

A Conceptual Paper on Factors That Affect Intention of Gap Year

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Abstract

This is a conceptual paper to study the effects of factors on intention of taking gap year. The study reviews literature on four factors that play role on taking gap year. These factors are personal growth motivations, stress level, the student's uncertainty regarding their future education plans, their parents' attitudes regarding taking a gap year and the socioeconomic status of the student's family. Studies and surveys related gap year were analyzed and discussed throughout the paper in the context of factors that influence gap year.

Keywords

Gap Year, Student, Malaysia

Introduction

The transition from high school is a major developmental milestone and it has different pathways such as entering the labor market, undertaking tertiary vocational education or traineeships, or by enrolling in university in anticipation of fulfilling entry requirements into high prestige occupations. During the last decades, the transition to university increasing and become popular among young people. This is because globalization, technological advancement, and changed demand characteristics on the labor market that required people to further their studies in university level. For example, UNESCO provides data for Malaysia from 1979 to 2016. The average value for Malaysia during that period was 12.25 percent with a minimum of 3.82 percent in 1979 and a maximum of 44.12 percent in 2016.

Traditionally, university entry proceeded directly after high school, however, this pathway has become increasingly diversified, as there are a growing number of individuals who do not enter university directly after schooling and instead take a gap-year period (Crawford & Cribb, 2012). The American Gap Association defines gap year as, "an experiential semester or year 'on,' typically taken between high school and college in order to deepen practical, professional, and personal awareness" (American Gap Association, "About"). The 'gap year' is defined as a time between the end of school and the beginning of further studies in which young people engage in a variety of activities, including paid or voluntary work (Stehlik,2010). Taking a gap year—a year or perhaps two between completing secondary school and enrolling in a university course—is common in some countries such as United Kingdom, Australia and United State. Students are more

likely than in the past to delay entry into post-secondary education (Hango, 2011). This phenomenon seems to be growing in Malaysia. In 2017, the Higher Education Ministry has implemented the Gap Year programme starting September to allow undergraduates to take a year off from studying to pursue their interests. There are eight public universities include Universiti Utara Malaysia, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia and Universiti Malaysia Sabah agree and will implement this programme. Besides that, student from Malaysia also interested in gap-year programme which indicated that this gap-year programme can gain more work experience apart from just reading from books and learning things during lecture sessions (Rahim, 2017).

A gap year is important for student because it allows them to gain experience and build connections, do volunteer work, enlist in a public service department, and or do something they are really passionate about. Nowadays, the current generation of student more likely to be digitally-based, fast-paced and require greater depth and breadth of knowledge. Taking a gap-year during their tertiary schooling might prepare them adequately for labor market. Previous studies have indicated that gap years has positive effect on academic performance, language development, personal growth and career attainment (Clagett, 2012; Knight, 2014; Stehlik, 2010; O'Shea, 2011; Lyons et al., 2012; Nieman, 2013; Walsh, 2016). Besides that, there are numbers of top university encourage their student have gap year. However, there are limited research in Malaysia on students' perception of a gap year especially in Malaysia. Thus, this study is to investigate whether student of Malaysia intent to take a gap-year before or during their schooling in university and what is the behavior factor that inhibits or encourage them to take a gap- year.

Previous studies have used the TPB to predict behavioral intentions in relation to various events, such as presenting at class lectures (White et al. 2011) and attaining certain academic achievements (Manstead and van Eekelen 1998). However, limited number of studies have used theory of planned behavior to explain and predict student intent to take a gap-year. There are three predictor variables of the theory of planned behaviour are themselves considered to be underpinned by individuals' beliefs about the behaviour. Attitude is governed by behavioural beliefs (beliefs and evaluations regarding the outcomes of the behaviour), subjective norm by normative beliefs (beliefs about the expectations of others and the motivation to comply with these) and perceived behavioural control by control beliefs (factors that might facilitate or limit the behaviour and the importance of these factors).The present study will use theory of Planned Behavior to investigate the factor that lead to intention of taking a gap year.

