

# Factors Influencing the Career Decision Making Process in Secondary School in Vietnam

Do Thi Bich Loan, Nguyen Thuy Van, Nguyen Duc Trung

**Abstract:** *The purpose of this study is to reveal the stages of career decision making process and emphasizes the influencing factors in each period of secondary students at the time of enrollment in Vocational and Technical Education Institutes (VTE). The analysis of documents reveals that career decision making process consists of four stages: (1) needs identification; (2) information search; (3) evaluation of alternatives; and (4) choices. Different factors impact each stage, such as personal interest, expectations & ability (self-motivated, academic performance; self-efficacy); family context (income/finance, geographical location, experiences); Schools' career ready (career counselor's orientation, teacher's recommendation, career aspirations); professional educational system (quality of VTE training and employments; career transition); social - economic (study fees, career prospects, career value; national trend of labor market; and the mass media). This study suggests that the above factors play a crucial role in designing suitable policies and career ready program for secondary students in the Vietnamese context.*

**Key words:** *career decision-making, Vietnamese secondary students*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In Vietnam, the national education system has four subsystems; the Pre-school education which includes kindergarten for children 3 to 6 years old, the 5-4-3 system for primary (grade 1 to 5), secondary (grade 6 to 9) and high school (grade 9 to 12) (MOET, 2007). As for other Asian countries, such as South Korea, Indonesia, and Malaysia, they maintain separate systems for Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) and the academic schools (higher education) for school leavers (Metheny & Mcwhirter, 2013)

Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) consist of two sub-systems: vocational schools and centers specialized in training skilled or semi-skilled workers; and the technical vocational school specialized in training intermediate practitioners in the field of education, economy, technology, culture and art (La, 2009). Although the Ministry of

Education and Training (MOET) largely supervises vocational and technical education's curriculum and programs, it plays a small role in VTE provision, running only 4 out of the 91 centrally-managed secondary technical schools (Tri, 1994).

In fact, there is a popular phenomenon in vocational behavior in Vietnam with most of students in favor of traditional university while a less number leave school and enroll at/in vocational and technical colleges. According to the Ministry of Education and Training (2017), the findings of investigation of a Project, "Career-oriented education and orientation of high school students" showed that postsecondary students studying at high school accounted for 79.6%; school center around 5.6%; enroll in vocational and technical education 7.8%; go to work 4.6%.

The rate of postsecondary students in making their choice of career has led to an imbalance in the structure of training and preparing labor force for human resources in national social economic development in Vietnam. In 2016, the national data survey center of workers Employment indicated that there were 1,110,000 unemployed people, among them the highest number were of them who had bachelor degrees, accounted for 218,800 people (46.4%); diploma college degree, accounted for 124,800 people (26.5%); due to which, there arises a shortage of skilled workers in industries and factories. The existing statistic indicates that many of university and college graduates do not have jobs. This is because these institutions produce unskilled workers, which the Vietnamese call "many teachers, and less workers". This serious problem calls for serious attention and consideration in order to improve the quality of vocational and technical education system as well as the career advising in secondary schools. This paper tries to review the career decision making process and factors of career choice and engagement in career readiness with the hope to contribute to the literate review of vocational and technical education in Vietnam.

## II. CAREER DECISION MAKING PROCESS

Several studies related to career decision making process assumed that this procedure is a complex and multi-phase process (Mihai-Florin, Dorel & Alexandra-Maria, 2006; Harris & Taylor, 2004; Eidimtas & Juceviciene, 2014, Andrius & Palmira, 2003). Some researchers present their studies with the conclusion of school-leavers' choice of

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studies based on classic models of a consumer's decision-making (Chimanikire, Mut, Gadzirayi, Muzondo, & Mut, 2007; Briggs & Wilson, 2007).

According to Bruyat & Julien (2001) career making decision process seems to be for individual development. Entrepreneurship has been defined as a process of exploration, searching information and evaluation as well as exploitation of opportunities through which individuals seek to create value by involving their interest and ability to get a nexus of opportunities and persons' development Shane & Venkataraman (2000). However, every person is constantly affected by a complex totality of social relations. Reviews showed that various fields of science (psychology, sociology, economics), investigated and emphasized the relationship between the school-leaver views and investment into the labor market in the future. How the society and environment impact their decision to leave schools and opt for other careers (Andrius & Palmira, 2013). For example, Shaver & Scott (1992) indicated that individual behavior of social cognitive processes has an impact on building representations of their external environment, and the motivational variables that affect behavioral choices.

