

HOW DO STUDENTS MAKE FUTURE CAREER CHOICES? A CASE STUDY IN VIETNAM

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Abstract: Nowadays, career choice seems to be the most difficult decision for students all over the world, including Vietnam. This research was conducted to explore Vietnam school students' attitudes and decisions towards future career selection. Through a small survey with self-designed bilingual questionnaire in a public high school in Vietnam, the authors pointed out various considering aspects as well as influential factors in the making of future occupational decisions. Additionally, main vocational tendency and criteria of students in Vietnam public high schools were also discovered. The results indicated that it is very important for most students to have future career orientation by parents, peers or teachers. Next, STEM-related and social work was seen as the major vocational trends due to active job markets and higher academic paths. Moreover, the findings of study also revealed students' attitudes towards gender differences in occupational selection. We concluded some factors such as personal preferences, educational attainment and gender-related stereotypes had a significant influence on vocational options.

Keywords: high school students, career choice, Vietnam.

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout our lives, we are constantly making decisions, among which, one of the most influential to our life is choosing an occupation. By the time individuals reach young adulthood, it is expected that an occupational choice will be made by carefully consideration and consultant. However, the complexity of today's vocational world and the pressures imposed by society make the career-choice process overwhelming for some coming-of-age students [1]. As in Vietnam, a young thriving economic market with developing educational facility, quick-to-change career trends and job demands can be a challenge for many high school students, more if lack of sufficient help and orientation. Responding to current situation, a mini survey was carried out in a public high school in Hanoi to describe the concepts, attitudes and trends of Vietnamese students towards occupational options in the future.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The cross-sectional study conducted a small-scale survey through self-designed bilingual questionnaire (Vietnamese-English). Multiple choice questions were mostly used with some open-ended questions. The first part of the questionnaire asked about students' concepts and attitudes in choosing a future job. The second one aimed at exploring students' trends towards future vocational options and some impacted factors.

The subjects were 100 high school students from a public high school located in Hanoi, Vietnam named Le Quy Don – Dong Da High School. 100 12th grade students participated in the survey in April, 2019. All the respondents read through the bilingual questionnaire and answered either in Vietnamese or English in 30 minutes. Queries about difficulties or misunderstanding were responded promptly.

3. FINDINGS

1. Students' attitudes and concepts in choosing a future job

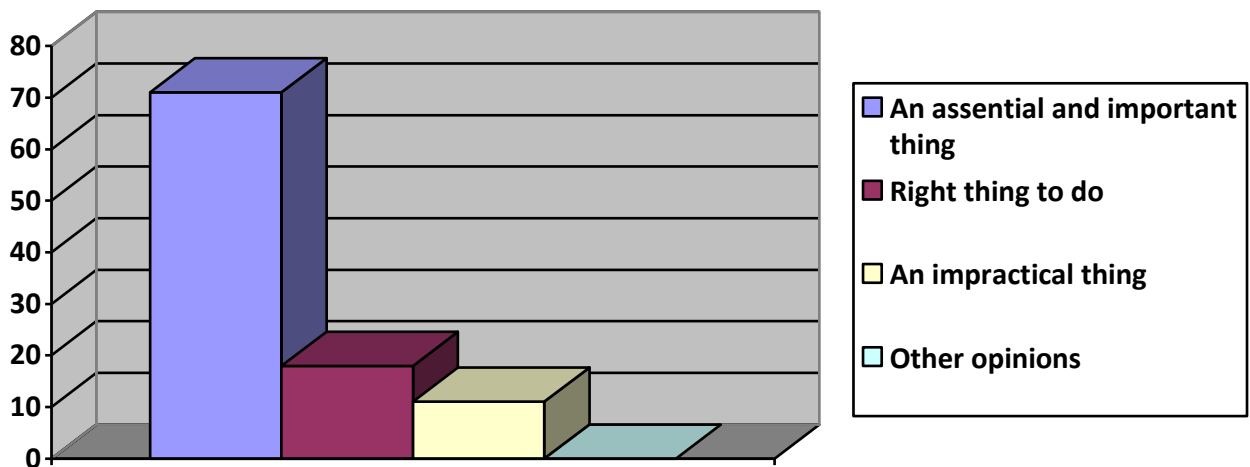


Chart 1: Students' concepts about choosing future jobs

As Chart 1 illustrates, most students stressed the importance of making future career decisions. 71% of students regarded occupational choices in the future as an essential and important thing. 18 students expressed that making future career options was simply just a right thing to do, while 11 students thought that this choice was just an impractical thing, distant from current life. The findings were similar to other research, emphasizing on students' concepts of making occupational choices before graduating from high schools. Indeed, Cavanaugh (1997) strongly referred occupations as a reflection of individuals' personality, which provide people with an official position and affect people's lifestyle as well as social interactions; therefore, choosing an occupation is a serious matter [1]. Gardner and Jewler (2000) also found that college students often regarded vocational choices as monumental and irreversible decisions [2]. Undeniably, making future occupational options plays a key role for high school students in Vietnam.

