

Issues and Challenges: Preparation as a School Counsellor

Syarifah Rohaniah Syed Mahmood^{1*}, Farah Azira Fadzir¹, Halim Ismail¹,
Ssekamanya Siraje Abdallah¹, Noorlila Ahmad¹

¹ Kulliyah of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

*Corresponding Author: rohaniah@iium.edu.my

Received: 22 March 2025 | Accepted: 2 May 2025 | Published: 1 June 2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55057/ijares.2025.7.3.15>

Abstract: *Fresh graduates often face significant challenges in preparing for entry into the professional workforce. The transition from academic life to the workplace is particularly important for final-year students, as it signifies a pivotal stage in their personal and professional development. To investigate this transitional period, a phenomenological approach was adopted to explore the challenges experienced by final-year undergraduates during their internships. In-depth interviews were conducted with four female students from a Public Institution of Higher Education (PIHE) located in Klang Valley, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The data collected were analysed using thematic analysis, which identified five distinct categories of challenges faced by the participants: adjustment to the school environment, unsupportive working environment, professional issues, struggling with main duties and additional duties.*

Keywords: overcoming, internship, challenges, trainee counselors

1. Introduction

Fresh graduates are currently struggling to find a full-time and permanent basis job, although official labour statistics show a decrease in unemployment. This is because they are competing with retrenched workers who lost their jobs during the pandemic due to limited job opportunities (Morden, 2022). Based on the statistics from the Human Resources Ministry, it was reported that 227,300 from a pool of 711,000 unemployed workers in the country are from the age group of 20 to 24 years old, followed by 160,800 individuals from those aged 25 to 29 years old. Furthermore, many fresh graduates work on a part-time basis while waiting to secure a full-time job.

On 25th May 2022, the Higher Education Minister, Datuk Seri Noraini Ahmad, announced five initiatives to address the declining marketability of graduates. Among the initiatives are the KPT-Career Advancement Programme (KPT-CAP), Teaching Factory Programme, TVET Transformation Programme, flexible and micro-credential programmes, and mobility programmes. Based on the Graduate Tracer Study 2020, the marketability of Malaysian graduates declined by 1.8 per cent to 84.4 per cent compared to 86.2 per cent in 2019. This was attributed to the Covid-19 pandemic (Bernama, 2022).

Despite all the initiatives proposed by the Ministry of Higher Education, the preparedness of Malaysian fresh graduates to enter the workforce is often debated. In a survey conducted by Talentbank in 2020, many employers considered local fresh graduates as not prepared to enter

the job market (Wong, 2021). This phenomenon is not limited to Malaysian fresh graduates only. A study entitled “Graduate work-readiness in the Asia-Pacific region” was conducted to discover perceptions of employers towards fresh graduates in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Australia. The study findings show that employers in the three countries generally perceived fresh graduates as lacking in career-preparedness. As such, they have difficulties hiring fresh graduates who have qualifications, skills, and personal capabilities.

In light of this issue, many studies have been conducted on factors that influence career preparedness among graduates, such as field attachment, clinical laboratory experiences, mentoring support, peer mentoring and self-leadership (Baynit & Ngussa, 2021; Chang et al., 2021; Flagge & Estis, 2022; Moon & Kim, 2017). However, only a small number of studies have ventured into the lived experiences of university students in preparing themselves to enter the workforce (Cameron, 2021; Krishnan et al., 2020). Hence, the focus of the present study is to explore the lived experiences of final-year university students in preparing themselves to enter the world of work and the challenges that they face.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Importance of Career Preparedness among Adolescents

Young adults need to develop career preparedness or employability skills to achieve a successful transition process from tertiary education to a fulfilling career. Significant years of life are spent in education, thus critical attention should be given to young adults’ career preparedness within a college or university context. Much literature revealed that young adults must satisfy the expectations of employers in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes as a strategy to embrace career-related challenges. Indeed, tertiary graduates are anticipated to enter the workforce with a work-ready attitude and acquire demonstrable levels of employability to remain relevant and become more competitive in their profession (Clarke, 2018). Similarly, several scholars believe that work-ready graduates would experience positive potential career performance, career success, and career growth (Atlay & Harris, 2000; Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006; Hart, 2008).

