

**INTENTION TO PURSUE AN ACADEMIC  
CAREER AMONG MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITY  
STUDENTS: THE ROLE OF PASSION, ROLE  
MODEL, PERCEIVED WORKPLACE  
FLEXIBILITY, AND CAREER DECISION-  
MAKING SELF-EFFICACY**

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**UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA**

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by

**JAKARIA BIN DASAN**

**Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
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In the name of almighty Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful. Peace upon Prophet Muhammad SAW, the role model of all mankind.

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**NIAT UNTUK MENGEJAR KERJAYA AKADEMIK DALAM KALANGAN  
PELAJAR UNIVERSITI DI MALAYSIA: PERANAN KEGHAIRAHAN,  
MODEL PERANAN, FLEKSIBILITI TEMPAT KERJA YANG  
DIJANGKAKAN, DAN EFIKASI-KENDIRI PEMBUATAN-KEPUTUSAN  
KERJAYA**

**ABSTRAK**

Penyelidikan ini adalah tepat pada masanya bagi menyokong aspirasi Malaysia untuk menjadi hab pendidikan tinggi yang dihormati di rantau ini di mana jumlah ahli akademik yang mencukupi perlu dipastikan. Hal ini dapat ditentukan dengan mengesan kewujudan ciri-ciri tertentu dalam diri seseorang untuk mengejar kerjaya akademik. Kebanyakan kajian mengaitkan keghairahan, model peranan, dan fleksibiliti tempat kerja yang dijangkakan secara berasingan sebagai peramal berpengaruh kepada niat seseorang untuk mengejar kerjaya akademik. Walaubagaimanapun, kajian yang dijalankan ini mendedahkan hasil keputusan yang menarik apabila faktor-faktor ini diuji secara serentak. Empat ratus enam puluh tiga soalselidik telah berjaya dianalisis dalam suatu kajian kuantitatif melibatkan empat buah universiti awam yang dikenali sebagai universiti komprehensif. Analisis faktor yang dijalankan mendapati bahawa keghairahan, dan model peranan mengalami beberapa perubahan kecuali fleksibiliti tempat kerja yang dijangkakan. Dimensi asal keghairahan harmoni dan keghairahan obsesif telah tergabung dalam satu dimensi sahaja yang dikenali sebagai keghairahan. Manakala, model peranan inspirasi, dan model peranan sokongan mengekalkan nama asalnya walaupun item-itemnya telah berubah kedudukan. Ini adalah kerana item-item yang berubah tempat masih

memenuhi maksud nama yang asal. Fleksibiliti tempat kerja yang dijangkakan pula mengekalkan semua item asalnya. Di samping itu, efikasi-kendiri pembuatan keputusan kerjaya turut didapati sebagai pemboleh ubah pencilah yang signifikan. Pemboleh ubah pencilah telah dihasilkan semula kepada tiga dimensi baharu; iaitu, keyakinan terhadap efikasi-kendiri pembuatan keputusan kerjaya untuk menangani tugas penilaian ciri-ciri peribadi dan pekerjaan, pengumpulan maklumat pekerjaan, dan pembuatan perancangan yang realistik. Perlu diberi perhatian adalah tiga dimensi niat untuk mengejar kerjaya akademik iaitu minat terhadap kerjaya akademik, kepentingan ekstrinsik yang terkandung dalam kerjaya akademik, dan kepentingan intrinsik yang terkandung dalam kerjaya akademik. Ini adalah kerana ketiga-tiga dimensi ini boleh memberi gambaran tahap kesungguhan seseorang individu dalam mengejar kerjaya akademik. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa semua keghairahan, model peranan inspirasi, model peranan sokongan, dan fleksibiliti tempat kerja yang dijangkakan mampu meramal sepenuhnya kepentingan ekstrinsik yang terkandung dalam kerjaya akademik. Walau bagaimanapun, hanya separuh sahaja kesan keghairahan, model peranan inspirasi, model peranan sokongan dan fleksibiliti tempat kerja yang dijangkakan ke atas minat terhadap kerjaya akademik, dan kepentingan intrinsik yang terkandung dalam kerjaya akademik. Hubungan di antara faktor-faktor tersebut dan ketiga-tiga dimensi keyakinan terhadap efikasi-kendiri pembuatan keputusan kerjaya juga adalah pada tahap separa sahaja. Sementara itu, pembolehubah keyakinan terhadap efikasi-kendiri pembuatan keputusan kerjaya yang menilai peribadi dan ciri-ciri pekerjaan, dan mengumpul maklumat pekerjaan terus menyumbang kepada kecenderungan meneruskan niat mengejar kerjaya akademik. Kedua-dua pembolehubah mempunyai kesan separuh pencilahan ke atas hubungan antara keghairahan, dan minat terhadap kerjaya akademik, dan hubungan antara

keghairahan dan model peranan sokongan, dan kepentingan ekstrinsik yang terkandung dalam kerjaya akademik. Pendek kata, penemuan ini memenuhi objektif utama penyelidikan iaitu untuk menyiasat faktor-faktor yang boleh mendorong niat seseorang untuk mengejar kerjaya akademik.

