



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***INFLUENCE OF PERSONAL RESOURCES ON CAREER ADAPTABILITY  
AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN  
MALAYSIA***

**KHOO KAI LE**

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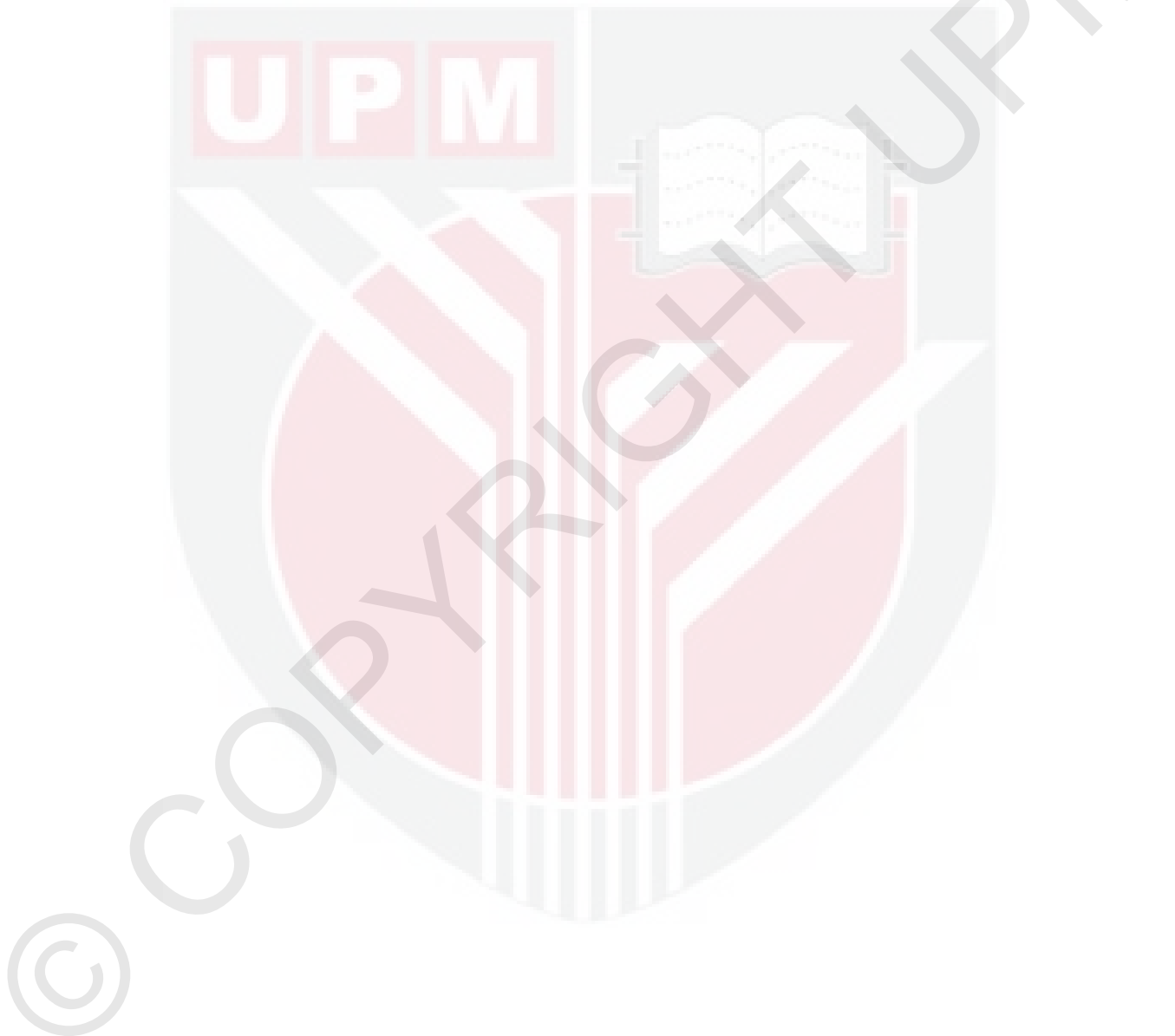
**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra  
Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Science**

