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A phenomenological study on career preparedness of final year students in post-pandemic

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ABSTRACT

One of the major challenges university students often face before graduating is preparing to transition into the workforce, a task made even more demanding after the Covid-19 pandemic.This phenomenological study explores how final-year students describe their career preparedness experiences in the post-pandemic era. In-depth interviews were conducted with four final-year students at a Malaysian public university. They were selected through a purposive sampling technique. The interview data were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed five themes related to the students' career preparedness experiences: expectations and realities, exposure to real work settings, promoting positive outcomes via preparation, development of professional identity, and acquisition of critical skills. The study recommends collaboration with selected secondary schools in exposing students to various client issues before practicum and internship training to further develop their counselling competencies and increase their career preparedness level.

Keywords: career preparedness; counselling internship; counsellors-in-training; final year students; post-pandemic

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INTRODUCTION

Career preparedness is one of the crucial developmental tasks that need to be developed in late adolescence, from 18 until 24 years old (Savickas et al., 2002). A focus on adolescents' career preparedness in college or university settings is important, considering that the majority of adolescents spend a number of years in education and delay their entry into the world of work. Adequate career preparation in adolescents is crucial because their early career experiences influence their future work experiences (Super & Hall, 1978), and inadequate preparation may lead to career-related issues (Skorikov, 2007). This is in line with Qamaria and Astuti (2021), who found that final-year students who do not have a clear career picture tend to feel confused, lack confidence, and are at risk of being unemployed or working in jobs that do not match their educational background.

Indeed, the need to prepare balanced and holistic graduates to enter the workforce is strongly emphasised in Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 for Higher Education. Furthermore, the Ministry of Higher Education has entrusted the career centres of Malaysian public universities with the responsibility of implementing initiatives to ensure that Malaysian graduates possess the mental readiness, skills, knowledge, experience, and competitiveness necessary to capitalise on opportunities post-Covid-19.

As Malaysia moves towards post-pandemic era, fresh graduates are struggling to find full-time and permanent basis jobs, 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). In December 2023, there were 307,200 unemployed Malaysians between the ages of 15 and 24, constituting an unemployment rate of 10.6 per cent. To put this figure in perspective, these adolescents make up roughly 76 per cent of Malaysia's total unemployed population, which stands at 567,800 (The Star, 2024). Among these unemployed adolescents, 90,000 are graduates (Centre for Future Labour Market Studies, 2023).

On April 7, 2015, former Prime Minister Dato' Sri Mohammad Najib bin Tun Abdul Razak launched the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 for Higher Education, which underscored the importance of cultivating well-rounded graduates ready for the workforce. Additionally, the Ministry of Higher Education has tasked career centres in every public university with the responsibility of implementing initiatives to ensure that graduates possess the mental readiness, skills, knowledge, experience, and competitiveness necessary to capitalise on opportunities post-Covid-19. These initiatives include the KPT-CAP (career advancement planned) generator and the KPT-PACE (professional certificate) generator, targeting final-year students (Bikar et al., 2023). Successful completion of these programs and meeting set criteria guarantees job placement.

Furthermore, the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education is continuously enhancing collaboration between industry and academia in public universities, promoting industry-driven curriculum development (Bikar et al., 2023). As per the ministry's guidance, institutions are urged to address graduate employability. For example, the University of Technology Malaysia conducts career development sessions, provides resources for resume and interview preparation, and facilitates registration for professional qualifications with bodies such as the Board of Engineering Malaysia (BEM) and the Malaysian Board of Technology (MBOT). Moreover, it collaborates with entities like the Malaysia Automotive Robotic and IOT Institute (MARii) and the Malaysia-Japan International Institute of Technologies (MJIT). Additionally, the university seeks to establish networks with domestic and international institutions to access broader information on skills and employment opportunities aligned with graduates' expertise and knowledge. These efforts are important because Mahfud et al. (2021) found that the quality of teaching is a significant antecedent of students' career choice readiness, which means that improving learning quality should also be part of this effort, not only certification programmes.