One of the primary aspects of career preparedness is the acquisition of relevant skills and knowledge. Graduates’ competency within their disciplinary fields and transferable skills mastery are needed to thrive in dynamic and endless changes in the labour market due to rapid economic and technological changes (Barrie, 2006; O’Brien et al., 2013; Schweinsberg et al., 2021). Correspondingly, Moon and Kim (2017) discovered a positive relationship between the level of career preparedness and self-leadership. In other words, this correlation suggests that enhancing self-leadership skills could potentially improve one's career preparedness behaviour. Other than that, environmental and trait factors play a significant role in inspiring career preparedness behaviours. Based on a study conducted by Kendricks et al. (2019), a supportive family environment significantly enhances students' readiness for their careers. Moreover, Kim (2018) reported that conscientiousness and career decision self-efficacy have a statistically significant influence on career preparation behaviour. Meanwhile, Kim (2018) emphasised the importance of identifying the psychological factors in determining the strategies taken by individuals to prepare for their careers, therefore highlighting the impact of personality traits and self-belief on the career preparation process.

Furthermore, career preparedness is notably related to career satisfaction and psychological well-being. Individuals with higher levels of career preparedness may experience higher levels of career satisfaction, work engagement, and a comprehensive state of well-being (Biju et al.,

2021; Marciniak et al., 2021). In addition, having a sense of preparedness is helpful to reduce career anxiety and indecisiveness. Researchers highlighted that higher levels of career decision self-efficacy significantly reduce anxiety levels (Deer et al., 2018; Işık, 2012). Meanwhile, career indecision positively correlates with anxiety (Campagna & Curtis, 2007; Miller & Rottinghaus, 2014).

In addition, young adults must be prepared to deal with unforeseen circumstances, a common theme in personal development and career planning. Lent (2013) mentioned that individuals are gradually confronting sudden possibilities and obstacles, and planning is essential, but it is equally crucial to be open to unexpected opportunities and to have the ability to adjust one's plans when necessary. Therefore, Super and Hall (1978) agreed that ensuring young adults are sufficiently prepared for their careers and occupied with various skills is critical, as their early work experience profoundly affects their future career goals. The study by Skorikov (2007) suggested that a lack of work readiness skills can result in various career-related difficulties such as burnout, workplace conflict, and reduced job satisfaction.

2.2 Challenges Faced by Trainee Counsellors During Field Placement

Counsellors-in-training (CITs) or trainee counsellors are undergraduate counselling students who are required to complete their formal training (practicum and internship experience) at schools as part of graduation requirements. CITs receive supervision from counselling lecturers and school counsellors. Certainly, field placement courses are vital for counsellors-in-training as they offer a dynamic learning environment where theoretical knowledge is transformed into practical skills as preparation to enter the professional setting. Through direct client interactions, CITs can refine their counselling techniques, learn to adapt interventions to individual client needs and gain confidence in their abilities. This hands-on experience is essential for the development of a strong professional identity as it allows CITs to see themselves as competent and effective future counsellors.

Furthermore, internships facilitate the development of professional identity through the process of professional socialisation. As noted by Rønnestad and Skovholt (2003), engagement in the day-to-day realities of counselling practice allows interns to adapt to the norms, values, and expectations of the profession. This includes learning to communicate effectively with colleagues and clients, understanding the importance of self-care and professional boundaries, and embracing a commitment to lifelong learning and professional development. Apart from that, a study conducted by Mansor and Yusoff (2013) revealed that internship programs are helpful as they provide opportunities for CITs to strengthen their skills and techniques to become professional counsellors. In fact, the journey to become a counsellor is demanding, both intellectually and emotionally. Engaging in consistent self-reflection and practising self-care is not only essential for counsellors' well-being but also fundamental in delivering effective, compassionate, and ethical counselling services to others. Hence, these experiences are essential in shaping a competent, compassionate, and skilled professional counsellor.

Nonetheless, challenges faced by CITs during professional training can vary, but several common themes emerge from the literature. One of the challenges is the struggle to align perceived views with the realities of counselling practice (Moss et al., 2014). According to Moss et al. (2014), trainee counsellors often enter the workforce unprepared and experience discouragement from their graduate training. Eventually, this will possibly lead to self-doubt and anxiety as they work to fill in the gap between their expectations and the realities of counselling (Aten et al., 2008; Moss et al., 2014). Generally, anxiety is associated with the desire to meet high standards and a fear of making mistakes.

