Chapter 31
Model of Self-Esteem, Job-Search Intensity and Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy for Undergraduate Students

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Introduction

In the twenty-first century workplace, possessing a bachelor degree is no longer the passport to secure jobs [1]. Employers are increasingly looking for more than just content knowledge and hard skills; they want 'work-ready' graduates with desired soft skills. Employers worldwide have been critical about graduates and their readiness for the world of work [2]. Similarly, Malaysian employers are generally not happy with the level of soft skills possessed by graduates entering the workforce. According to Malaysian employers, Malaysian graduates normally were qualified in their area of studies, but they lacked self-confidence and skills in preparation for job search [3], and their main drawbacks are lack of positive attitude, confidence and preparation for job search [4]. In other words, there has been lack of soft skills and competency among newly graduating students (self-confidence, positive attitude, job-search preparation skills and communication skills) in relation to employability.

These drawbacks are closely related to self-esteem, job-search behaviour, and career decision-making self-efficacy as the variables involved in the present study. Self-esteem has a vast definition by different scholars. For example, self-esteem is referred to as an overall evaluation of oneself in either a positive or negative way and a belief that oneself is competent and worthy of living [5]. Self-esteem is also viewed as a global judgement of the worth or value of the self [6]. Job-search

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intensity is defined as the frequency whereby job seekers engage in job-search activities such as preparing a resume or contacting an employment agency [7]. Career decision-making self-efficacy specifically refers to individuals' feelings of competency in their abilities for self-appraisal, gathering occupational information, selecting career goals, engaging in career planning, and problem solving when difficulties are encountered [8].

Several studies had investigated certain variables related to self-esteem [9–13], job-search intensity [14–17] and career decision-making [18–23]. However, there has been little discussion about the relationship on these three variables. As such, this study aimed to examine the relationship between self-esteem (individual differences variable), job-search intensity (job-search behaviour) and career decision-making (outcome predictor) among undergraduate students and propose a model of self-action-outcome for the undergraduate students. The hypotheses tested for this study are as follows:

Self-esteem influences the career decision-making self-efficacy among undergraduate students.

Job-search intensity influences the career decision-making self-efficacy among undergraduate students.

Self-esteem influences the job-search intensity among undergraduate students.

Materials and Methods

The sample sizes for this research were 678 undergraduate students and adequate for structural equation modelling (SEM) techniques [24, 25]. This research used three instruments, namely, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, the Job-Search Intensity Scale and the Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale.

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale is used to measure students' global self-esteem. This instrument is one of the most widely used instruments to measure self-esteem in research settings. The instrument focuses on people's general feelings towards themselves, without referring to any specific quality or attribute. The original SE has a 10-item scale. The items are scored by using a 4-point Likert type, ranging from 0 (strongly disagree) to 3 (strongly agree). Half of the items are worded in a positive direction and the other half are worded in a negative direction. The Job-Search Intensity Scale is a self-report scale assessing behaviours related to seeking employment. This scale measures the frequency of individual participation in several job-seeking behaviours each week with options ranging from 1 (never or zero times) to 5 (very often, at least ten times). The Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale is used to assess career decision-making self-efficacy among respondents. The CDMSE measures confidence in accomplishing career-related tasks. This instrument consists of 25 items rated on a 5-point scale, with responses ranging from 0 (no confidence at all) to 4 (complete confidence).

This research was a survey-based type, and participants were recruited using cluster sampling procedure. This research used the test-retest to determine the reliability of the instrument and then SEM to test the validity of the constructs. The study applied a six-stage structural equation modelling using the AMOS (version 18) model-fitting program to test the research hypotheses.

