Spotting passions too early may limit students: Experts

Those with narrow focus may struggle with issues in other fields

Fabian Koh

Students should be wary of crying "students identify their passions and interests early in life so as to limit their education and hinder their potential, according to new research."

It added that students who are in a narrow range of interests are at a disadvantage when faced with other students who are in other disciplines.

The research was commissioned by Yale-NUS College assistant professor of psychology Paul O'Keefe and other researchers at Stanford University, and found that "students identify their passions and interests early in life so as to limit their education and hinder their potential, according to new research."

By O'Keefe noted that students in America are at a disadvantage when faced with other students who are in other disciplines.

"If students identify their passions and interests early in life, they are at a disadvantage when faced with other students who are in other disciplines."

As students, we need to be aware of the potential risks and develop a broad set of skills that can help us adapt to different situations.

The findings will be published in Psychological Science journal.

Funding for the study was provided by the National University of Singapore and the National University of Singapore's College of Arts and Social Sciences.

When we teach students to find their passion, we are really in a sense telling them, they sort of have this immense interest or passion in something, whereas we need to be careful.

"We don't want to tell them they are the best at class and they are the best at other things as well," said O'Keefe.

He added that students should not be told to "identify their passions and interests early in life so as to limit their education and hinder their potential, according to new research."

"It's not helpful," he said. "We need to be careful."

In junior college, where students are at a crossroads between different courses and career paths, it may have implications for their perception of their interests and careers.

"They could interpret it as, I've been told that I'm good at this, therefore this is what I'm going to do," said O'Keefe.

Similarly, with interests, one message is that their interests are only for one place, or doubtful in one place, and it's not a cultural value.

We should not tell students that they are in a narrow range of interests and that they are at a disadvantage when faced with other students who are in other disciplines.

He said that the study is significant as it will help to understand the latest education developments.

"Against this backdrop, the research by Dr O'Keefe, together with other research, will form a wider body of work that helps us understand how we can adapt our education and our curricula for design and implementation."

In Singapore, students may be overwhelmed by courses of study and making a living. Sociologist Vincent Chua cited the example of how the skills and knowledge required for design and implementation in the arts and humanities, especially with a universal emphasis on IT skills and proficiency in coding.

"Programmes that are designed to be marketable can offer students a wider range of career options," he said.