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Academic Fit, Adolescent-Parent Career Congruence, and Career Exploration in University Students

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Abstract

Based on the person-environment congruence theory which argues that better fit with individual's environment will lead to more positive outcomes, we examined the relationships between the fit between individuals and organization (i.e., academic fit), the fit between individuals and their parents (i.e., adolescent-parent career congruence), and career exploration in Indonesian university students. We surveyed 125 students (53.6% girls, mean age = 18.96 years) majoring in Fisheries and Marine Science from a state university in Semarang, Central Java, using measures of academic fit, adolescent-parent career congruence, and career exploration. We examined whether adolescent-parent career congruence mediated the relationship between academic fit and career exploration. Structural equation modelling demonstrated that adolescent-parent career congruence partially mediated the relationship between academic fit and career exploration, suggesting that fitting with academic situation affects career exploration behavior by directly motivating students to engage in career exploration activities, and also by facilitating congruence with parents regarding career matter, that in turn, influences involvement in career exploration behavior. Findings of this study showed the vital roles for academic fit and adolescent-parent career congruence in students' career exploration behavior.

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1. Introduction

The concept of person-environment congruence is based on the interactionist theory of behavior, which underlines that any variation in behavioral and attitudinal variables is the result of the interaction between the individual and the environment [1]. The contemporary theories of person-environment fit consist of three assumptions. First, individuals are more likely to find environments that match with their characteristics. Second,

the level of fit between individuals and their environment is related to vital outcomes for both the individual and the environment. Greater fit leads to positive outcomes, such as satisfaction, improved performance, and more persistence, whereas poorer fit leads to negative outcomes, such as dissatisfaction and lower achievement. Third, the process of fit is bi-directional. The individual influences the environment, and the environment influences the individual, and this bi-directional relation is a system, where change in one component affects the other component in the system [2]. No studies to date have involved two kinds of perceived fits and the outcome variable. In this study, we examined whether the fit between individuals and their parents (i.e., adolescent-parent career congruence) mediated the relationship between individuals and organization (i.e., academic fit) and university students' career exploration behavior.

We operationalize academic fit as the degree to which students feel that their sense of what is academically important to them is consistent with their perception of what their university and faculties value. Certain aspects of fit are likely to vary across institutions that differ in the nature of their missions, faculty and staff, and student bodies. However, the aspects of fit that are of interest in the current research deal with things that are likely to be shared across students at different universities/institutions such as the perceived need for competent faculties, course availability, and having classmates with similar academic interests [3].

Further, we operationalize adolescent-parent career congruence as the perceived compatibility, that is, the degree to which the adolescents perceive parents as fulfilling career exploration, planning, and goal-setting needs, and the degree to which they perceive parents to be happy, proud, contented, or agreeable with their career progress, and the perceived similarity between adolescents and their parents, that is, the level to which the adolescents perceive that their parents possess similar or corresponding ideas regarding career interests, values, plans, and goals [4].

In this study we involved career exploration as an outcome variable. Career exploration includes activities of gathering information relevant to the career progress of the individual [5, 6], and contains self- and environmental explorations [7]. Self-exploration refers to the exploration of individuals' own interests, values, and experiences in order to reflect on their career choice and to obtain a deeper understanding of themselves, whereas environmental exploration involves individuals' investigation of various career choices and involves collecting information on jobs, organizations, occupations or industries that correlates with more well-informed career decisions (Zikic&Klehe)[7]. During career exploration process, an increased self-understanding and knowledge about the working world allows individuals to crystallise their career goals and preferences, which can lead to a focus on a specific area for exploration [8]. Moreover, individuals who thoughtfully search for, analyse, and investigate career information relevant to themselves are likely to show better adaptation within rapidly changing modern work settings [9].

We tested the hypothesis using a sample of Indonesian students from a state university in Semarang, for whom adolescent-parent career congruence is especially salient. Indonesia is ranked high on aspects of collectivism, and Indonesian adolescents rely heavily on parents and respect obedience [10]. We targeted students majoring in Fisheries and Marine Science, as interest in this faculty was relevant with the location of Semarang as one of the coastal regions in Java. We hypothesized that adolescent-parent career congruence would mediate the relationship between academic fit and career exploration.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were 125 Indonesian students (53.6% girls, mean age = 18.96 years) majoring in Fisheries and Marine Science from a state university in Semarang, Central Java, consisting of 53 students from Marine Science and 72 from Fisheries.

2.2. Survey Materials

All responses were made using a 6-point Likert-like scale (1= strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree). Higher scores indicate higher levels of each construct.

The 12-item Adolescent-Parent Career Congruence Scale [4] measures adolescent perceptions that parents are helpful and are satisfied with their career progress (complementary) and that parents have parallel career preferences and goals (supplementary congruence). A sample item, "My parents want the same career for me as I

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