Research Article

THE FACTORS AFFECTING UNIVERSITY MAJOR
AND PROFESSION CHOICES OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study involves the issues of the university major and profession choice of high school students based on factors that influence students' choice. The results show that the current trend of students choosing the major and profession is typically embedded in "hot" majors and occupations with a high income. The findings also indicated 11 factors influencing significantly on students' choices. Of 11 factors, "Advice of family members" and "Job opportunities in the future" factors had a strong influence on students' choices. These findings provide teachers and professional consultants with a better understanding of factors affecting students' choices of university majors and occupations t Based on the study findings, some suggestions have been recommended to teachers, profession consultants and parents, and those directly involved in choosing the university major and profession of students.

Keywords: high school students; influencing factor; university major and profession choices

1. Introduction

In recent years, choosing a major at a university for high school students has emerged as a social phenomenon. There are a lot of different trends and thoughts from the students. Many of them choose a major or a profession based on the imposition of their parents and other people. Others choose a famous major, a "hot" major at a top university or a well-paid profession, etc. The students choosing a major do not consider relevant conditions such as tuition fees, length of training, and the characteristics of the job required by the major and especially the demand of the future labour market. This may cause the risk of potential unemployment in the future.

The choice of a major is always considered one of the important steps determining each person's future, particularly high school students. However, most students do not pay attention to choosing a profession for themselves (Nguyen, 2004). Some students choose a major based on their feelings and do not care about the features of their selected profession

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or job opportunities after graduation (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2006). Others choose a major following, "the trend of crowds" to get to their destination (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2006). This is significantly attributed to the fact that many students have no excellent preparations before choosing a major and a profession (Nguyen & Luong, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2003). They lack the information about the professional characteristics and have no concerns about future labor market demand (Nguyen, 2004).

Parents insist their children to have a university degree while universities are looking for ways to recruit new students to maintain their training operations. As a result, training at many universities takes place massively. Many universities favour quantity without a long-term plan for teaching the future human resources as required by the labour market (Nguyen et al., 2003). Additionally, parents desire their children to study a major in which they are uninterested. Parents seem not to account for future job opportunities (Nguyen & Luong, 2018). This risks a waste of money in their children's education and leads graduates to fall into unemployment after graduation. In fact, some graduates have to struggle to find a job. Others are employed with unsuitable jobs, trained at the university, and even unemployed.

Increasing the unemployment rate in recent years has come from various causes. The supply of workers with university degrees is in excess of those with this qualification have not met the job requirements in the labour market (Nguyen, 2004; Nguyen et al., 2003). In other words, some al fields have excess human resources while others lack labour (Nguyen, 2004). This situation may derive from choosing a major following "the crowd" or a "hot" major. It is noted here that high school students need support, the guidance and counselling in choosing a major, which may prevent the negative impacts of relevant factors from their choice.

Many studies suggest that high school students are affected by two main factors, internal factors and external factors when selecting a major (Borchert, 2002; Chapman, 1981). Internal factors are known as internal motives (subjective factors), such as their interest, aspirations, and learning ability. Meanwhile, external factors are also known as external motives (objective factors), such as advice from relatives, and school's career guidance (Borchert, 2002; Chapman, 1981; Nguyen & Luong, 2018). In the main groups of factors affecting the university major choice of the high school students, the group of factors relevant to family members and friends have important influence on their profession choices (Bromley, 2004; Ogowewo, 2010). The researchers pointed out that if students are aware of their abilities and characteristics as well as their interests in choosing a major, their decision may affect less or more by their family members and friends (Chapman, 1981; Nguyen & Luong, 2018; Tang & Newmeyer, 2008).

Borchert (2002) suggests that in three main groups of factors affecting the choice of a major: Environment, opportunities, and personal characteristics, the group of individual characteristics has an important impact on their choices. Likewise, Nguyen and Luong

(2018) and Tran and Cao (2009) believe that the factors of individual students are one of the groups of factors that greatly influence their decision to choose a profession. More importantly, the environment factor also involves their professional choice, such as teachers' guidance and professional consultants (Borchert, 2002; Tang & Newmeyer, 2008). Through these profession counselling programs, students may receive guidance, advice, and help to be ready to choose a suitable profession. The student's choice is affected by many factors at the same time. Many researchers emphasise that university major and profession choice of students constantly change under the impacts of social conditions, especially economic and labour market conditions in the future (Nguyen et al., 2003; Tran & Cao, 2009).

