

Socioenvironmental influences on career choices of novice undergraduates



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This paper extends an in-depth, comprehensive research on the socio-environmental influences on career choices of novice undergraduates in Malaysia. It elaborates the various trends that is being adopted by today's contemporary undergraduate society and how it affects or influences their career-making decisions. The focal point of thie research paper in the usage of the PIC Model by Gati & Asher (2001) and how it has aided many undergraduates to obtain more insight towards career decision making skills.

This paper also takes a critical perspective on career choice as one of the main foci on this paper would be the gaps from previous researches and the proper implications that could possibly enhance the future studies and researches in this area. This paper concentrates on the possible gaps of previous researches and also the intensity of the effect of gender and academic achievement on career choice of Malaysian Undergraduates by reviewing two research questions: " Do high academic achievers find it more difficult do choose a career compared to lower academic achievers?", and " Does gender have a significant effect on career choices of undergraduates in Malaysia? ".

Concise and thorough evaluation of past reasearch has been done and given much attention in order to pick out the gaps and flaws that have not been given much attention to. These evaluations and answers to the said research would hopefully provide sufficient information for further researches to be done in order to obtain maximum information and insight regarding the topic of career choices aming undergraduates in Malaysia.

Overview of Research Topic Description of Research Area For most individuals, the whole idea of a career choice that leads to their career development is very often regarded as a lifelong process of ensuring that the choice of employment opportunities are made as available as possible to them. There are many factors that play a pivotal role in influencing the individual through the process of making his or her choice of career. These may include educational attainment, personal aptitudes, the context in which they live, their social environment, and even socio-economic status (SES) (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001).

Bluestein, Phillips, Jobin-Davis, Finkelberg, & Roarke, 1997 have researched and proven that a vital turning point in the lives of many if not the majority of adolescence generally occurs while they are in their “ undergraduate” level of life. Society often regards this stage of a person’s life as a time where individuals are often prepared or given proper exposure in establishing a career path. A major turning point in adolescents’ lives involves the career choice that they make while in high school.

Frequently, it is viewed by family and community as a mere start to workplace readiness; however, this decision plays a major role in establishing youth in a career path that opens as well as closes opportunities. Given the differences in the social and economic context of college-bound versus work-bound adolescents (Bluestein, Phillips, Jobin-Davis, Finkelberg, & Roarke, 1997), a study was designed to explore the factors that influence rural young adults’ selection of specific careers. Recent scholarship shows that vocational interests are less related to Asian American’s career choice.

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Asian American might choose their career based on their family's mission rather on their own interests, which may lead to occupational incongruence (Qin, 2010). It is very often that we come across the word "career". What most people fail to realize is that this simple word carries many different yet closely related meanings. One of the layman ways that we usually define this term would be by an individual's method, way or trade of making a living in a particular society. A fair majority of people often interchangeable use the word "career" with words such as "jobs", or "occupations".

When we hear experts speak of career choice, it is very commonly referred to as the deciding process or the factors involved in the choice of career of an individual. Another method in defining the term "career" would be a listing or series of all the occupations a person had held over the span of his or her lifetime. Career decision making refers to the process people go through when they search for viable career alternatives, compare them and then choose one" (Gati & Asher, 2001). These occupations or jobs that people experience or go through during their life span will very often reflect an upward trajectory.

This shows that the person would be entitled or exposed to much more pressure, responsibility, competition, and prestigious compensations with each subsequent post he or she has held. When the term "career choice" is brought about, ideas such as required education and training, career outlook, job description, and salary often do pop up (Gati & Asher, 2001). We also have to realize that there are many other factors that exist and may prove as an influence in the career choice of an individual (Gati & Asher, 2001). The PIC had three stage model for career decision.

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The three stages were; Pre-screening the potential set of alternatives through structured search based on the individual`s preferences (motives), resulting in promising alternatives, In-depth exploration of the promising alternatives, resulting in few suitable options that were left for the subject(s) or participants to chose from. There are currently many discussions that are on the rise when it comes to career decision making, as the public is beginning to realise that there are many factors that play a role in determining a person`s career choice.

Among the most sought after or aimed topics are models that outline and define the career decision-making process (Brown, 1990). Almost every model proves that the career decision-making process happens by the candidate going through a series of predefined phases, although different steps may be given to recognise the processes that take place (Gati, Shenhav, & Givon, 1993; Peterson, Sampson, & Reardon, 1991). This is also evident for some of the most latest models of career decision-making.

I have come across many other models that assists an individual in making proper career choices besides the PIC model, such as the CDDQ (Career Decision-making Difficulties Questionnaire), the CDSQ (Career Decision-making Style Questionnaire), and the MBCD (Making Better Career Decisions). The reason to why I have opted to chose the PIC model ahead of all the other models and questionnaires is simple because it is rather clear that when an individual completes the PIC models amongst all the others, he or she is much more able to come up with a proper career choice or career option.

