

Doctoral Dissertation
(ABSTRACT)

**Revisiting Career Decision Making Process of Indonesian Polytechnic Graduates
amidst COVID-19 - Drawing out the Pandemic Interactive Agency System
(PIAS) Model**

RAHMATIKA DEWI

International Education Development Program
Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences
Hiroshima University

September 2023

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 has had a profound impact on society as a whole, including health, education, jobs, and all spheres of society. The objective of this study is to revisit the career decision-making (CDM) process of polytechnic graduates amidst COVID-19 and ultimately to draw out a new model of their CDM process. Four research questions are utilized: (1) What are the typical characteristics of the extraordinary setting under COVID-19 compared to those before COVID-19?; (2) In the typical characteristics of the context, how can the various capitals be activated/functioned and how do the capitals differ from before?; (3) In the typical characteristics of the labor market setting and by using their activated capitals, how do the graduates' CDM behaviors change amidst COVID-19?; (4) Ultimately, based on the results of the study, what is a new form of CDM process reflected by the polytechnic graduates amidst COVID-19?

To achieve the objectives above, a qualitative research design is deemed suitable, specifically using phenomenological design method. The semi-structured interviews were used, focusing on the graduates' self-reflection on their experiences nearing graduation, transition from polytechnics to workplaces, career choices and current career trajectories. These semi-structured interviews were also conducted with representatives from polytechnic, including the director, heads of study programs, and staffs of career centers, as well as representatives from the user sides (employers). In total there were 98 participants in this study.

This study presents 22 themes as findings in which those themes were interpreted to answer each research questions. **For research question 1**, before COVID-19, there were no typical characteristics at the national level. However, in the labor market setting, limited job opportunities and backdoor hiring practices were already prevalent characteristics. In the polytechnic setting, there were no specific typical characteristics identified. At the family setting, economic problems were observed as typical characteristics within the informants' families.

Amidst COVID-19, there have been changes in the typical characteristics. At the national level, social and mobility restrictions have become the prominent characteristic of the field. In the labor market setting, three typical characteristics have emerged: limited job opportunities, backdoor hiring practices, and digital transformation. The labor market has experienced a decrease in job availability, an increase in the prevalence of backdoor hiring practices, and a significant shift towards digitalization. In the polytechnic setting, online learning, adapted work placement delivery methods, and adapted career guidance have become the typical characteristics. Polytechnics have transitioned to virtual learning environments, modified the way work placements are conducted, and provided adjusted career guidance to cater to the challenges posed by the pandemic. In the family and surroundings setting, parental job loss or experiences of bankruptcy have become the typical characteristics, reflecting the economic hardships faced by families during the COVID-19 crisis. These changes in typical characteristics across different levels and contexts highlight the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on various aspects of society and individuals' lives, particularly in the realms of employment, education, and family dynamics.

For research question 2, amidst COVID-19, the typical characteristics of the context have led to changes in the activation and functioning of various capitals, which differ from the pre-COVID-19 period.

1. Online (digital) social capital activation

Amidst COVID-19, the typical characteristics of the context have led to changes in the activation and functioning of various capitals, particularly social capital. The social and mobility restrictions

imposed during the pandemic have indeed hindered the functioning of offline social capital, which heavily relies on in-person interactions and physical networks. The limitations on face-to-face contact and gatherings have disrupted the ability to maintain and strengthen social relationships through traditional means.

However, as a response to these restrictions, there has been an activation of online (digital) social capital. With the increased reliance on digital platforms and virtual connections, individuals have adapted to maintaining and fostering social relationships through online channels. This activation of online (digital) social capital allows individuals to continue engaging with their networks, seek support, and access information despite the physical limitations imposed by the pandemic.

Through various digital platforms such as social media, video conferencing tools, and online communities, individuals have found alternative ways to stay connected, collaborate, and interact virtually. These online interactions have facilitated the exchange of knowledge, emotional support, and resources, thereby maintaining and activating social capital in a digital context.