**August 2019**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in  
fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

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**August 2019**

**Chairman : Associate Professor Siti Raba'ah Hamzah, PhD**  
**Faculty : Educational Studies**

Industry is expecting a “finished product” who able to display a well-rounded skills to adapt to constant changes. However, many graduates are struggling with the shift from school. This thesis is aimed at examining the influence of personal resources on career adaptability in terms of concern, control, curiosity and confidence among university undergraduates. Based on the reviewed literature, three possible predictors of career adaptability are identified for further investigation, namely emotional intelligence, self-esteem and career self-efficacy. Correlation research design was used in this study. A set of self-reported structured questionnaire was deployed for data collection through direct administration of the instrument among the final year undergraduates' students (n=205). The results were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics based on the study's research questions and research hypothesis. The findings indicated that there was a significant correlation between emotional intelligence, self-esteem, career self-efficacy, and career adaptability among undergraduates. The findings also showed that emotional intelligence, self-esteem and career self-efficacy among final year undergraduates in public university are important predictors of career adaptability. The most significant predictor in this study on career adaptability was career self-efficacy. The results of this study would assist stakeholders in the development of undergraduates' personal resources to improve undergraduates' career adaptability.

**Keyword:** career adaptability, emotional intelligence, self-esteem, career self-efficacy

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia  
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

**PENGARUH SUMBER PERIBADI KE ATAS KEBOLEHSESUAIAN  
KERJAYA DALAM KALANGAN MAHASISWA DI UNIVERSITI AWAM DI  
MALAYSIA**

Oleh

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**Ogos 2019**

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**Fakulti** : **Pengajian Pendidikan**

Industri menjangkakan “produk siap” yang dapat memaparkan kemahiran yang sempurna untuk menyesuaikan diri dengan perubahan yang berterusan. Walau bagaimanapun, ramai graduan bergelut dengan peralihan dari sekolah ke bekerja. Tesis ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji pengaruh sumber peribadi dengan kebolehsesuaian kerjaya dalam hal perhatian, kawalan, keinginan, dan percaya diri di kalangan siswa universiti. Mengikut kajian literatur, tiga peramal kemungkinan kebolehsesuaian kerjaya telah dikenal pasti untuk siasatan lanjut, iaitu kecerdasan emosi, harga diri, dan keberkesanan kerjaya diri. Reka bentuk kajian korelasi telah digunakan untuk kajian ini. Satu set soal selidik berstruktur laporan sendiri telah digunakan untuk pengumpulan data melalui pngurusan instrumen secara langsung kepada para peserta oleh penyelidik di kalangan siswa akhir tahun ( $n = 205$ ). Statistik deskriptif dan statistik inferens telah digunakan untuk menganalisis data, berdasarkan soalan-soalan penyelidikan, dan hipotesis kajian. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa hubungan antara kecerdasan emosi, harga diri, dan keberkesanan kerjaya diri, dan kebolehsesuaian kerjaya dalam kalangan siswa adalah positif. Dapatan kajian ini juga menunjukkan kecerdasan emosi, harga diri, dan keberkesanan kerjaya diri adalah peramal-peramal signifikan kebolehsesuaian kerjaya di kalangan siswa akhir di universiti awam Malaysia. Peramal yang terbaik dalam kajian ini tentang kebolehsesuaian kerjaya adalah keberkesanan kerjaya diri. Dapatan kajian ini akan membantu pihak-pihak yang berkepentingan dalam pembangunan sumber peribadi mahasiswa untuk meningkatkan kebolehsesuaian kerjaya siswa.