Despite the various initiatives proposed by the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysian recent graduates perceived lack of readiness to enter the workforce. According to a 2020 survey by Talentbank, many employers expressed concerns about the readiness of local fresh graduates to enter the job market (Wong, 2021). This issue extends beyond Malaysia, as evidenced by a study titled "Graduate Work-Readiness in the Asia-Pacific Region," which examined employer perceptions of fresh graduates in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Australia (Verma et al., 2018). The study revealed a consensus among employers in these countries that fresh graduates lack preparedness for their careers. Specifically, Malaysian graduates are criticised for lack of competence in critical thinking, communication skills, and proficiency in languages, particularly English. Consequently, employers encounter challenges in hiring fresh graduates who possess the requisite qualifications, skills, and personal attributes.

One of the challenges concerning the readiness of graduates for the workforce in Malaysia is the lack of competence in soft skills (Teng et al., 2019). Soft skills encompass a range of abilities, traits, and attitudes that reflect an individual's personality, attitude, and behaviour. Malaysian graduates exhibit incompetency in soft skills, including low self-confidence, ineffective time management, inadequate communication abilities, difficulty in problem-solving, lack of critical thinking, limited interpersonal skills, and deficient leadership capabilities (Nazron et al., 2017). Additionally, feedback from industries underscores concerns about the absence of a positive work ethic, teamwork abilities, decision-making skills, effective communication, and leadership qualities, all of which impact graduate employability in Malaysia (Nazron et al., 2017). In this context, Salim and Darmayanti (2021) showed that social support from teachers and classmates significantly influences students' self-efficacy in making career decisions. This suggests that relational factors, not only technical skills, also shape graduates' readiness.

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The literature also addresses the issue of inadequate English proficiency among graduates (Verma et al., 2018). The inability to communicate effectively in English poses a significant barrier to employment for graduates and presents a major challenge for employers when considering hiring local graduates (Zainuddin et al., 2019). Another concern regarding graduate unemployment in Malaysia is the lack of work experience (Azmi et al., 2018). As noted by Belwal et al. (2017), employers seeking to hire graduates typically expect them to possess some level of practical experience in the field. Work experience stands as a crucial factor many companies consider before deciding to hire local graduates, thus creating a hurdle for recent graduates who often lack substantial professional experience.

Given this concern, some studies in Malaysia have delved into external predictors of career preparedness among university students, including career readiness programs, learning programs and initiatives by the Ministry of Higher Education (Bikar et al., 2023; Musa & Mat Rashid, 2020; Nik Yusoff et al., 2024; Paul et al., 2022). Meanwhile, numerous studies focus on internal predictors of career preparedness, such as critical skills, self-concept, and self-efficacy (Adnan et al., 2021; Balan et al., 2021; Lau et al., 2020; Mani & Wan Mustaffa, 2024; Rachmawati et al., 2024). However, only a small number of studies have ventured into the lived experiences of university students in preparing themselves to enter the world of work (Cameron, 2021; Krishnan et al., 2020). Ratu et al. (2021) also highlighted the need for mentoring programmes on both career and academic dimensions to help students feel more prepared for the world of work, but this has not yet touched on students lived experiences in depth. Hence, the focus of this study is to explore the lived experiences of final-year university students in preparing themselves to enter the world of work. Based on the findings, this study proposed necessary recommendations for the improvement of existing counselling internship practices at Malaysian universities specifically and suggested avenues for future research related to career preparedness among university students.

METHOD

In this study, the phenomenological method of inquiry and analysis was employed to identify and understand the lived experiences of final-year students in preparing themselves to become a school counsellor. A phenomenological approach is relevant for this kind of study as the approach focuses on the meaning of several individuals lived experiences which are related to a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Marshall et al., 2021). Moustakas (1994) stressed that this approach is suitable for this kind of study as it describes "what" participants of the study have experienced phenomenon and "how" they experienced it. In the present study, the researchers explore how final-year students at a Malaysian public university describe their experiences of preparing themselves to become school counsellors.

Participants of this study comprised four final-year students of Bachelor of Education specialised in Guidance and Counselling at a Malaysian public university who went through seven weeks of counselling practicum during the Covid-19 pandemic in semester 3, 2020/2021. Then, they went through their 14 weeks of counselling internship after the Covid-19 pandemic in semester 2, 2021/2022. They were purposefully selected based on five inclusion criteria, which are (a) a final year student at a Malaysian public university located in Klang Valley (b) specialised in Guidance and Counselling, (c) gone through counselling practicum during the Covid-19 pandemic, (d) went through counselling internship after Covid-19 pandemic, and (f) agreed to participate in the study. As suggested by Creswell and Poth (2016), criterion sampling is suitable for phenomenological study as all individuals studied represent people who had experienced the phenomenon.

