

The Relationship between Self-concept and Career Awareness amongst Students

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Abstract

Using the survey method, this study aims to look at the relationship between self-concept and career awareness amongst secondary school students. A total of 165 12-year old students from an international school were chosen as subjects for this study. Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale was administered as the research tool to measure the students' self-concept while their career awareness was tested using the Career Awareness Inventory. The data obtained were then analyzed using the Pearson correlation with significance level set at .05 to note the relationship between self-concept and career awareness. The end results revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between self-concept and career awareness among students. The study also showed that students with higher self-concept or those with a more positive outlook had higher levels of career awareness.

Keywords: self-concept, career awareness

1. Introduction

Generally, human beings have a picture or a personal view of themselves. This picture, which is called self-concept or self-image includes an overview of their appearance, physical health, abilities, weaknesses and behavior. Self-concept can be defined as a person's personal assessment of themselves or rather, what they think of themselves, and this could either be positive or negative. This view is closely related to the way they feel about their ability, past experiences and what they think lies ahead for them. To build self-concept, one also looks at the way he or she is viewed or judged by others. The perception of self and their environment through their senses and feelings about their ability to exude confidence and dignity also contributes to a person's definition of self-concept. Not only does self-concept include physical and psychological aspects but it can also relate to the experiences and knowledge acquired throughout their childhood (O'Connell 2001).

According to Woolfolk (2006), self-concept is an agent of self-development especially among children. A child's development can be observed as they grow since each child is a unique object. As such, co-operation from different parties is required to ensure the development of a positive self-concept in a child. In a research, Hormuth (2010) relates self-concept to self-assessment or self-perception. The concept largely represents the extent of an individual's faith in their own characteristics. This concept also reflects a person's judgment of themselves based on the way they weigh the importance of their success. Prescott (2006) defines self-concept as mental awareness, pre-conception and constant interest of oneself. Components of self-concept encompass the physical, psychological and social well-being of a person which can be influenced by attitude, habits, beliefs and ideas. These components can be summarized to form the concepts of self-image and general self-appreciation.

Rogers (1951), one of the most influential and well-versed theorists of the self-concept theory introduced a holistic system to help build the importance of self-concept. He defines self-concept as the totality of a complex, organized and dynamic system of learned beliefs, attitudes and opinions that each person holds to be true about his or her personal existence. According to Rogers, the self is the central ingredient in human personality and personal adjustment. He further described the self as a social product, developed out of interpersonal relationships and is continuously striving for consistency. He also stated that there is a basic human need for positive regard; both from others and from oneself. Additionally, Rogers believes that there is a tendency towards self-actualization and development in every person if the individual is permitted and encouraged by an

inviting environment.

Indeed, a career is an extremely important part of an individual's life. It is through employment that an individual earns a living to support themselves and others; as well as reach out to community. Hence, the importance of hard work cannot be denied. Research done by Super (1957) claims that career includes preparations made by an individual prior to joining the working world, when an individual actually enters the working environment as well as other roles taken on after retirement. In addition, Super also noted that career represents a sequence of positions held during the course of a lifetime. According to Moreland (2006), the career development of an individual is related to having a profession that brings profit. If an individual is not guided and assisted, he will not be able to make a career choice in congruent with his own personal requirements. If the selection made is inaccurate, the person would have wasted his time and energy until a more fulfilling career is found. Therefore, career counselling is crucial in helping individuals become more aware and make informed decisions about the different fields and the available career opportunities that best suit their personalities.

Career awareness is especially imperative in the early stages of career development. Eliason and Patrick (2008) stated that career awareness refers to an individual's awareness of the career opportunities available and their career needs. Awareness includes information such as education requirements, skill requirements, the types of professions available, job climate, and regulations and expectations of a particular field or industry. The development of students' career awareness programs should therefore, include preparation of specific information on the different careers, a systematic search for career information and the methods to fully utilize the information gathered. Perry and VanZandt (2006) stipulate that career awareness should be the basis before one begins exploring his career options. In the first stage of the career development process, students need to be open to the choices and possibilities available to them in the job market. They need to be made aware that their career choice will eventually have an impact on all the their other future roles in life. This would give students some form of direction and perspective at an early age. Counselling programs then, function as a tool to help students understand the working world, to create awareness about the career options available, and to provide motivation and expectations for their future.