Kata kunci: Kebolehsesuaian kerjaya, kecerdasan emosi, harga diri, keberkesanan kerjaya diri

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree Master of Science. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
<b>ABSTRACT</b>		i
<b>ABSTRAK</b>		ii
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>		iii
<b>APPROVAL</b>		iv
<b>DECLARATION</b>		vi
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>		x
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>		xi
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b>		xii
<b>CHAPTER</b>		
<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	Background of Problem	1
1.2	Statement of Problem	4
1.3	General Objective	6
1.4	Specific Objective	6
1.5	Significance of the study	6
1.6	Scope of the Study	7
1.7	Limitations of Study	7
1.8	Definition of Terms	7
	1.8.1 Career Adaptability	7
	1.8.2 Personal Resources	7
	1.8.3 Emotional Intelligence	8
	1.8.4 Self-Esteem	8
	1.8.5 Career Self-Efficacy	8
<b>2</b>	<b>REVIEW OF LITERATURE</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1	Career Development and HRD	9
2.2	Career Adaptability and Career Development	9
2.3	Career Adaptability	10
2.4	Career Adaptability Dimensions	11
2.5	The Importance of Career Adaptability for Undergraduates	13
2.6	Predictor Factor Affects Career Adaptability	13
2.7	The Role of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)	14
2.8	The Component of Personal Resources	15
	2.8.1 Emotional Intelligence	15
	2.8.2 Self-esteem	16
	2.8.3 Self-efficacy	17
2.9	Theoretical Framework	19
	2.9.1 Human Capital Theory (HCT)	19
	2.9.2 Career Construction Theory (CCT)	20
	2.9.3 Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)	23
2.10	Conceptual Framework	25
2.11	Chapter Summary	25

<b>3</b>	<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>26</b>
3.1	Design of Study	26
3.2	Population and Sampling	26
3.3	Sampling Method	28
3.4	Measurement and Instrument	29
3.5	Pilot Test of Instrument	31
3.6	Reliability and Validity of Instrument	31
3.7	Data Collection	32
	3.7.1 Questionnaire distribution information	32
3.8	Data Analysis	33
3.9	Descriptive Statistics	34
3.10	Inferential Statistics	34
	3.10.1 Pearson Product Moment Correlation	34
	3.10.2 Multiple Linear Regression Analysis	35
3.11	Exploratory Data Analysis	35
3.12	Test for Normality	36
3.13	Chapter Summary	36
<b>4</b>	<b>FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS</b>	<b>37</b>
4.1	Demographic Profile of Respondents	37
4.2	Respondents Level of Emotional Intelligence, Self-esteem, Career Self-efficacy and Career Adaptability	39
4.3	The Relationship between Personal Resources and Career Adaptability of the Respondents	41
4.4	The Best Predictive Factor that Influencing Career Adaptability of the Respondents	44
	4.4.1 Regression Model for Career Adaptability and Its Determinants	45
	4.4.2 Emotional Intelligence Prediction on Career Adaptability	46
	4.4.3 Self-esteem Prediction on Career Adaptability	47
	4.4.4 Self-efficacy Prediction on Career Adaptability	47
4.5	Linking the findings into Theories	48
4.6	Chapter Summary	49
<b>5</b>	<b>SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>51</b>
5.1	Summary of the Study	51
5.2	Conclusion of the Study	52
5.3	Implication of the Study	53
	5.3.1 Implication for Theory	53
	5.3.2 Implication for Practice	53
5.4	Recommendation	54
	5.4.1 Recommendation for Practice	54
	5.4.2 Recommendation for Future Study	54
	<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>56</b>
	<b>APPENDICES</b>	<b>70</b>
	<b>BIODATA OF STUDENT</b>	<b>81</b>
	<b>PUBLICATION</b>	<b>82</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table</b>		<b>Page</b>
3.1	Sample size calculated by GPower software 3.1.9	28
3.2	Number of students in the selected clusters	29
3.3	Instruments adopted and adapted in this study	30
3.4	Inter-item consistency reliability	31
3.5	Reliability of instruments and measurements in pilot test	32
3.6	Rate of Responses	33
3.7	Statistical analyses employed in this study	34
3.8	Guilford's Rule of Thumb for interpreting the size of a correlation coefficient, $r$	35
3.9	Test of Normality	36
4.1	Demographic profile of respondents	39
4.2	Frequency and percentage distribution of respondents according to level of emotional intelligence, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and career adaptability (n=205)	41
4.3	Inter-correlations between personal resources and career adaptability	43
4.4	Value and Model Significance in the Prediction of Career Adaptability	44
4.5	Result of Coefficients	45
4.6	Overall results of Research objectives and hypothesis	50