Notably, Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994, 2000), developed their social cognitive career theory (SCCT), in which authors illustrate how career choice, interest, performance, and satisfaction develop in an ongoing cycle (Brown & Lent, 2013). Reviews indicated that one single measurement for college and career choice making of school leavers is insufficient and limited, because this process is complicated and the influencing factors are multi circles (Dalton, 2018). Self-efficacy and outcome expectations are significantly influencing the performance of setting goals (Dalton, 2018). Contextual variables such as, ability and disability, ethnicity, gender and socioeconomic status influence learning experiences and interests, choices of goals, and choice of actions are moderate constructs (Brown & Lent, 2013). Dalton (2018) emphasized that the previous literature promotes exposure to career development, the SCCT models provide a framework which intentionally plans career development interventions, currently applied to career choice making procedure for career ready high school graduates. The SCCT has attracted research interest with respect to entrepreneurial career (Lanero, Vázquez, & Aza, 2016; Liguori et al., 2018). In sum up, this paper aims to review factors influencing career making decision process in the four stages: (1) needs identification, (2) information search, (3) evaluation of alternatives, and 4) choices. In each different stages, there are different factors affecting the complex correlation to impact the final decision (Andrius & Palmira, 2013; Taylor, Harris & Taylor, 2004; Hossler and Galagher, 1998).

### III. FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHOICE OF CAREER

#### A. The Need of Identification

Cosser and Du Toit (2002) state that students needs identification, their choices of career at the ninth grade and ends with the student signing a contract for enrolling in a certain higher education institution. At this stage, students at secondary school realize that the secondary education is not sufficient and university education or vocational education is required for career purposes in life (Pope & Fermin, 2003). Moogan and Baron (2003) emphasize that needs recognition takes place in the initial stage of any decision making process and plays an important role in various internal or external factors (Al-Fattal, 2010; Andrius & Palmira, 2013). The needs are usually determined by personal, cultural circumstances, as well as family and environment conditions (Hossler et al. ,1998; Moogan and Baron, 2003; Pérez & Ceja, 2010, Al-Yousef, 2009; Wong and Liu, 2010). As a teenager, student usually tries to choose persons who are successful models to motivate them. Therefore, the career counselor in secondary school should help students to have enough information related to personal interest, family context, and overview of status of socio-economic of the country and the local areas as well as the trend of labor market for students to identify themselves for school-leaver with career ready.

The attitudes and opinions of a person formed by family environment condition influence the school-leaver's decision to enter higher school or vocational education. Pérez & Ceja (2010) stated that the family status, elder siblings and school experience is a significant influence on the student career decision. Parental discussions in the families encourage pupils to pursue higher level or choose vocational education so as to find job early.

Secondary schools play an important role for career ready to support students. Bottoms (2004) stated that secondary school must be able to link their curricula to realistic and available professional opportunities. He further says that secondary school should incorporate career and post-secondary training and planning to find more success in preventing students' drop out. The current review proposes that schools can mitigate students' potential barriers to career achievement with career development resources and support for all students (Praskova, Creed, & Hood, 2015).

In Vietnam, with the emergence of new jobs in various fields has caused an enormous change in the perspectives of parents towards career choices for their children. This emergence of new jobs also transformed the choices of their children. However, many parents and senior family members still play important roles in guiding their children in career decision-making process (Khuat, 1992; Ngo, 2005). The review indicates that in the decade of eighties, when the economy of Vietnam was still under-developed by the negative impact of war,

parents used to be non-farmers, living in urban, wanted their children to continue their study in high school and enroll in higher education. However, parents who were farmers could not have their children complete their high school because of low income and unclear expectations about their children's career. In that case, they usually left their children to decide on their own. Thus, most of them already studying in the vocational technique schools and decided to learn handwork careers in village so that they may get stable job to support their family (Khuat, 1992).