Results and Discussion

Figure 31.1 presents the empirical results of the hypothesised structural relationship model of self-esteem, job-search intensity and career decision-making self-efficacy. The overall fit of the model was adequate with CFI = .977, TLI = .971 and RMSEA = .048. The statistics indicate that the parameters were free from offending estimates, ranging from .52 to .90. The CFI (.977) and TLI (.971) fit indicators exceeded the threshold of .90, indicating a very good fit. The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA = .048) has met the cut-off point requirement for a reasonable error of approximation. The normed chi-square of 2.578 for a good fit is also met [26]. The final fit index indicates that the test failed to reject the hypothesised model. Therefore, there is a strong significant relationship with a
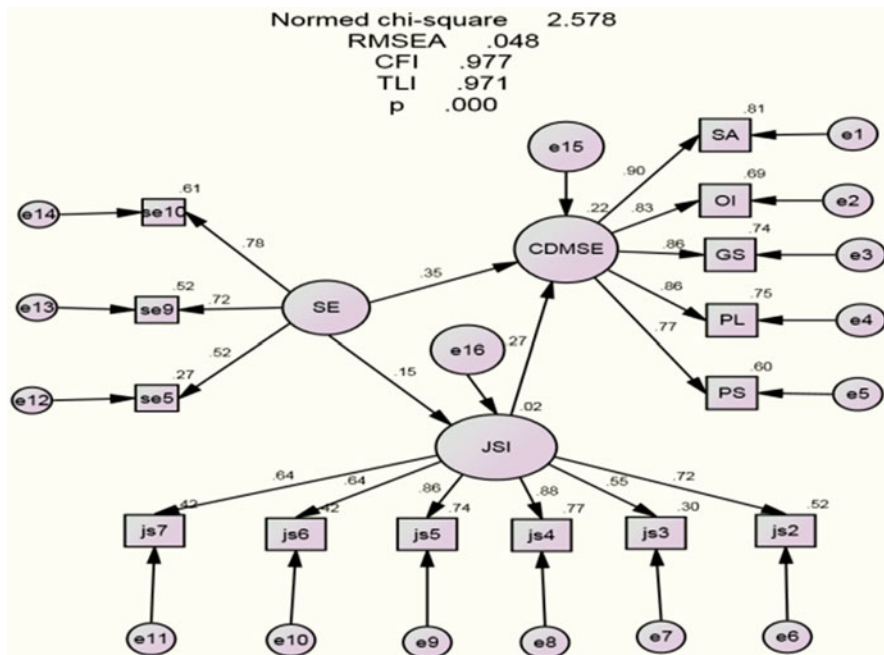

Fig. 31.1 The revised results of the hypothesised structural relationship of the SAO model

value of .35 between self-esteem and career decision-making self-efficacy among undergraduate students. There is a significant relationship with a value of .27 between job-search intensity and career decision-making self-efficacy among undergraduate students, and there is a significant relationship but rather weak with a value of .15 between self-esteem and job-search intensity among undergraduate students. As such, the researcher concludes Fig. 31.1 to be the validated structural equation model.

Therefore, a self-action-outcome model is developed as shown in Fig. 31.2. The items for self (S) represent self-esteem, which indicated three statements related to attitude towards self, feeling about self and thinking about self. These three statements show the factor loading above .50 [26] which indicated that the statements represent the self-esteem indicator. The items for action (A) show six items related to resume preparation, job-search information, sending a resume to potential employers, filling out job application, contacting relevance agency, and using of computer services to locate a job. These six statements also show the factor loading above .50 [26] which indicated that the statements represent the job-search intensity indicator.

The outcome (O) components show that 25 statements related to the 5 sub-scales. The sub-scales involved are Self-Appraisal, Occupational Information, Goal Selection, Career Planning and Problem Solving. *Self-Appraisal* (SA) refers to the confidence one has for assessing and making career-related decisions. The factor loading for this sub-scale is .90. *Occupational Information* (OI) refers to the ability to find job information. The factor loading for this sub-scale is .83. *Goal Selection* (GS) refers to the confidence in deciding upon a major, occupation or career. The factor loading for this sub-scale is .86. *Career Planning* (PL) refers to the ability to make career plans. The factor loading for this sub-scale is .86. Finally, *Problem Solving* (PS) refers to the confidence to face and to solve career-related problems. The factor loading for this sub-scale is .77. The factor loading for all five sub-scales above .50 shows that these sub-scales represent the career decision-making self-efficacy scale.

The findings of the present research have expanded the knowledge on the relationship among self-esteem, job-search intensity and career decision-making self-efficacy among undergraduate students. The results indicate that self-esteem is strongly related to career decision-making self-efficacy among undergraduate students. The self-esteem and career decision-making self-efficacy have a positive relationship in the full-fledged structural equation modelling model. The result of this finding shows that if self-esteem increases, the career decision-making self-efficacy also increases among undergraduate students. Therefore, it is important for the undergraduate students to build up their self-esteem in order to make them more confident in preparing themselves for career. Individuals with high self-esteem are generally confident of themselves, self-directed, decisive, loving and lovable, eager to express idea and assertive and get along well with others. They also accept themselves unconditionally and are willing to take calculated risks [5].