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
2.1	Model of Human Capital Theory	20
2.2	Career construction model of adaptation	21
2.3	Conceptual Framework	25



## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

UPM	Universiti Putra Malaysia
CA	Career Adaptability
EI	Emotional Intelligence
SE	Self-esteem
CSE	Career self-efficacy
DV	Dependent Variable
IV	Independent Variable
HCT	Human Capital Theory
CCT	Career Construction Theory
SCCT	Social Cognitive Career Theory
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
FME	Free Management Ebooks

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Career adaptability is a person's ability to efficiently generate a sequence of transitions, undergoing important transformation in the labour market, organizations and basic occupational and organizational knowledge bases (Bimrose et al., 2011). Due to an influx graduates from universities in Malaysia in absence of the required skills and competency to survive in the competitive labour market, this series of transition is imperative. Lacking of the aforementioned could result in months of futile job search, mostly due to the incompetency of young adults in their career. This chapter addresses the background problem, problem statement, research objectives (general objectives and specific objectives); followed by significance of the study, study scope, study limitations and definition of terms.

#### 1.1 Background of Problem

Human Resource Development (HRD) is a framework to help individuals develop their personal and organizational abilities, knowledge and skills. HRD involves possibilities such as career development, training and development, and organization development (Swanson, 1995). The focus of all elements of HRD revolves around creating the most superior workforce to enable the organization and staff to achieve their client-service work goals (Susan, 2019). Under the functions of HRD, career development is deemed to be one of an employee's most significant features for successful job (Swanson & Holton, 2001). According to Braer, Flexer, Luft and Simmons (2008), career development is a life-long progression of developing one's career that includes childhood growth and change, formal career education at college and maturation processes that continue throughout individual working adulthood and retirement. Career development generally relates to the process of handling career learning, transitions and change to move towards a preferred personally determined and evolving. As career adaptability serves as strategies competency for career development as career adaptability is a psychosocial structure that includes both willingness and resources to face job duties, occupational transitions, and unforeseen challenges effectively (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). These postulations posit the link that one of the important skills of career development under HRD role is career adaptability.

In this era of intense competition, rapidly changing technology, complexity, high expectations of consumers and demand, the capability development of employees should not be sidelined by organizations. Money, however, is not always the key to all problems, but the fundamental man. Funds are useful only when used by men and women in educated, skilled and committed (UN, 1995). For example, some people can work miracles even with limited resources. HRD



is the main source of sustainable competitive advantage that should be strategically developed to contend with current and future challenges. The efficiency of organizations in creating a robust workforce is mainly dependent on employee adaptability. Recently, the demand for career adaptability for the local and international labour market has risen (UNESCO, 2012). The demand for career adaptability seems to be more essential among developing countries with elevated youth unemployment rate likened to that of developed nations.

Undergraduates who are about to graduate enter a very significant stage of their lives: the transition from college to job. They will soon leave their students life behind and join the labor market in order to find an appropriate job. Important career-related choices must be made during this transition which shape and determine their future career (Koen, Klehe, & Van Vianen, 2012). However, when entering the labor market, many of them are struggling. Transitions from school to fitting job are slow and difficult nowadays. It takes longer for graduates to find suitable job during an economic crisis and the chances of permanent position and competitive salary are limited (SEO, 2013). Unfortunately, the current economic situation forces graduates to be less selective on what kind of job to accept. This results in lower job quality (ILO, 2013) which is not desirable since it is increasingly important to find high quality jobs during the transition from school to work. The first job of a graduate may influence their future career outcomes and performance (Ng & Feldman, 2007) which highlights the importance of the school to work transition.

