

ENHANCING JOB AWARENESS THROUGH CAREER EXPLORATION COURSE – A REPORT

就職活動に対する意識向上のための授業実践報告

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Abstract: In recent years, in developed countries such as the USA, Europe and Japan, ‘career search behaviour’ awareness and practice via university courses have been a keen focus. However, this is not the case in Malaysia, even worse is, university students do not think about it at all. This career exploration course was introduced with the aim to raise undergraduate students’ awareness toward job searching before graduation. This was a 14-week career exploration introductory course with four main interventions; 1) to set your future career goal, conduct an interview with a graduated senior from the same faculty, who work in the industry you are interested in and then share with your course mate the interview results and what you have learned from the interview via oral presentation, 2) once the career goal is set, learn the techniques of making career-related documents(e.g., resume writing), 3)do a self-examination on the knowledge and skills required in the job market and make a career searching action plan, 4) share and discuss your actual job search action plan via second oral presentation. Learning achievement is measured via continuous assessments and final written examination. Excerpts from the written examination revealed that students were more aware of the importance of conducting job searching activities before graduation and skills learned on career-related documents and writing the job search action plan have been useful to them.

Keywords: Career exploration awareness. Class practice. Job search action plan and behaviour.

要旨: 近年、欧米、日本を中心に大学生の「キャリア探索行動」のような意識と実践に着目してきた一方、マレーシアでは大学生が職業の前に職業探索を行うところか、それを考えることさえ意識していない。そこで就職活動に対する意識向上させる授業実践を行った。本実践では一学期、すなわち14週間にわたり、次の4つを学生にさせた。1) 職業についての希望や目標を明確にしていくため、自分が興味のある業界で働いている学部先輩を訪ね、実際の仕事と内容などをインタビューする。そのインタビューの結果をクラス内発表し、発

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表を通じて、教室でクラスメートとOBOG訪問する際に必要であったマナーなどの情報を共有する。2) 明確になった自己の職業に対する目標を設定し、企業への履歴書など書類作成する。3) 職場における必要な知識、スキルなど自己検討し、今後のキャリア計画を考え作成する。4) 再びクラス内で、キャリア計画を発表し、クラスメート間でコメントし合う。本授業の学習達成度は、教師の継続評価と期末試験で測る。期末試験で本授業に対する内省文を書かせたところ、多くの学習者が自己理解、就職活動の準備を卒業する前に行う、キャリア計画の重要性が有意義であったと回答した。また、本授業の学習者同士のコメントの話し合いを通じて、OBOGに対するマナーや言葉遣いなどが重要であることを学ばせることができた。

キーワード：就職活動意識、授業実践、キャリア計画、職務探索行動

1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education plays an essential role in the process of national development and nation building (Kee et al., 2012). Being able to produce graduates with competence increases the marketability and manpower values in the employability market is one of the important roles play by universities. Graduates must be well-equipped with knowledge and skills in order to excel/survive in the competitive working world. In general, marketability means the ability of an individual to get employed using a set of skills he/she possesses. In other words, it means the quality of being attractive to employers (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries) to secure a job as soon as they graduate. In the past decade, the marketability of university graduates has become one of the local universities' issues in many developing countries including Malaysia. University graduates are unable to meet the demands of job market.

Holding a bachelor degree of a study program (knowledge/hard skills) does not guarantee a job if university graduates do not possess soft skills such as good personal management behaviour, desire to learn new skills, ability to adapt to company culture which are required by many employers (Cai, 2012). A survey done by Ahmad & Noor Akmal (2014) related to the quality of graduates in one of the local universities in Malaysia, reported that many of them failed to get employed due to the poor command of English language proficiency during job interview, as communication skills is one of the determinants of the marketability of graduate students. Being unable to speak fluently in English creates a sense of inferiority and reduces one's confidence level as well. As a remedy, the concerned university introduced soft skills curriculum (e.g., social skills and sense of responsibility, communication and problem-solving skills, leadership and teamwork, entrepreneurship) to address this issue by familiarizing students with real world challenges and essence of marketability before graduation (Ahmad & Noor Akmal, 2014).

In the study of Gurvinder, K & Sharan, K. (2008) related to Malaysian graduates' employability skills, revealed that many employers urge universities to put extra effort in developing university students' 'transferable' 'soft' 'employable and or generic

skills' which were needed in the job market (p.16). Curriculum in nurturing marketable university students with higher awareness of job market demand should be developed. In response to the employers' call, this study aims to add relevancy to students' learning experience by offering a career exploration course to expose them to real-world career options; at the same time raise their awareness to the job market's demand and the nature of job, so that they are more prepared before entering the competitive working world.

