
THE EFFECTS OF DURATION TO OBTAIN A FIRST JOB ON MATURE AND IMMATURE SELF-DEFENSE MECHANISMS AMONG RECENT GRADUATES

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Abstract: Obtaining a job after graduation in today's job market is quite challenging. Some graduates obtain a job during an internship while others do not secure their first job for a few months or even years. The length of time it takes to obtain a job might affect graduates in coping with job demands. To examine this phenomenon, a study involving 189 graduates was conducted. The study predicted that the duration of a graduate's job search would affect their mature and immature self-defense mechanisms. The study also examined the difference between graduates with matched and mismatched jobs in using immature and immature self-defense. The study found that taking a longer time to get the first job negatively affects one's mature self-defense, while there are no significant effects on the immature self-defense mechanism. This study showed that graduates who obtain jobs earlier after graduating tend to apply mature self-defense mechanisms (e.g., sublimation, humor, anticipation, & suppression) compared those who obtain job only after a longer duration. Regarding the differences between the two groups of graduates in using each self-defense mechanisms, the study found no significant difference. The findings showed that the mature psychological self-defense mechanism was more frequently used among graduates who get jobs sooner after graduation than among those who obtain jobs after a longer search. The study findings may help employed graduates to understand their self-defense mechanisms in adapting to their work environment based on the start of their first job.

Keywords: Graduates, Self-Defense Mechanisms, Job

INTRODUCTION

Obtaining a job after graduating is a goal for graduates, particularly in times of the highly competitive job post-modernist job markets. Every year, both local and private universities produce a large number of graduates. As stated by Li et al. (2022), in recent years, the number of students who

have graduated from higher education institutions across the world has been increasing. This increase may cause worry and concern among graduates regarding highly competitive jobs and their future employment opportunities. To ensure graduates can secure a job after graduating, universities and other relevant agencies organized various employability programmes, such as upskills and reskills programs. These programs were implemented for future graduates to be more prepared and fit into the work industry. They may also provide graduates with confidence in adapting to their new work environment and demands from their prospective employers and industries. The shift from the academic world to working life might cause worry and anxiety among recent graduates. Therefore, various strategies were used by graduates to overcome and decrease negative feelings when dealing with their new work environment. One of these strategies is to engage in either mature or immature self-defence mechanisms.

The time it takes to obtain a first job might also affect the way graduates apply self-defence mechanisms. Some employed graduates might apply different self-defence mechanisms to decrease the psychological tensions they experienced in the workplace. The use of psychological self-defence mechanisms may assist employed graduates in decreasing their work-related stress, frustration, and anxiety. Mature self-defence mechanisms refer to suppression, sublimation, humour, and anticipation, while immature ones include projection, passive aggression, acting out, devaluation, autistic fantasy and sometimes denial (Andrews et al., 1993).

Many young people feel disoriented, confused, dissatisfied and, in many cases, overwhelmed, when facing the real world of work. For instance, the feedback they receive from their industry about their work performance may differ from the feedback they receive during their academic studies (Molinsky & Pisman, 2019). Dealing with colleagues and employers with different personalities and demands can sometimes produce stress and anxiety for recently employed graduates. They may perceive that their senior colleagues and employers might critique and monitor their work styles and performance. Also, some graduates might take more time to adapt and understand work procedures and the standards of the organisation.

When people cannot emotionally tolerate the prospect of either considering an intensely threatening problem or dealing directly with that situation, they tend to use self-defense mechanisms, which include internal and mostly subconscious conflicts (Gokdag, 2015). Self-defence mechanisms play a significant role in communication problems and difficulties, and the unsuccessful use of available self-defence mechanisms can cause psychological problems (Gokdag, 2015). According to Negrii (2014), self-defence mechanisms are defined as a set of actions aimed at reducing or eliminating any changes that threaten individuals' biopsychic integrity and stability. For instance, adapting to a work setting plays a significant role in the success or failure of one's personal adaptation to the work environment (Nam et al., 2019).

Besides adapting to work environment, some employed graduates must adapt to jobs that are not in line with their level of education and the programme that they learnt at the university, which causes graduates with job mismatches to face more challenges than graduates with better job matches. This is like under-employment, where the talents and skills possessed by graduates cannot be fully maximised by the economy (Darusman, 2020). Even those with job matches need to understand job and industry demands, which may help to increase their work performance and the industry's productivity.