This study involved four female participants, who were assigned codes as Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, and Participant 4 to ensure confidentiality. Of the four participants, only Participant 1 completed her internship in Selangor, while the others conducted theirs in Kuala Lumpur. Additionally, Participant 4 interned at a Boarding Secondary School, whereas the remaining participants did their internships at National Secondary Schools. Table 1 shows the participants' demographic background.

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Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the study participants

Participants	Gender	Age	Race	Internship site	Internship Site
Participant 1	Female	25	Malay	National Secondary School	Selangor
Participant 2	Female	25	Malay	National Secondary School	Kuala Lumpur
Participant 3	Female	25	Malay	National Secondary School	Kuala Lumpur
Participant 4	Female	25	Malay	Boarding Secondary School	Kuala Lumpur

A set of interview protocols was used to collect data for the study. Four participants of the study were selected using the purposive sampling method. They were virtually interviewed using Google Meet. Throughout the interviews, the researchers employed a semi-structured approach with open-ended questions. Each interview lasted from one to two hours. Prior to the formal interviews, the researchers piloted the interview questions with a student enrolled at a private university. Following this pilot study, researchers refined the interview questions for actual interviews. The recorded interview results were translated into written transcripts and analysed using thematic analysis to obtain related themes and sub-themes.

Each interview was recorded, and the verbal recordings were transcribed post-interview, following the recommendations of Creswell and Creswell (2022). Directly after the interviews, analytic memos were composed to capture reflections and insights, as well as to document the emergence of themes and meanings, in accordance with the suggestions of Bogden and Biklen (2007). The researchers personally transcribed the interviews to maintain ongoing engagement with the data while also maintaining supplementary analytic memos to illustrate the process and their thoughts and reactions to the data.

Based on the interview transcriptions, the researchers identified significant statements, sentences, or quotes that offer insight into the participants' career preparedness experiences. Subsequently, these significant statements were organised into thematic clusters to distil meaning. These themes served as the foundation for crafting a narrative depicting the participants' experiences and the unfolding of those experiences. Finally, a composite description was formulated, encapsulating the essence of the phenomenon by focusing on shared experiences among the participants. Throughout this data analysis process, the researchers adhered to the methodology outlined by Moustakas (1994).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The findings related to participants' career preparedness experiences are organised into five sub-themes, namely, expectations and reality, exposure to real work setting, promoting effective outcomes via preparation, development of professional identity and acquisition of critical skills. Below are detailed descriptions of each sub-theme:

Expectations and reality

The initial stage of internship placement involves participants' expectations of clients' acceptance, interactions with clients and counsellors' responsibilities. As a result, they shared diverse reactions towards their first experience of face-to-face counselling sessions with their clients. They described feelings of nervousness, agitation, awkwardness, unpreparedness, and chaos, yet their experiences resulted in a positive and enriching experience. Participant 1 remarked, "During the first day of the internship, I met the clients. I felt nervous, excited, and agitated. Will they accept me and share their issues?" Moreover, Participant 3 added, "Mentally, I am ready. But, when I go to school, I think I'm not ready. Because I am a counsellor, I must do many things. Not just thinking about approaching clients or completing counselling hours. I also need to do tasks which are not related to counselling."

Their first experiences during face-to-face counselling sessions with clients also have significant impacts on their expectations in building therapeutic relationships with their clients.

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Participants disclosed the differences between the virtual mode of counselling practicum amidst the COVID pandemic and the physical mode of counselling internship after the pandemic impacted them. Since they were used to virtual sessions during practicum, but for an internship, they need to allocate extra effort to adapt to the transition from online to face-to-face counselling sessions. Nevertheless, that nervousness was reduced as they engaged further with their clients. Participant 4 said, "The first day of the internship was chaotic because I needed to go to school and deal with lots of clients' issues. It affected me because I used to conduct virtual sessions during practicum. But for the internship, I must meet clients face-to-face, and to some extent, I feel awkward. But, as time passed, I got used to all of these."