Many universities offer career exploration with the aim to help students in making effective career selection (Logue, 2019). These career exploration courses benefited students in variety of areas including self-efficacy (Bollman, 2009; Hansen & Pederson, 2012), career maturity and decidedness (Hardesty, 1991). Self-efficacy, to Logue (2019), is a kind of belief in one's ability to accomplish a certain task or play a significant role that leads to success. However, little is known about this career exploration courses, especially within Malaysia universities contexts. With this premise, this course is introduced with the following objectives:

- 1) to raise students' awareness of future career choices
- 2) to determine if course interventions are significant to enhance students' career related planning and decision making.

2. METHOD

This paper used Super's theory which postulates, 'career development is a stage-by-stage implementation of self-concept in the world of work' (cited in Godbey and Gordon 2019, p.3). The five stages of career development are: growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline (Super, 1990). As this study was introduced for the first time as an exploratory course, focuses are on the first, growth stage and second, exploration stage. In the growth stage, students experience their initial stage of self-understanding and the world of work followed by the exploration stage; by exploring their work interest in various areas by interviewing their graduated seniors telling their experiences in the real working world. This will help students to narrow down their career choices, scheduling a job search plan at the end of the course and eventually deciding on the right career path.

Participants

13 third-year Japanese language major students (one student withdrawn after semester break due to health issue- made the total of student as 12) were enrolled in this 14-week Career Exploration Course, for session 2019/2020, 2nd semester that covered topics; self-discovery, understand the world of work, interview working seniors, job search preparation and planning. They were 41.7% of male and 58.3% of female between the ages of 20-23.

Self-discovery stage assignments and handouts

ASGM1a: Job Interest Short survey

ASGM1b: Egogram Test & result acceptance or otherwise

ASGM1c: Is Japanese company my career choice?

ASGM3b-self promotion

Handout 3: My strength & weakness (長所と短所)

*Note: ASGM=Assignment

Career exploration stage assignments, handouts and activity sheets

Handout1: Foreign students' dairy

Handout2: List of industry (業種)

AS1: Career exploration quiz

AS2: Graduate seniors' work information

ASGM2a: OBOG interview proposal

ASGM2b: Interview Feedback Evaluation

Career related skill-building exercises

ASGM 2c Email: How to write a polite email for making an appointment in Japanese

ASGM 2d Email: Letter of appreciation to senior after interview

Oral presentations

1. Reporting the interview result in group
2. Reporting and sharing 'my job search action plan' individually

Job search action plan

ASGM3a-Group and self-evaluations on senior interview (what contribution has one made)

ASGM3c- Individual Evaluation on the Career Exploration Course

ASGM3d: My actual job search preparation and planning

3. PROCEDURE

This 14-week course was divided into 2 sections with one week break in the mid semester. This was a 2-hour course with total of 28 hours per semester. The lead investigator (the lecturer) used interactive teaching methods: lectures including e-lectures, oral & audio-visual presentations, discussion, group work activity to engage students both in the real and online classrooms. The assessment weightage of this course was 40% continuous assessment (assignments & oral presentations) and 60% final written

examination. Some of the worksheets and handouts were adopted and adapted from Business Japanese Series for Foreign Students (留学生のためのビジネス日本語シリーズ) published by The Association of Overseas Technical Cooperation and Sustainable Partnerships (AOTS). In University of Malaya, students and lecturer are given a sharing platform called **Spectrum (Student Powered e-Collaboration Transforming UM)**, an official e-learning platform with multifunctionality for students to ask questions, upload their assignments or to make forum discussion; as well as for lecturers to make announcement related to course activities, to take students' online attendance, etc.

4. THE 14-WEEK TEACHING FLOW OF THE COURSE

Week 1 – course introduction & career exploration

In the first class, students were briefed with the contents of the course, types of assignments, assessments (40% of continuous coursework, 60% of examination), expected tasks completion and concept of career exploration (就職活動)

Handout 1 Foreign Students' Daily was distributed to students to let students to have a rough idea on what career exploration.

Students were required to sit in pairs to read Handout1 that related to two foreign students' story (A-san- was from China, B-san was from South Korea) started their one-year career exploration journey from their 3rd year of study in April till the next year of March. A-san & B-san's career exploration activities including 2-week internship, preparatory study for the company-entry examination (e.g., aptitude test and personality test), written test and essay writing, learn the interview strategies, how to write company specific 'entry sheet', attend career talks. The final stage was waiting for the results of job application (内定) in March, the next year.