Indeed, being mental health professionals may lead to intense stress and anxiety as they have to embrace the persistent struggle to develop trust, build a rapport and set goals with clients, which, over time, can lead to feelings of helplessness (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003). Arifin et al. (2019) found that trainee counsellors often feel anxious as they strive to demonstrate good performance and provide adequate services to clients. Thus, this research implies that supervision plays an important role in supporting trainee counsellors and helping them navigate anxiety. Trainees can benefit from developing coping strategies for managing anxiety, such as mindfulness techniques, self-care practices, and seeking support from peers and supervisors (Arifin et al., 2021).

Over the years, a number of studies on stress and burnout reported by counsellors-in-training have been conducted, revealing insightful findings about the issue. Counsellors-in-training may feel overwhelmed and experience psychological distress or burnout due to the demands of balancing academic performance, professional identity, and personal obligations (Pierce, 2016; Thompson et al., 2012). Similarly, Barnett et al. (2007) revealed that emotional fatigue is commonly known as a potential threat for burnout. Hence, counsellors-in-training require resilience to protect their mental health, ensure professional fitness, and navigate professional growth (Gibson et al., 2010; Tyre et al., 2016). In a study by Suarez et al. (2022), counsellors-in-training exemplified several approaches to enhance their resilience, including adaptability and sustaining focus on their professional goals. Further, Thompson et al. (2012) highlighted the significance of the role of supervision to engage in constructive discussions with counsellors-in-training about various aspects related to burnout, including early identification of burnout signs and effective strategies for addressing and preventing burnout. Researchers believe that this proactive approach helps in nurturing resilience as a self-care approach against burnout among counsellors-in-training.

3. Method

This study adopted a phenomenological approach to explore and understand the challenges encountered by final-year university students in their journey to becoming school counsellors. This methodological choice is particularly suitable, as phenomenology centres on the meaning of individuals' lived experiences related to a specific phenomenon. As highlighted by Moustakas (1994) and supported by Creswell and Poth (2024) and Marshall et al. (2021), this approach not only captures the essence of the phenomenon as experienced by participants but also examines how they navigate and make sense of those experiences. In the present study, the researchers sought to describe the study participants' career-prepared experiences and the challenges they faced during their internship training.

Participants included four final-year female students majoring in Guidance and Counselling who had completed their counselling internship. They were selected using purposeful sampling based on six inclusion criteria: (a) enrolment as a final-year student at KOED, (b) specialisation in Guidance and Counselling, (c) completion of the internship, (d) experience of challenges during the internship, (e) successful overcoming of those challenges, and (f) voluntary participation. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), criterion sampling is appropriate for phenomenological research, as it ensures that all participants have directly experienced the phenomenon under investigation.

The participant recruitment process involved two main steps. Initially, the researchers sent a formal request to the coordinator of the Teaching Practice and Practicum Unit (TPPU) to obtain permission for data collection and to access a list of students who had completed their

internship in Semester 2, 2023/2024. Emails were then sent to potential participants, followed by phone calls to arrange interview appointments with those who expressed interest.

Despite these efforts, the researchers faced challenges in recruiting participants. Out of nine potential participants contacted via email and WhatsApp, only four agreed to take part in the study. Time constraints and work commitments were the most common reasons for declining participation. Initially, the study aimed to include five participants—two males and three females. However, due to rejections and non-responses, particularly among male students, the final sample comprised only female participants, reflecting the voluntary nature of participation.

Data collection was conducted virtually through Google Meet, using semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. Each session lasted between one to two hours. Prior to the main interviews, a pilot interview was conducted with a student from a private university, which helped refine the interview questions for clarity and relevance.

All interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed by the researchers, following the procedures outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2017). Immediately after each interview, analytic memos were written to document reflections, emerging themes, and initial interpretations, consistent with the guidance of Bogdan and Biklen (2007). Transcribing the interviews themselves allowed the researchers to remain intimately engaged with the data while also enabling continuous analytic reflection through memo writing.

From the transcriptions, significant statements and quotes were identified to capture insights into the participants' experiences of anxiety during their internships. These statements were then grouped into thematic clusters, which formed the basis for a narrative account of the participants' experiences. Finally, a composite description was developed to encapsulate the essence of the phenomenon, emphasising shared elements of the participants' journeys. The entire process of data analysis was guided by the phenomenological framework proposed by Moustakas (1994).