The results indicate that the job-search intensity have a significant relationship with career decision-making self-efficacy. The result of this finding shows that if
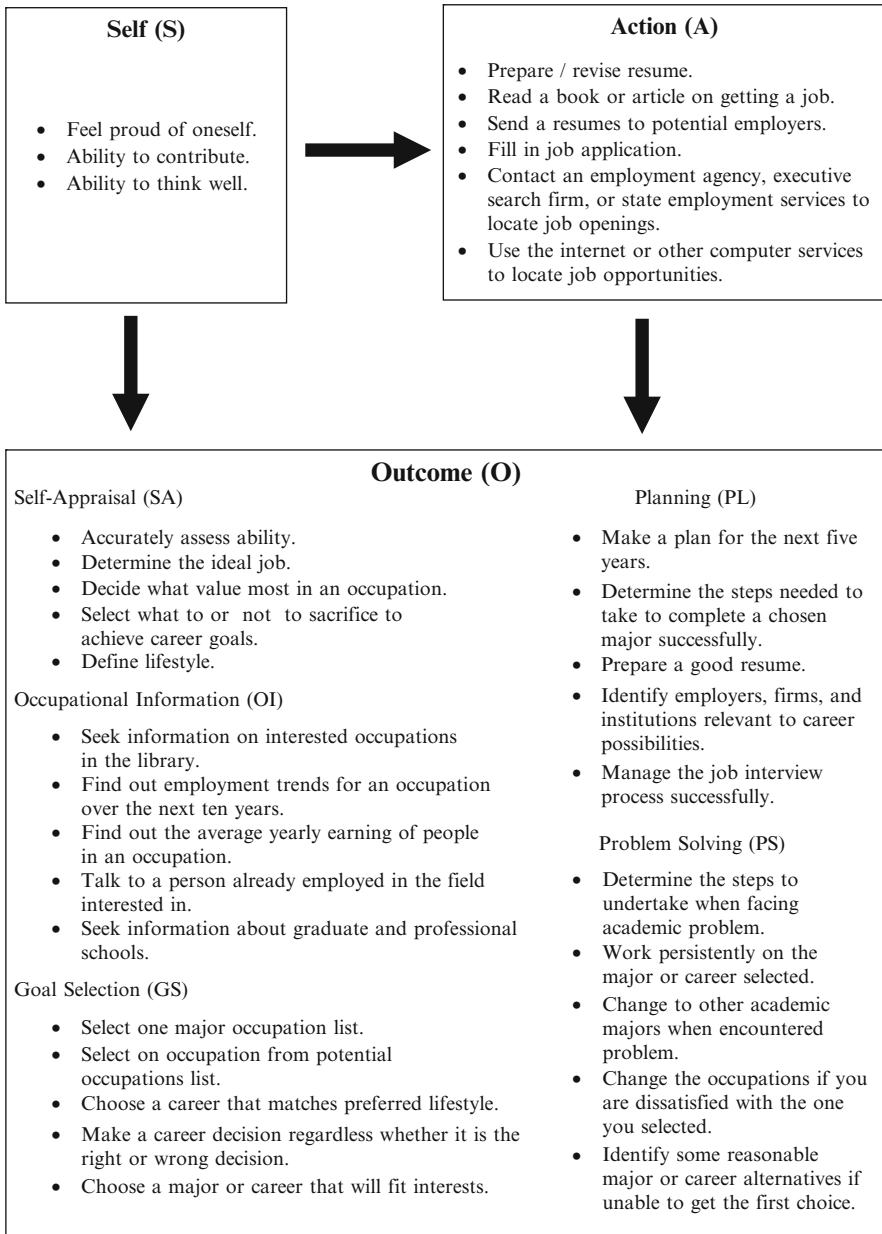
Self (S)	**Action (A)**
• Feel proud of oneself. • Ability to contribute. • Ability to think well.	• Prepare / revise resume. • Read a book or article on getting a job. • Send a resumes to potential employers. • Fill in job application. • Contact an employment agency, executive search firm, or state employment services to locate job openings. • Use the internet or other computer services to locate job opportunities.

Outcome (O)

Self-Appraisal (SA)

- Accurately assess ability.
- Determine the ideal job.
- Decide what value most in an occupation.
- Select what to or not to sacrifice to achieve career goals.
- Define lifestyle.

Occupational Information (OI)

- Seek information on interested occupations in the library.
- Find out employment trends for an occupation over the next ten years.
- Find out the average yearly earning of people in an occupation.
- Talk to a person already employed in the field interested in.
- Seek information about graduate and professional schools.

Goal Selection (GS)

- Select one major occupation list.
- Select on occupation from potential occupations list.
- Choose a career that matches preferred lifestyle.
- Make a career decision regardless whether it is the right or wrong decision.
- Choose a major or career that will fit interests.

