

## Career Indecision: A Cross-Sectional Survey among Students of National Youth Skills Training Institutes

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study is to compare several factors namely gender, academic achievement, working experiences and participation in career intervention programs on career indecision among students of one Malaysia premier skills training institution that offers various technical and vocational programs. Career indecision is measured by Career Factors Inventory (CFI) that was adapted from Chartrand, Robbins, Morrill and Boggs. The inventory contains four factors which are two information factors and two personal emotional factors. The information factors are Need for Career Information (NCI) and Need for Self-Knowledge (NSK). The others two personal emotional factors are Career Choice Anxiety (CCA) and Generalized Indecisiveness (GI). The survey is conducted to 292 students that were randomly selected from a National Youth Skills Training Institute (IKBN) in the state of Selangor, Malaysia. Data is analyzed by descriptive and inferential statistics with utilized of SPSS program. The finding shows career indecision among students is at high level. Furthermore, it shows no difference between gender, academic achievement, working experiences and participation in career intervention programs on student's career indecision. Several suggestions are made in improving career indecision among students in IKBN.

**Key words:** Career indecision % Working experience and career indecision % Career intervention program and career indecision % Students of National Youth Training Institute % Technical and vocational education

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### INTRODUCTION

Over the years, career indecision has been a concern of faculty members, counsellors, academic advisor, administrators and researchers in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions in Malaysia. These institutions have a responsibility to train and prepare a future workforce with skills, knowledge and be a good citizenship. Therefore, graduates from these institutions should be faced with less unemployment or inability to make decision for their future career. A number of studies conducted internationally focused on career decision making strategies that were influenced by internal and external factors. These factors have been identified as culture, motivation and families [1]; self esteem, self efficacy, perceived barriers and occupational information [2]; too much information in the Internet [3];

emotional intelligence [4]; work related interest, knowledge of occupations [5].

The Malaysian government's investment in establishment of TVET institutions is to fulfil needs of manpower in various industrial sectors. Furthermore, this also ensures that the nation stay competitive for domestic and foreign investment. Therefore, TVET institutions play major roles in contributing manpower for various industrial sectors' needs and the nation's long term competitiveness. A TVET institution should not only provide future potential manpower with knowledge and skills in specific area, but needs to equip them with career decision making and employability skills before they graduates. Through the government initiatives called the national key economic area (NKEA), it was expected a total of 3.3 million job opportunities available by the year 2020, whereas, 1.3 million of the jobs need to be fulfilled

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by a TVET institution graduates [6]. A TVET institution has big challenges ahead to make sure that a future workforce of the nation is prepared to face real workplace situation. In addition, a TVET institution need to contributing for Malaysia to become a develop nation by the year 2020.

The National Youth Skills Institute (IKBN) is one of the TVET institutions that provides training in various technical and vocational skills to the youth for the country. Usually, a student enrolled in IKBN institutions is not likely to have a chance to further their study in university due to academic achievement as well conflict of interest. One of the biggest issues among IKBN graduates is their readiness and preparedness to fulfil needs of various industrial sectors. Career development is important for students in TVET institutions to make sure they are prepared and ready to connect with a new and challenges workplace due to effects of globalization, technology advancement in rapid pace and international economic competition among others. According to Herr, Cramer and Niles [7], career development is the lifelong psychological and behavioral processes that influences creation of a career pattern, decision making style, integration of life roles, expression of values and life role self concept for an individual. In earlier years, career development is known as vocational guidance [8].

The history of vocational guidance or vocational education originally meant working with one's hands. According to Herr [8], the terms began to gain considerable favor were career development, career model, career guidance, career assessment, career counselling and career interventions also refers to vocational guidance. In reference to US earlier career development, Parson [9] suggested many techniques in ending child labor and helping adolescents and adults identify their capabilities as well choose jobs with reasonable expectations of reaching their goals. By 1964 and later, the term career instead of vocational had increasingly become embedded in the training and the practice of counsellors and counsellor educators in United States [8]. Appropriate career intervention will smooth a transition from TVET institutions and a workplace. Finding from Mansor and Tan [10] indicates that students generally have aspiration to further study in higher institution and get jobs. In reality, not all students graduated from higher institution then get a decent job. An unemployment issue not only occurs to graduates from higher education institutions but also for TVET institutions. Referring to Malaysia Labor Statistics from January 2011 to March

2013, the numbers fluctuated from approximately 400,000 to 435, 000 people. The percentage of Malaysia unemployment status continuously at 3.3 percent until March 2013 [11]. Specifically, for IKBN graduates, percentage of their marketability from 2009 to 2011 was 73 percent, while 27 percent of them were unemployed [12]. Therefore, unemployment after graduation from higher or tertiary institutions is one of issues needs to be address. TVET institutions need to emphasize and plan a strategy to overcome this issue with appropriate career interventions. In addition, career indecision that reflect students career readiness and career maturity needs also to be included in the career interventions strategy.