An effective transition occurs when graduates match their personality traits and skills to work environments in which they are required to use those traits and skills (Solberg, Howard, Blustein, & Close, 2003). This is reflected in a high person-job fit. Person-job fit match well with job satisfaction, organizational engagement and intent to leave, which outcomes are found important by both workers and employers (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). Furthermore, companies are currently functioning in a changing environment that continuously pressures them to constantly adapt (Cummings & Worley, 2010). This also has implications for employees in terms of changing working conditions and flexible career requirements. Nowadays, people change jobs more often due to technological developments and large changes in organizational structures (ROA, 2011). Because rapidly changing organizations will remain to be the market norm in the future, it requires people to be highly adaptable throughout their entire careers. This forces them to take initiative in their own careers since it is their own responsibility (Van Vianen, De Pater, & Preenen, 2010). It is imperative for graduate students who will soon enter the labor market to be ready for the school to work transition. However, the uncertainty that goes with this transition can hinder people's initiative to prepare themselves for such a change (Klehe, Zikic, Van Vianen, Koen, & Buyken, 2012). Therefore, it is important to prevent this and provide graduate students with necessary resources to cope with all the changes before entering the school to job transition.

Career adaptability is essential for the navigation of constant change (Maree, 2012). A more adaptable individual in vocations have more potential to improve themselves to satisfy the demands of the work (Autin et al., 2017). People must adapt to the adjustments in careers, technology and various life roles when compared to previous generations (Del Corso, 2013). Career adaptability is feasible among individual who make use of their strengths (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Thus, it is momentous for an individual to acquire high level of career adaptability to adapt to the changes in career.

Employers nowadays are seeking out highly skilled and competent employees to attain an edge for their organization. It is prevalent for employers to expect that the graduates are having the potential to exude instant value to the agency (Luscombe, Lewis, & Biggs, 2013). According to one of the managing director in Google Malaysia, employers are expecting their employees to be knowledgeable and competent (Oii, 2016). Goleman (1998) stated that the regulations of labour are dynamic. Employers are interested on how workers manage themselves and others instead of just how educated or knowledgeable employees are (Archer & Davison, 2008). Companies' concern on employees' talents is changing from knowledgeable skills to personal assets (Goleman, 1998). Personal resources are defined as positive self-assessments related to resilience, tolerance and willingness to successfully influence their surrounding (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009). Personal resources are therefore useful in stimulating individual and career development.

The necessity to acquire certain personal resources is of utmost importance in today's working environment, especially for undergraduates who are about to graduate. Pressures in workplace become a main challenge for each individual and organization (Oginska-Bulik, 2005). Employees today are required to carry out multiple tasks, uphold high-quality of social relationships, perform tasks efficiently, learn new skills and technology to fulfill competitive needs, and being plagued to deal with work challenges. All of these great expectations may result in work-related stress (Oii, 2016). This may be overwhelming for present undergraduates and may eventually have a negative impact when they venture into the work environment. People enhance their personal resources in order to adapt to the changing working situation effectively (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

Several individual variables have been associated with career adaptability. With the anticipated expansion of customer-facing professions in which human interaction performs a crucial part, emotional intelligence becomes even more critical in the future knowledge-based economy system than it is now. (Moynagh & Worsley, 2006). Employers are also looking for applicants with a high level of emotional intelligence to understand and manipulate other people's emotions, making them a better listener, collaborative, empathetic and able to notice the nonverbal cues (Williams, 2017). Therefore, in the stride to achieve effective career adaptability in career development, an undergraduate will need to develop emotional intelligence competencies.

Lack of self-esteem could lead to future unemployment (Huysse-Gaytandjieva et al., 2015). Other postulations by (e.g. Cai et al., 2015; Tolentino et al., 2013) have similarly shown that self-esteem as a significant indicator of career adaptability. Undergraduates with high level of self-esteem display their career adaptability confidently in working world. Thus, it is essential to understand the relationship between individual's positive or negative self-esteem and the capability to cope with and adapt to dynamic work environment.

Career self-efficacy is an explicit belief in one's ability to carry out a work duty effectively (Bruning, Dempsey, Kauffman, McKim, & Zumbunn, 2013). According to Bocciardi et al. (2017), higher career self-efficacy enhances career adaptability. Individual who have potent career self-efficacy beliefs will strike on instead of avoiding those challenges in career. Career self-efficacy affects individual career choices and career development (Hou, Wu, & Liu, 2014). Therefore, career self-efficacy is a facilitator for undergraduates withal to being a predictor of career adaptability.