Planning (PL)

- Make a plan for the next five years.
- Determine the steps needed to take to complete a chosen major successfully.
- Prepare a good resume.
- Identify employers, firms, and institutions relevant to career possibilities.
- Manage the job interview process successfully.

Problem Solving (PS)

- Determine the steps to undertake when facing academic problem.
- Work persistently on the major or career selected.
- Change to other academic majors when encountered problem.
- Change the occupations if you are dissatisfied with the one you selected.
- Identify some reasonable major or career alternatives if unable to get the first choice.

Fig. 31.2 Self-action-outcome (SAO) model of self-esteem, job-search intensity and career decision-making self-efficacy

job-search intensity increases, the career decision-making self-efficacy also increases among undergraduate students. Therefore, it is important for the undergraduate students to actively involve with job-search behaviour in order to make them more confident in preparing themselves for career. The finding of the research affirms the study done by other researchers [7, 9, 13, 27, 28] and shows that there is a significant relationship between job-search intensity and career decision-making self-efficacy.

The results also indicate that self-esteem has a significant relationship with the job-search intensity. Therefore, it is important for the undergraduate students to build up their self-esteem in order to make them more productive. Individuals with high self-esteem will take more risks in job selection and more likely to choose unconventional jobs than people with low self-esteem [5]. Individuals with high self-esteem tend to be successful in their job searches than those with low self-esteem.

The results of the research have highlighted several invaluable contributions and implications for professionals and particularly practitioners. The main practical contribution of this study for practitioners is to bring to their attention the relationship among self-esteem, job-search intensity and career decision-making self-efficacy. The results are useful in helping the transition process of students from university to work. Such information could lead to an improvement in planning and policymaking for the development of a more effective and efficient counselling and career guidance system in the university settings. Practices of counselling by guidance counsellors are to provide guidance to students in preparing for their working life. This includes the development of attitude, beliefs, and students' psychological development.

Based on tracer study reported by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (MOHE), only 23.5 % of the students sought help from the guidance and counselling services centre, and only 39.9 % of the students sought help related to career guidance [29]. This report indicated a gap in the MOHE tracer study. The gap is caused either by the guidance counsellor, counselling service or the graduates. As a policymaker at the Ministry of Higher Learning, the MOHE can enforce undergraduate students to go through the process of career guidance in preparing them for the world of work. At the same time, it is possible to make it compulsory for universities to offer courses or programmes for the career guidance centre related to help prepare student readiness for the careers available.

Career counsellors can assist through training workshops provided with tools, manuals, annual labour supply/demand report. Alumni mentorship programmes can be created to link students with successful alumni working in a career field of similar interest. Online community portal can include an interactive website for posting questions and answers to facilitate collaboration among career counsellors, students, new graduates and employers. It is imperative for policymakers at the faculty or centre level to scrutinise the contents in educational institutions. Curricula with psychology and soft skills will go a long way in building student confidence in dealing with the environment of work. Hopefully, issues pertaining to students soft skills and confidence level as reported in the UNESCO report [30] as well as feedback from CEO of large corporations [3, 4] can be dealt and looked into.

The present study is focused on the relationship of self-esteem, job-search intensity and career decision-making self-efficacy**.** Furthermore, it would be interesting to investigate other variables involved in self-categories, job-search behaviour and the linking of the predictors' variables with the outcome variables for future studies as suggested by Saks [13] in his model. The self-action-outcome (SAO) model is the ultimate finding from the current study. This model is a good-fit model based on the structural equation modelling analysis. For future research, this model can be tested again to prove the validity of a good-fit model with different respondents and locations.

The current study used the self-report methodology without any external corroboration; thus, the findings are limited to what have been included in the self-report measures. The future study needs to address this limitation. Longitudinal studies using self-report measures combined with other research methods, including qualitative methods (e.g., interviewing, observations), would be likely to reveal more outcomes that may be useful in understanding students' self-esteem, job-search intensity and career decision-making process of young adults.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study examined the relationship between self-esteem, job-search intensity and career decision-making self-efficacy among undergraduate students. The findings show that there are significant relationships between self-esteem and career decision-making self-efficacy, between self-esteem and job-search intensity and between job-search intensity and career decision-making self-efficacy. Self-esteem and job-search intensity have a mediating effect on career decision-making self-efficacy. At the end of the research, a model of self-action-outcome (SAO) was developed as shown in Fig. 31.2.

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