**INTENTION TO PURSUE AN ACADEMIC CAREER AMONG MALAYSIAN  
UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: THE ROLE OF PASSION, ROLE MODEL,  
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MAKING SELF-EFFICACY**

**ABSTRACT**

This research is timely to support Malaysia's aspiration to become a respected higher education hub in the` region where a sufficient number of academics have to be ensured. This can be determined by detecting the presence of certain features in a person to pursue an academic career. Most researches have attributed passion, role model, and workplace flexibility separately as influencing the intention to pursue an academic career. However, this study revealed interesting results when these factors are tested simultaneously. Four hundred and sixty three questionnaires were successfully analysed in a quantitative study involving four public universities which are known as the comprehensive university. After conducting factor analysis, the original dimensions of harmonious passion and obsessive passion had merged into a single dimension only, and known as passion. Meanwhile, supportive role model and inspirational role model have remained the same despite of the presence of the cross-loading items. The cross-loading items can still define the underlying meaning of the supportive role model and inspirational role model. Perceived workplace flexibility also retains the original items. In addition, the study found career decision-making self-efficacy as a significant mediating variable. This mediating variable has been reproduced into three new dimensions; namely, career decision-making self-efficacy's confidence to handle task of assessing personal and occupational features, gathering occupational information, and making a realistic planning. Noteworthy, the

three dimensions of intention to pursue an academic career that were introduced; namely, interest to pursue academic career, extrinsic importance attached to academic career, and intrinsic important attached to academic career need to be acknowledged. These three factors indicate the seriousness of the individuals to really pursue the academic career. The results supported full mediation of career decision-making self-efficacy's confidence to handle tasks on the relationship between passion, supportive role model, inspirational role model and perceived workplace flexibility, and extrinsic importance attached to academic career. Career decision-making self-efficacy's confidence to handle tasks, however, partially mediated the relationship between passion, and interest to pursue academic career, and intrinsic importance attached to academic career. Each dimension of career decision-making self-efficacy's confidence to handle task also partially mediated the relationship between passion, supportive role model, and perceived workplace flexibility, and each dimension of intention to pursue an academic career as well. Meanwhile, career decision-making self-efficacy's confidence to handle task of assessing personal and occupational features, and gathering occupational information contribute further to the tendency of really pursuing the intention. Both partially mediated the relationships between passion and interest to pursue academic career, and the relationship between passion and supportive role model, and extrinsic importance attached to academic career. In short, the present findings meet the main objective of the research in investigating factors that can encourage one's intention to pursue an academic career. Consequently, this effort will enable Malaysia to be well-prepared in becoming popular higher education hub in the region.



# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

### 1.0 Introduction

This chapter describes a brief background of the research. It provides an overview of the background of the study as well as explores the problem statement, the research questions, the research objectives, and the significance of the study. Definition of key terms and the outline of the thesis are also provided at the end of the chapter.

### 1.1 Background of the Study

The role of higher education institutions is not only to cater education and to transfer knowledge, but it has expanded to building human capacities (Elhag, 2011). The expectation is to produce human capital who is able to adapt and survive in facing the challenging environment. In other words, higher education should be viewed as one of the most influential tools for human and community development in which it prepares people with knowledge, skills and disposition to improve people's lives. Therefore, if our nation aspires to become the region's higher educational hub (Ministry of Higher Education, 2007; Tham & Kam, 2007; Jamaludin, 2014), it needs to have an ample supply of academics to provide quality higher education. The availability of academic human resource is crucial once the nation reaches the regional hub stage. Knight (2011, p. 85) mentioned in his work that Malaysian universities are expected to have enough academics to offer cross-border education that responds to these three important developments: the escalating demand for a skilled workforce by nations wanting to engage in the knowledge economy; a pronounced orientation to a market economy and commodification of education;

and the escalating numbers of students wanting higher education opportunities and in many cases a foreign credential (Knight, 2011).

Quality higher education is the end result of quality teaching which is linked to the quantity or the numbers of academics available (Arubayi, 2009). In other words, the quantity or the numbers of academics available may ensure the quality of the graduates. Some top universities portray the significant impact of quantity to quality. For instance, Times Higher Education (2012) has reported that Harvard has a 1:7 teacher-student ratio and Duke is 1:8, where both referred as highly recognized institutions. These universities have benefitted from the less number of students attached to a supervisor in which this will enable the teaching staff to have time for other related academic activities such as conducting research, publishing the research result, and engaging in professional consultancy or community services (Norhasni Zainal Abidin & Mohd Razaai Ayudin, 2008). In return, the students and the institution receive immense benefit from knowledge cultivation and innovation activities that have taken place as the academicians may use the research finding in the teaching. In addition, the publication from the research will give credit to the university ranking. In average, the ratio of academicians to students in Malaysian public universities is within 1:15 to 1:18 as shown in Table 1 (next page).

The National Higher Education Research Institute reported that the ratio of academics to student was different across and within the universities (IPPTN, 2006). Similar tendency occurs across the faculties in the university as well. This scenario had led to faculties overburdened by tasks. Consequently, this may affect the quality of teaching. In view of this, a suggestion was proposed for the universities to have a 1:17 teacher to student ratio to reduce the burden (Ahmad Nurulazam Md Zain, Aida Suraya Md Yunus, Ibrahim Che Omar, Morshidi Sirat,

Munir Shuib, Rosni Bakar, & Shukran Abd Rahman, 2008). The Table 1 above reports that the suggested ratio had been followed. However, the decrease in the number of local academics and the increase in the number of students as shown in Table 1 might find the ratio to be inappropriate anymore in the future. Thus, it is necessary to have the highest commitment from the relevant authorities not to let the gap become wider knowing that the imbalance ratio between academics and students might affect the teaching quality (Arubayi, 2009).

