of social surrounding to career choices (Mohd *et al.*, 2010; Murphy and Lambrechts, 2015; Demirtas and Tezer, 2012; Byrne *et al.*, 2012; Korkmaz, 2015).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The 84 technical engineering students (28 males and 56 females) from Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka were involved in the study. The instruments used in this research were the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (10 items), Interpersonal Support Evaluation List (40 items) and Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale (25 items). The Rosenberg self-Esteem Scale is a test used to measure global self-esteem. The instrument focuses on people's general feeling toward themselves, without referring to any specific quality or attribute (Abdullah, 2012). The Interpersonal Support Evaluation List by Cohen and Hoberman (1983) was used to measure the perceived availability of four relatively independent social support resources and thus to provide tests of stress buffering hypotheses. The Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale by Betz and coauthors is used to assess career decision-making self-efficacy among the respondents. The CDMSE measures confidence in accomplishing career-related tasks (Abdullah, 2012). The CDMSE is one of the most frequently used scales in career counseling and vocational guidance. This research used the test-retest to determine the reliability of the instrument and Structural Equation Modeling to test the validity of the constructs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive analysis: Demographic analysis is used to describe the demographic profile of the respondents according to their gender, ethnicity and academic achievements.

Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage distributions of the respondents according to personal characteristics such as gender, ethnicity and academic achievements. Total 33% of the respondents were males while 67% of the respondents were females. The 71% of the respondents were Malay and 29% were Chinese. The distribution of the respondents according to the academic achievements shows that 31% of them have low CGPAs while the remaining 69% have high CGPAs.

Analysis of self-esteem, social support and career decision-making: Self-esteem influences career decision-making among technical engineering students.

Table 1: Sample distribution based on gender, ethnicity and academic achievements

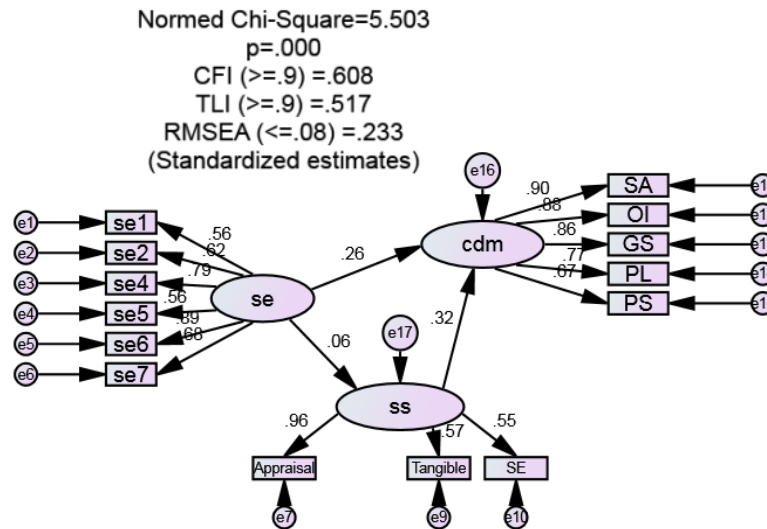| Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
male	28	33
female	56	67
Ethnicity		
Malay	60	71
Chinese	24	29
Academic acheivement		
Low CGPAs	26	31
High CGPAs	58	69

Fig. 2: Empirical results of the hypothesized structural relationship between Self-Esteem, Social Support, and Career Decision-Making

The factor loadings in the final revised model (Fig. 2) are substantially significant with CFI = 0.608, TLI = 0.517 and RMSEA = 0.223. The normed Chi-square (χ^2) of 5.503 for a good fit is also met. Therefore, there is a significant relationship with a value of 0.26 between self-esteem and career decision-making self-efficacy among technical engineering students.

This research firstly examined the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making. The results indicated that self-esteem is related to career decision making among technical engineering students. Self-esteem and career decision-making self-efficacy has a positive relationship in the full-fledged structural equation modeling model. When self-esteem increases, the career decision-making self-efficacy also increases; therefore, it is important for undergraduates to build their self-esteem in order to make them more confident in preparing themselves for their careers (Abdullah, 2012). Other than that, individuals with effective personalities are able to use high level assertiveness, possess high self-esteem and self-confidence, have the ability to problem-solve and learn from experience are able to use high level of work capacity and have emotional stability.

The finding shows that when self-esteem increases, career decision-making also increases among technical engineering students. Therefore, it is very important for students to build their self-esteem in order to make them more confident in preparing themselves for their careers. According to Ranjit, individuals with high self-esteem are

generally confident of themselves, self-directed, decisive, loving, lovable, eager to express idea, assertive and get along well with others.

This finding also reveals some similarities with other findings of previous research on the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making self-efficacy. Previous research found the relationship between self-esteem and career decision making among students (Abdullah, 2014), the relationship between career decision difficulty and self-esteem among college students (Ali and Shah, 2013), the relationship between self-esteem and career choices amongst African American high school students and self-esteem and career decision making among Latina American female college students. Therefore, the findings of the present study are similar to previous studies which have indicated the relationship between self-esteem and career decision-making.

Social support significantly influences career decision-making among technical engineering students: The factor loadings in the final revised model (Fig. 2) are substantially significant with CFI = 0.608, TLI = 0.517 and RMSEA = 0.223. The normed Chi-square (χ^2) of 5.503 for a good fit is also met. Therefore, there is strong significant relationship with a value of 0.32 between social support and career decision-making self-efficacy among technical engineering students.

Secondly, this research examined the relationship between social support and career decision-making. Social support and career decision-making self-efficacy have a

positive relationship in the full-fledged structural equation modeling model. According to Cenkseven *et al.* (2010), the level of career indecision of the students whose fathers had positive attitudes was lower than whose fathers had negative attitudes about helping their children with career development. This indicates the importance of identifying the influence of the family in order to understand the complexities of career development and the career decision-making process. Furthermore, Cheung (2013) found that the more social support and psychological resources are given by authoritative parents, their children are less likely to develop high trait anxiety.

The result shows that social support such as parental influence has a strong relationship with career decision-making among students. Therefore, it is very important for parents to help and guide their children to make good career decisions. Research done by Byrne *et al.* (2012) found that parents and their subject teachers are the only people who influence students to make a career decision. Similar to studies done by Murphy and Lambrechts (2015) and Lerchundi *et al.* (2015), the result of this study shows that social support such as parental influence has a strong relationship with career decision-making among students. Therefore, it is very important for parents to help and guide their children to make good career decisions. As explained by Byrne *et al.* (2012), parents and their subject teachers are the only people who influence students to make a career decisions. Therefore, the relationship between social-support and career decision-making self-efficacy found in this study is similar to that by previous researchers (Sovet and Metz, 2014; Pappas and Kounenou, 2011; Li *et al.*, 2015).

CONCLUSION

The relationship between self-esteem, social support and career decision-making was examined and validated using a structural equation model. The findings show that there are significant relationships between self-esteem and career decision-making as well as between social support and career decision-making. It is very important for students to build their self-esteem in order to make them more confident in preparing themselves for their careers. The findings show that social support such as parental influence has a strong relationship on career decision-making among students. This highlights the importance of parental support and guidance for good career decision-making among students.

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