Literature Review

Gap year

The gap year concept originated and developed in the United Kingdom which began in the latter part of the 17th century. At the beginning, the earlier concept of gap-year is a period of travel to see the world as part of their education, before beginning their careers (O'Shea, 2011).

The gap- year that used in recent literature are inconsistent. For example, some studies indicated that gap year as period of time period of time spent away from formal, full-time studies after high school graduation is considered a gap year (Tomkowicz and Bushnik, 2003; Ferrer and Menendez, 2014; Hango, 2008; Lovstrand, 2015). But some studies defined gap-year as youth time off for

the purpose of personal growth, personal development and learning. (Greenspon, J., 2017; Hoe, 2014).

In the present study, youth considered take a gap-year only if their time off from full time education, the length of delay between high school graduation and entry into post- secondary education is between 3-12 months long, either the youth already been accepted to a higher learning institution or intent to apply for enrollment in university, and the purpose of their activities during gap-year is for personal growth, learning and skills improvement.

Recently, there are many stakeholders support and promote gap-year program such as industry, university and government (Martin, 2010; Simpson, 2005; Rahim, 2017). For example, Iris Yusof, ex-minister of Higher Education Malaysia stated that gap-year programme can improve student holistic skill and also prepare the student for employment. Previous research also indicated that gap-year programme will improve personal growth academic performance and employment and earning (Crawford and Cribb, 2012; O'Shea, 2011; Martin,2010; Ferrer and Menendez, 2014; Hango, 2008). For example, Hango (2011) stated that student that have taken a year gap can engage in self –discovery and and become better citizens from having experiences outside of the post-secondary education system, which benefits society as well. Besides that, previous study also indicated that youth with higher marks in high school delayed entry to post-secondary education for a shorter period of time than youth with lower marks in high school (Hango , 2011).

Theory of Planned Behavior

An extension of the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen 1975), the theory of planned behaviour is a model that aims to predict and explain human behaviour (Ajzen 1988, 1991). Central to the theory is the premise that engagement in a particular behaviour is governed by two factors: an individual's intentions and their perceived behavioural control (an individual's confidence in their ability to carry out behaviour). Intentions are a central factor in the theory and its predecessor and summarise an individual's motivation to act, for example, an individual's motivation to study physics in post-compulsory education. The TPB has received considerable attention in the literature and has met with some degree of success in predicting various behaviors in an expectancy value model of attitude-behavior relationships (Ajzen 1988, 1991; Cheng et al. 2005; Tolma et al. 2006). One of the advantages of the TPB model is its ability to identify the determinants of behaviors. Thus, theory of planned behavior is suitable to use as guideline to identify the factor of intention taking gap year.

Factor that influence gap-year programme

There are a number of factors that play a role in youth's decision on whether to take a gap year before their post-secondary education. There are several common factors that are cited in the literature and assesses the evidence for how each factor influences youth in their decision on whether to take a gap year. There are personal growth motivations, the student's academic performance in high school, their academic motivation and aspiration, the student's uncertainty regarding their future education plans, their parents' attitudes regarding taking a gap year, the socioeconomic status of the student's family and the financial constraints they face.

Personal Growth and Gap year

Nieman (2013) stated that student often explain that they gain clearer direction in life after they spend a gap year. Besides, they become more responsible and independent after taking gap year. They know how to deal with responsibilities such as being punctual, completing tasks on time, maintaining certain standards that a job entails, and making their own decisions without being able to ask their parents' advice, had enhanced their ability to manage time effectively. Besides that, previous studies (O'Shea, 2011; Hulstrand, 2010) also indicated that student taking gap year programme like volunteering, intership and others activities can make them more confidence. Hango (2011) indicated that the gap year programme will allowed student had experience outside of the secondary and post-secondary education systems. It will lead student have different perspective and more understanding about themselves and the world around them. (Hango,2011). Moreover, student in Malaysia who taking gap year programme also stated that taking a break before enroll in university can improve the confidence and more understand about themselves (Jeannette, Luwita, and Khor, 2014). These personal growth and development can lead them to have better preparation for university, life and for world of work. Thus, the present study proposed H1: Personal growth have a significant relationship with intention of taking gap year.