It is important to note that the activation of online (digital) social capital may differ from the dynamics of offline social capital experienced before COVID-19. The shift to virtual interactions and reliance on digital platforms introduces new modes of communication and engagement, which can impact the nature and quality of social connections. However, the activation of online (digital) social capital demonstrates the adaptability and resilience of individuals in utilizing digital tools and platforms to sustain their social networks and access social resources in an extraordinary setting characterized by social and mobility restrictions.

2. Solidarity capital activation

Amidst COVID-19, the limited job opportunities have indeed negatively impacted the functioning of cultural capital in the labor market setting. Individuals may face challenges in effectively leveraging their educational qualifications, skills, and credentials to secure employment due to the scarcity of available positions. The traditional mechanisms through which cultural capital, such as educational attainment and relevant experience, would typically contribute to job prospects may be less influential during this period.

However, it is important to note that the limited job opportunities have also led to the activation of social capital, particularly through backdoor hiring practices. In an environment where formal job vacancies are scarce, connections, referrals, and personal networks have become increasingly crucial in accessing employment opportunities. This activation of social capital allows individuals to bypass or circumvent traditional recruitment processes and tap into hidden job markets. By leveraging their social networks and relationships, individuals can gain access to job openings that may not be publicly advertised, thus increasing their chances of securing employment.

Additionally, the activation of social capital in this context also highlights the role of solidarity capital. Solidarity capital refers to the support and assistance provided by individuals within social networks during times of need. The activation of social capital, particularly through backdoor hiring practices, relies on the goodwill and solidarity of individuals who share information, recommend candidates, and facilitate job opportunities for others. In this way, the activation of solidarity capital contributes to addressing the challenges posed by limited job opportunities, providing alternative avenues for individuals to find employment.

Overall, amidst COVID-19, the limited job opportunities have impacted the functioning of cultural capital in the labor market setting. However, this has also led to the activation of social capital and the emergence of solidarity capital, emphasizing the importance of connections,

referrals, and personal networks in accessing employment opportunities and navigating the challenges of the job market during the extraordinary circumstances brought about by the pandemic.

3. Digital cultural capital activation

Amidst COVID-19, the digital transformation accelerated by the pandemic has indeed activated digital cultural capital, which refers to the possession of digital skills, technological literacy, and the ability to navigate digital platforms. Individuals who possess digital cultural capital have an advantage in the evolving job market, as the pandemic has necessitated a shift towards remote work, virtual communication, and online collaboration. Those who already had digital skills and familiarity with technology were better equipped to adapt to the new work environment and utilize digital tools effectively.

The activation of digital cultural capital is reflected in the resilience demonstrated by individuals in adapting to digital tools and remote work environments. They are able to leverage their technological competence to stay productive, communicate efficiently, and collaborate remotely. Their ability to navigate digital platforms, utilize online resources, and quickly adapt to new technologies reflects the activation of digital cultural capital in response to the extraordinary circumstances brought about by the pandemic.

However, it is important to acknowledge that the digital transformation has also widened the existing digital divide. Individuals who lack access to technology or digital skills face additional challenges in utilizing their digital cultural capital effectively. The digital divide refers to the disparity in access to technology, internet connectivity, and digital literacy skills among different individuals or groups. Those who are unable to access or effectively use digital resources may experience barriers in education, employment, and accessing critical services during the pandemic.

The activation of digital cultural capital highlights the increasing importance of digital skills and technological literacy in the current job market. While it offers opportunities for those who possess digital cultural capital, it is crucial to address the digital divide and ensure equitable access to technology and digital skills training to minimize the disparities faced by individuals who are marginalized or lack the necessary resources to fully participate in the digital transformation.

Overall, the digital transformation during the pandemic has activated digital cultural capital, providing advantages to individuals with digital skills and technological literacy. However, efforts are needed to bridge the digital divide and ensure that everyone has equal opportunities to develop and utilize their digital cultural capital effectively.

These shifts in the activation and functioning of capitals highlight the changing dynamics and opportunities in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Adapting to online social interactions, leveraging social connections for employment opportunities, and possessing digital skills have become increasingly important in navigating the extraordinary setting brought about by the pandemic.