Table 1.1

*The Ratio of Academician to Students in Malaysian Public Universities from 2008 to 2015*

No. of/Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Academicians:								
<i>Local</i>	25,084	26,700	28,571	27,433	27,618	29,804	29,487	29,678
<i>Foreign</i>	1,261	1,403	1,681	1,765	2,151	2,712	2,430	2,199
Total	26,345	28,103	30,252	29,198	29,769	32,516	31,917	31,877
Students:	419,334	437,420	462,780	508,256	521,793	560,359	563,186	540,638
Ratio:	1:16	1:16	1:15	1:17	1:18	1:17	1:18	1:17

*Source:* The table shows the number of academicians and the number of students for the past eight years (2008 – 2015) in Malaysian public universities. Adapted from <https://www.mohe.gov.my/muat-turun/awam/statistik>. Copyright 2016 by Ministry of Higher Education.

Table 1 also depicts that there were about 29,678 local academicians and 2,199 international academicians serving 540,638 students in the 20 public universities in 2015 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2014). After recording a constant increase from 2008 to 2010, there was a four per cent decrease of 1,138 local academicians in 2011 compared to 2010. In 2012, a slight increase of 185 local academicians was recorded. Then, there was an increase of 2,186 academicians in 2013. In 2014, the number decreased again to 317. Year 2015 witnessed the number rose up with additional 191 academicians. In general, throughout the years from 2008 to 2015, the increment was contributed by academicians that just returned from their

study leave. Similarly, most of the reduction cases were also due to study leave reason. Noteworthy, there was an increase of 386 international academicians employed in 2012 and additional of 696 in 2013. The number of foreign academicians, however, showed a decrease in 2014 and 2015. Nevertheless, the significant impact of the increase number of local academicians is yet to justify the bigger increase in the students' intake in which the number of students for both local and international experienced a doubled increase since 2011. This has opened wide the ratio of lecturer-student in which the available number of academicians could not cope up with the increase number of students. Thus, there is a need to investigate any issue that decelerates the supply of academics. In fact, Lindholm (2004) had predicted that the widespread faculty retirements over the next decade should trigger an alarm that there is a need to recruit larger number of new faculty to support the increase in student enrolments. Particularly, after Malaysia expressed its aspiration to become a regional hub of higher education (Ministry of Higher Education, 2007; Tham & Kam, 2007).

Thus, the government has repeated the urgency for each higher learning institution in Malaysia to equip itself with a sufficient number of academics to cope with the target enrolment of 200,000 international students in higher education institutions by the year 2020 (Hussaini Amran, 2014). The targeted quantity was mentioned in various occasions (Mohamed Khaled Nordin, 2012; Richards & Mohd Ismail Abd Aziz, 2011). Mok and Yu (2011) in their work also said that the increase in the number of international students would add to the existing 40 per cent of Malaysian youth aged 19 to 24 years who will enrol in the local higher education institutions as well. Table 2 below indicates the growing interest of international

students to further their study in Malaysia both in public and private higher learning institutions.

Table 1.2

*Enrolment of International Students in Public and Private Higher Education Institutions (2010-2015)*

HEI/Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Public	24,212	25,855	26,232	29,662	32,842	26,405
Private	62,705	45,246	57,306	53,971	74,996	88,248
Total	86,919	71,101	83,538	83,633	107,838	114,653*

Source: Statistics from Ministry of Higher Education

\*as on 30 September 2015

## 1.2 Problem Statement

The Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) has expressed its concern on the short supply of academics to cope with the future demand of higher education (Mohamed Khaled Nordin, 2011a). The reported decrease of 1,138 academics in 2011 that equates negative four per cent (Ministry of Higher Education, 2013) was worrying. Norzaini Azman, Ibrahim Che Omar, Aida Suraya Md Yunus & Ahmad Nurulazam Md Zain (2016) revealed that the increasing number of student enrolment led to the need of more academicians. Even though the number the number of academics has increased in 2013, but the continuing enrolment of students; both international and local, as shown in Table 1, gives a hint that there will be a problem in meeting the goal of providing quality teaching due to the adverse relationship on the number of academics available and the number of students to be enrolled. In other words the expected huge numbers of students enrolled each year will pose a threat to quality education as there is no commensurate expansion in the number of academic staff in most public higher learning institutions. Consequently, this may

delay the target of becoming a successful higher educational hub in the region by the year 2020 (Mohamed Khaled Nordin, 2011a).

Moreover, several western countries had been reported to experience the recurring shortage of academicians (OECD, 2015). This indicates that any country could face shortage of academicians. Hence, without sustainable planning, there is a challenge of providing quality education due to insufficient number of quality academicians. In view of this potential threat to Malaysia's aspiration of becoming higher education hub, an early awareness to increase the number of academicians is a wise move. Moreover, all higher education institutions in Malaysia keep on receiving international students which indicates the continuing trust of foreign students to our higher education system. In addition, there is a new trend among senior lecturers to move to another public university for the purpose of getting better promotion (Norzaini Azman et al., 2016). As a result of this act, there is a tendency for academics' shortage to take place in some fields or courses in any of the 20 public universities due to the turnover cases.

The remark from the Ministry of Higher Education further indicates that to be recognized as a successful provider of higher education, Malaysia needs to ensure the presence of qualified teaching staff in order to produce graduates of higher degree to publish quality referred publication and to lead innovative solutions to problems faced by the country (Mohamed Khaled Nordin, 2011b). The performance of a university at the national arena takes into account in the above criteria. Hence, inadequate number of academics would put pressure to the existing pool of academics to perform. In view of this, an initiative to promote career in academics becomes an urgent issue.