Past research shows that a career development intervention in Malaysia was fragmented and superficial [13-14]. The finding shows that career counsellor in schools relied on large scale programs. Another finding indicated that career readiness level among undergraduate students is at low level [10]. Other similar research that was conducted at other countries shows that career readiness is at low level such as in India [15], Thailand [16], Nigeria [17], Norway [18] and moderate level at countries such as in Korea [19] and Australia [16]. According to the Boston Consulting Group, the Malaysian government invested with amount of MYR1.3 billion for the total of operation cost of TVET institutions for the year of 2010 [6]. Specifically, for IKBN, the government spent with amount of MYR112 million for the year of 2009 and MYR102 million for the year of 2010.

In the evolution of vocational guidance to career development, earlier vocational guidance focused on adolescents and was delivered within schools. Gradually, however, career counselling and career services are being addressed to the total spectrum of children and adult populations, including adult retirees [8]. In the United States, these programs occur in schools, community centers, secondary education and post secondary institutions, governmental agencies, business and industry. The Unfinished Agenda [20] advocated that comprehensive career guidance programs available to all students and it reaffirmed the importance of strong career guidance programs in vocational education. Lotto [20] also stated that the National Commission on Secondary Vocational Education indicated that vocational education should be and generally is concerned with the development of vocational students in five areas, namely personal skills and attitudes; communication and computational skills and technology literacy; employability skills; broad and specific occupational

skills; and knowledge and foundations for planning and lifelong learning. Furthermore, Feller and Furbish [21] stated that there is a connection between work, learning and well being. Through a comprehensive career development program offers at TVET institutions, students need to feel be empowered to construct and manage their future career, learning and well being. However, at this stage, the most important matter is to make sure a smooth transition of each student from training institutions to workplace. Career indecision has been posited as one way to measure whether these students are ready to enter a workplace. The present study is conduct to examine a comparison of gender, academic achievement, working experiences and participation in career intervention programs on career indecision among of IKBN students who going to penetrate in the various industrial and market sectors in Malaysia.

**Methodology:** This quantitative study utilized a cross-sectional survey method. A number of 310 samples were selected randomly from a total 1600 students of four IKBN institutes in the state of Selangor. All selected samples must be in at least in the second semester of their programs to be as respondents in the study. A questionnaire consisting of 30 items in two parts hand out to samples. Part A contains nine demographic questions, while Part B consists of 21 questions that measure career indecision. A questionnaire from Part B is adapted from Chartrand, Robbins, Morrill and Boggs [22] which measure of career indecision containing two information factors and two personal factors. The information factors are Need for Career Information (NCI) and Need for Self Knowledge (NSK). Meanwhile, two personal emotional factors are Career Choice Anxiety (CCA) and Generalised Indecisiveness (GI). The entire Part B question is responded by five point Likert scales which the total of score shows career readiness among respondents. The inter item consistency of the Career Factors Inventory is 0.827. The career indecision score is categorize into high level and low level, where, the score of 1.00 to 2.99 as high level of career indecision and 3.00 to 5 as low level of career indecision.

## DISCUSSION

Refer to Table 1, a total 292 of 310 samples from IKBNs in the state of Selangor completed the questionnaire survey. There are four IKBNs established in the state of Selangor.

Table 1: Demographics of Respondent

Variable	N	Percent (%)
<b>Institution</b>		
IKBTN Sepang	73	25
IKBN Dusun Tua	72	24.7
IKBN Peretak	77	26.4
IKBN Kuala Langat	70	24
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	145	49.7
Female	147	50.3
<b>Race</b>		
Malay	282	96.6
Chinese	3	1.0
Indian	5	1.7
Others	2	0.7
<b>Age</b>		
19-21	251	86.1
22-24	33	11.2
25-29	8	2.7
<b>Program</b>		
Engineering based	149	51
Service based	143	49
<b>Level of Program</b>		
One	12	4.1
Two	138	47.3
Three	77	26.4
Four	65	22.3
<b>Academic Achievement</b>		
High (≥3.67)	50	23
Moderate (2.67-3.66)	123	56.7
Low (<2.66)	44	20.3
<b>Working Experience</b>		
Yes	78	26.7
No	214	73.3
<b>Involved in Career Development Intervention</b>		
Yes	182	62.3
No	110	37.7

The numbers of respondents, gender and categorized of program are approximately equal from each IKBN. For race, Malay is dominant compare to the other races in the study. Therefore, this factor will not be applied for inference analysis. Meanwhile, the table also shows that 86 percent of respondent is between ages of 19 to 21 compare to combination of the other two age categories. For academic achievement, a majority of respondents have CGPA of 3.66 and below. Respondents with working experience are approximately 27 percent in the study. The percentage of respondent that involved in the career development intervention is approximately twice compare to respondent who do not involved in career development intervention.