Regarding the duration it takes a graduate to obtain his or her first Job, fortunately for some graduates, this happens once they have completed their studies. Some are hired after completing an internship with relevant organizations. On the other hand, others obtain their jobs after several months or years. The length of time it takes to obtain their first jobs might affect the way they handle job demands and the work environment, using relevant self-defense mechanisms. To deal with work challenges, graduates who were hired once they have completed their studies might engage in more mature self-defence mechanisms than those graduates who do not. This might be because graduates who secured a job earlier might more concerned about their senior workers' and employers' perception of their performance because they are still new in the job industry and need to learn more, although they performed well academically in university.

Each worker either beginner or well-experienced, uses different types of self-defense mechanism at work. Defence mechanisms are an automatic

psychological process necessary for successful adaptation. According to Elizabeth (2020), everyone in the workplace possesses some type of desire that may be socially unacceptable or problematic. Instead of dealing with a problematic worker, a person might deal the problem with healthy self-defense mechanisms, such as sublimation, by doing other healthy activities, such as exercising or participating in fun activities.

This study was conducted to understand the effects of the duration of obtaining a first job on mature and immature self-defence mechanism. It might be interesting to understand whether this can affect both types of self-defense mechanisms. The psychological self-defence mechanisms in this study are categorised into two types: mature (e.g. suppression, sublimation, humour and anticipation) and immature (e.g., projection, passive aggression, acting out, devaluation, autistic fantasy and denial). The study's findings may help current and future graduates understand the effect of this time duration on mature and immature self-defence mechanisms. In this study, we also examined the differences between the two groups of graduates with matched and mismatched jobs on the use of both groups of self-defence mechanisms.

To understand the aims and focus of the study, several related past studies will be discussed. Regarding the difference types of self-defence mechanisms, Cosmas et al.'s study (2023, in press) found that mature self-defence mechanisms influence work performance. It revealed that mature psychological defence mechanisms can contribute to positive work performance regarding task performance, contextual performance, and counterproductive performance. Conversely, immature psychological defence mechanisms were not shown to have any significant effects on work performance.

Every employer performs different strategies in dealing with work challenges. As stated by Olmo (2019), the workplace consists of different personalities who have diverse ways of dealing with situations. There are different types of defensive mechanisms that workers apply when dealing with different work scenarios, such as humour self-defence mechanisms, one of the mature psychological self-defence mechanisms. Besides humour, other types of mature self-mechanisms are sublimation, suppression, and anticipation. Another past study by Diehl et al. (2014) revealed that while the use of self-defence mechanisms increased from

adolescence to middle age, it remained stable until late midlife and started to decline thereafter. This showed that the use of the mature coping mechanisms, such as sublimation and suppression, increased across age groups. Using mature defence mechanisms helps young adults to adapt to a particular situation, such as in the working environment.

A study conducted by Sepihdehdam et al. (2012) examined the relationships between job burnout and defence mechanisms used by 234 participants from the air staff of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The study found that the more mature mechanisms people have, the less emotionally fatigued they feel and the more emotionally fatigued they feel the more immature mechanisms they have. There is a significant relationship between high depression levels and symptoms, fatigued and poor quality of life. When emotionally fatigued, the sense of empathy is reduced, and it affects the person's social life and quality of life. Mature defences are correlated with better adaptability and compatibility in life. The continuation of work and a successful love life are positively correlated with mature defence mechanisms and are negatively correlated with immature defence mechanisms (Sepihdehdam, 2012).

The second aim of this study involves examining the differences between graduates with job matches and those with job mismatches regarding mature and immature self-defence mechanism. This study assumed that graduates with job mismatches tended to use immature self-defence mechanisms compared to graduates with job matches. A study conducted by Cosmas et al. (2023, in press) found that there was no difference between the two groups of graduates (matched and mismatched jobs) in using both types of psychological self-defence. This might be due both types of graduates (matched and mismatched jobs) in using both types of psychological self-defence. This might be because both types of graduates must deal with work demands and challenges in their work settings. Wafa et al. (2022) found that soft skills are more important to employers, but that recent graduates should also possess basic or fundamental technical skills. In Malaysia skills mismatching skills has been a persistent issue wherein the expertise of jobseekers, particularly fresh graduates, does not match industry requirements (The Star, 2020). In today's job market, education is not sufficiently preparing graduates for the world of work, whether in terms of skills, attitudes and/or expectations.