4. Findings

Study findings indicate that participants in the study experienced five types of challenges, which are discussed below.

4.1 Adjustment to School Environment

Adjusting or getting familiar with the school environment during a counselling internship can be significantly challenging. Each school has unique norms, values, and operating methods that shape its working culture. Besides, this gradual process of adjustment involves observation, adaptation, and a willingness to integrate into the norms and values of the school. Participant 1 shared that:

“It is challenging because it is difficult for me to get to know and adapt to new people unless they approach me first. Thus, I try to make the first move by approaching teachers in the teacher's room. If there are school events, I try to communicate with other teachers. Thus, they acknowledge our presence at the school”.

As for participant 2, she indicated the importance of observing and examining the appropriate approach while working with school administrators. This is to strengthen the quality and productivity of work. For instance, she said:

“When I did reflection ... as a trainee counsellor, we must observe the situation around us. So, I take that experience as a lesson for me. When coming into others’ place (internship site), try to observe the surroundings and the school administration.”

Next, participant 4 mentioned that her first two weeks of internship were hectic because she needed to adjust to the school setting. She unexpectedly found herself involved in managing a disciplinary issue, which is a counsellor’s responsibility. She said:

“The second week, I jumped into a hectic week because suddenly, there was a case at the school. That case involves discipline and indirectly involves counselling as well. So, it was hectic because we had to handle the disciplinary issue. We need to conduct individual sessions for 24 to 25 students within three days. That is why my internship was hectic.”

4.2 Unsupportive Working Environment

Completing counselling hours in a school setting with a limited number of students is a disadvantage for counsellors-in-training. Among the four participants, participant 3 expressed that she had a very challenging internship experience because she chose the wrong school to complete her internship. She said:

“I think I chose the wrong school because the school only has one session. Then, the school has 600 students only. So, we are struggling to get clients there. Because the counsellor also must conduct counselling sessions with clients as she needs to complete her counselling hours. Therefore, all of us engage with the same clients. So difficult. For me, finding clients is very challenging.”

Furthermore, the study participants encountered challenges while working with teachers who imposed strict restrictions and would only allow them to call students for sessions outside their class times. The situation hinders the participant from executing her counselling activities.

“Some teachers would not allow it. She wanted us to call the students during other teachers’ time. So, it is quite difficult to bring the student out from classes.”

In addition, she also disclosed that the school has poor counselling facilities, and she must conduct sessions in other places, such as the library. Inadequate access to counselling facilities posed challenges in executing her counselling services. For example:

“The counselling facilities at the school are inadequate. The school only has one room for counselling sessions. Individual and group sessions are conducted in the same room.”

Next, the conflict was continuous as she had to fight for that counselling room with her internship buddy. Although they created a schedule to ensure both had equal time to use that room, her internship buddy never followed it. Hence, she had to embrace her intolerant partner throughout this internship journey. She stated:

“We prepared a schedule to use the counselling room. I cannot do a session in the counselling room, although it is my turn to use the room. My internship buddy never follows the schedule.”

What is the point of having a schedule if she does not follow it? When she wants to use the room, I must give in.”

4.3 Professional Issues

Transitioning from theoretical learning to real-life practice can be a significant challenge for students entering their initial placement in counselling. Working with real clients means facing the complexities of human emotions, diverse backgrounds, and unpredictable situations, which are different from the theoretical knowledge learned in a classroom. For instance, participant 4 commented:

“When we learned about counselling in a classroom, we did not have the experience of dealing with real clients. We just listened to those lecturers’ experiences. However, when we face a real situation, to some extent, it helps me act according to the situation.”

The conflicts of professional practices include difficulty approaching clients, handling difficult clients, such as resistant and manipulative clients, working with different genders and language barriers, and struggling to trace clients’ issues. Some of the participants admitted that they faced difficulty working with opposite-gender clients due to a lack of interpersonal skills, which limited their competency. Besides, feelings of inadequacy while working with different genders caused self-doubts about the effectiveness of their counselling services.

For example, Participant 1 disclosed that:

“I have no idea how to handle male clients. I always overlook the opportunity. It can be a valuable experience for me to handle male clients and their cases. Because if I only conduct sessions with female clients, my experience is limited.”