Exposure to real work setting

Counselling internship allows participants of the study to practice their counselling skills with real clients and expose them to real work settings. This experience is meaningful for them to get a clear picture of real working experiences. Participant 1 said, "I enter the world of work and observe the real working environment in a school setting." As for Participant 2, she mentioned, "We got a clear picture of how to conduct school programs and procedures that we need to follow. It was helpful." Participant 4 also shared the same experience, "In fact, when we have been exposed to counselling sessions in a school setting, we get a clear picture that counsellors' responsibilities are huge. The responsibility is not only dealing with problematic students but more than that."

Promoting positive outcomes via preparation

Preparation does promote positive outcomes for counselling processes. Being systematic is vital to ensure efficient and organised overall counselling processes and documentation. In general, the participants mentioned that preparation during the internship influenced their practices as counsellors-in-training. Participant 1 indicated that ample preparation helps her to plan her work by allowing her to consider different options and outcomes, making it easier to make informed decisions when the time comes. When asked, she replied, "Based on my experience, my work will be systematic with preparation. I know what I want to do next."

Similarly, Participant 2 described that preparation will ensure that everything she planned will progress smoothly towards completion. She expressed, "I got confused and lost when going to the internship site without preparation. Once I have enough preparation, everything will run smoothly". Furthermore, Participant 3 shared that early preparation, specifically on counselling documentation, allows her to work systematically. It prevents procrastination and enables her to submit her work earlier than the due date. She stated, "In relation to the preparation of documentation, it has a positive effect on me. I divided the tasks into files A, B, C, and D. When I prepared my counselling documentation from the beginning, I wouldn't procrastinate. So, I managed to submit my documentation before the deadline."

Development of professional identity

A professional identity for counsellors-in-training involves integrating their formal education, training, and skills with their personal qualities, beliefs, and experiences within the framework of the counselling profession. Participants agreed that internship fosters their professional identity as future school counsellors. Besides, they identified several essential qualities in preparing themselves to become professional counsellors, including attractive physical appearance, pleasant personality, and adherence to ethical standards that guide their practice. Participant 3 viewed the counsellors as generally expected to present themselves in a well-groomed and neat attire. She commented, "In terms of appearance, clients will have a negative impression if a counsellor is not presentable."

Correspondingly, Participant 4 shared the same opinion. She believes that physical appearance is crucial in shaping clients' initial impression of a counsellor. Clients are more comfortable with an attractive counsellor, potentially leading to a higher possibility of self-disclosure during the early stages of counselling. Based on her experiences, physical appearance, such as neat dressing and applying a moderate amount of make-up, encourages clients to be more

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open. She mentioned, “When I come to school, the first impression of students when they see an attractive counsellor is, 'Wow! The counsellor is attractive! They will automatically want to approach her. This is one of the things I must continue. I need to wear suitable clothes so that I look good and apply make-up so that my face would not look dull.”

In fact, some participants agreed that a counsellor’s attractiveness also includes a skill in conveying compatibility to their clients. Compatibility is related to the counsellor's ability to “fit in” with clients via effective communication. When clients sense compatibility, they feel connected and comfortable with the counsellor. Participant 2 disclosed, “When I always greet students outside the classroom, they will start talking to me. Whenever I talk about things that they are interested in, they are going to communicate with me easily.”

Furthermore, Participant 3 emphasised the importance of demonstrating warmth and a pleasant personality as they offer reassurance and allow students to feel comfortable throughout the counselling process. A counsellor's nonverbal communication, such as facial expression and body language, enhances the overall communication process throughout the counselling session. She stated, “If we want to talk to clients, we must approach them gently so that more clients will come to seek the counselling services. When we are warm and friendly, students feel more welcome and want to share their stories.”

Finally, honesty is a foundation for establishing trust and contributing to the development of a strong therapeutic alliance, which is essential for effective counselling outcomes. A counsellor must ensure that any information shared within counselling sessions is kept private and not disclosed to anyone without the client’s consent. Participant 4 shared, “The most important thing that I must observe is confidentiality. Even if it is only a small issue that a student shares, I cannot disclose it to others.”