Table 2: Level of Career Indecision among Students at IKBN

	M	s.d.
Career Indecision	2.85	.32
Career Choice Anxiety (CCA)	3.12	.54
Generalized Indecivness (GI)	3.06	.47
Need for Self Knowledge (NSK)	2.97	.40
Need for Career Information (NCI)	2.28	.45

**Career Indecision:** The overall mean value for career indecision of IKBN students is 2.85 of 5 point scale with standard deviation of .32. This mean value is categorized as high level of career indecision among students at IKBN. In details, for each contributing factor to career indecision, the career choice anxiety and generalized indeciveness have low mean values. Meanwhile, the other two factors, which are need for career information and need for self knowledge, categorized as high level mean values. Table 2 shows the level of career indecision among students in various technical and vocational education programs at IKBN.

As seen in Table 2, the respondents rated themselves more likely to have confidence for choosing career since the mean value for career choice anxiety is low level. The other factor, generalized indeciveness shows that students' also rated themselves at low levels categorized. This means that the respondents more likely to have awareness or narrow down their array of choices for their future career. Meanwhile, for the two information factors of career indecision, the respondents rated themselves at high levels categorized of mean values. This means the respondents highly rated their need on self knowledge on career information during their training at IKBN.

These finding are similar to a study conducted by Mansor and Tan [18 10] where their respondents were undergraduate students of universities in Malaysia. However, findings from study conducted by Poh, Suet and Abdul Razak [23] show that freshman of counselling programs in Malaysia rated their career readiness at high levels. Another study by Mustafa and Muhammad Faizal [24] using international university students in Malaysia also shows similar findings with Poh *et al.* [23]. One of the reasons that freshmen in counsellor programs have high level of career readiness since they believed wide ranges of job opportunities available for them after graduation. This is similar with international students that have job opportunities when their returned home. However, with increase of global unemployment, corporate downsizing, job shifts and other factors, career development should take seriously by IKBNs administrators and counsellors.

As findings of the research, it can determine that IKBN institutions need to provide their students with job and career information during their study. Several suggestions to construct responsive career intervention are through view career decisions as values-based decisions, offer counseling-based career assistance not only assessment, provide multicultural career interventions and focusing on multiple life roles [7]. Schutt [25] suggested that this can be achieved through establishment of a career service center. A career service center can offer various services through close partnerships with relevant industries such as career preparation and networking or internship placements and employment opportunities.

**Gender and Career Indecision:** The result for an independent *t* test to compare gender and career indecision shows that there is no significant difference between male ( $M = 2.85, s.d. = .33$ ) and female ( $M = 2.82, s.d. = .30$ ) students,  $t(290) = 0.94, p = .351$ . Although there were background differences among them, the finding shows that male and female students of IKBNs are more likely to share a common strength and weakness in career indecision. Finding from Gibbons, Woodside, Hannon, Sweeney and Davidson [26] suggested that gender role affected career development if their parents lacked post secondary education. Furthermore, the study also revealed that they encounter numerous barriers such as gender roles, family support and pressure to care family. Another study by Koumoundourou, Tsaousis and Kounenou [27] reported male student in Greek who perceived their parents as using permissive parenting style tended to report more difficulty making a career decision. This study also reported that female student who perceived their parents as exerting strict control over their behaviour led to increased difficulty with the career decision making process.

However, findings from other researcher's in Malaysia shows there were a significance difference between male and female students in higher institution on career readiness [28]; [13]; [24]. This finding is a good indicator for administrators of IKBNs or career counselors in tailor career development intervention programs for student.

**Working experience and Career Indecision:** Respondent also were asked about their working experience. Respondents need to have at least three months of working experiences with industry. The *t* test analyzed shows that there are no significant difference between

students with working experiences ( $M = 2.86$ ) and not have working experiences ( $M = 2.83$ ) with career indecision,  $t(290) = 0.89, p = .372$ . The result shows that students with working experiences also more likely to have similar career indecision with students with no working experience. Therefore, working experiences have no impact for the students to make career decision.

Furthermore, this study also revealed that students who had industrial training experiences also show high level of career indecision. One of industrial training objectives is to provide students with the opportunity to apply theory into practice, explore their career options, discover their strengths and gain insight into the working world. Since the result shows no difference between the two groups, IKBN needs to evaluate their industrial training program to make sure their internship could benefit their students. Industrial training should assist their students in planning and deciding on career pathways, preparing for job search and interviews and enhancing their employment opportunities.