Similarly, participant 3 said:

“I only conducted sessions with female students because I will pass male clients to my internship buddy. I cannot handle it and feel awkward with them.”

4.4 Struggling with Main Duties

The study participants encountered various challenges in fulfilling their main duties as trainee counsellors. Among the challenges are struggling to prepare counselling documentation, searching for clients, conducting counselling sessions, and organising counselling programs. Hence, they were stressed on preparing the documentation and fulfilling the required number of clients’ contact hours. For example, participant 1 commented:

“Because the hours to be completed are a lot, we must go to relief classes. Then, we must conduct sessions to complete the counselling hours and search for clients.”

Participant 3 remarked that having organised initial planning is crucial to avoid insufficient counselling hours.

“We must target how many clients to be counselled and how many sessions to be conducted. So, we really need to plan what we need to do to complete the counselling hours. Otherwise, we will be in trouble and will not have sufficient counselling hours.”

The study participants also faced financial challenges related to expenses associated with their internship training. The financial burden affected those with limited financial resources and created financial stress. As for participant 2, she mentioned the struggle and feeling overwhelmed to complete all the counselling documentation and financial problems.

“Initially, I was keen to do the documentation, but only counselling students know the reality. It is very difficult. I am running out of tears, I do not know what to say, and running out of money. We were not paid. Oh God! It is hard to prepare. My body was tired. I worked hard for the first two weeks to update. It was hard to prepare the whole document. Printing and binding required lots of money. Many things need to be prepared.”

4.5 Additional Duties

As justified by the study participants, they were also occupied with additional duties aside from their primary duties. The duties include going to relief classes and attending meetings, being actively involved in school programs, escorting students to programs outside school, and fulfilling the requests of other teachers. The mentioned duties can be either a burden and a challenge for them or positively impact their learning and professional development. Sometimes, this may lead to an excessive workload and distract them from their primary duties and responsibilities as a counsellor in training. All participants shared their experiences and concerns in doing jobs unrelated to counselling. Participant 1 shared her experiences in handling students during relief classes:

“Handling relief classes is challenging. We do not know what to do. When we entered the relief classes, the students were too noisy. How to handle them? Handling relief classes where students like to sleep, be noisy, play in class, fight, and so on. So that was a challenge for us.”

Apart from that, engaging in non-counselling tasks reduced the study participants’ time to practice their counselling skills and do counselling reflection, which is essential. Participant 3 mentioned that she had to handle many relief classes, which was a burden to her, and this created additional stress as she had to balance with her counselling work. She said:

“There were too many relief classes that we must handle. We must inform the school administrators that we have counselling sessions or programs. This is to ensure that we can conduct the counselling sessions and programs to fulfil our internship requirements. Otherwise, if we do not inform them, they will allocate us with many relief classes to be handled.”

Participant 2 shared the dilemma in fulfilling the requests of teachers at the internship site. The dilemma happened because the advice she received from her site supervisor contradicted her university supervisor’s advice. It was challenging for her to choose which advice to follow. She stated:

“Teachers at my internship site usually give tasks. They know I’m good at making videos. They asked me, can you help us to make a video for a language competition? It is not related to counselling. Should I take it or reject it? They also asked, can I be the mentor for a student to enter a competition? My site supervisor advised me not to say no. However, in supervision class, our lecturer said if it is not your job, do not do it. It is a dilemma. What should I do? The site supervisor is the one who will give marks for the internship.”

5. Discussion

Study participants perceived that adjusting to the school environment during a counselling internship is challenging (Arrieta et al., 2021). Besides, this continuous process requires observation, adaptation, and willingness to assimilate into the school's norms and values throughout the internship journey. Even though study participants found it challenging to approach new people, they managed to face the challenges since they were aware of the essence of establishing rapport with the teachers at school. Furthermore, using an appropriate approach while working with higher authority in a school setting is crucial to maximising the quality and efficiency of tasks and preserving a good and healthy relationship with the school community.