Meanwhile, Participant 2 highlighted that a professional counsellor must adhere to the counsellor’s code of ethics as they serve as ethical guidelines and professional standards to ensure clients’ well-being, maintain the integrity of the counselling profession, and establish a foundation for ethical decision-making. She mentioned, “It is crucial to follow the codes of ethics when dealing with clients. If anything happens to a client and the counsellor does not follow the Code of Ethics, nobody can help him. So, I think the code of ethics is something that all counsellors must follow”.

Acquisition of critical skills

Embarking on counselling internship training is an exciting opportunity for participants of the study to gain hands-on experience and acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to ensure the effectiveness of their counselling sessions. Participant 1 improved her interpersonal communication skills and learned to adapt her communication style to suit the needs of her clients. She commented, “Communication is important. I must know how to approach my clients even though I am an introvert person.”

Furthermore, an internship can be a valuable platform for participants of the study to develop leadership skills. Leadership skills are essential for guiding clients effectively and contributing to the overall success of counselling processes. By actively engaging in school programs, participants of the study developed leadership skills. Participant 1 explained, “Leadership is essential because counsellors handle lots of programs. For example, I conducted a program related to bullying prevention, and then I guided students to do activities in groups.”

Meanwhile, Participant 4 stated, “Before this, I did not have leadership skills because I cannot give commands to others. However, after successfully conducting a few programs, I developed leadership skills.” In addition, Participant 2 shared, “I conducted a motivational program that I never thought I could do. During the practicum, I spoke for two hours in front of a crowd, even though it was online. During post-Covid, I did not have stage fright anymore. Even though I met clients face-to-face after Covid-19 pandemic, I was confident on the stage because I had experience managing crowds beforehand.”

Time management is also crucial for counsellors in balancing counselling tasks and administrative tasks. Incorporating effective time management practices can enhance the participants’ productivity and provide effective services to their clients. Participant 3 highlighted,

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"The aspect that I want to improve is time management. When I promised to meet clients, I must keep it because counsellors do not conduct counselling sessions only. I need to conduct programs for students, and I must also prepare proposals, posters and counselling documentation".

Discussion

The study findings indicate reflections of final-year students on their career preparedness experiences during counselling internships in post-pandemic era. The reflections consist of five aspects which are expectations and reality, exposure to real work setting, promoting effective outcomes via preparation, development of professional identity and acquisition of critical skills.

Expectations and reality for the students involve a gap between what they anticipated and what they experienced during the first few weeks of their counselling internship. Among the issues that they highlighted are related to their first experience of physical counselling sessions with clients, adaptation from virtual to physical mode of counselling and adjustment to the work environment. Similarly, pre-service teachers who went through an online teaching practicum during Covid-19 pandemic experienced adjustment issues (Özmantar, 2021). They faced challenges in adjusting to online teaching in terms of classroom planning, mentor expectations and theory-practice balance. Furthermore, findings of several studies support that adjustment to an unfamiliar environment and culture in an internship setting is challenging for internship students (Akhtar & Parkar, 2024; Saglam et al., 2021). They experienced difficulties in adapting to new core skills, work roles, new systems, and complex tasks (Berrett-Abebe et al., 2023; Ratih et al., 2021). Moreover, teaching in unfamiliar settings had an impact on internship students' self-efficacy (Chandra & Lloyd, 2020).

Counselling internship is crucial in preparing final-year students to enter the world of work. It provides hands-on experience in real-world settings, allowing them to apply theoretical knowledge to practical situations. This experience helps bridge the gap between classroom learning and actual practice. Past studies supported that internship offers students a chance to gain practical experiences by exposing them to real job practices (Akhtar & Parkar, 2024; Chow & Lam, 2015; Galbraith et al., 2020; Karunaratne & Perera, 2019). This helps them to apply skills learnt in the classroom and to interact with practitioners in work environments. Furthermore, an internship provides students with real-world applications and practices (Kapareliotis et al., 2019; Silliman et al., 2020).

Preparation plays a crucial role in promoting effective outcomes in counselling processes. Being systematic is vital to ensure efficient and organised overall counselling processes and proper documentation of counselling cases. For counselling practitioners, session planning and treatment planning are essential tasks to be carried out (Gutierrez et al., 2018; Last et al., 2024). The need for effective session planning and treatment planning are illustrated in the standards for the accreditation of counselling programs (Council for Accreditation of Counselling and Related Educational Programs, 2016) and the ACA Code of Ethics (American Counselling Association, 2014). In addition, increased preparation is also crucial for the professional growth of counselling practitioners during their practicum training (Pollard-Kosidowski et al., 2024).