Furthermore, scholars suppose that chance of getting a job after graduation is also a factor affecting students' decision to choose a major (Bromley, 2004; Tang & Newmeyer, 2008; Washburn et al., 2000). This issue is related to students' awareness, family support, and guidance in predicting future job opportunities. However, this depends on the social background and economic context within four years after graduation. As warned by Nguyen (2004), students ignore the necessity of the majors for their future job chances. Therefore, a combination of personal demands and aspirations with the requirements of the job and the labour market are potential to choose a major (Nguyen, 2004). Thus, the future job expectations are one factor influencing the university's major choice of students. Therefore, the personal readiness for work and chances of getting a job after graduation also influence their decision to choose a major at a university (Tang & Newmeyer, 2008; Washburn et al., 2000).

Conversely, the teachers at schools and the professional consultants play an important role in guiding students through choosing a major (Bromley, 2004; Tran & Cao, 2009). They contribute enormously to adjusting student's university major choices in the right direction, which can be suitable for the future labor market context. This is argued that teachers at school can identify students' talents and abilities. Accordingly, they encourage their students to participate in career-oriented activities to help them realise their abilities and interests (Tang & Newmeyer, 2008). Additionally, professional consultants provide the fact of current occupations and the future environment before choosing a major (Bromley, 2004; Nguyen et al., 2003). It is important that counselling and orientation for high school students help them recognise the individual differences and the influencing issues regarding each student's university major choice. However, the best way is that the profession consultants should contribute to the development and implementation of comprehensive career-oriented programs to support students with a right decision (Tran & Cao, 2009). Thus, professional counselling programs are the ways to aid students in changing their minds about university major and profession choices with the direction of economic restructuring and labour market.

With the brief overview above, this study sought to answer the following questions: (1) what current trends do students choose the university major after graduating high school?

(2) What factors affect their choice? and (3) what are the key factors in their choice of the university major?

2.   Methodology

This study used quantitative methods to gather information to explore insight into the primary purpose mentioned earlier. The data were attained based on two resources, the secondary data from the statistics of the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education and Training in 2021, while the primary data was gained through the designed questionnaire of the current study.

The approach was to investigate the participants' self-reports about the importance of 16 factors in choosing a university major through the questionnaire. All the participants, who were studying in Grade 12 at 10 high schools in two provinces, Gia Lai and Kon Tum in school year 2020 – 2021, were invited to the study based on their consents. Two hundred ninety-three students agreed voluntarily to answer the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was designed based on the criteria proposed by Creswell (2009). The asked items in the questionnaire were to rate each statement by the level of agreement in five point Likert scale consisting of totally unimportant (1), unimportant (2), neutral (3), important (4), very important (5). The questionnaire was adapted from the studies of Washburn et al. (2000) and Bromley (2004), and modified to suit the current study.

SPSS software (version 20.0) was used to analyse the collected data from the questionnaire. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was applied through Exploration Factor Analysis (EFA) method to determine the levels of significant correlation between variables and eliminate the uncorrelated variables. Accordingly, descriptive statistics of variables, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO test), and Cronbach's Alpha coefficient were examined to evaluate data and specify the factors influencing the university major choice of students. Based on the process of EFA, Linear Regression Model (LRM) was analysed to determine the impact of factors and groups of factors on students' university major and profession choices.

3.   Findings and Discussion

3.1.   The current trend of university major choice of high school students

In the literature review, the most important thing is that students need to grasp the future profession trends and predict the demand for human resources in the next three or four years, which will supply them with a suitable university major and profession choice. However, the secondary data show that the practical trend of choosing university majors for high school students based on many various options. According to the statistics from the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), out of 24 groups of majors for enrolment in 2021 at universities, the ratio of the first Option (1st Option) per total enrolment targets shows that the trends of the candidates' choice focused on the "hot" majors as warned by Nguyen (2004).