One of the sources to ensure the continuous supply of academics is from the individuals of Generation Y (Gen-Y). Specifically, the sooner they join the academic force, the better equip the public universities are in providing quality education. Thus, the information is needed to provide a general overview of the interest among Gen-Y towards academic career. In relation to this, an immediate effort was taken to seek information on the number of Gen-Y's academics serving in some selected public universities. A letter requesting information on the Gen-Y's academics was sent to several public universities. However, only two universities; namely, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), and Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) responded. The information revealed that only 25 per cent of academics in UPM, and 23 per cent in UMS are from Gen-Y. These percentages indicate a small proportion of Gen-Y's academics who joined the force at the early stage. If this percentage could be increased, the better prepared the universities will be in providing quality education.

In addition, Malaysia's transition to knowledge-based economy has taken place tremendously along with other developed nations, which saw more attention given to other career choices. Knowledge-based economy, or as it is commonly called a K-economy, can be defined as an economy in which knowledge, creativity and innovation play an ever-increasing and important role in generating and sustaining growth. Many countries including Malaysia have put more efforts in implementing the K-economy strategies urgently to transform their economies (Laili Hashim & Khairul Mizan Taib, 2012; Ramlee Mustapha & Abu Abdullah, 2004). Ramlee Mustapha and Abu Abdullah (2004) revealed that in k-economy era, the workplace environment would face a major shift particularly in industry based in which employers would recruit and keep workers who acquire relevant skills and knowledge only. Thus, in order to fully equip the future human capital with

the k-economy expectations, Malaysia has sent out many prolific graduates for overseas education to become expert industry players. Subsequently, many of the young people are now investing heavily on education that could enable them to enter career-related industry (Brown, Lauder & Ashton, 2008). As career-related industry gaining more popularity due to k-economy, less is known about academic career as a potential choice of career among students. As a consequence, this would hinder Malaysian competitiveness in higher education where Malaysia is inspired to rise as a leader of educational provider in the region. Furthermore, the lack of academics is not good either for a quality product of academics and positioning of Malaysian universities among other international universities.

Based on the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994, 2000; Gore & Leuwerke, 2000; Sheu, Lent, Brown, Miller, Hennessy, & Duffy, 2010), some factors could develop career related interest to pursue academic career. These factors affect the learning experiences through which career-relevant self-efficacy and outcome expectations develop. Subsequently, this will trigger the interest to pursue the career choice. The factors include being passionate in what one is doing (Vallerand, Blanchard, Magneau, Koestner, Ratelle, & Leonard, 2003; Vallerand & Houlforth, 2003; Carbonneau, Vallerand, Fernet, & Guay, 2008; Bobinsky, 2009), being inspired and expecting guide from role model (Fried & MacCleave, 2009; Karunanayake & Nauta, 2004; Perrone, Zarnadelli, Worthington, & Chartrand, 2002; Nauta & Kokaly, 2001; Walqui, 2000; Basoc & Howe, 1979) and perceiving greater workplace flexibility (Hill et al., 2001; Richman, Civian, Shannon, Hill, and Brennan, 2008; Lu, Kao, Chang, & Wu, 2011; Lindholm, 2004; Voydanoff, 2005). The effects of these factors toward the interest will incite the intention to pursue the career. In addition, various studies found passion (Forest,

Mageau, Sarrazin, & Morin, 2011; Day, 2004; Elliot & Crosswell, 2002; Fried, 2001; Carbonneau et al., 2008), role model (Nauta & Kokaly, 2001; Fried & MacCleave, 2009), and workplace flexibility (Hill et al., 2008; Sharafizad, Paul & Omari, 2011; Lindholm, 2004; Goldacre, Turner, Fazel, & Lambert, 2005) may attract people to academic career since these factors reflect academia's environment. Studies had also found that the relationship between these factors and academic career choice would have a greater effect if mediated by career decision-making self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986; Hackett & Betz, 1981, 1995). In fact, there is still less information on career decision-making self-efficacy literature for different culture like Malaysia. Thus, the current study would also provide an answer on whether the increase unemployment rate among graduates is due to the inability to perform career decision-making tasks successfully.

In short, unless the aspects of passion, role model, perceived workplace flexibility, career decision-making self-efficacy, and intention to pursue academic career are investigated, the effort to increase the academic manpower will remain slow. Consequently, the perceived short supply of academics could not be subdued. As a result, Malaysian universities will face a problem of not being able to offer quality education due to the low number of qualified teaching staff. In other words, Malaysia could not achieve its aspiration to become the higher educational hub in the region. Therefore, it is important to make people aware of academic career and to highlight its importance and benefit in order to raise people interest in pursuing academic career. Subsequently, this will prevent potential shortage of academics in the future. Hence, understanding better how personal factor of passion and contextual factors of role model, perceived workplace flexibility, and career decision-making self-efficacy operate together to shape individuals' intention to

pursue academic career, may assist the effort to attract career aspirants to the profession.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

The study aims at examining the personal and contextual factors that contribute to one's intention to pursue academic career as guided by the following questions:

1. What are the effects of personal factor (passion) and contextual factors (role models and perceived workplace flexibility) on people's intention to pursue academic career?
2. What are the effects of personal factor (passion) and contextual factors (role models and perceived workplace flexibility) on people's career decision-making self-efficacy?
3. What is the effect of career decision-making self-efficacy on intention to pursue academic career?
4. What are the mediating effects of career decision-making self-efficacy on the relationship between personal factor (passion) and contextual factors (role models and perceived workplace flexibility) and intention to pursue academic career?