A huge number of studies indicated that systematic planning is crucial for pre-service teachers' professional development during their teaching practicum (Colley & Lassman, 2021; Costa et al., 2020; Deocampo, 2020; Kabilan et al., 2020). Prior to lesson application, they need to be well-prepared with their lesson plan, lesson structure and material selection. Other than lesson planning, classroom management and workload management are also important aspects for pre-service teachers (Akhtar & Parkar, 2024; Deocampo, 2020). Sufficient planning in lesson plans, classroom management, and workload management assist pre-service teachers in overcoming challenges and obstacles during their teaching practicum (Chandra & Lloyd, 2020).

Counselling internship is pivotal in fostering the professional identity of the final year students. A professional identity for the students involves integrating their formal education, training, and skills with their personal qualities, beliefs, and experiences within the framework of the counselling profession. These are consistent with the study findings of Anjum (2020), Chaminuka and Mtezo (2019) and Pollard-Kosidowski et al. (2024). They found that internship programs increase students' professional growth by improving competence and self-efficacy.

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Other than enhancing professional growth, internships also enhance personal qualities such as confidence, empathy, respect, acceptance, patience, and honesty (Gondane et al., 2024; Lester & Cuayzon, 2024; Sari et al., 2024; Silliman et al., 2020)

Counselling internship is an excellent opportunity to develop critical skills such as interpersonal communication, leadership, time management, and resilience. The final year students improved interpersonal communication skills and learned to adapt their communication style to suit the needs and preferences of individual clients. These are congruent with the findings of a few studies (Batcha et al., 2024; Kapareliotis et al., 2019; Karunaratne & Perera, 2019; Keshk et al., 2018). The findings show that students develop critical skills such as ethical values, social skills, communications skills, problem-solving skills, leadership, and management skills during their internship programs. In addition, studies also show that during and after the pandemic Covid-19, internship students acquired and enhanced several skills, namely, communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, analytical, technical, interpersonal relationships, and resilience (Akhtar & Parkar, 2024; Shtembari & Elgün, 2023; Tan et al., 2024). Moreover, internships increase students' resilience via engagement with real-work issues and challenges (Goodenough et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION

This study, though small in scale, has effectively gathered valuable insights into the career preparedness experiences of counsellors-in-training, filling a gap in existing literature. The findings indicate that while these trainees may feel well-prepared in certain areas, there are notable opportunities for improvement, particularly in managing various client issues in school settings and acquiring key skills such as leadership and event management. Addressing these challenges can contribute to more effective counselling processes and outcomes.

Due to the nature of this research, there were several limitations to it. First, the findings of this study are explanations of the lived experiences of four final-year students in preparing themselves to become school counsellors after the Covid-19 pandemic. These students went through their internship at several schools in Klang Valley, Malaysia. Thus, the findings cannot be generalised to other students at other schools in other areas and display other characteristics. Second, participants' selections are based on their agreement to participate in the study. All students who have gone through a counselling internship in semester 2, 2021/2022, were contacted and invited to participate in the study. However, the majority refused to participate in the study, and only four agreed to participate.

Despite its limitations, the study offers the following recommendations for enhancing current counselling internship practices at Malaysian universities and for future research on career preparedness among university students. Future research should explore the predictors and outcomes of career preparedness among final-year university students. Studies should employ quantitative or mixed-method designs, with a focus on larger samples of students across the country, with a representation of different majors, races, and locations, and to ensure the findings are robust and generalisable. Such research will provide valuable insights for Malaysian higher education institutions, offering a framework for understanding the factors that influence career preparedness among university students. The findings will help graduate programs, educators, and counsellors better equip students for their transition into the workforce. In improving current counselling internship practices, counsellor educators should dedicate more time to relevant courses for counselling sessions and programs with real clients in school settings. Collaborating with selected government or private schools could facilitate this. Exposure to real clients before practicum and internship experiences would provide trainees with more opportunities to apply theory in practice, refine their skills through repeated interactions with real clients, receive feedback from practising counsellors in school settings, and build confidence in conducting counselling sessions.

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