Psychology Career Development Enhancement: A Case Study of the Fourth-Year Thai Undergraduate Class

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Abstract
With the work field of Psychology remaining at a budding stage within Thailand, psychology undergraduates – while increasing in number – reportedly experience difficulties identifying their future psychological work. The course "Career in Psychology" hence was offered, to assist students to explore their psychology career options. With the increased enrollment and course limited time resource, classroom action research was conducted to compare the benefits of the five learning components in the course. Participants were thirty-two fourth-year public-university undergraduates. The majority of them (94%) were in an undergraduate international program in psychology with the remaining being foreign exchange students. The students responded to self-report measures where they indicated how much they perceived the benefits and relevance of the course five learning components (i.e., Self-evaluation, Interviews of Psychology Professionals, Career Site Visit, Career Counseling, and Integrative Analysis of Career Exploration) and relevant open-ended questions. One-way Analyses of Variance (One-way ANOVAs) were conducted for data analysis, with post-hoc comparisons. Findings suggested that the students perceived relatively high benefits and high relevance of the five learning components. Indeed, they did not perceive them as significantly different in terms of their benefits. Still, in terms of their relevance, they found Career Counseling significantly more relevant to their career exploration than a Career Site Visit. Findings were discussed in terms of implications for future class time and resource management. Generalizability of the findings to other psychology career development program within the contexts in which psychology was yet to be well-established was also discussed.

Keywords: Learning Components, Perceived Benefits, Career Exploration

Introduction

With the work field of Psychology remaining at a budding stage within Thailand, psychology undergraduates – while increasing in number – reportedly experience difficulties identifying their future psychological work. The course "Career in Psychology" hence was offered, to assist students to explore their psychology career options. The course is one of the compulsory courses in the Bachelor of Science (B.S.) in Psychological Science (International Program). The course is aimed at enhancing the readiness in career decision of students in this international program. Its main objectives are twofold: 1) to equip students with opportunities to engage in career exploration and 2) to increase students' understanding of career options within the country, given some of the students' international educational background.

Career in Psychology is designed as a one-credit hour course. Thus far, students have rated the course as beneficial in assisting them in their career exploration. The benefits could be attributable to the five components of the course learning activities. These components are:1) career self-assessment, 2) career interview; 3) individual career counseling,4) career site visit, and 5) the preparation of an Integrative Analysis of Career Exploration report.

Each learning component is based on well-recognized empirically-based literature on career exploration and has been shown promising in assisting students in their career exploration in various ways. To begin with, based on the notion that individuals with different personal characteristics flourish in distinctive careers (Spokane & Cruza-Guet, 2005), career self-assessment activity helps the students to become more aware of their personal characteristics so as to incorporate them into their career exploration.

Drawn from the Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), the two activities of career interview--- students' interviewing of professionals in psychological fields of their interests--- and career site visit--- students' visit to a psychological workplace of the class consensus--- help provide students with vicarious learning of psychological professions. Then, in the fourth activity, students attend an individual career counseling for a minimum of three sessions from the Faculty Wellness Center.The benefits of career counseling have been well documented (Brown & Lent, 2005).

Then, in the final activity, students will have opportunities to evaluate how well they have progressed in the integrative analysis of their career decision. Self-awareness and such an evaluation have been shown to be beneficial for goal setting (Schunk, 1996) and should provide the students with the basis for establishing appropriate goals in their subsequent career development.

Despite these benefits, with the course time limit (i.e., one-credit hour) and a significant increase in the number of students registering in the course, it become essential to effectively review how to allocate appropriate course resources to each activity. The review could be conducted by comparing the students' perception of the benefits of each course component. In addition to these perceived benefits, the degree to which the students perceive the relevance of each learning component to their career exploration, will be examined. With past findings suggesting the association between perceived benefits and relevance (Robertson, 2013), information on the latter

should help clarify students' perception of the former. This should lead to the more fruitful planning of class time and resource management.

Methodology

Participants

Participants were students enrolling in the class "Career in Psychology", offered by the B.S. in Psychological Science, Academic Year 2016.

Whereas the total enrollment was thirty-four students, thirty-two of them (i.e., 94%) participated in the current study. The remaining two students (i.e., 6%) were absent in the final class meeting where data collection took place.

The majority of the respondents were fourth-year students in the program (i.e., $N = 27$, 84%). Some of them (i.e., $N = 5$, 16%), however, were foreign exchange students who attended the program for a period of one semester. These students also majored in Psychology and attended an undergraduate program in other Southeast Asian countries. Similar to their Thai classmates, these foreign exchange students participated in the course since the very beginning and attended all of the learning components previously outlined. The exchange students had a good command of English. On the learning components where the native language was involved, hence, special arrangements were made to ascertain that these students were well supported.

Instrumentations

In addition to the measures of perceived benefits and perceived relevance of the five learning components, which will be subsequently outlined, additional instruments were administered. These entailed self-rating questions regarding students' perceived progress in their career decision, their urgency in achieving the decision, and their effort expenditure in career exploration. Additionally, two open-ended questions were provided regarding the students': 1) recommendations for improving the five learning components and 2) overall recommendations for the course.