Super et al. (1963) has suggested that self-concept plays an important role in the formation of career development. As people grow, they develop a view of their own roles, personality traits and abilities. With a myriad of different career opportunities available to cater to the different individual personality traits, people tend to compare their self-view with various occupational concepts. The identification process experienced by each individual and their attempt to play an influential role will in turn affect their career development.

In his research, Super claims that self-concept is built through one's physical and mental growth, job observation adult's career identification and the general experience gathered. The growth of a person's knowledge and experience contributes to the complexity of his or her career self-concept. Super had also suggested that the approach on development and social phenomenological psychology. In his study, Super looked at the four main stages in a person's career development, the first being when the individual is searching for a vocation. This is followed by vocational maturity, which then leads to the transfer of self-concept to a vocational self-concept and finally, the career pattern itself (Super 1957).

In line with the literature above, the objective of this research is to study the relationship between self-concept and career awareness amongst high school students.

2. Method

A survey was conducted in an international school in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The study subjects comprised of 165 aged 12, secondary school students who are studying in Year 7. The international school hosts students from 42 different countries including Malaysia. The Year 7 students were randomly selected as study subjects for this survey.

The selection of the subjects' age group was made based on a study done by Super who had also considered the various roles played at the different stages of our lives and the important relatives to the roles we gave ourselves during these changing life stages. Super's first stage of a life-long career development is the career awareness stage. This occurs during the growth stage which is from birth to 15 years old. Additionally, Super and Thompson (1979), have identified six factors in vocational maturity which are; 1) awareness on the need to plan 2) decision making skills 3) knowledge and information source usage 4) general career information 5) career information 6) detailed information on the main career.

In an initial study, students were administered the Career Awareness Inventory Test, an equipment used to identify the level of awareness, created by Fadale (1974). This test is used to study the levels of career awareness

among students aged below 13. This tool is divided into seven sections and comprises of 131 questions. Six examples were given, two examples in Section 1, and one example each in sections 2, 4, 6, and 7. The study's subscale consists of: identity, training, models, function, prestige, clusters and characteristics.

Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (Piers et al. 1969) is the most widely used tool to test the psychological health among children and teenagers. This test tool identifies subjects that require further testing or treatment. The Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale is based on self-perception among children and not on observations from parents or teachers. The test assesses the self-concept of children aged between 7 to 18. The test consists of six subscales, which are; behavioral adjustment, intellectual and school status, physical appearance and attributes, freedom from anxiety, popularity, happiness and satisfaction. The test items were simple descriptive statements, where the statements given were based on the second level of their reading ability. Students needed to simply choose between 'yes' or 'no' to the given statements. Generally, students spent between 10 to 15 minutes to complete the entire test. Both the career awareness test data and self-concept test data were collected and analyzed using correlation statistics to study the relationship between career awareness and self-concept.

3. Results

Using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient to analyze and summarize the data obtained, Table 1 indicates the existence of a positive and significant correlation between career awareness and self-concept ($r = .325$, $p < .05$) leading to the conclusion on the positive relationship between career awareness and self-concept. The findings of this study supports Super's (1953) theory on the existing self-concept in a person.

Table 1. Correlation of career awareness and self-concept

Variable	Career Awareness Inventory (n= 165)
Self Concept Subscale	.325 *

* $p < .05$

The self-concept is dynamic and is constantly changing. The self-concept is dependent on a person's social interactions towards his or her surrounding environment. In this case, as the person socializes more, the more experience he or she will gain. Each individual has the potential to reach the point of self-perfection as long as he has confidence in himself. Therefore, it is important for someone to have a good self-concept in order to shift towards self-perfection thus ensuring a meaningful life.