Next, adjustment is also challenging when it involves unexpected events that require the study participants to adjust quickly so that they can engage with the school community and meet their expectations (Abdul Rahim et al., 2021). Therefore, a study by Moss et al. (2014) revealed that counsellor trainees often face difficulty reconciling perceived expectations with the realities of practice. As proposed by Arrieta et al. (2021) and Lent (2013), trainees should constantly be mindful of and be prepared for uncertainties. Addressing this struggle through supportive training environments, realistic expectations, and continuous professional growth is crucial for developing competent counsellors. As adjustment progressed, trainees stated that they experienced struggles and burnout throughout the internships, yet this experience improved their professional growth and identity as school counsellors. As highlighted in the literature, emotional fatigue is a significant factor of burnout that threatens their psychological well-being (Sharma et al., 2023) and the self-efficacy of trainees (Bardhoshi et al., 2022). Certainly, supportive supervision, self-care practices, peer support, and professional development are essential for fostering resilience and ensuring the success and well-being of future counsellors.

The research findings also revealed that a participant was more significantly impacted during the internship compared to the other three. She described her experience as extremely challenging due to her mistake in selecting a school with an unsupportive work environment. She admitted that doing a site visit before applying for an internship placement is essential to prepare for the uncertainties. The challenges that she had to encounter in her internship setting included a limited number of students at school to fulfil client contact hours, working with certain teachers who imposed strict restrictions and an intolerant partner, and inadequate access to counselling facilities to conduct counselling sessions, constraint the trainee from performing her counselling activities well (Kassim & Rais, 2021). On the other hand, Ku Johari and Amat (2019) revealed that comfortable and conducive counselling facilities, including the right room size for individual and group sessions, play a significant role in job satisfaction for counsellors to support effective counselling practices, contributing to a professional environment, and positively impact both client outcomes and counsellors' well-being.

6. Conclusion

This phenomenological study supplemented existing contemporary literature on counselling students' lived experiences as they prepare themselves to enter the workforce. Considering that the concept of preparedness for practice is vital to the proficiency and credibility of higher education programs in professional fields, career preparedness has been described as important since it allows graduates to experience positive potential career performance, career success, and career growth. Study participants emphasised the significance of internship placement courses for trainee counsellors as they offer a dynamic learning environment where theoretical knowledge is transformed into practical skills in preparation for entering the workforce. Apart

from that, this training curriculum serves as a platform for trainee counsellors to enhance their knowledge, skills, and techniques to become professional counsellors. Indeed, the findings strongly indicate the benefits of career preparedness for trainee counsellors, and sufficient preparation will assist them in overcoming career-related challenges.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to express their appreciation and gratitude to the Kulliyah of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia, for funding this publication via the Hassan Langgulung Research Grant.

References

- Abdul Rahim, N. S., Wan Jaafar, W. M., & Mohamad Arsad, N. (2021). Career maturity and career decision-making self-efficacy as predictors of career adaptability among students in foundation program, Universiti Putra Malaysia. *Asian Journal of University Education*, 17(4), 464–474. <https://doi.org/10.24191/ajue.v17i4.16181>
- Arifin, S., Noah, S. M., Jaafar, W. M. W., & Zakaria, N. S. (2019). The influence of the role conflict and role ambiguity towards counseling competency in supervision among trainee counselors in Malaysia. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 8(4), 77–89. <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v8-i4/6437>
- Arrieta, G. S., Valeria, J. R., & Belen, V. R. (2021). Counseling challenges in the new normal: Inputs for quality guidance and counseling program. *Counsellia: Jurnal Bimbingan Dan Konseling*, 11(1), 71–85. <https://doi.org/10.25273/counsellia.v11i1.8802>
- Aten, J. D., Madson, M. B., Rice, A., & Chamberlain, A. K. (2008). Postdisaster supervisor strategies for promoting supervisee self-care: Lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology*, 2(2), 75–82. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1931-3918.2.2.75>
- Atlay, M., & Harris, R. (2000). An institutional approach to developing students' "transferable" skills. *Innovations in Education and Training International*, 37(1), 76–84. <https://doi.org/10.1080/135580000362115>
- Bardhoshi, G., Um, B., Niles, J., Li, H., Han, E., & Brown, M. (2022). Novice school counselors' burnout profiles and professional experiences: A mixed-methods study. *Professional School Counseling*, 26(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X221126686>
- Barnett, J. E., Baker, E. K., Elman, N. S., & Schoener, G. R. (2007). In pursuit of wellness: The self-care imperative. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 38(6), 603–612. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0735-7028.38.6.603>
- Barrie, S. C. (2006). Understanding what we mean by the generic attributes of graduates. *Higher Education*, 51(2), 215–241. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-004-6384-7>
- Baynit, M., & Ngussa, B. M. (2021). Effect of field attachment experiences on students' career preparedness in higher learning institutions: A case of selected universities in Arusha. *International Journal of Educational Policy Research and Review*, 8(5), 182–191. <https://doi.org/10.15739/IJEPRR.21.020>
- Bernama. (2022, May 25). Malaysia implements 5 initiatives to address drop in graduates' marketability. *New Straits Times*. <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2022/05/799293/malaysia-implements-5-initiatives-address-drop-graduates-marketability>
- Biju, S., Shetty, K., & Fitzsimmons, J. R. (2021). Perceived barriers to career progression amongst female students: evidence from India and the United Arab Emirates. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 36(6), 697–713. <https://doi.org/10.1108/GM-06-2020-0197>

- Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods* (5th ed.). Pearson.
- Cameron, J. (2021). *Experiences of community college health professions graduates that affect career preparedness for middle-skilled healthcare occupations* [Doctoral dissertation, National American University].
- Campagna, C. G., & Curtis, G. J. (2007). So worried I don't know what to be: Anxiety is associated with increased career indecision and reduced career certainty. *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 17(1), 91–96. <https://doi.org/10.1375/ajgc.17.1.91>
- Casner-Lotto, J., & Barrington, L. (2006). Are they really ready to work? Employers' perspectives on the basic knowledge and applied skills of new entrants to the 21st century U.S. Workforce. In *Partnership for 21st Century Skills* (Vol. 1). Massachusetts Avenue NW Suite 700.
- Chang, C. N., Patterson, C. A., Vanderford, N. L., & Evans, T. M. (2021). Modeling individual development plans, mentoring support, and career preparedness relationships among Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) trainees in the life sciences. *F1000Research*, 10, 626. <https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.53705.1>
- Clarke, M. (2018). Rethinking graduate employability: The role of capital, individual attributes and context. *Studies in Higher Education*, 43(11), 1923–1937. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2017.1294152>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, D. J. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th Edition). Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2024). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Deer, L. K., Gohn, K., & Kanaya, T. (2018). Anxiety and self-efficacy as sequential mediators in US college students' career preparation. *Education + Training*, 60(2), 185–197. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-07-2017-0096>
- Flagge, A. G., & Estis, J. M. (2022). The effectiveness of near-peer mentoring and clinical laboratory experiences in undergraduate student perceptions of career preparedness and the profession of audiology. *Teaching and Learning in Communication Sciences and Disorders*, 6(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.30707/tlcsd6.1.1649037808.631199>
- Gibson, D. M., Dollarhide, C. T., & Moss, J. M. (2010). Professional identity development: A grounded theory of transformational tasks of new counselors. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 50(1), 21–38. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6978.2010.tb00106.x>
- Hart, P. D. (2008). *How should colleges assess and improve student learning? Employers' views on the accountability challenge*. The Association of American Colleges and Universities.
- Işık, E. (2012). The relationship of career decision self-efficacy, trait anxiety, and affectivity among undergraduate students. *Psychological Reports*, 111(3), 805–813. <https://doi.org/10.2466/01.09.10.PR0.111.6.805-813>
- Kassim, S. K., & Rais, H. (2021). Counselors' supervision: What helps to express their thoughts? *IJUM Journal of Educational Studies*, 9(2), 31–41. <https://doi.org/10.31436/ijes.v9i2.350>
- Kendricks, K. D., Arment, A. A., Nedunuri, K. V., & Lowell, C. A. (2019). Aligning best practices in student success and career preparedness: An exploratory study to establish pathways to STEM careers for undergraduate minority students. *Journal of Research in Technical Careers*, 3(1), 27–48. <https://doi.org/10.9741/2578-2118.1034>
- Kim, K. H. (2018). Influence of personality traits, social support, and career decision self-efficacy on career preparation behavior in nursing college students. *The Journal of the*