After the pair work, students were required to answer the Career Exploration Quiz (AS1) as a summary of the important points in Handout 1.

Week 2 – self discovery

A short lecture about the preparation of career exploration (就職前に知っておくポイント) was done using power-point slide presentation and students had to answer a short survey (ASGM1a) and complete the ASGM1b related to online personality analysis.

ASGM1a: Job interest short survey

1. The type of job they want to work (1. 9am – 5pm fixed hour job, 2. Have a certain freedom to decide their job scope, 3. A job that required higher ability but can work in a short hour)
2. List 3 previous experiences – being praised by others.
3. Share your experience of 'nobody can stop me from doing what I want to do.'

4. Write one or more episodes on past experience related to ‘my best effort to complete OO’

ASGM1b: Egogram Test & result acceptance

Students were asked to do an online personality diagnosis test called *Egogram*. *Egogram* is a free of charge online interpersonal relationship analysis (交流分析), used to determine students’ interaction ability and work-related competency. The diagnosis results were summarised and displayed at the end of the test. After completing the test, students were asked to fill in ASGM 1b to tell whether they could accept the results of their personality diagnosis and the suggestion of suitable career. Reasons have to be given to support their agreement and/or disagreement of the test.

Week 3 – OBOG work information

Handout 2 ‘List of industry’ were distributed and explained to students about the available industries in the local market for their future career selection.

A lecture related to OBOG (old boy/old girl) interview and the purpose and importance of executing such activity were explained via PPT (power point file format). The objectives of this interview were first, to enable students to learn from their seniors with the same major, graduated from the same department whom they were familiar with and second, to expose them to their seniors’ real working world situations including joy and challenges.

As a homework, they had to complete a short survey by listing 5 persons or more Japanese language major graduated seniors work information related to 1) company’s name, 2) job position and 3) a brief-search on the senior’s company background, the products or services provided using AS2. This survey could be done via online search (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Alumni chat), telephone or email. After information was attained, they were asked to choose 1 out of the 5 seniors’ company, to make comments about the company and share with their course mates using a sharing forum in ‘Spectrum’.

Another worksheet of ASGM1c: ‘Is working in a Japanese-owned company my career choice?’ was distributed to gauge information to help students to start thinking of narrowing down their job interest. Regardless of positive or negative responses, reasons needed to be given to support their decision.

Week 4 & 5 – interview preparation

Students were given the freedom to choose their working peers to form a group of two or three persons. Once the groups were formed, through discussion they had to complete the OBOG interview proposal (ASGM2b). The content of the proposal was: 1) the name of members of group, 2) the senior and company they want to interview 3) the objectives of interview and, 4) the questions they wanted to ask including senior’s

job scope, company colleagues. This proposal would have to upload to *Spectrum* as an assignment submission.

The interview proposals of each group were commented and returned to them via *Spectrum* by the lecturer. Students sit in groups to discuss, amend, and add the insufficient parts according to the lecturer's comments.

Semester break

Week 6 & Week 7 – career related skill-building exercises

After the semester break, before conducting the interviews, students practiced on 2 important writing skills:

- 1) writing a polite email to make appointment for the interview,
- 2) writing a letter of appreciation to their senior after the interview

The care of manners during the execution of interviews (with 'Do' and "Don't"), polite expressions to be used were briefed using PPT.

The emails of making appointment (ASGM2c) and appreciation (ASGM2d) were advised to send on the day or the next day of interview and had to make a cc copied to the lecturer's email for record.

Week 8 – final preparation before interview

An online discussion (tool: using channel in Microsoft Teams) in groups were set up to prepare students before the interview day such as, discuss the suitable online tool to make the interview, turn-taking of asking questions. Lecturer could join the 4 channels freely to give advice and

Week 9 – interview report preparation

A sharing section was conducted for students to talk about their interview experiences including the success and failure, the important points learned during the interview. After the sharing, students were back to their own group to prepare their OBOG interview reports for next week oral presentation (OP1).

Week 10-11 – oral presentation and group and self-evaluation

The results of interview were reported via group oral presentation. Time limitation for each group presentation was 12 minutes and 3 minutes of question & answer section. Students were encouraged to speak and comment on each course mate's presentation. At the end of the 2 weeks continuous oral presentations, students had to complete ASGM3a (グループの発表の振り返りシート): group interview report feedback evaluation; part I- self-evaluation on what I had learned, what was my contribution to the group, part II- group evaluation on whether the objectives of interview had been achieved, what were

some of the problems and the solutions they had or should have taken and at the final part to answer ‘Do I want to work at the same company as my senior and why?’