### **1.4 Research Objectives**

The specific objectives of this study are as follow;

1. To examine the effects of personal factor (passion) and contextual factors (role model and perceived workplace flexibility) on intention to pursue academic career.
2. To investigate the effects of personal factor (passion) and contextual factors (role models and perceived workplace flexibility) in enhancing career decision-making self-efficacy.

3. To investigate the effect of career decision-making self-efficacy on intention to pursue academic career.
4. To examine the mediating effects of career decision-making self-efficacy on the relationship between personal factor (passion), and contextual factors (role model and perceived workplace flexibility), and intention to pursue an academic career.

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

*Theoretical contribution.* The present study fills the gap in academic career choice by addressing the influence of personal factor particularly passion, and the contextual factors of role model and perceived workplace flexibility on individuals' intention to pursue academic career. Based on social cognitive career theory's (SCCT) construct of interest development model (Brown & Lent, 1996; Gore & Leuwerke, 2000; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994, 2000), people are attracted to activities that they feel competent and successful at. Therefore, factors that could be supported using SCCT were investigated. These factors affect the learning experiences through which career-relevant self-efficacy and outcome expectations develop. Subsequently, this will trigger the interest to pursue an academic career. The factors include being passionate in what one is doing (Carbonneau et al., 2008; Vallerand et al., 2003), being inspired and expecting guide from role model (Fried & MacCleave, 2009; Karunanayake & Nauta, 2004; Nauta & Kokaly, 2001) and perceiving greater workplace flexibility (Hill et al., 2001; Richman et al, 2008; Lindholm, 2004). The significant impact of these factors towards the interest will incite the intention to pursue the career. In addition, passion, role model, and perceived workplace flexibility may also attract individuals to academic career since these factors reflect academia's environment. Studies also found that the relationship between these factors and academic career choice would be greater if mediated by career

decision-making self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986; Hackett & Betz, 1981, 1995). In fact, information on career decision-making self-efficacy literature for different culture like Malaysia is still lacking (Sumari, 2011). Sumari (2011) revealed that the role of self-efficacy in career decision-making had not received attention by Malaysian researchers. Malaysian college students, like many other college students, are often faced with challenges when planning and selecting their career. Because they live in a collectivist society, in which the needs of the group are put before the needs of the individuals, their career decisions are also influenced by the group. Perhaps one of the challenges is to make sure what they plan are approved by their families. It is not surprising because as pointed out by Leong (2002), the type of society in which individuals grow up, may affect the way they communicate, their life style, and the way they solve problems and make decisions. Thus, the inability to perform career decision-making tasks successfully could be one of the reasons why unemployment rate among graduates increases.

In short, this study will advance the academic career choice literature, which had not discussed the mutual effects towards intention to pursue academic career of these factors. The three variables of passion, role model, and perceived workplace flexibility are selected based on their specific corresponding characteristics (Downe, Ho, & Loke, 2008; Dries et al., 2008; Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2000) to academic profession (Carbonneau et al., 2008; Goldacre et al., 2005; Nauta & Kokaly, 2001; Sharafizad et al., 2011; Edwards & Quinter, 2011; McCrindle, 2006; Richman et al., 2008; Gappa et al., 2007; Richardson & Watt, 2005). Specifically, this means that the three variables are the common aspects which are related to academics. In addition to those factors, career decision-making self-efficacy will strengthen the theoretical operation of the overall relationship of variables involve.

As originated from Bandura's (1990) study, people's self-efficacy increases if elements such as personal performance and accomplishments are supported, vicarious learning through observation is offered, social persuasion or community respect is high, and physiological and affective states are safeguarded. Knowledge on these particular aspects is significant in the development of intention. Even though the theoretical relationship between career decision-making self-efficacy and career choice had been tested before (such as Isik 2010; Sheu et al., 2010; Tracy, 2008; Hirshi & Lage, 2007; Creed, Patton & Prideaux, 2006; Luzzo, 1993, 1996; Lent et al., 1994; Taylor & Betz, 1983), the significant influence of career decision-making self-efficacy as a mediator in the relationship between passion, role model and perceived workplace flexibility, and the intention to pursue academic career choice present a new theoretical contribution as proposed in this study. The current study extends academic career choice research by integrating passion, role model, perceived workplace flexibility, career decision-making self-efficacy and intention to pursue academic career social cognitive career theory. Empirically, this study also advances the conceptual framework which contributes to academic career choice from the perspective of social cognitive career theory.

*Practical contribution.* The current study provides input to the relevant authorities such as Ministry of Higher Education and university management in devising strategies to attract more individuals to academic career. Apart from that, the study also presents academic career as a promising career opportunity for individuals. In addition, the study may also highlight the importance of career decision-making self-efficacy in career exploration behaviour and vocational identification. In particular, a career counsellor could focus more on the five related tasks; namely, engaging in accurate self-appraisal, engaging in problem solving,

planning for the future, gathering occupational information and engaging in goal selection career decision-making self-efficacy when giving career advice. In short, investigating individuals' intention to pursue academic career will provide important feedback that can be practical when solving perceived higher education human resources problems.