However, currently, there has been an enormous change in the national economic development due to the open policies of the government at the end of twentieth century in Vietnam. La (2009) found that most of the families wanted their children to finish high school and have the opportunity of studying at universities. Furthermore, some of the respondents in their study emphasized their preference for high social status rather than menial work or hand maker irrespective of monetary benefits. This resulted in the imbalance of educational levels in Vietnam with regard to the great number of students opting for vocational and technical education. She emphasized the need for providing information about the value of vocational and technical education to both parents and children. However, in the Vietnamese current context, the result of a huge number of postsecondary students enroll in higher education and less number of students choose technically vocational education (institutes). The reason of this phenomenon may come from the poor career ready program in secondary school (Dalton, 2018). School leavers' decision may be determined by their traditional approach and less pay attention to the cognitive of career the social economic in the current practice. In the another hand, income and social position also affect students' career making decision process (La, 2009).

## B. Information Search

In this stage, the pupils start considering various possibilities of studies at higher education (HE) institutions or vocational technique schools (Cosser and Du Toit, 2002). The searching stage starts with gathering of necessary information and assimilation by making a list of options based on various factors. Notably, school-leavers solely imagine the change of direction when collecting new information, the change of direction depends on the nature of new information obtained (Taylor, Harris & Taylor, 2004).

There are two types of information search process: internal and external search (Barber, Dodd, and Kolyesnikova, 2009). When the internal search takes place, the user tries to retrieve information from his long term memory, the search from the external field of a current period has a strong impact on students. Whiteside & Mentz (2003) stated if students have experiences of internal search from his or her own memories they can easily make their final decision of choice of career. With students lack internal search for their choice of career may have much information from external search, are usually unable to distinguish the useful information. The external search usually comes from

various sources, such as personal sources, friends, family, relatives, career planning counselors, reference groups and public opinion leaders or independent sources of user groups, governmental institutions and mass media (Strauss, 1998; Rowan-Kenyon, Perna & Swan, 2011, Al-Yousef, 2009)

In Vietnam, children have the tendency to find information related to social values and connections among education, occupation and income. (McMahon & Watson, 2005, p. 243). The findings of this research show that the Vietnamese senior high school students are not only concerned about the status of career but also about their income. The students expressed that they wanted a stable, high income job, with a higher social status. "Social norms" such as what is considered to be a career, and what is not, and what is meant to be successful or unsuccessful, what is a noble job, and what is ignoble job. Besides, factors like gender, age, beliefs, ethnicity also contribute to a person's decision about his/her career (Ngo, p.2005). The above mentioned factors are the main reasons that a small number of students chose vocational training, while majority wanted to pursue general higher (academic or professional) education.

Another notable reason which positively affects students' academic and occupational choices is their living in urban areas in comparison to students who live in rural areas have less opportunities in occupational and academic world (La, 2009). In Vietnam, students living in rural have limited resources and limited access to information. For example, they do not have access to computers or printed media and most of them mainly learn about educational and career opportunities from their schools and peers. Students face difficulty in making decision regarding their choice of career based on the large information obtained from various sources and marketing promotion attracting the students. In Vietnam, the lack of career counselors at secondary school is one of main reasons to lead of the weak facilitates students in making decision regarding choice of career. It is one of reasons, students facing difficulty when make decision in a big data from various sources in the marketing promotions to attracted students (La, 2009; Al-Yousef, 2009).

## C. Formation and Evaluation of Alternatives

This stage plays an important role in career decision making process, depending on the abilities of a pupil. According to Hossler et al. (1998), each alternative conforms to purposes and consequences of decision. The number of alternatives determines the complexity of the decision. Alternatives of some decisions are obvious while the origin of others is immediately clear. Another characteristic of the alternatives of the decision is how clearly formulated they are in the beginning of decision making process. Besides, other factors such as, value of career in the future (Moogan, 2003); physical distance from a living place to university or schools (Drewes, Michael 2006), finance for studying (Saichaie, Morphew, 2014).