The statistics of MOET (2021) indicate that the university major group of *Security - National Defence* was registered most by the candidates (566.82%), followed by *Journalism and Information* (311.65%), *Arts* (210.7%), *Hotel Tourism and Services* (201.3%), *Social and Behavioural Sciences* (197.97%) and *Business - Management* (186.14%). Meanwhile, the Science of Education and Teacher Training major group was registered at a moderate rate, ranking in the top 9. In contrast, the groups of the least attractive majors (in terms of 1st Option) were *Life Sciences* (26.14%) and *Natural Sciences* (20.15%). These results show that candidates focused on university major groups that tend to be a "hot" major and have high income after graduation. This may explain that students may learn about the practical needs of the current labour market. Still, they seem not to know how to choose the right major for them related to their ability, interests, and other relevant issues in the future, as pointed out by Nguyen et al. (2003).

On the other hand, they cannot previse the demand for human resources in the future labour market (Nguyen, 2004). A popular explanation is that a majority of students have no professional experiences. They have no understanding of the true value of professions but have too high expectations for some majors. This may be because they have too little knowledge about those majors or do not even understand their selected major (Nguyen et al., 2003).

An important question associated with university major and profession choice is how to pursue students to choose majors and occupations based on their beliefs about themselves and theirabilities and their understandings about the relative values of different professions. This suggests that the trends of choosing university majors for students are not one-way that can be changed because a student's experiences are shaped by his or her own aptitudes and the impacts of the surrounding relationships such as parents, teachers etc. The student's perceptions of university major and profession choice may also change if they are helped to shape their beliefs about themselves, profession values, and profession contexts in the future.

3.2. *Factors influencing the university major and profession choice*

Advice from family members and friends, and more importantly, personal interests, expectations, and abilities are known as factors affecting a student's university major and profession choices. These derive from students' perceptions, motivations, interests, and other relevant issues. Based on the overview and data collection procedures described in this study's methodology section, the factors influencing students' university major and profession choices were explored.

The 16 variables (factors) from the questionnaire were analysed and presented in Table 1. The findings indicate that of 16 variables, "Advice of the friends/ classmates" was "totally unimportant" with a mean of 1.18, and "Advice of the former students" was a mean of 2.56 between "unimportant and neutral", whereas 14 remaining variables had means of over 3.09. To test the reliability of the scale, the KMO test was applied to measure the quality of the

correlations between variables to be able to continue further with EFA. According to Hutcheson and Sofroniou (1999), the KMO index varies between 0 and 1 and compares the zero-order correlation with the partial correlations observed between the variables. Accordingly, the value of KMO between 1.0 and 0.9 is very good; 0.8 - 0.9 good; 0.7 - 0.8 medium; 0.6 - 0.7 reasonable; 0.5 - 0.6 bad; and < 0.5 unacceptable.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics of Variables*

	Variables	**Mean**	**Std.D**
1	Advice of the former students	2.56	0.67
2	Advice of the friends/classmates	1.18	0.46
3	Finance of the family	3.83	0.87
4	Advice of family members	3.50	0.87
5	Reputation of the university	3.35	0.99
6	University with many professions for options	3.74	0.85
7	Advice of school teachers	3.60	0.71
8	Career counseling programs	3.90	0.69
9	Marketing Programs of the universities	3.40	0.51
10	Job opportunities in the future	4.37	0.67
11	High income after graduating	4.07	1.05
12	High chance of admission	4.17	0.37
13	University near home	3.42	0.72
14	Pride of studying the field	3.09	0.99
15	Suitable for own learning ability	3.36	0.61
16	Personal interests and forte	3.87	1.29

At first, PCA was applied through the EFA method with 16 variables (Table 1), which were all determined on the Likert scale from 1 "totally unimportant" to 5 "very important". The results indicate that there were five variables with factor loading coefficients less than 0.5, consisting of "Advice of the friends/classmates", "Career counseling programs", "Marketing Programs of the universities", "University near home" and "Suitable for own learning ability". Therefore, these variables have been removed because the reliability of the variables is ineligible.

Table 2. *KMO and Bartlett's Test*

Criteria		**Value**
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.75
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	509
	df	55
	Sig.	0.000

After removing five ineligible variables, the 11 remaining variables were analysed the second time. The result indicates that the value of KMO was at 0.75. This states that the sample size of the study was adequate for analysing LRM. Additionally, Bartlett's Sphericity Test indicated a high statistical significance level with Sig. < 0.05 (see Table 2). This proves that there are significant correlations among variables, and the analysis of LRM is completely accepted with the current sample.