In his research, Super (1953) states self-concept will affect a person's choice of career and level of satisfaction. An individual's career selection which harmoniously conforms with the person's self-concept will thus provide maximum career satisfaction. The career development process begins with growth; which particularly happens at childhood when self-fantasy in different careers thrive. This is then followed by the embodiment stage and the inaugural stage before ending with the retirement stage. Career consciousness is the first stage of development in Super's career options; where the cognitive process begins to consciously formulate a common career purpose based on the resources, the various possibilities, interests and values available. Each individual progresses through the career ranks depending on their efficiency in each rank. The Career Awareness Phase is influenced by self-concept in accordance to Super's theory, as demonstrated in the results of the study which demonstrates that consciousness of self-concept is positively and significantly correlated.

The study also confirmed that increased levels of experience and knowledge of the working world contributes to a more developed self-concept among the subjects. The development of self-concept is a very important aspect of globalization, especially in the world today. Knowledge and awareness of self-concept could help a person to be mentally prepared to face the challenges ahead. In a study by Egbochuku and Aihie (2009), it was found that group counselling has a major positive impact on self-concept. Another study by Chafey Rosselló and Jiménez (2006) suggested that students' self-concept improved significantly after cognitive behavioral group counselling. Therefore, it is suggested that further research and studies are done in areas related to self development such as development of self-appreciation, development of self-concept, real and ideal self-concept issues, personal and interpersonal conflicts, self-concept and motivation, and self-concept and delinquency.

4. Discussion

Efforts on the development of self-concept should be done continuously so that the students would be able to concentrate towards brighter future. Students who have high-level of self appreciation will tend to have the drive and the motivation to learn and the goals for a future career objective. The students will also see themselves as talented and will want to gain the satisfaction of making the accurate career choice. Students with high

self-concept or positive self-concept have some advantages such as the ability to assess themselves positively, the belief that they are able and skilled, the ability to react positively, the ability to handle responsibilities, the knack in emotional control against disappointments, the ability to influence his or her surroundings, the feeling of pride in his or her own actions, the achievements of high grades, the willingness to take risks, the positive self-acceptance, the self- appreciation and the knowledge of his or her own strengths and weaknesses.

Career development is a lengthy process which includes choosing the right career path. In making the right decision and to achieve the desired career goals, certain objectives and specific measures have to be taken into account. This is in accordance with the study done by Rivera and Schaefer (2008) which stated that focus should be given to career awareness programs as that is the starting point of career development. McMahon and Watson (2007) also stated that the information given to a child about the available careers will have a life-time implication on the child's career choices and life management, interests and personal characteristics built in terms of career. In another study by Carter et al. (2009), it was emphasized that career counselling is one of the most important factors to help students with special needs in the process of career development. Therefore, it is suggested that further research and studies are done in the future on career counselling programs that include career awareness, career exploration, career preparation, career maturity, career planning, career selection, and career decisions, among others.

According to Super's career development theory, career awareness is the first stage in the development of career choice. Super states that this stage marks the cognitive process in formulating a general career goal based on the awareness of the available resources, the various probabilities, interest and values. Each individual will go through each career development stages and will need to utilise their mastery of each level in order to move on the next. The career awareness stages will shape the self-concept according to Super's theory, the research has shown that the career awareness and self-concept has a positive correlation and are significantly parallel with the highlights in Super's theory.

Super's first stage of career awareness, which is the child development stage is growth stage for self-concept, behaviour, needs and the employment world. Children associate their self-concept with career as a way of self-expression. This shows that the self concept development has a direct impact on the career growth in children.

A person's self concept is built through his or her physical and mental growth, career observation, adult career identification and general experience. The elevation of the self-concept stages indicate the breadth of an individual's experience and subject knowledge expansion; as the person's working world relationships improves, the better his or her self-concept will grow.

The positive and significant correlation indicates that career awareness and self-concept tend to affect one another. The first stage of career development, according to Super, begins early in a child's life; and the development of career awareness influences the development of self-concept, attitude, needs and beliefs of the child. Children impose self-concept into their careers as a means of self expression. This shows that the development of self-concept has a direct impact on a child's career development

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