Combined, the personal resources of emotional intelligence, self-esteem and self-efficacy can make a significant contribution in which an undergraduate is considered as prepared and ready to adapt in the working environment.

## **1.2 Statement of Problem**

Young adult nowadays are typically grown up in the technology era which requires them to be always prepared to adapting the changes (Leonard & Rikleen, 2014). Consequently, the future work environment that they enter into could be full of uncertainties and extensively reshaped (Sundarajan, 2017). Today, employers seek for the employees who are able to adapt and react quickly to changes (Iva & Eliska, 2016) in which the workers can effectively deal with multiple tasks as a result of rapid changes in their organisations (Klehe, Zikic, Van Vianen, Koen & Buyken, 2012). These contemporary findings are vindications on the importance of career adaptability for employees and job-seekers, particularly for undergraduates who are going to enter the workforce. Researchers have discovered in recent times that low career adaptability among undergraduates is related to lack of personal resources skills, especially in term of emotional intelligence, self-esteem and self-efficacy (Atac, Dirik, & Tetik, 2018; Negru-Subtirica, Pop, & Crocetti, 2015; Cai et al., 2015). This study therefore aimed to examine the level of career adaptability among undergraduates and how their personal resources may affect their extent of career adaptability.

In Malaysia, vast arrays of initiated programs were introduced by the government to assist undergraduates' to transit from lecture hall to job market effectively. Some of the programs have been launched by government and run by universities and related bodies such as 1 Malaysia Training Scheme (SL1M),



Graduate Career Accelerated Program (GCAP), Industrial Skills Enhancement Programs (INSEP) and Graduate Employability Management Schemes (GEMs). Malaysian Higher Education (MOHE) also released a number of initiatives via Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (HE Blueprint) to enhance undergraduate students' employability and career adaptability. In congruence to the efforts exerted by the government, the study into career adaptability within the context of undergraduate is therefore valuable and treasure.

Career adaptability is vital for today's work challenges. Sidelining career adaptability may concoct several issues including unemployment. According to Malaysia Graduate Tracer study in 2018, approximately 26.5% of fresh graduates were unable to locate and secure a job in six months after graduation. This has shown that some of the undergraduates are not prepared or compatible to join the workforce. In addition, consistent with Malaysia Employee Federation (MEF), job market in year 2018 is expected to be unpromising as students graduated from higher education will face harder time in getting a job (Kuar, 2018). Furthermore, complaints from employers on the lack of preparedness and readiness among the fresh graduates were prevalent (Jobstreet, 2015; Zaliza & Mohd., 2013, Oliver, 2013) where the fresh graduates were lacking of career adaptability to adapt to the transition from lecturer hall to work environment. While the skill mismatch, unemployment and under-employment in today's global labour market are partially because of inadequate and insufficient career adaptability among the young adult job seekers (UNESCO, 2012). The lack of career adaptability among the fresh graduates in the country is alarming. As a consequence, the problem needs to be urgently addressed with the aid of all stake holders of the higher education institution.

There is an abundance of research regarding to the undergraduate's attitude but there is little research on undergraduates' readiness in entering the workforce in term of career development view (Kowske, Rasch, & Wilet, 2010). Therefore, this raises the question: do undergraduates have the necessary career adaptability, emotional intelligence, self-esteem, and career self-efficacy that is needed for the workplace in order to be employed? Some recent studies also investigated the relationships between personal factors and career adaptability (Atac, Dirik, & Tetik, 2018; Negru-Subtirica, Pop, & Crocetti, 2015; Cai et al., 2015). However, very few of them probed into the realm of the influence of emotional intelligence, self-esteem, and career self-efficacy on career adaptability among undergraduates in Malaysia. The limited studies available on the correlation between emotional intelligence, self-esteem and career self-efficacy towards career adaptability raise the issues about the link between the variable listed above. This study therefore attempts to explain the subsequent research questions posed by the literature gap.