**Involvement in Career Intervention Programs and Career Indecision:** The independent  $t$  test shows that there is no significance difference between respondent who involved in career development interventions ( $M = 2.84$ ) and who are not involved ( $M = 2.83$ ),  $t(290) = 0.58, p = .56$ . An effective career development intervention can offer students with career decisions as values-based decisions, counseling-based career assistance not only assessment, provide multicultural career interventions and focus on multiple life roles. In addition, career development interventions should help students make connections between future work, learning and well being in themselves. However, this study does not explore in details about career development interventions program. The study conducted by Mat Rashid, Asimiran, Bakar and Loh [14] shows that career development intervention in secondary school systems is fragmented and superficial. Another study by them shows that career counsellor in schools relied on large scale programs [14]. If these awkward situations occur at IKBNs, certainly administrators and career counsellors should take imperative action to improve the situations. Students at IKBN are more likely to get involve in a career development intervention program since more than half of respondent did involved. Therefore, it is important for IKBN administrators and career counsellors to make sure their career development intervention programs can benefit by student for their future work, learning and life well being in the community.

**Academic Achievement and Career Indecision:** This study also compare between academic achievements with career indecision. The results of one way ANOVA test shows that there is no significance difference between three levels of academic achievement on career indecision,  $F(2,214) = 1.41, p = .25$ . This is indicated that students with high academic achievement ( $M = 2.90, s.d. = .31$ ) have no difference with students with moderate academic achievement ( $M = 2.83, s.d. = .33$ ) as well with low academic achievement ( $M = 2.79, s.d. = .32$ ) on career indecision. Furthermore, there is also no significance difference between students with moderate academic achievement and students with low academic achievement. This result shows that students at IKBN regardless their academic achievement is not ready with their future career. This is a loss to the country future workforce. On the contrary, study by Westbrook [29-32] indicated that student with high academic achievement tend to have high career readiness as well low level of career indecision.

This result also indicates that students in various programs at IKBN are not ready to make a career decision and to enter workplace. The situation is really unfulfilling to the investment made by the government. In addition to the implementations of industry relevant curricula across all programs offers by the IKBNs, students should also needs to empower with future career through efficient networking and employment opportunities. This including but not limited to development of individualized career plan, career preparation, resume and cover letter review, career exploration, job or internship search strategy, career reference materials, discover strengths and gain insight into the working world, interviews skills development every step of the way until graduation. IKBN needs to assist their students to secure placement in their company of choice and preparing them with the edge to excel.

In conclusion, career indecision among students at IKBNs is high level. Career indecision was measured by Career Factors Inventory which containing two information factors and two personal factors. This indicates that career indecision among students is a major problem at IKBNs. Two factors related to information factors need to be assess in depth. Although the other two personal factors is show low level of indecisiveness, they also not to be taking for granted. The reason for this suggestion is since there was no difference between students who involved in career development intervention program, academic achievement as well

working experiences. Based on the findings, the following suggestion is made for improvement of career indecision among students at IKBNs:

- C Establish a career service center. This career center provides a service to tailor individual career needs from a student enrol in the program until they graduated. The center should provide services such as development of individualized career plan, career preparation, resume and cover letter review, career exploration, job or internship search strategy, career reference materials, discover strengths and gain insight into the working world, interviews skills development every step of the way until graduation. This center also needs to be a linkage between students, faculty members and various industry companies. This is to make sure every student shows their inner and outer potential in their future career field for the competitiveness of the country.
- C Create effective intervention program for students, faculty and potential employer. An intervention program for students should be from first semester to end of the semester. For instance, for first semester or first year students, awareness interventions is appropriate such as career fair, career talk or field trip. For year two students, interventions like industrial training preparation as well resume workshop is appropriate. Meanwhile, for final year students, a placement intervention is appropriate for them. For faculty member, interventions like engage and update in their respective field is appropriate. Lastly, for the potential industry companies, interventions like networks, review, selection and feedback is appropriate.
- C IKBN need to develop a database with complete students' information and various industry companies' profiles. This database should be a basis for students, faculty members and companies to collaborate and get benefit with each others. For instance, students can make sure their career matches with their own interests, skills and values or the fastest and efficient way to looking for industrial training placement or or a company industry can post their occupational information and job requirements.
- C Reevaluate industrial training program. Based on the finding of the study, industrial training less likely to have an impact on career decision making or career readiness. Since IKBN is one of the training

institutions that provides future workforce for the country, it is a major problem that a compulsory program such as industrial training have less impact on future workforce. Industrial training should play its major roles to make sure each student acquired enough skills, knowledge and competent to enter workforce, enhance employability skills and understand a connection between work, learning and well being.

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