Additionally, the results show that the 11 analysed variables were grouped into three groups of factors, consisting of "Family", "School and Society" and "Personal Characteristics" (see Table 3). As indicated, the Total Variance Explained was $60.1\% > 50\%$. This means that the EFA method explained over 60% of the variation of the observed variables. Moreover, Factor Loading coefficients were greater than 0.5 (Table 3). Therefore, the 11 variables ensures the convergence and the discriminant validity when the regression model analysed. This can be concluded that the variables are reliable.

Table 3. Rotated Component Matrix

Factors	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Group 1: Family			
Advice of the former students	0.699		
Advice of family members	0.635		
Finance of the family	0.579		
Group 2: School and Society			
Advice of school teachers		0.708	
University with many professions for options		0.708	
Job opportunities in the future		0.685	
Reputation of the university		0.660	
Group 3: Personal Characteristics			
High income after graduating			0.905
Personal interests and forte			0.898
High chance of admission			0.853
Pride of studying the field			0.681
Cronbach's Alpha	0.642	0.881	0.656
Total Variance Explained (%)		60.141	

Based on three groups of factors identified with 11 factors, a Linear Regression Model was analysed to evaluate the impact of the three groups on the students' university major choice by using SPSS software. The specific model is as follows:

$Y = B_0 + B_1X_1 + B_2X_2 + B_3X_3 + \ldots + B_{11}X_{11} + \varepsilon$

Y: Dependent Variable (major choices)

B_0: Regression Constant

$X_1, X_2, X_3, \ldots,$ and X_{11}: Independent Variables (including 11 factors)

B_1, B_2, B_3, …, and B_{11}: Unstandardised Coefficients

ε: Residuals

The analysis of LRM presented in Table 4 shows statistical significance (Adjusted R^2 = 0.546). This result reveals a correlation between the independent variables and the student's university major choice. This means that 11 analysed factors have influenced 54.6% to students' university major and profession choice, and the remaining 45.4% are the errors of measurements in the model among variables. In other words, three groups of factors (Family, School and Society, and Personal Characteristics) have the impact on students' choices.

Table 4. The results of Linear Regression Model

Factors	Standardised Coefficients		
	Group 1	**Group 2**	**Group 3**
Group 1: Family			
Advice of the former students	0.319		
Advice of family members	0.455		
Finance of the family	0.358		
Group 2: School and Society			
Advice of school teachers		0.377	
University with many professions for options		0.355	
Job opportunities in the future		0.415	
Reputation of the university		0.346	
Group 3: Personal Characteristics			
High income after graduating			0.344
Personal interests and forte			0.318
High chance of admission			0.330
Pride of studying the field			0.191
Sig. (Beta)	0.101*	0.012***	0.065**
Adjusted R Square (R^2)		0.546	
Sig. (F)		0.000	

*Note: *p < 0.1; ** p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01; Beta: Standardised Coefficients*

All the Standardised Coefficients of 11 factors were positive, fluctuating between 0.191 and 0.455 (see Table 4). This reveals that all factors influence the student's choice. The findings imply that any impact on each factor will contribute to changing the students' orientation to choose a major. Moreover, as shown in Table 4, in three groups of factors, "School and Society" had the greatest influence with Sig.(Beta₂) < 0.01. This means that the university major and the profession choice of the students is strongly affected by the group of factors "School and Society". These results are in line with the suggestions of Bromley (2004) andTran and Cao (2009). This can be explained that the role of high school teachers

is important for guiding and advising students in university major choice. In addition, job opportunities, social context, and labour market positively impact students' choices. For example, the advice of consultants in profession orientation programs is held at schools, or businesses offer job opportunities at forums. The issues related to the social context of job opportunities and labour market should be discussed by teachers to support students' university major and profession choice.

In the literature review, the abilities of students and the advice of family members have a certain influence on their university major and profession choice. In this study, the result also discloses that the groups of "Personal Characteristics" and "Family" had significant impacts on the students' choice with $Sig.(Beta_3) < 0.05$, with $Sig.(Beta_1) < 0.1$ respectively (see Table 4). The findings are in line with those of Chapman (1981), Nguyen and Luong (2018), and Tran and Cao (2009). Although the results show that three groups of factors have a significant influence on students' university major and profession choice, when looking at each factor in Table 4, some factors have strongly influenced student's choices whereas others have weaker impacts.