Research Objective

This study was conducted to examine the effects of the duration of obtaining a first job on self-defence mechanisms. The psychological self-defence mechanisms in this study are categorised into: Mature (i.e., suppression, sublimation, humour and anticipation) and immature (i.e., projection, passive aggression, acting out, devaluation, autistic fantasy and sometimes denial). The second aim of the study is to investigate the differences between the two groups of graduates with matched and mismatched jobs on the use of both groups of self-defence mechanisms.

METHODOLOGY

This study involved working graduates who were born and raised in Sabah and who graduated from various universities in Malaysia. The study was conducted via an online survey. Potential participants answered the online questions by clicking on a Google Forms survey link, which the researchers shared with the participants.

Participants

A total of 189 employed graduates from various fields participated in this study. They are from governmental and non-governmental organisations in Sabah. Participants were invited to join the study and the invitation to participate in this study were sent via various social media platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, Telegram) and via email. A snowball strategy was also applied by requesting prospective graduates who had already participated in the study to share the survey link with their friends, who were categorised as employed graduates.

Research Instrument

A three-part questionnaire was used in this study.

Part A: Demographic Profile

The demographic scale consisted of nine items that measured gender, ethnicity, religion, university, programme, year of graduation, current job, academic level and work duration and experience.

Part B: Job Mismatch

Job mismatch was measured using the vertical (educational level) and horizontal (field) classifications. Vertical mismatches based on educational level focused on overeducation. The measurement of

overeducation was conducted by comparing an individual's actual education and the education required by his/her work. Horizontal mismatches were measured by comparing the graduate's field of work or background. Based on the Dictionary of Occupational Titles in the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO), which reports several types of skills and education optimally required for each occupation category, individuals were categorised as overeducated if their education level was more than the level of education required for their work. Graduates stated whether they were overeducated based on their perceptions and understanding of the work done. The respondents also had to indicate the minimum level of education required for their current job. Then, a comparison was made between the minimum level of education needed and the actual level of education they had attained. Sample items included the following: 'What is your educational level?' 'What is the minimum level of education needed for your current job?' 'Does your current job match your field/the programme at your university?' and 'What kind of education is needed to perform your job?'

Part C: Defence Style Questionnaire (Andrew et al., 1993)

The Defence Style Questionnaire was created by Andrew et al. (1993) and consists of 40 items. The questionnaire examines three types of psychological self-defence. For this study, only two types of defence style were measured: the mature style, which is based on suppression, sublimation, humour, and anticipation, and the immature style, which is based on projection, passive aggression, acting out, devaluation, autistic fantasy, and denial. The scale responses range from 1 'strongly disagree' to 9 'strongly agree'. Sample items for mature psychological self-defence are as follows: 'I work out my anxiety through doing something constructive and creative like painting or woodwork' and 'I am able to keep a problem out of my mind until I have time to deal with it'. For immature psychological self-defence mechanisms, sample items include the following: 'I often find myself being pleasant to people at whom, by all rights, I should be angry at' and 'If I have an aggressive thought, I feel the need to do something to compensate for it'.

RESULTS

One hundred and eighty-nine participants participated in this study. Most of them were female (119; 63%), and only 70 were male (37%). The complete demographic profile of the participants is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Participants (N=189)

Variables	Number	Percentage
Job category		
Matched	93	49.2
Mismatched	94	49.7
Missing	2	1.1
Education level		
Undergraduate	175	92.60
Masters	14	7.40
Job level		
Full-time and permanent	113	59.80
Full-time and contracted	54	28.60
Part-time and contracted	4	2.1
Part-time and not contracted	5	2.6
Self-employed	13	6.9

Based on the reliability values, all the variables showed acceptable reliability values ranging from mature self-defence mechanisms (.74) (defensive coping skills) to immature coping skills, (.90). Before we ran the regression analysis, the skewness and kurtosis for each variable (i.e., duration to obtain a first job and mature and immature self-defence mechanisms) were checked. The skewness and kurtosis of each variable were less than 2. Only the kurtosis for the duration of obtaining a first job was 3.36 (see Table 2).