### **1.6 Scope of the Study**

The current research focuses on individual's intention to pursue an academic career. This academic career refers to the profession as academic in the university. The final year undergraduate students in Malaysian public universities are selected as the population of study. Hence, for four year program, the final year students are the fourth year students, while for three year program, the final year students are the third year students. It was apparent from the literature review that a personal factor such as passion (Day, 2004; , 2008; Vallerand et al., 2003; Elliot & Crosswell, 2002; Fried, 2001;) and contextual factors such as role model (Fried & MacCleave, 2009; Karunanayake & Nauta, 2004; Nauta & Kokaly, 2001), and workplace flexibility (Hill et al., 2008) predict the criterion variable which is intention to pursue an academic career (Cohen & Parsotam, 2010; Johnson et al., 2008). Passion, which represents personal factor, seems to have strong effect on the intention, while role model and perceived workplace flexibility work as influential contextual factors. In addition, the mediating effect of career decision-making self-efficacy is believed to mediate the relationship between the predictor variables and criterion variable.

### **1.7 Operational Definition of Key Terms**

Definitions and descriptions of terminologies used in the study are presented below:

*Career choices* represent two components of words; "career" and "choice" (Ozbilgin, Kusku, & Erdogmus, 2004). Ozbilgin et al. (2004) defines career

as a field or pursuit of consecutive progressive achievement which is known as profession whereby one is trained to perform constant duty. It is a long-term profession of what one plans to do for the rest of one's life (Andrew, 2010; Ching, 2010; DeBrule, 2010; Mattoon, 2010; Piziak, 2010). Boerlijst (1998, pp. 284 – 286) defines career as a 'sequence of successive positions as ascertained by an observing agency (self and/or other) that a career occupant has held or acquired within a certain period of time on aspect variables that have a certain relevancy to a certain context like role, position status or other externally verifiable markers'. Boerlijst's (1998) definition holds the idea that career is best explained based on the context stated. In other words, the career concept is multidimensional and multifaceted, comprising many constructs and variables such as career development (Boerlijst 1998; Millward, 2005); career advancement (Tharenou,1997); career progression (Thomas, et al., 2005; Tharenou,1997); career ladder; (Thomas et al., 2005; Millward,2005); career success (Judge et al., 1995; Seibert& Kramer, 2001; Tharenou, 1997); executive career success, and managerial career success (Judge et al., 1995; Thomas et al., 2005) which are largely dependent on 'managerial career skills'. Therefore, career will be conceptualised in terms of the specific facet. In view of the current study, academic career is the preferred choice against other careers. This leads to the second component on choice. Choice involves the voluntarily act of selecting or separating from two or more types of occupations or professions (Ozbilgin et al., 2004).

*Academic Career.* In this study the researcher refers academic career to a career as a lecturer in combination of research and teaching of the academician area of speciality, as well as administrative work (Levin, 1991; Norhasni Zainal Abidin & Mohd Razaai Ayudin, 2008; Taylor, 1999; Lindholm, 2004; Goldacre et al., 2005).

Practically, academic career requires one to do the preparation and delivery of lectures, preparing and marking assignments, essays and exams; giving academic advice to students, supervising students research, keeping up-to-date with their own subject area, conducting research, writing and publishing articles on their subject area, as well as attending and presenting at conferences. Academic career is also known as a helping profession, in which criteria such as personal and social experiences, as well as inspiration to serve others are identified as important in this profession (Fischman et al., 2001). In short, academic career encompasses teaching, research, community services, and administrative work (Lindholm, 2004; Levin, 1991; Norhasni Zainal Abidin & Mohd Razaai Ayudin, 2008; Taylor, 1999).

*Intention to Pursue an Academic Career.* Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines intention to pursue as an individual's desire to try to achieve something over a period of time. In this case, the intention is to pursue a career as an academic, which main tasks include teaching, conducting research, publishing result of the research (publication), supervising students, and involvement in professional services (Lindholm, 2004; Norhasni Zainal Abidin & Mohd Razaai Ayudin, 2008). Earlier studies (such as Cohen & Parsotam, 2010; Parsotam, 2010; Johnson, Stone, & Phillips, 2008) provided the definition on the intention to pursue a career as the subjective probability of the student choosing to pursue a career. This definition was used in studying career intention (Cohen and Parsotam, 2010; Parsotam, 2010; Johnson et al., 2008). Accordingly, the current study adapted the authors' definition of other career choices into academic career choice in which intention to pursue academic career choices can be defined as the intention to pursue academic career as the subjective probability of the individuals choosing to pursue a career as academics in the higher learning institutions.

*Passion* is adopted from its original definition which refers to “strong inclination or desire towards an activity that one likes, finds important, and in which one invests time and energy” (Vallerand et al., 2003, p. 757). Passion, therefore, refers to a person's internal desire to do something as moved by the intrinsic motivation which has a crucial link between emotional attachment to the work and individuals’ personal level of commitment (Day, 2004). Individuals’ personal passion for teaching is central to their on-going commitment to, and engagement with the profession (Day, 2004; Elliot & Croswell, 2002). For academics, passion in teaching, research, and service will contribute to the fulfilment of the current agenda of having quality academics.

*Role models* have been defined as people whose lives and activities influence another person in some way (Basoc & Howe, 1979). Nauta and Kokaly (2001) had further defined role models as individuals who one knows in person that influences one’s career decisions by being admirable in one or more ways. Family members or successful person in the relevant field may act as role models for the career aspirants. A study shows that role models have a direct and indirect relationship with self-efficacy through the act of vicarious learning (Quimby & DeSantis, 2006) and outcome expectations (Lent et al., 1994; Springer, Larson, Tilley, Gasser, & Quinn, 2001). The direct and indirect relationship is viewed in the form of role models as supportive role models or merely inspirational role models (Nauta & Kokaly, 2001). The current researcher adopted Nauta and Kokaly’s (2001) definition of role models.