Week 12 – Basic ability of working people & self-promotion

To equip students with some knowledge skills and abilities of working people are expected to have in Japan context, the concept of Basic Ability of Working People ‘社会人基礎力’ introduced by METI (Ministry of Economy, Trading & Industry, Japan) emphasize on 1. The ability of taking the first step (前に踏み出す力), 2) The ability of thinking out of the box (考え抜く力), 3. The ability to work as a team (チームで働く力) were introduced. Apart from that, the attitude with spirit of challenge and communicative competence were other skills that working people should demonstrate and possess in Japan working environment.

At the second of half of the lesson, how to fill the career related form ‘entry sheet (Japanese resume)’ and how to write a good self-promotion were taught in the class.

- The concept and format of ‘Entry-sheet’ (エントリーシート) and why and how it was used in Japan was explained. Students were given a few examples of ‘自己PR’ (self-promotion related to PREP method (point, reason, example, point) for discussion and evaluation.

In brief, PREP means:

- Point: my strengths are... 結論 (私の長所・強みは_____です)
- Reason: the reasons are... なぜならOOだからです。
- Example: my story/concrete example 具体例・事例 (エピソード)
- Point: summary 結論 (まとめ)

To sum up the lesson, each student was required to select a company they want to work with and write a self-promotion essay (ASGM3b) to be uploaded unto Spectrum as assignment submission. Feedback was given by the lecturer in written form via Spectrum.

Handout 3 (examples of strength and weakness written in Japanese) was distributed to students for reference and each of them required to list 3 own strengths and 2 of their group members in a piece of small note paper. After completion, they had to give the note paper to the concerned person to read. This was done as a kind of encouragement for them to discover their unaware/hidden strength perceived by others for self-discovery as well.

Week 13 – Job search preparation and planning

All students need to do their actual job search preparation and planning (就活アクションプラン) by filling ASGM3d which was divided into 5 sections:

- S1: Self-discovery (strength & weakness)
- S2: The company I want to work with and the search I have done on this company (company can be more than one)

- S3: my current situation (the number of courses I need to take to complete BA degree, my company choices for internship)
- S4: My learning plan (the courses I want to attend to improve my OO skills)
- S5: My job search action plan (from now till I get the job, set the dates and preparation in details)

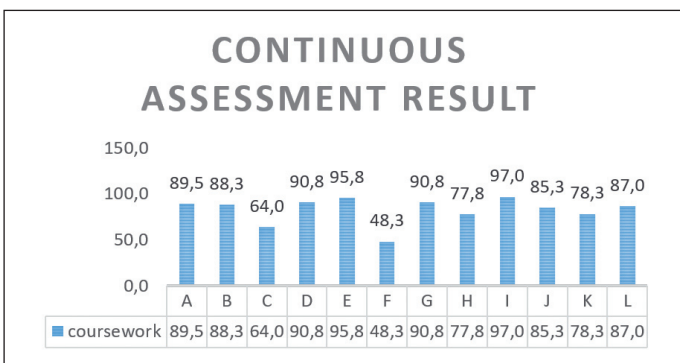
Week 14 – My actual job search action plan submission

All students need to complete ASGM3c and share their action plan via oral presentation as part of their final coursework. As a conclusive worksheet, ASGM3c covered topics on 1) individual evaluation on the whole career exploration course, what I had learned from the process of doing interview, what did I think about my senior’s job, what kind of company I want to work at?

5. COURSE ASSESSMENT MARKING SCHEME

- 1) Continuous assessment (40%)
 - Assignment 1a,1b,1c (self-discovery stage) – 8%
 - Assignment 2a, 2b, 2c (career exploration stage – skill building exercises) – 10%
 - Assignment 3a, 3b, 3c (career exploration stage – self & group course evaluations, My actual job action plan) 12%
 - Group oral presentation 1 & individual oral presentation 2 – 10%
- 2) Final written examination (60%)