Perceived Benefits. The students' perception of the benefits of the five learning components was measured using a self-report Likert-type format. Students rated each of the five learning components in terms of its benefit referring to a response format ranging from 1 (Least Beneficial) to 5 (Most Beneficial). A higher score indicated higher benefit perception of the given component whereas the lower score indicated the opposite.

Satisfactory psychometric properties were found for the measure of Perceived Benefits employed here. Corrected Item-Total Correlation coefficients (CITC) were beyond the significant level, ranging from .34 and .76. The Chronbach's alpha estimate was .81, suggesting high internal consistency.

Perceived Relevance. Students' perception of the relevance of the five learning components was measured using a self-report Likert-type format. Students rated each of the five learning components in terms of its relevance to their career exploration referring to a response format ranging from 1 (Least Relevant) to 5 (Most Relevant). A higher score

indicated higher relevance perception of the given component whereas the lower score indicated the opposite.

Satisfactory psychometric properties were found for the measure of Perceived Relevance employed here. Corrected Item-Total Correlation coefficients (CITC) were beyond the significant level, ranging from .45 and .80. The Chronbach's alpha estimate was .83, suggesting high internal consistency.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted in the last class meeting. Then, students were asked to respond to the measures previously outlined. Response time was 5-10 minutes. Precaution was taken to ascertain to the students the anonymity of their responses and the use of the responses for the key purposes of subsequent class resource planning and management.

Data Analysis

SPSS (Version 18) was used for data analysis. The analysis started with the descriptive analysis for the distribution, mean, and standard deviation of scores for the key study variables. Then, One-way Analyses of Variance (One-way ANOVAs) were conducted after relevant assumptions were tested and confirmed.

Whereas the examination of the effects of the learning components on the two dependent variables suggested a multivariate data analysis. A One-way Multivariate Analysis of Variance (One-way MANOVA) was not selected. This was because the number of the participants in the current study, 32 students, were relatively small and did not meet the minimum MANOVA sample size requirement. According to Hair et al. (2010), there should be at least 20 participants for each of the two dependent variables, leading to a minimal sample size of 40. Therefore, One-way Analyses of Variance (One-way ANOVAs) were conducted twice to examine whether students' perception of the learning components differ in the two dependent variables. Such employment, however, entailed limitations in terms of an increased chance of a Type l error (Hair et al., 2010).

While this was not the main focus of the current study, additional data analyses were conducted based on students' responses to the two open-ended questions regarding their: 1) recommendations of ways to improve the five learning components and 2) overall course recommendations. Frequency and percentage were calculated to summarize key recommendations obtained.

Results

Table 1 illustrated the level of urgency, effort expensed, and progress made toward career decision as perceived by the participants, together with the descriptive statistics of key study variables.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Key Study Variables

Variable	N	M	SD	Min	Max	Range	Possible Range
Perceived Benefits							
Self-assessment	31	4.16	.69	3.00	5.00	2.00	1.00-5.00
Career Interview	27	4.22	.89	2.00	5.00	3.00	1.00-5.00
Career Site Visit	29	4.07	.92	2.00	5.00	3.00	1.00-5.00
Career Counseling	32	4.63	.71	2.00	5.00	3.00	1.00-5.00
Integrative Report	32	4.09	.86	2.00	5.00	3.00	1.00-5.00
Perceived Relevance							
Self-assessment	31	4.26	.68	3.00	5.00	2.00	1.00-5.00
Career Interview	27	4.22	.93	2.00	5.00	3.00	1.00-5.00
Career Site Visit	30	4.03	.89	2.00	5.00	3.00	1.00-5.00
Career Counseling	32	4.69	.54	3.00	5.00	2.00	1.00-5.00
Integrative Report	30	4.50	.63	3.00	5.00	2.00	1.00-5.00
Career Exploration							
Perceived Urgency	31	4.16	.93	1.00	5.00	4.00	1.00-5.00
Effort Expenditure	31	4.10	1.04	2.00	5.00	3.00	1.00-5.00
Perceived Progress	31	3.94	.93	2.00	5.00	3.00	1.00-5.00

With support for its assumption, One-way ANOVA was employed twice for data analyses. Outcomes were shown in Tables 2 and 3:

Table 2: The Effects of Learning Components on Perceived Benefits

Variables	Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig
Perceived Benefits	Between	6.48	4	1.62	2.44	.05
	Within	96.94	146	.66		
	Total	103.42	150			

Table 3: The Effects of Learning Components on Perceived Relevance

Variables	Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig
Perceived Relevance	Between	8.03	4	2.00	3.64	.007**
	Within	79.94	145	.551		
	Total	87.97	149			

*Note. **p < .01*

Findings suggested that students' perception of the benefits of the five learning components were marginally different. With increased chances of Type 1 errors inherent in multiple analyses, precaution was taken not to validate the marginally significant difference observed in perceived benefits.