In my opinion, this is because the PIC model contains a much more interactive and responsive step-by-step method in helping the individual determine his or her job scope according to many or at least enough social and environmental factors. Before explaining a little more in-depth regarding the PIC model, I would first like to elaborate on the processes most people go through before making a basic decision when it comes to career choices.

To do this, I would have to refer to the work of Gati, Krausz, Onispow (1996), who came up with "Possible focuses of Career-Making Difficulties". It is found out that many people, prior to engaging themselves in a search for a preferred career, often find themselves at a phase of "lacking readiness". This is due to lack of motivation, indecisiveness, and dysfunctional beliefs. And as for those who already have engaged in the process of looking for a suitable preferred career, they often find themselves sandwiched between phases of "lacking information" and "inconsistent information".

In the "lacking of information" phase, individuals are mostly unable to decide simply because they do not have sufficient information regarding CDM (Career Decision Making), themselves, occupations that are available, and way of obtaining the information they would need for a proper career choice. As for the "Inconsistent information" phase, many of the related individuals find that this is due to unreliable information, internal conflicts (problems regarding oneself), and also external conflicts (problems involving outsiders or outside factors).

In the Pre-screening stage of the PIC model, candidates will be required to achieve a common goal which happens to be able to locate a small set of

promising alternatives (preferable 7 alternatives) that they would presume to deserve further, in-depth exploration. A method of sequential elimination would be used here where the candidates would be required to do 4 things which are; to locate and prioritize relevant aspects or factors, explicate within-aspect preferences, eliminate incompatible alternatives, and to check list of promising alternatives.

The outcome of the pre-screening stage would result in a list of promising alternatives that would deserve more in-depth exploration (Gati & Asher, 2001). As for the In-depth exploration stage, the main goal here would be for the candidates to not only locate alternatives that they'd deem promising but also those that are regarded as suitable for the candidate. In this stage, the candidate would then proceed to focus on the promising alternatives and also evaluate them to gauge how suitable they are for the candidate (this usually involves a lot of self exploration and personal preferences).

The outcome of this stage would provide the candidate with 3 or 4 suitable career options (Gati & Asher, 2001). Lastly but definitely not the least, in the Choice stage, candidates would be required to choose the most preferred and suitable alternative and then proceed to rank these alternatives in the order that favours the candidate the most. By this stage, the candidate usually has a rather clear idea on the preferred choice of career path to pursue (Gati & Asher, 2001).

Scope and Focus of Theoretical Paper From early on in the research of this paper, I thought it would be vital to clear off any central doubts that enrolling into a particular tertiary education course meant that students were finally

narrowing down their interest of scope of career, and were committing themselves toward a particular type of profession. It must not be oblivious to us that there are certain sectors of education in this world that commonly ends up in little to no employment, and high levels of wastage of human talent (Swinhoe, 1967).

With this prevailing truth, many people were beginning to perceive that further education represented a poor second choice (Swinhoe, 1967). There have been several gaps that I have discovered in most of the journals that I have read through. I have decided to focus on the two main gaps which highlight the fact that the point of gender being a possible determinant of career choice was not focused on in many of the available studies that have been done by Abdullah, Rahim & Mohamed (2009). In their study, a research was conducted to determine the career interests of university students.

Two hundred and thirty-eight undergraduates were introduced and used in this study. They consisted of a total of 101 males and 137 females who were currently attending three public universities in Malaysia. They reported that there was a significant different of realistic career interest pattern between male and female students, and merely that. Student career preference patterns were drawn but unfortunately, there were no proper reasons to why there was a gender preference of career options or the possible factors that influenced the results of their study.

This, I found to be a major gap as the povital part of obtaining results to a research would be to underline the variables that were involved. Another gap would be that none of the studies have actually come up with a proper

theory or conclusion to whether high academic achieving individuals have a higher or lower acceptance towards career choice compared to lower scoring or lower academic achieving individuals. This was researched by Mansor & Tan (2009), where they hypothesized that there is no significant relationship between academic achievement and career indecision among Malaysian undergraduate students.

This research was followed by results that state that there happens to be no significant correlation between academic achievement and career indecision among Malaysian undergraduates. There also have been researches that have proven that both these factors; high academic achieving and gender may have a pivotal role to play in the career decisions of a person. Research undertaken by the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) has shown that equal numbers of men and women consider a career in chemistry, but men and women make different career choices.

More men than women consider or undertake post-doctoral research in higher education. Women are apparently more likely than men to take up positions outside higher education; for example, in analytical chemistry or in training and education within higher education. Results also have proven that a higher proportion of women study chemistry at first degree level than either physics or engineering chemistry is less successful than either subject at subsequently drawing women into an academic career. These gaps have enabled me to come up with my research questions.