- Korea Contents Association*, 18(3), 399–408. <https://doi.org/10.5392/JKCA.2018.18.03.399>
- Krishnan, I. A., Govindasamy, M., Ramalingam, S., Ching, H. S., & Muthutamilselvan, K. (2020). Preparedness for the world of work among Malaysian diploma students in a local institution. *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH)*, 5(4), 56–70. <https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v5i4.388>
- Ku Johari, K. S., & Amat, M. I. (2019). Malaysian school counsellors' challenges in job description, job satisfaction and competency. *Religación*, 4(19), 93–99.
- Lent, R. W. (2013). Career-life preparedness: Revisiting career planning and adjustment in the new workplace. *Career Development Quarterly*, 61(1), 2–14. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-0045.2013.00031.x>
- Mansor, N., & Yusoff, W. M. W. (2013). Feelings and experiences of counseling practicum students and implications for counseling supervision. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, 3(7), 731–736. <https://doi.org/10.5901/jesr.2013.v3n7p731>
- Marciniak, J., Hirschi, A., Johnston, C. S., & Haenggli, M. (2021). Measuring career preparedness among adolescents: Development and validation of the career resources questionnaire—Adolescent version. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 29(1), 164–180. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072720943838>
- Marshall, C., Rossman, G. B., & Blanco, G. (2021). *Designing qualitative research* (7th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Miller, A. D., & Rottinghaus, P. J. (2014). Career indecision, meaning in life, and anxiety. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 22(2), 233–247. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072713493763>
- Moon, M., & Kim, S. (2017). The mediating effect of self-leadership in the relationship between career decision level and career preparation behavior of nursing students. *Journal of Health Informatics and Statistics*, 42(2), 162–169. <https://doi.org/10.21032/jhis.2017.42.2.162>
- Morden, Z. (2022, June 1). While employment grows, fresh grads say still jostling for full-time jobs with retrenched workers. *Malaymail*. <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2022/06/01/while-employment-grows-fresh-grads-say-still-jostling-for-full-time-jobs-with-retrenched-workers/9989>
- Moss, J. M., Gibson, D. M., & Dollarhide, C. T. (2014). Professional identity development: A grounded theory of transformational tasks of counselors. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 92(1), 3–12. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2014.00124.x>
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Sage Publications.
- O'Brien, K., Moore, A., Hartley, P., & Dawson, D. (2013). Lessons about work readiness from final year paramedic students in an Australian university. *Australasian Journal of Paramedicine*, 10, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.33151/ajp.10.4.52>
- Pierce, L. M. (2016). Overwhelmed with the burden of being myself: A phenomenological exploration of the existential experiences of counselors-in-training. *The Journal of Humanistic Counseling*, 55(2), 136–150. <https://doi.org/10.1002/johc.12030>
- Rønnestad, M. H., & Skovholt, T. M. (2003). The Journey of the Counselor and Therapist: Research Findings and Perspectives on Professional Development. *Journal of Career Development*, 30(1), 5–44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089484530303000102>
- Schweinsberg, A., Mundy, M. E., Dyer, K. R., & Garivaldis, F. (2021). Psychology education and work readiness integration: A call for research in Australia. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 623353. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.623353>
- Sharma, G., Yukhymenko-Lescroart, M., & Bernal-Arevalo, K. (2023). Counseling students' experiences and interpretations of purpose development. *Heliyon*, 9(3), e13760. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e13760>

- Skorikov, V. (2007). Continuity in adolescent career preparation and its effects on adjustment. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 70(1), 8–24. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2006.04.007>
- Suarez, A. L., Elliott, A., Behrend, B. A., & Carver, C. L. (2022). The effects of COVID-19 on counselor-in training resilience: A case study. *Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision*, 15(2), 19.
- Super, D. E., & Hall, D. T. (1978). Career development: Exploration and planning. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 29(1), 333–372. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.ps.29.020178.002001>
- Thompson, E. H., Frick, M. H., & Trice-Black, S. (2012). Counselor-in-training perceptions of supervision practices related to self-care and burnout. *The Professional Counselor*, 1(3), 152–162. <https://doi.org/10.15241/eht.1.3.152>
- Tyre, Y., Griffin, M., & Simmons, R. T. (2016). Building resiliency in counselors in training for counselors educators. *Alabama Counseling Association Journal*, 41(1), 25–44.
- Wong, X. (2021, March 10). *Are Fresh Graduates In Malaysia Really Career-Ready?* LinkedIn. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/fresh-graduates-malaysia-really-career-ready-xinia-wong>