Uncertainly Regarding Future Education

Uncertainly Regarding Future Education also one of the motivator that lead student to take a gap year. Mey (2002) stated that majority of students do not know what they need to study or not sure what kind of course suitable for them. Therefore, taking a gap year might give them time to consider their educational and career plan. Besides that, Niema, 2013 stated that student who take a break before enroll to university due to they want to avoid taking a costly decision to enroll in a program that may not fit their goals. Previous study also reported that students does not immediately enroll into college because they need to classify their future plan example in terms of their program of study, career goals, and where to live. Moreover, a study from Australia also showed that one of the motivator that lead student to take a gap is uncertainly regarding future education. They need more time to explore themselves. For example, one of the student sparked her interest in teaching after she join the volunteering program (Jeannette et al, 2014). Davies, Mangan, & Hughes (2008) and Wells, Ryan and Cassie (2012) have examined student will take a break when they have uncertain plan for their future life. The study of Martin, 2010 showed that there is relationship between postschool uncertainty and gap year intention. Based on previous studies, we can be concluded that taking the time to think seems to be an important motivation for many gappers who are unsure what their career goals are or what educational plan best fits them.

Thus, the study proposed

H2 There is relationship between Uncertainly Regarding Future Education and intention of gap year.

Parental Attitudes

Parent plays important role in determine intention of their children take gap year. Most of the student are less likely to take a gap year during pre-university time if their parents have high expectations that they need to go higher level of education immediately (Hango, 2011). In Malaysia, parents are worry about their children will not go to higher education if they allow their children to take time off (Hana, 2016). Based on case study of Hana (2016), one of student failed to take a gap year to explore herself because her parents not allowed her to do that and need her to

go higher education immediately.) In study of Hango (2011), the finding showed that students talk about their future education with their parents more frequency, the length of the student taking break become shorter. It can be indicated that parent attitude might influence the decision of the student to take gap. According to Crawford and Cribb (2012), parents are the one expect their children to pursue higher education are more supportive of their children taking a gap year. Another study (Jones,2004) also stated that parental view of gap year and its component activities is an important factor influencing many students' opinion due to parent are the one who provide them financial support, mentality support and authority. In conclude, parental attitude can influence the intention of student taking gap. Thus, present study proposed,
H3 There is relationship between parental attitude and intention gap year.

Family Socioeconomic Status

Family socioeconomic status of student also influence their decision of taking gap year. According to Crawford and Cribb (2012), students who plan on taking a gap year tend to come from families with middle to upper socioeconomic status. This finding also supported by (Lumsden& Stanwick,2012) which indicated that student from middle or upper class could afford take a gap year for travelling or volunteering. However, there is inconsistent finding with previous research (Crawford and Cribb, 2012; Lumsden& Stanwick,2012). Goldrick-Rab and Han (2011) found that of American high school graduates who come from households in the top quintile of the socioeconomic distribution seldom postpone post-secondary enrolment compare to those students come from lowest quintile. It suggested that students from families with a lower socioeconomic status delay enrolling in post-secondary education more by necessity than by choice. Some of the students who take a gap year because of they want to earn money to support their university tuition fee (Niema, 2013; Wu et al,2015). Besides that, Jeannette also indicated that some of the students in Malaysia will take a gap year because their family can't support the university tuition fee. Thus, they need to work to gain the money. The inconsistent findings lead researcher to further classify the relationship between socioeconomic status and intention gap year.

Thus, present study proposed:

H4: There is relationship between family socioeconomic status and intention of gap year.