1. Is there a significant correlation between emotional intelligence, self-esteem, career self-efficacy, and career adaptability?

2. Do emotional intelligence, self-esteem and self-efficacy influence career adaptability?

### **1.3 General Objective**

To determine the influence of personal resources on career adaptability among undergraduates.

### **1.4 Specific Objective**

1. To determine the level of career adaptability, emotional intelligence, self-esteem, and career self-efficacy among undergraduates.
2. To determine the relationship between emotional intelligence, self-esteem, career self-efficacy and career adaptability among undergraduates.
3. To determine the factors that best predicted career adaptability among undergraduates.

### **1.5 Significance of the study**

Theoretically, this study is valuable for researchers to understand career development process among university students in Malaysia as a multi-cultural eastern country. This study would contribute to the body of knowledge of career development in human resources development by clarifying personal resources factors that influence career adaptability among university students from a non-western country. Career development is a continuous phase during which individuals adapt to changes at the workplace. It is a response to vocational task development as well as career transition throughout one's working life.

Human resource development (HRD) is a mechanism of cultivating and unleashing human skills in order to improve performance through organization development, career development and training (Swanson & Holton, 2001). Thus, this study will also provide human resource development information for decision maker in higher education institution, lecturers, government and family institutions so that additional training and support can be given to undergraduates. Such information would be helpful to assist undergraduates make the transition from the lecture hall to the working environment.

Lastly, this study seeks to create awareness among undergraduates on the need for personal resources (emotional intelligence, self-esteem and career self-efficacy) to improve their level of career adaptability. Undergraduates should know what kind of personal resources affect their career adaptability so that they

would take steps to acquire suitable skills, knowledge and attitude in order to embark on successful career development.

## **1.6 Scope of the Study**

Objective of this research is to analyze the level of career adaptability among final year undergraduate students in Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM). This study was specifically constructed to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence, self-esteem, and career self-efficacy towards career adaptability among undergraduates in UPM. This research adopted a quantitative research technique with a cross-sectional data collection technique for the investigation of career adaptability among final year undergraduates in Universiti Putra Malaysia.

## **1.7 Limitations of Study**

This study covered only UPM final year undergraduate students in Malaysia and not the entirety of higher education undergraduates in Malaysia due to the limited resources such as time and costs. The measures applied in this study were self-declaratory by the students. It was relying on the honesty of the participants.

## **1.8 Definition of Terms**

### **1.8.1 Career Adaptability**

Career adaptability refers to the willingness of people to react to change which permit individuals to cope with the adjustment through plan-making, explore, and guide career decisions (Rossier et al., 2012).

In this study, career adaptability was operational as the level of readiness of the undergraduates to cope with their future work task and adjustments caused by the changes in the working situations.

### **1.8.2 Personal Resources**

Personal resources refer to one's personal traits that promote a person's sense of control and self-evaluation, as well as the capability to control one's surroundings successfully (Hobfoll, Johnson, Ennis, & Jackson, 2003).

In this study, personal resources were operational as the undergraduate's emotional intelligence, self-esteem and career self-efficacy to control their surroundings successfully.

### **1.8.3 Emotional Intelligence**

Emotional intelligence refers as the capability to perceive, communicate, recognize and control emotions effectively at work in a proficient and effective manner (Mayer et al., 2004, p 197).

In this study, emotional intelligence was operational as the extent of abilities of the undergraduates to understand own emotions, for motivating and managing their own emotions and relationships, as well as others'.

### **1.8.4 Self-Esteem**

Self-esteem refers to an individual's positive self-assessment (Harter, 1990).

In this study, self-esteem was operational as the level of self-worth and personal value among undergraduates.

### **1.8.5 Career Self-Efficacy**

Career self-efficacy refers to one's belief on their ability to execute work-related activities in terms of career development, preference, and adaptation (Anderson & Betz, 2001).

In this postulation, career self-efficacy refers to students' beliefs in their individual capability to conduct courses of action, perform actions, complete the task and obtain desired results in relation to their career adaptability.



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