*Workplace flexibility* is defined as “the ability of workers to make choices influencing when, where, and for how long they engage in work-related tasks” (Hill et al., 2008, p.152). Lu et al. (2008) defined the meaning of workplace

flexibility as the consideration given by direct supervisor to entertain personal or family matters for an hour or two. The current researcher conceptualized the definition of perceived workplace flexibility mainly based on these definitions. Since respondents are final year undergraduates, the current research uses perceived workplace flexibility as one of the variable that predicts intention to pursue academic career. Thus, the operational term used for perceived workplace flexibility is one's ability to perceive the choice that one has in arranging the core aspects of one's professional lives with regards to where, when, and how long work is performed (Hill et al., 2008) and time permitted to attend personal and family matters that can be considered by the employer (Lu et al., 2008). In academia, workplace flexibility provides freedom and discretion to academics (Lindholm, 2004; Goldacre et al., 2005; Richman et al., 2008; Gappa et al., 2007) which is highly desired in order to carry various tasks and obligations while ensuring full commitment is given on teaching responsibility. For instance, teaching schedule is discussable so that the necessary time allocated for teaching will not in conflict with the time spends for research works. Research is a component that is required to be excelled in as academics. Meanwhile, the flexible adjustment of time on teaching, research, and community service will enable academics to enjoy their work-life balance.

*Career decision-making self-efficacy* refers to individuals' beliefs about their competency in career-related tasks (Hackett & Betz, 1981; Taylor & Betz, 1983) whereby career decision-making self-efficacy provides people with a confidence to make decisions. It is one of the domains of self-efficacy. Five tasks of career decision-making self-efficacy include engaging in accurate self-appraisal, engaging in problem solving, planning for the future, gathering occupational information, and engaging in goal selection (Crites, 1976). These five tasks (Crites, 1976) posit as five

competencies in the sub-scales of Career Decision- Making Self-Efficacy Scale (Taylor & Betz, 1983).

*Generation Y* is the current generation in the current workforce. According to Strauss and Howe (1991, 2000), Generation Y born starting around 1982 and continuing through the year 2001, is a hero or civic generation. Strauss and Howe (1991, 2000) argue Generation Y as unraveling and is asserting itself among culture wars, postmodernism, and technology. A local study (Lim & Wong, 2009) had identified Generation Y as those individuals born between 1980 and 2000 only. This cohort of generation has different characteristics that determine their different personality, attitudes, motivations, and ways of behaving at work as a result of their own life experiences and expectations (Kupperschmidt, 2000; Tay, 2011). Despite of many thoughts being put forth by scholars about the differences involving generational differences, it is worth to ponder that the different experiences that these generations experienced that has shaped their unique views, traits and behaviors (Willetts, D., 2011). Noteworthy, while studying the behavior of Generation Y has increased in publication, topics on the other senior generations still actively pursued, especially when comparative research of generational differences becomes the focus. The current trend of research, however, witnesses Generation Y to continuously dominate most researches in all sectors. In fact, this Generation Y has become the largest workforce to be. In this research Generation Y involves university students of Generation Y who currently pursuing their undergraduate studies at Malaysian public universities.

### **1.8 Organisation of the Thesis**

The study consists of five chapters. Chapter one presents an overview of what to expect from this study as described in the background of the study, its problem, and

significance of the study. Chapter Two presents the literature review of academic career choice, and its relation to passion, role models, and work flexibility. The mediating effect of career decision-making self-efficacy is also discussed. Relevant theories, theoretical framework and research framework and hypotheses development, and gaps of the study are further explained in Chapter Two. Chapter Three focuses on the methodology aspects employed by the current research. Chapter Four discusses on the results. It contains results from the data analysed based on the hypotheses developed. At the end of this chapter, the researcher states whether to accept or reject the hypotheses.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Literature Review**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter is devoted to the literature related to academic career choice. Specifically, the focus is on literature involving individuals' intention to pursue academic career choices. The chapter begins with an overview on Malaysian higher education hub aspiration related to academic career in which Generation Y is suggested to be the main player to achieve the aspiration. Literatures related to intention to pursue academic career choices are extensively revised that include the development of occupational aspirations (Gottfredson, 1981) which describe how people identify what their possible career aspirations would be, career development process as espoused in Super's (1957) and Levinson's (1978) models which link people's range of age to career decision making stages, the underpinning theories which are mainly operationalized by Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 1994), personal and contextual factors influencing academic career choice, and the mediating effect of career decision-making self-efficacy (Taylor & Betz, 1983; Betz, Klein & Taylor, 1996). Finally, a theoretical framework and hypotheses are presented to show the relationships between the study variables.

#### **2.1 Higher Education Hub and Academic Career**

Increasing enrolment growth of local and international students into Malaysia's higher learning institutions is heavily expected as Malaysia sails passes 2010, the year when Malaysia had earlier expressed its aim of not only to be a regional center for higher education but also to be a global education hub (Yean & Yi, 2007). Since then, Malaysia has revived its aspiration to be recognised as an excellent