Review indicates that recently Vietnamese students'



feelings of self-efficacy were strongly associated with their occupational expectations and interests. Students' beliefs and values and their academic progress based on their self-reported grade point averages showed that these factors play important roles in their educational and career decision-making (Hoang, 2001; La, 2009; Ngo, 2005). However, in reality there are two main factors such as academic performance and finance issues strongly affect their choices of career even though students have strong belief in their own interest and value of career.

### D. Choice.

Choice is defined in research literature as deciding to select one or more institutions and enrollment in a certain program of study, as well as vocational technique or journey to high school and university. The final decision regarding a particular program of study depends on the time spent in collecting information about the future studies and the possible alternatives. Many professional counselors, such as career consultants, teachers, representatives of colleges, members of admissions committees, consult and advise the prospective students in the process of searching and choosing a particular field of study. Kern (2000) remark that majority of pupils need these counselors in their secondary school to choose their career pathways.

In Vietnam, the choice of secondary school pupils takes place in class 9, most of them opt for high school as mentioned above (Khuat, 1992; Ngo 2005; La, 2009). Recently, there has been a change in the trend with the support from policies to promote development of vocational and technical education and orientation in both middle and high schools. Teachers and administrators are playing an important role in advising and helping students to get access to information about vocational and regular higher education programs. However, the result of these changes need more interest in research to show more clear evidences.

## IV. EXPERIENCES & DISCUSSION

Currently, some studies found that with passage of each day, there has been an enormous change with having more students to confidently choose technical or vocational education of their career choice. For example, some students observed that the Traditional High School Education is not linked to their life goals and interest. Where high school mainly prefer theories and lacks career skills while some student's self-interest is in technical skills only for their career development. Therefore, they prefer to choose enroll in VTE for their own career interest and development (Dalton, 2018). With some of the students who have realized clear purpose of career decision and development by linking to long and short term goals since their secondary school, are confident to choose career path starting from their post-secondary planning experiences through their present enrollment in a technical post-secondary program (Dalton, 2018; Kight, 2015). Reviews indicated that the secondary's curriculum for career ready is significant impact on students who made decision to select technical or vocational

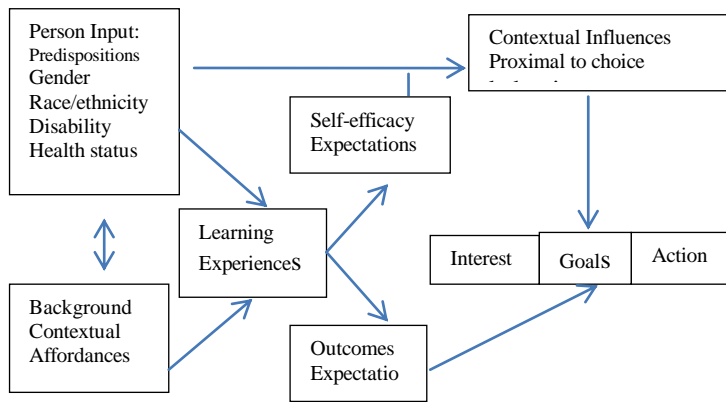
education (Lamb, Arceneaux, Cox-Moses, Sweat & Owens, 2013). The literature shows that secondary schools offer more courses teaching work based competencies, distribute employability skills lessons across all subject areas, and include technical and general skills. This will help students to enhance their career preparedness in order to make right decision (Guy et al., 2009). Darling et al. (2014), found that the incorporation between college or technical education and the work ready skills into secondary curricula make do not the students see the value of vocational education outcomes. Especially, students prefer technical skills, they do not pay attention to in a speech in the lessons of curriculum, they usually keen on visiting industry activities (Loera, Nakamoto, Oh & Rueda, 2013).

In Vietnamese, secondary school prepare career ready for students through career orientation in grade 9, which comes at the end of class system. However, one emerge issue is lack of vocational guidance and counseling activities in secondary school in Vietnam (Nguyen, H. 2005). Another element which impacts students' career choice is a change in the structure of exams, Vietnam. In 2009, La stated that universities entrance exam was the main challenge for students, however, crossing this barrier becomes easy for students when Government extends the number of universities in Vietnam. In every province, there should be at least one local university which opens their doors to welcome students who are not much concern about their academic abilities (Loan, 2016). Therefore, Vietnamese secondary schools need to improve their task of career ready program with wise strategies. In which secondary schools need to provide fulfill information related to individuals interest, abilities, family context, developmental social-economic trends etc.(Loan et al, 2016).