5.1. The final result of continuous assessment



Graph 1: Continuous assessment result

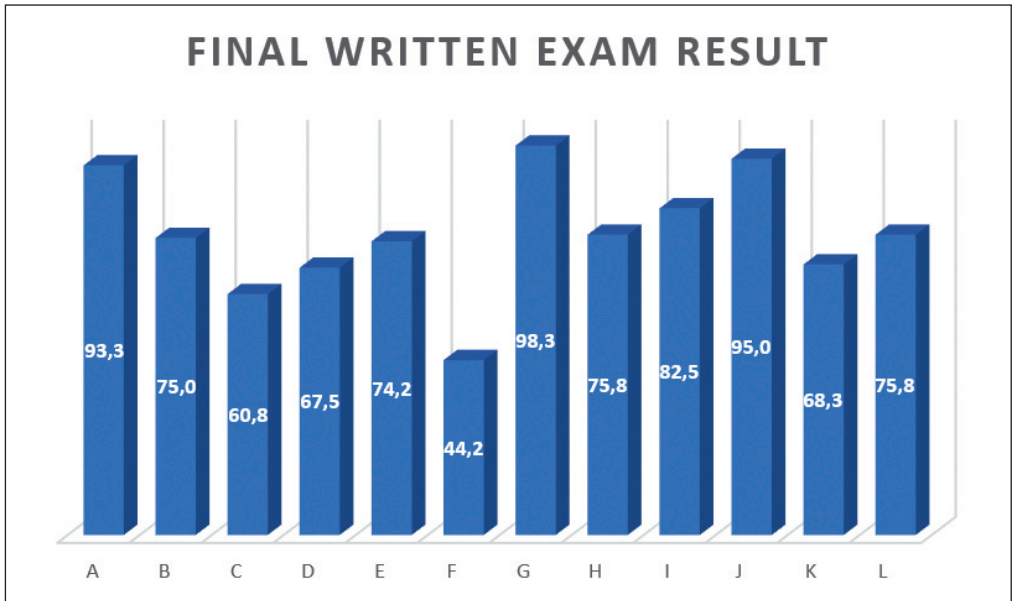
A+	90 and above
A	80-89
A-	75-79
B+	70-74
B	65-69
B-	60-64
C+	55-59
C	50-54
C-	45-49
D	40-44
F	0-39

Table 1: Assessment grade scale

Graph 1 revealed that 4 students obtained A+, 4 with A, 2 with A-, 1with B- and 1with C- (failed)

*note: passing grade is C

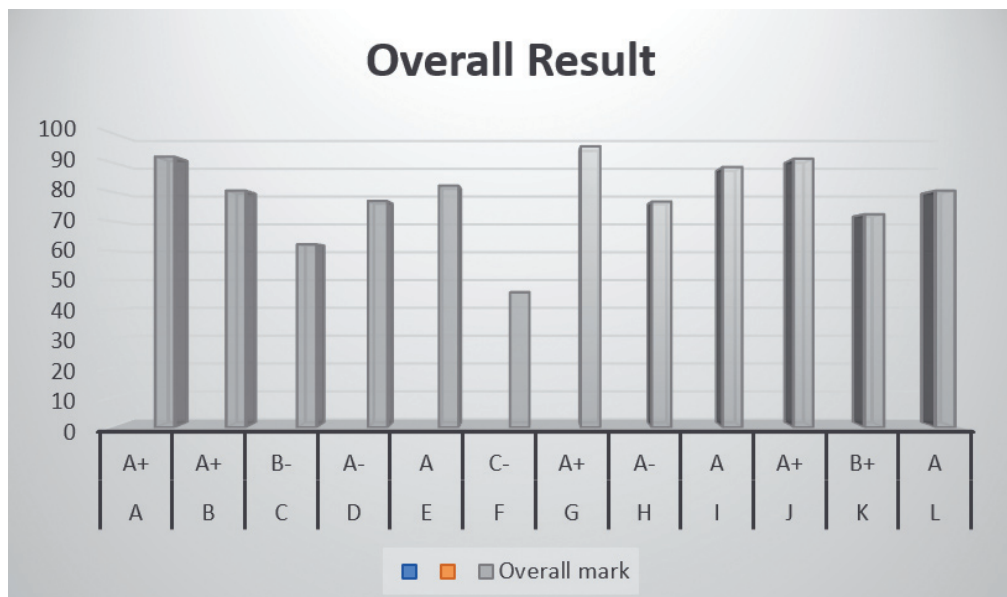
5.2. The final result of written examination



Graph 2: Written examination result

Graph 2 showed that 3 students obtained A+, 1 with A, 2 with A-, 2 with B+, 2 with B, 1 with B- and 1with C-(failed)

5.3. Overall results



Graph 3: Overall result of the Career Exploration Course (continuous assessment + final examination)

The overall result was analysed by the university's default mark calculation system. 11 students passed (84.6%) with 3 obtained A+(>90 mark), 4 obtained A(80-89marks), 2 obtained A-(75-79 marks), whereas 1 student failed (C- (45-49 mark), and 1 student withdrew due to health problem (15.4%).