For research question 3, amidst COVID-19 and the typical characteristics of the setting, the graduates' career decision-making (CDM) behaviors have undergone changes, resulting from the activation of various capitals and shifts in the horizons for action. There are two scenarios that highlight the changes in the graduates' CDM behaviors amidst COVID-19. Despite the differences, both scenarios reflect changes in the horizons for action and ultimately influence the graduates' pragmatically driven CDM behaviors.

Scenario 1: In this scenario, the graduates' CDM behaviors are driven by the need to survive during the crisis. The typical characteristics of the setting, such as social mobility restrictions, limited job opportunities and economic challenges, influence their decision-making. As a result, their CDM behaviors include taking any available job (horizontal, vertical, underemployment), being self-employed, working as freelancers/gig workers, being part-time workers, or even considering overseas employment (boundaryless careers). These behaviors are adopted as a pragmatic response to the difficult circumstances, allowing them to secure income and meet their immediate needs. However, it is important to note that these decisions may be temporary in nature, as the graduates may continue to seek better job opportunities in the long run.

Scenario 2: In this scenario, the graduates actively explore digital job opportunities, even if they do not have an IT background. The activation of digital cultural capital, along with the typical characteristics of the digital transformation during COVID-19, influences their CDM behaviors. The graduates recognize the growing demand for digital skills and adapt their career choices accordingly. They may acquire new digital skills or leverage existing ones to pursue job opportunities in the digital sector. This strategic adaptation allows them to enhance their employability and increase their chances of finding stable employment in a changing job market.

Both scenarios highlight the shift in the graduates' CDM behaviors compared to the pre-COVID-19 period. Before the pandemic, their CDM goals might have focused on security, work interest, and enjoyment. However, amidst COVID-19, the typical characteristics of the setting, along with the activation of capitals, influence their pragmatically driven CDM behaviors. They may temporarily accept any available job or choose self-employment as a survival strategy, while also actively seeking better job opportunities in the long term. Additionally, they may recognize the value of digital skills and pursue digital job opportunities, even if their educational background is not directly related to the IT sector.

Overall, the changes in the graduates' CDM behaviors amidst COVID-19 reflect the adaptation to the extraordinary setting and the utilization of their activated capitals. The shifts in their career choices and strategies are influenced by the context-specific challenges and opportunities, emphasizing the pragmatic nature of their decision-making in response to the crisis.

For research question 4, based on the information provided in the previous research questions, the study can indeed suggest a new form of career decision-making (CDM) process reflected by polytechnic graduates amidst COVID-19, termed **the Pandemic Interactive Agency System (PIAS) Model**. It is a framework for simulating the actions, behaviors, and interactions of autonomous agents, including individuals, organizations, and groups, within the context of graduates' career decision-making (CDM) processes in Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The PIAS Model reflects the adaptive strategies and decision-making processes employed by polytechnic graduates in response to the challenges posed by the pandemic. It recognizes the importance of various capitals, including online (digital) social capital, digital cultural capital, and solidarity capital, in shaping the graduates' CDM behaviors during the crisis.

Notably, the PIAS Model introduces the concept of "**solidarity capital**". It refers to the inherent social capital that is naturally activated within Indonesian society during times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. In this study it represents the collective support, collaboration, and interconnectedness among individuals, communities, and institutions in addressing challenges for the graduates' CDM process. It encompasses the networks, connections, and mutual aid that are crucial for navigating the challenges of the pandemic and accessing employment opportunities through mechanisms such as backdoor hiring practices.

By incorporating the PIAS Model and highlighting the concept of solidarity capital, the study offers insights into the unique CDM process adopted by polytechnic graduates amidst COVID-19 in the Indonesian context. It provides a comprehensive understanding of how these graduates adapt, make decisions, and leverage their resources in an ever-changing job market shaped by the pandemic.

Overall, the PIAS Model represents a significant contribution to the field of career decision-making research, particularly in the context of an unprecedented crisis like COVID-19. It offers a fresh perspective on how individuals in Indonesia navigate their career paths, emphasizing the importance of adaptive decision-making and the activation of solidarity capital as they face the challenges and uncertainties brought about by the pandemic.

Keywords: Career decision making, COVID-19, polytechnic, PIAS Model, solidarity capital