Table 2: The Skewness and Kurtosis for Each Variable

Variables	Skewness	Kurtosis
Duration to obtain job (based on months)	1.85	3.36
Mature self-defence mechanism	-.55	.46
Immature self-defence mechanism	.56	.84

Data are normal if skewness is between -2 to +2 and kurtosis is between -7 to +7 (Bryne, 2010; Hair et al., 2010). This shows that the skewness and kurtosis for all the research variables in this study were considered normal. Therefore, the final analysis was conducted and based on the simple regression analysis, it showed that there was an effect of duration to get a first job after graduating on self-defence mechanisms. It also influenced maturity and had a negative significant effect on self-defence mechanisms

($\beta = -.17$ ($t_{(1,181)} = -2.30$)). The duration of obtaining a first job contributed 3.0% to mature self-defence mechanism. This indicates that the shorter duration to obtain a job may increase the frequency of agreement with the use of mature self-defence mechanism (see Table 3).

Table 3: The Effect of Duration on Obtaining the First Job on Each the Self-Defence Mechanism

Duration of obtaining a first job	R squared	Beta	Significant value
Mature self-defence mechanisms	.03	-.17	.02
Immature self-defence mechanisms	.001	.03	.65

DISCUSSION

The Effect of Duration on Obtaining the Job on Psychological Self-Defence Mechanisms

The study found that graduates who obtained jobs after short durations, such as after graduating or within several months tended to show a high frequency of agreement on using mature psychological self-defence mechanisms, such as suppression, sublimation, humour, and anticipation. A study conducted by Cosmas et al. (2023, in press), found that mature self-mechanism contributes to work performance in terms of task performance, contextual performance, and counterproductive performance. This might be one of the reasons graduates who obtained a job for short duration after graduating tend to apply the mature self-defence mechanism. On the other hand, the duration to obtain a first job did not have any effects on immature psychological self-defence mechanisms (i.e., projection, passive aggression, acting out, devaluation, autistic fantasy, and denial) among employed graduates.

Most workers including recently employed graduates, might apply self-defence mechanisms that can help distract themselves from unpleasant events in their working environment. This can be conducted by removing themselves from unpleasant events, actions, or thoughts. Workers sometimes might not always be aware of the way their minds or egos will respond. However, this does not mean that they cannot alter or modify their behaviours. Indeed, they can transform unhealthy defence mechanisms into ones that are more sustainable (Healthline, n.d.). This

might lead to healthier and more mature self-defence mechanisms, as opposed to immature ones. The maturity of defence mechanisms is positively associated with adaptability and negatively associated with psychopathology (Nam et al., 2019).

Graduates who gain the opportunity to work once they have completed their studies or after a few months might be more meticulous in performing their first job. Furthermore, they tend to have healthy and conscious relationship with reality. Unpleasant emotions and thoughts might deliberately take less threatening forms rather than being pushed aside. People decide and choose to cope using mature defence mechanisms; such actions do not just occur spontaneously. Suppression is a conscious form of repression and occurs when an individual chooses not to engage or talk about distressing feelings or thoughts. Sublimation refers to the decision to transform the energy behind uncomfortable feelings and thoughts and to use it for a different, constructive purpose. Examples of this are as follows: 'I work out my anxiety through doing something constructive and creative like painting or woodwork' and 'I'm mad at my father, but instead of yelling at him (which won't help things), I'm going to get out my paints and paint a picture' (An American Addiction Center, n.d.).

According to McCleod (2020), defence mechanisms are psychological strategies that are unconsciously used to protect a person from anxiety arising from unacceptable thoughts or feelings. Based on Freudian theory, defence mechanisms involves a distortion of reality in some way so that we are better able to cope with a situation. Sublimation is like displacement, but it occurs when we manage to transform our unacceptable emotions into behaviours that are constructive and socially acceptable than destructive. In dealing with challenges in the workplace, besides using self-defence mechanisms, it is advisable to involve employees in discussions that allow them to devise their own ways to improve their performance. Also, employees can also make a list of individual improvement goals for themselves. Allowing employees to assess their own performance, while focusing on using a positive attitude, can greatly decrease their defensive behaviour (Omol, 2019).