international hub for higher education by the year 2020 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2007; Tham & Kam, 2008). Several strategies have been implemented (Singh, Schapper & Jack, 2013). Among others include; (1) the introduction of Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB), 2013-2015 which would assist in the improvement of the functional elements in the education system, (2) the implementation of National Higher Education Strategic Plan which emphasized on comprehensive internationalisation, (3) the merger of Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education to ensure the smooth implementation of matters related to education quality (latest move, however, saw the separation of these two ministries once again on July 29, 2015), and (4) increasing efforts in internationalisation of higher education in Malaysia which is seen as a means to make local higher education is in comparable with the best universities in the world (Tham & Kam, 2008). As a matter of fact, Malaysia was ranked 11<sup>th</sup> in the World Education Service Report of preferred destinations for higher education in which the number of international students had increased to 93,000 in 2014 from 86,000 in 2010 (Jamaludin, 2014, May 12). This suggests the growing interest of international students. Thus, the pressure could be felt strongly as we approach the year 2020, when there is an expectation of having enrolment of 200,000 international students (Chong & Mokhtar, 2013; Suryandari, Jaafar & Hamzah, 2014). In view of this, there is a doubt on the capacity of universities to provide quality education since no commensurate expansion occurs on the number of academic staff in most universities, particularly public universities (Ministry of Higher Education, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013). In other words, the ability for public universities to be capable of offering quality education is at stake since there is no clear indication that the static increase in the number of academics is tally to the bigger increase in

the number of students. There is a new trend among senior lecturers to move to another university simply for getting better promotion and other reasons (Norzaini Azman et al., 2016) as well. As a result, a shortage was felt in some fields or courses in any of the 20 public universities due to the turnover cases. This situation justifies previous studies which found that the perceived shortage of academicians might be due to the incompatibility between various factors, and academic career environment (Saroja Dhanapal, Sueraya Mohamad Alwie, Thanam Subramaniam, and Deparechigi Vashu, 2013; Haryani Haron, Sharifah Muzlia Syed Mustafa, & Alias, 2010; Norhasni Zainal Abidin & Mohd Razaai Ayudin, 2008; Amer Darus, Farah Lina Azizan & Fais Ahmad, 2016). Hence, social factor of passion (Fried, 2001), and contextual factors of role model (Nauta & Kokaly, 2001), and workplace flexibility (Lindholm, 2004) could be introduced to pull people to academic career choice.

Passion is the personal factor that has been discussed in various literatures as capable of attracting individuals to academic career choices (Vallerand et al., 2008; Vallerand et al., 2003). Carbonneau et al. (2008) noted that individuals become more passionate to pursue a career if individuals see knowledge dissemination as a noble desire (Lindholm, 2004; Daniels et al., 2006). In academic career, the knowledge is disseminated to students mainly in two ways; teaching and research. Two types of passion (Vallerand et al., 2003); namely harmonious and obsessive passion, can exert positive and negative influence toward one's intention to pursue academic career (Day, 2004; Elliot & Crosswell, 2002; Fried, 2001). Individuals must be capable of ensuring passion to properly accompany individuals in getting the career while keeping them from burnout.

Role models which fall under contextual factor have been identified as another important factor that may attract people to academic career choices (Fried & MacCleave, 2009; Karunanayake & Nauta, 2004; Nauta & Kokaly, 2001). Nauta and Kokaly (2001) revealed that role models could directly influence individuals to pursue a a career through the support given or inspire individuals to be like them by showing some reputable influence. These supportive and inspirational role models, however, have different weight in their impact toward individual career intention (Fried MacCleave, 2009; Karunanayake & Nauta, 2004).

Perceiving greater workplace flexibility (Hill et al., 2001; Richman et al., 2008) is the other relevant contextual factor along with passion and role models. The effect of this factor toward the individuals' interest in joining academia is crucial since academic career is always related to academic freedom in which flexible work arrangement characterizes the meaning in academic freedom (Hill et al., 2008). Altbach (2000) defined academic freedom as the term used to express the freedom of the faculty to teach and conduct research without undue interference and fear from inside or outside institutions. The term is also used to reflect the freedom of academic institutions to operate freely with out fear and intimidation by external forces. Basic principles of academic freedom ensure the right of the faculty to teach, undertake research, and communicate unduly uninhibited (pg. 250).”

In addition, career decision-making self-efficacy, which is a domain of self-efficacy, could act as a construct that predicts career goal under social cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 1994). Career decision-making self-efficacy has an intervention effect that may lure individuals to academic career (Stringer & Kerpelman, 2010; Rogers, Creed, & Glendon, 2008; Betz, Klein, & Taylor, 1996). Based on self-efficacy belief, career decision-making self-efficacy could be defined

as the belief that influences people to successfully perform tasks necessary to making career decision (Betz & Taylor, 2001). Rogers et al. (2008) also related self-efficacy in defining career decision-making self-efficacy in which career decision-making self-efficacy predicted directly career planning and exploration. Sumari (2006) noted that low career decision-making self-efficacy is one of the factors that causes the shortage of professionals in science-related fields and the reason for students choosing certain fields over the others.

Hence, it is highly hope that the findings gathered from the current study could benefit the recruitment exercise of future academicians in terms of recruitment initiatives, socialization strategies, and orientation moduls as the input may enhance professional satisfaction and fulfilment within the academic profession. Consequently, this study will be able to provide positive input in generating recruitment of more academicians in the future. Thus, the researcher proposes a number of personal and contextual factors that may attract individuals' intention to pursue academic career choice. These factors comprise of the person inputs factor and contextual factor (Lent et al., 2000) and the criterion variable (intention to pursue academic career). This can be explained with social cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 1994) and supported by other theories such as self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and person-organization fit theory (Kristof, 1996). The mediating effect of career decision-making self-efficacy (Betz, Klein & Taylor, 1996) is proposed because it can motivate people to achieve special goals, such as pursuing a career in particular areas (Feltz & Payment, 2005).

## **2.2 Generation Y**

The current study uses respondents belong to Generation Y's cohort. In connection with this, the researcher has reviewed literatures on Generation Y's characteristics