However, significant differences were found in students' perception of the relevance of the five learning activities ($p < .01$). Hence, post-hoc comparisons were conducted using Scheffe. Findings suggested that the students perceived career counseling ($M = 4.68$, $SD = .54$) as significantly more relevant to their career exploration than career site visit ($M = 4.03$, $SD = .89$), $p<.05$. These outcomes are shown in Table 7.

Additional data analyses were conducted to obtain supplementary information regarding the students' perception of the five learning components. Two questions were posted. One was regarding the method for improving existing learning components and the other was overall course recommendation.

Based on response frequency, suggested methods for improving existing learning components were mainly relevant to the career site visit. Suggestions were made for the increased hand-on experience during the visit together with the increased visit frequency so as to cover more sites. Suggestions were also made regarding the increased flexibility of career interview group size (i.e., individual--- rather than group--- interview) so that the students could pursue more areas of interest).

Based on response frequency, course recommendations were made for increased discussion time and invitations of guest speakers. Some of the students reiterated increased frequency of career site visits so as to cover more sites of the class interests.

Discussions

Findings from the current studies attested the benefits of the five learning components designed to aid students' career exploration, based on the empirical evidence provided by Brown and Lent (2005). The self-administered assessments were conducted to aid students' self-exploration based on the notion that individuals with various personal characteristics flourish in different career types (Spokane & Cruza-Guet, 2005). The assessments were perceived by the students as beneficial and relevant. Similar perception was reported for the career interview. The interview was aimed to equip the students with opportunities to vicariously learn about psychology careers of their interests through a narration and observation of selected informants. Students appeared to perceive the relevance and benefit of this vicarious learning (Bandura,

1986). The completion of the integrative analysis, in which the students were required to engage in personal reflection regarding their career decision, their career goals, progress made toward these goals, and ways to enhance such progress, appeared to be similarly well-perceived by the students, both in terms of its benefits and relevance.

An interesting finding emerged regarding the comparative relevance perception of career counseling and career site visit. Whereas findings resonated past reports of the benefits of both learning components (e.g., Brown & Lent, 2005), discrepancies emerged regarding the students' perception of their relevance (i.e., career counseling was perceived as significantly more relevant to the students' career exploration than was career site visit). Potential explanations could be drawn from information obtained from additional data analyses. There, significant concerns were raised regarding the frequency and format of the visit. Whereas the visit site was selected based on the class majority voting, it appeared restricted in responding to some students' needs and was perceived as less relevant. For this reason, recommendations for increased site visits where more career options could be explored were made. Additionally, activities engaged during the visit might not fully respond to students' needs. Apparently, additional hand-on experiences (e.g., opportunities to visit work areas and interact with relevant personnel) would be perceived as more relevant to the career exploration than the lecture-based presentation. Therefore, it is impossible to conclude at this stage whether the compromised relevance perception was due to the limited relevance of the learning component or the unique characteristics of this individual visit.

In addition to the consideration of the aforementioned distinctiveness of the learning components delivered, the unique characteristics of the current "Career in Psychology" course should be taken into consideration prior to finding generalization. These could be considered one of the study limitations. With the current course being designed for an International Program with enrollment from foreign exchange students, compromised knowledge and experiences of the class regarding the practice of psychology within the Thai cultural context is not unanticipated. Additionally, a limited number of responses obtained prevented the use of more sophisticated statistical analyses (i.e., One-way MANOVA) which promises more accurate results. Information obtained, additionally, came from self-reported responses. While confidentiality was reiterated, it could not be viewed as totally free from concerns for social desirability. Lastly, whereas the students' perception was obtained through their rating responses, the rationales for such responses were not obtained.

Research and Teaching Implications

To address the aforementioned limitations, future research studies could consider expanding the scope of data collection to include students from other classes that aid in career exploration, particularly students within the Thai program. Comparisons of the benefits offered by the five learning components as perceived by students from the Thai and International programs would be informative and suggest unique needs of the two groups. Increased sample size would allow the use of more sophisticated data analysis. Additionally, the use of methods other than self-report ratings in evaluating students' perception (e.g., students' attendance check, assignment submission rates) would help validate such ratings. Finally, qualitative data (e.g., interview) would help clarify the rating responses obtained.

Despite the aforementioned limitations of the current study, findings obtained are beneficial for classroom planning and resource management of future courses in Career in Psychology. To begin with, consideration will be made regarding the possibility of increasing the frequency of career site visits so that students of different career interests could perceive their relevance and benefit more from such visits. Caution will be exercised as well to ascertain that the visits are more proportional in terms of hand-on experiences versus lecture-based presentation. Furthermore, increased resources will be given to career counseling. With relatively high perceived relevance and benefits of this learning component, considerations will be made regarding the possibility of increasing the number of counseling sessions offered to the students and to introduce class-activities that help consolidate the benefits obtained. In addition to the personal reflection written assignment, the possibility of engaging the students in post-counseling group discussion will be explored, as long as the students' confidentiality remains well-maintained.

Acknowledgements

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