Stress

One of reason that student take a break because of they want to release stress. Stress level of student getting higher especially in High school. According to Nieman (2013), student are often tired of studying upon completion of their school careers and they would like to have a break between school and university. Jeannette et.al (2014) also indicated that gap year student in Malaysia spend the break time to decompress. Haigler & Nelson (2005) also indicated that the major reason of student taking a break before enroll university is they burnout from high school. For the high school students, they need to take an important test to get a school –leaving certificate. For example, in Malaysia, if they failed to score on Sijil Persekolahan Malaysia (SPM). They might not have certificate and will influence student to get a good university. Therefore, student from high school will be more stressful compare to other level. Thus, the present study proposed

H5: There is relationship between stress and intentional of taking gap year

Below is the summary of the literature review

Table 1: Summary of literature review

Factor	Literature
Personal Growth	O'Shea (2011); Hulstrand (2010); Hango (2011a), Nieman,2013
Uncertainly Regarding Future Education	O'Shea (2011); Wells and Lynch (2012); Crawford and Cribb (2012); Lumsden and Stanwick (2012), Martin (2010), Nieman,2013
Parental Attitudes	Hango (2011); Crawford and Cribb (2012), Hana (2016)
Family Socioeconomic Status and Financial Constraints	Hango and de Broucker (2007); Goldrick-Rab and Han (2011); Wu, Pearce, Huang & Fan (2015)
Stress	Haigler & Nelson, 2005, Nieman,2013

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

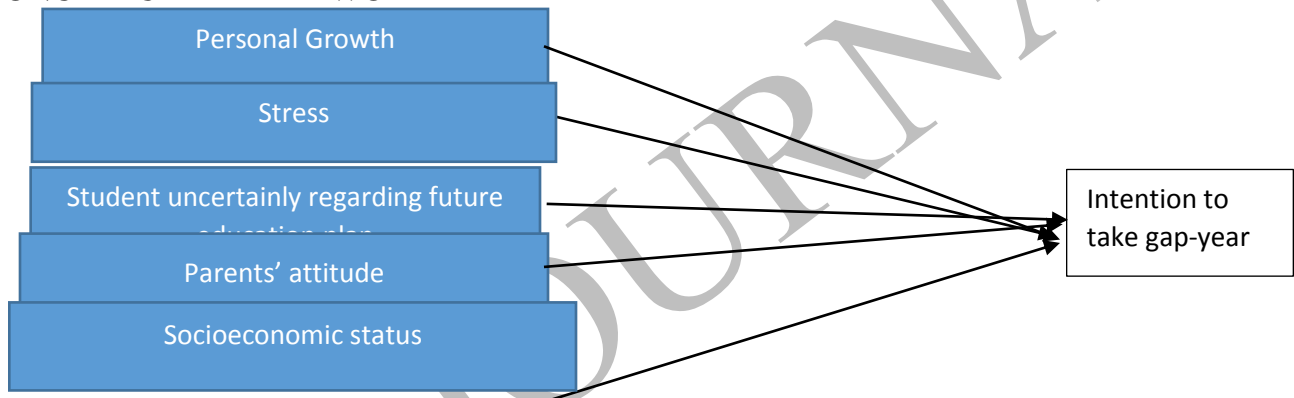


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

To translate these concepts to the present study, it might be contended that the gap year can be seen as an opportunity for young people to develop clarity around university plans. Based on literature, there are five major factor that influence intention of student taking gap. The independent variables of the study are personal growth motivations, stress level, the student's uncertainty regarding their future education plans, their parents' attitudes regarding taking a gap year and the socioeconomic status of the student's family. The dependent variable is intent to take gap-year.

Conclusion

Based on the review, we found out there is lack of study to investigate the factor of intention taking gap year in Malaysia. Most of studies are from Canada, Australia and United Kingdom. Based on the review, we found that the main reason of intentional taking gap year is uncertainly regarding their future education plans. Total have five studies supported that student taking gap year because of they do not know what they need to study and what program that need to investigate. In Malaysia,

the concept of gap year getting more attention compare to last decade, but there are limited people understand about gap year. For example, parents in Malaysia restrict their children to taking a gap year because they worries about their children do not continue study if taking gap year. In conclusion, the contribution of the present study is to clarified the reason that encourage student intent to take gap-year before or during entering tertiary education. Since Higher Education Minister allow student to take one year off from studying to pursue their interests, the present study contribute on whether the new implementation is accepted by SPM students.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the literature the following recommendations for future research are below:

Recommendation 1: Further research should be conducted to test the factor of intention of taking break.

Recommendation 2: Further research should be conducted in Malaysia.

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