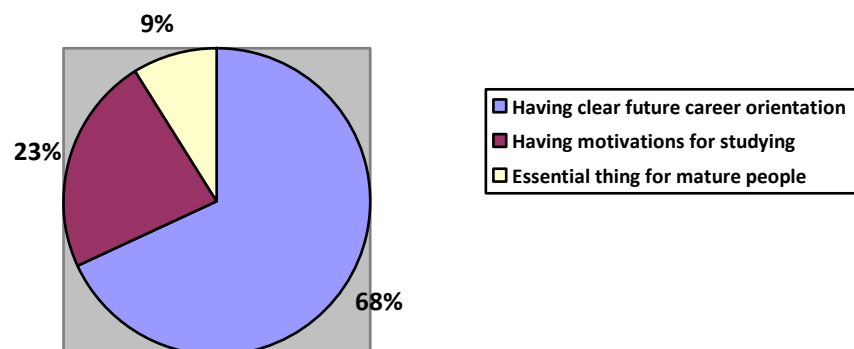


Chart 2: Students' reasons for making future career choices

For students, making future career choices can be regarded for different purposes (Chart 2). The majority of participants (68%) saw it essential to have clear future career orientation. 23% considered having motivations for studying as a suitable reason for deciding career fields in the future. Only 9% regarded career choices as essential for mature life.

Clearly, a clear career pathway is considered the most common reasons to decide future career choices for Vietnamese students. Turner and Helms explained this attitude that all young adults must establish themselves as worthwhile and significant individuals [3]. This has usually been accomplished in the world of work, by earning wages and serving useful purposes for life and society [3]. Thus, as occupations remain an important function of the individuals, orientation will help people set clear goals for their future. On the other hand, some researchers indicated that consideration for vocational

choices would be more suitable and well-fit for middle-aged and older workers, not young students [1]. Nevertheless, it is never too early to have a clear motivation for future career after graduation [4], especially with sufficient early research for job market demands during high school, students would be more adaptive to the work force and motivate to qualify themselves in college and university [4].

2. Students' trends towards future vocational options

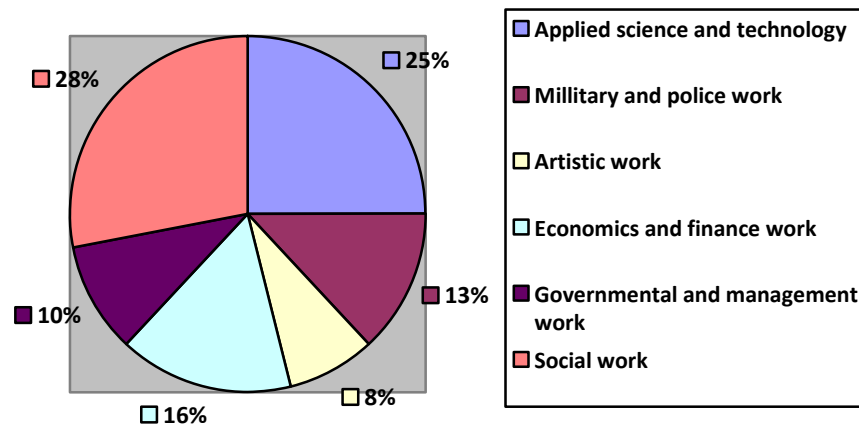


Chart 3: Different categories of occupational options of high school students

While one in 5 student chooses applied science and technology as their future work career, 28% of students decided to work in a social field. Other job categories include: Economics and finance work (16%), Military and police work (13%), governmental and management work (10%), and lastly, artistic work (8%).

The findings were in line with other research, showing social work as a common choice among high school students. According to Prescott, "social work is actually a very broad field that offers a great variety of specialties, comprised of diverse responsibilities in numerous practice settings" [5]. In terms of social career fields there are a variety of occupations such as "nurse, teacher, social workers, genetic, counselor, marriage counselor, rehabilitation counselor, school superintendent, geriatric specialist, insurance claims specialist, minister, travel agent, guidance counselor convention planner" [2, p.199]. Therefore, there are clearly high demands for employees in social fields, which is very beneficial for potential students to choose a suitable job after graduation. Meinert, Pardeck and Kreuger also claimed that social occupations have become the champion of the diversity in all other career fields [6]. Indeed in Vietnam, social work remains high employment volume in the labor force, hence explaining the common choices of high school students.

Science and applied technology is also an upcoming trend among high school students. In the age of Internet of Things and Industry Revolution 4.0, demands for high-skilled workers with information technology degrees and qualifications are increasing. To meet the requirements of future job markets, many students do see the need to pursue vocations in this field.

The survey also illustrated students' attitudes towards gender differences in occupational selection. Most students (92%) believed that substantial gender disparities in vocational employment still remained for several reasons such as personal preferences, social prejudices and stereotypes. Worell (2001) also found that gender is an impacting factor in the vocational options of many men and women [7, p.45]. For instance, women are overrepresented in clerical and services-related jobs whereas men are disproportionately employed in technology and sciences, operator and laborer occupations.

4. CONCLUSION

Career-related choices play a significant role for the future of every student [4]. The study indicated that most students saw great importance towards future occupational selection. It is viewed that to have a clear career path and study motivation is the main reason to choose career choices in high school. Social and technology-related work remained the common job category for high school students in Vietnam, while gender disparities are viewed as an important impact factor for career choice process. In summary, vocational choices is an important long-term process for every student, thus clear orientation would help students better prepared for ever-changing job markets in the future.

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