Elizabeth (2020) stated that defence self-mechanism can assist people in resolving a specific challenge in the present. It distracts people's attention from the negative emotions experience. However, strategies such as

sublimation under matured self-defence mechanisms are a healthy way to channel negative emotions in the workplace. Mature defence mechanisms are rooted in conscious decisions, are rooted, and they are often constructive. More mature defence mechanisms acknowledge stressors or traumas in a productive way while remaining a mechanism that is a reaction to stressors or trauma (Psychcentral,n.d.). Those who employ acceptable, mature mechanisms cope with stress very well and adaptively respond to conflict. These people will suffer less job burnout than others (Sepihdehdam, 2012).

Some graduates use internship, job training and short-term contracts as stepping stones to obtain their first job. Such experiences are a useful way for graduates to discover their strengths, weaknesses, likes and dislikes when it comes to work and a career. This self-awareness should lead to more informed career choices in the future in terms of job functions and industry (Lim, 2021).

Job matches and mismatches

The study found no differences between graduates with job matches and those with job mismatches in terms of using either mature or immature self-defence mechanisms. This may be because both groups of employees are faced with a new work environments and challenges that differed from those encountered in their university environments. In today's workforce, employees need to have the appropriate skills to enable them to thrive in the workplace, along with the ability to continue to retrain throughout their lives. Employers want new employees to have strong soft skills as well as hard skills. Demands from employers regarding recruitment, such as the need to possess soft and hard skills, might cause worry, anxiety, and concern among employed graduates. For employers, soft skills are more important than basic knowledge and technical skills, but such skills are often not taught in universities. All these challenges may force graduates to use various kinds of psychological self-defence mechanisms (Wafa et al., 2021). Also, jobs are changing rapidly, and individuals are also changing their skill sets, either through education and training or through their work and life experience.

Both groups of employed graduates (match and mismatch job) also showed no difference in using either type of self-defence mechanism. Perhaps this is because they are aware of the current situation that mostly

graduates experience in today's job market, such as engaging in job mismatches. Furthermore, some graduates might also be more resilient in dealing with any circumstances they face in the job industry and are willing to take a job, even though it is not in line with their educational level and field. This is because they need to secure money for their own living and do not want to depend on their parents (Noorshahrizam,2021).

CONCLUSION

The study's findings revealed that the duration to obtain a first job can influence the use of mature psychological self-defence mechanisms, while the duration of time to obtain a job did not show any significant effect on immature self-defence mechanisms. Also, neither group of employees showed any significant differences regarding mature and immature psychological self-defence mechanisms. The interesting finding in this study is graduates who obtained their first job a short time after graduation tend to use more on mature self-defence mechanism. The finding can create awareness among recent graduates to search for healthy strategies that may help them to adapt and deal with unpleasant events that they experienced in the workplace.

By understanding oneself defence mechanisms better, a person can see and understand others better (Elizabeth, 2020). This may help to create a pleasant work environment and may improve communication in the workplace. For future studies, it is suggested to examine the effect of duration to get a first job on each type of mature self-defence mechanism specifically, such as sublimation, denial or rationalization. This may elevate our understanding on psychological self-defence mechanisms graduates applied in facing with job demands, expectation from senior workers and employers and other work challenges, particularly during the era of post-modernism.

Informed Consent Statement

I am aware that my participation is entirely voluntary, and I can withdraw at any time, for any reason and without incurring any fees. I am aware that a copy of this permission form will be provided to me. I willingly consent to participate in this study.

Conflict of Interest

The authors names are listed below certify that they are NOT associated with or involved in any organization or entity that has any financial interest (such as honoraria, educational grants, memberships, employment, consultancies or other equity interest) or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, or knowledge or beliefs in the subjects matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Ethics Statement

This study was carried out in accordance with the written informed consent from all subjects.

Author Contributions

The study's conceptualization and design, data collection, analysis and result interpretation, as well as the creation of paper, all bear the authors' complete responsibility.

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Data Availability Statement

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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