Related to career preparation in secondary schools, reviews show that schools are usually facing some barriers, such as building self-efficacy for career development to post-secondary preparation created by schools that lack career consoler experiences. Lent and Brown (2000) argue that strong self-efficacy is key to students' perception of barriers to career achievement. They can build interventions to implement career counseling programs well before high school (Gibbons & Borders, 2010). Another barrier is lack of orientation of technical education in career preparation program in secondary schools that result of student lack of information for career making decision (Nguyen, 2005).

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) highlights the temporal period which occurs in a particular environmental influence. Conceptual convenience and environmental variables are divided into two basic categories according to their relative proximity to career choice-making process.

In order to overcome the challenges, one of the solutions is to apply Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). This will help them develop their own framework for secondary school in order to prepare effective program of career ready (Dalton, 2018).



(Source: Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994)

Students need ample opportunities to develop their interests through career goal and activity selection, also to strengthen their self-efficacy in specific career interests (Brown & Lent, 2013). Therefore, integrates of career orientation in lessons is a good way for students in secondary schools to improve self-efficacy in their own specific career interests.

Students' expectations and willingness is a strong factor to impact their career interests by setting new goals and selecting correlated skill building activities for strengthening self-efficacy (Brown & Lent, 2013). Career interest plays a vital role and connect family with community expectations, socioeconomic status, and culture (Rojewski & Kim, 2003; Thompson & Dahling, 2012), educational expectations and experiences are significant contributing factors as well. To achieve the goal of producing career ready high school graduates, Grundman (2013) strongly suggested that schools must include career exploration, expectations and aspiration in daily lesson plans with school subject material and classroom curricula and should also connect school classwork to potential careers (Curry et al., 2013; Grundman, 2013; Wood & Kaszubowski, 2008). A notable thing, that is the level of strength of career interests from students' self-efficacy depend on the outcome of the career activities and goals they establish In which, contextual, personal, and experiential factors such as socioeconomic status, ability, cultural norms, and gender also affect students' access to career related behaviors (Brown & Lent, 2013). Therefore, secondary schools should recognize their students' varying needs and deficiencies in career development process. They should be provided with career development resources and support for all students build self-efficacy that is one of the effective strategies (Praskova, Creed, & Hood, 2015).

In secondary schools, career center as their best post-secondary preparation activity is supported to promote occupational engagement for student in career ready (Bennett, 2007). Technological educational courses are found to be effective in teaching career preparation skills and better prepare students for the post-secondary plans (Guy et al., 2009; Hanuscheck et al. 2011; Kim & Passmore, 2016).

## v. CONCLUSION

To sum up, the school-leaver's choice of studies process, four categories of influencing factors have been distinguished: educational factors (family: style of education; at school: recommendations of teachers and career counselors), professional educational system (quality of VTE training and employments; career transition); information factors (open days, exhibitions, mass media), economic factors (study fees, career prospects, incomes), other factors (geographical location of a higher education institution and ratings, personal skills and demography). Rowan-Kenyon (et al., 2011) inform that effective career developmental programs in secondary school are key in decision- making process and connect education to potential future careers for all students. Dalton, (2018) states that secondary schools need to integrate career exploration activities into the general curriculum and career developmental lessons. These strategies work to build student vocational identity, better inform students of the skills and demands of the workforce, and connect school work to future career skills. The core socio-cognitive variables of self-efficacy, outcome expectations and goals are defined in relation to career adaptive behaviors and their outcomes. The career exploration and skill building activities chosen by the participants were notably effective. Secondary and postsecondary technical education programs facilitate building self-efficacy and developing career interests, both important components of the career choice process. Building self-efficacy, supporting career interests, increasing career activities, understanding personal and contextual factors are factors that significantly impact on career development. This career decision making process and experiences apply SCCT in developing career ready program and the above analysis reviews expect to find a better way to improve career orientation for secondary school students in Vietnam.

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