Std mean is 74.6

6. DISCUSSION

Based on the assignments submitted by the students in the 14-week course and final written examination, what they have learned can be traced and analysed to examine whether the objectives of this course have been achieved.

The awareness of students toward career choices

After the 14-week course, all students' awareness toward their future career choices had raised to a higher level after conducting the OBOG interview and sharing their interview results with their course mates. The five selected companies with graduated-seniors which were of the students' interests were: two Japanese-owned companies,

Japan Travel Bureau Malaysia (JTB), Hideo Ito Holding Sdn Bhd (apparel Retailing), two foreign-owned companies; Mary Kay Malaysia (beauty consultant), Qatar Airways and one local multinational company, Top Glove Corporation Bhd (rubber glove manufacturer).

The interview sections were particularly benefited students in terms of getting the real working information, starting from their seniors' application to the company, their job scopes, salary and remuneration, joys and challenges of the current job. The good advices given by their seniors seemed to be taken into account to many of them in choosing their future career path. Answering the worksheet ASGM3c '*Do you want to work at the same company as your senior? Give reasons to support your choice*' helped them to evaluate their seniors' companies and their seniors' jobs and gave them a good opportunity to think critically on their future career choice.

The awareness of the importance of using language to express and communicate with people in a high position, customers became higher among the students particularly who are interesting in marketing and customer service lines. Company with good human resource management and working culture such as cultivating staff good relationship via team-building camps or staff monthly birthday celebrations, turned out to be other criteria for their career choice. The need and importance of doing a thorough search on company before job application has been realized and noted as well.

At the last section of the final written examination, a question was set as such whereby students were asked to choose 3 out of eight interventions of this 14-week course, elaborate freely what they have learned, the problems they faced and the resolutions, the behavioural changes after taking the course. The eight course interventions to help students to think of their future career were; 1) self-discovery (自己分析), 2) the preparation for OBOB interview (OBOGのインタビュー準備) 3) reporting the interview result via oral presentation (OBOGインタビューの結果発表) 4) Do I want to work at the same company as my senior after graduation? (先輩の会社に就職したいかを考えている) 5) how to write 'entry form' (エントリーシート) 6) how to do self-promotion (自己PR) 7) my actual job search action plan (就活アクションプラン), 8) what kind of company that suits me the best? (どんな会社に就職したいか). From the students' feedback, interventions 6, 2 and 8 were top three most useful interventions for them.

In job application context, self-promotion (自己PR) is a short personal summary to let recruiters and employers know about applicant's unique experiences, strengths and ambitions. It can be a tough task if one does not have proper training or knowing what to write in a short and precise way. The challenge becomes greater in using second or foreign language as the medium of writing. Thus, this intervention 6 appeared to benefit many students.

The next useful intervention 2 was doing the OBOG interview. Students reported that in the process of preparation, as a group, they learned how to discuss and came to agreement on senior selection, the questions they wanted to ask. Following by sending

an email to make interview appointment with their senior using polite/honorific form of language in Japanese. They should pay attention to manners such as punctuality and turn taking in conducting interview (using zoom), right after the interview, or the latest by the next day, an email of appreciation should be sent out to thank their senior was something new to them. It is thought that the repetitive saying ‘thank you’ before, during, and after an event was one of the Japanese cultures which should be realized before entering the job market. The task distribution among members in completing the interview analysis, reporting and putting the important points on the power point slides trained their patience and strengthened their tie as a group.

Intervention 8 ‘the kind of company suits me the best’ gave good opportunity to students to think critically by applying all the knowledge and skills they learned in this course to choose their future job and the know-how planning to secure the job was written in their ‘Job searching action plan’.

7. CONCLUSION

Overall, this career exploration course has achieved both objectives of this study as indicated by the growth stages where students demonstrated increased personal awareness and the positive responses given to the course interventions. This study is expected to continue further to achieve the establishment stage with the next cohort of student in the coming semester.

7.1. Implication

It is suggested that career exploration course should be added as a requirement/ compulsory rather than an elective course to increase the marketability and employability of students to the job market.

7.2. Limitations

The limitation is the small sample size without comparison group. For the next cohort of students in the coming semester, a pre- and post-test should be conducted for comparison with a larger sample size.

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<https://www.aots.jp/jp/project/nihongo/kyozai/index.html>

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