In group 2, "School and Society", of four factors, "Job opportunities in the future" had the strongest impact on students' choice (0.415) while the three remaining factors had the similar effects (from 0.346 to 0.377). This can be understood that the students are concerned about the future labor market when they choose a major. It is also explained that job opportunities are associated with the students' choices. Besides the role of high school teachers in profession orientation programs for students, the factors like "Universities with many professions for options" and "Reputation of the university" also had a significant impact on students' choice. This suggests that the position and reputation of universities or institutes are also one of the key factors attracting students' attention when choosing a major.

As indicated results in group 1, the factor of "Advice of family members" had the most significant influence on the student's choice (0.455) while the other two factors had a similar effect (see Table 4). These results are in agreement with those found by Borchert (2002), Bromley (2004), and Ogowewo (2010). It may be because of the family members who have had social and professional experiences. Therefore, they can predict their children's chances in the future when deciding to choose a major. It can also be explained that parents are aware of their current family economic situation and their children's education. This suggests that the family members are strongly involved in the student's choice.

"Personal characteristics" is believed to impact students' major choices. The results of this study also show that among the four factors, "High income after graduating" had the significant influence on choosing a university major of students (0.344) whereas "Pride of studying the field" had the slightest impact at 0.191 (Table 4). These findings are in accordance with results reported by Tran and Cao (2009) and Nguyen et al. (2003). This can be explained that it is a common phenomenon when students choose a major, meanwhile,

they are not fully aware of their capacity and social needs. In other words, students need to be equipped with knowledge related to self-assessment of their ability, associated with the reality of labour market demand. Therefore, it is recommended that high school students need real experiences in career-oriented education courses to better understand the true value of a certain profession.

4.   Suggestions and Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, the group of factors "School and Society" strongly impacted students' choice. This suggests that profession counselling programs and career orientation courses in high schools for students should be done. Additionally, the profession consultants should update information and predict the future labour market to supply students with more information in choosing a major. It is noticed that the job opportunities for graduates and future labour market must be recommended in such programs. Besides, teachers of high schools also need to have knowledge related to professional guidance activities to promptly provide information to students at the beginning of the school year.

It is also necessary that both profession consultants and high school teachers need forums to meet parents about career counselling for their children as family members have the great influence on students' choices. On the other hand, not every parent has knowledge of majors and professions, and the labor market information to advise and support their children. More significantly, keeping open the door of opportunity to choose a major high school students does not guarantee they will pass through it. Therefore, intervention efforts or impacts of teachers and parents may be necessary for students. It should be understood that parents are perceived to influence professional choice more often for students at home. In contrast, teachers may play a significant role in influencing the students' choice at school. Hence, it is important that the parents' influence is more often and teachers' is much more often for them in choosing a university major.

Thus, the factors which play a role in determining high school students' university major and profession choices cannot be understood solely in terms of their effect on personal students' choices. Their free choice is not affected by any factors that can lead to negative impacts in the future, such as shortage of human resources, costly expenses for family, and unemployment because this does not meet the needs of the labour market. Hence, the three factors influencing the students' university major choice found in this study indicate that high school students should be well prepared for their direction based on knowledge and profession values, which they expect along with future job demands.

This paper provides the high school teachers and the profession consultants with more evidence of counselling for high school students regarding their university major and profession choice. In this study, it demonstrated that the use of KMO test and Cronbach's Alpha coefficient by applying EFA method, as well as analysing LRM to determine the factors influencing the choices of university major and profession of high school students

are completely useful. The results of this study identified 11 factors in three groups of factors, and all of them had impacts on students' university major and profession choice. Based on the findings of LRM, of 11 factors, 2 factors strongly influenced "Advice of family members" and "Job opportunities in the future". With the methods and the factors explored in this study, it is recommended that further study be done to be able to identify more factors related to students' university major and profession choice.

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PHÂN TÍCH CÁC NHÂN TỐ TÁC ĐỘNG ĐẾN VIỆC LỰA CHỌN NGÀNH HỌC ĐẠI HỌC VÀ NGHỀ NGHIỆP CỦA HỌC SINH TRUNG HỌC PHỔ THÔNG

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TÓM TẮT

  Bài viết đề cập sự lựa chọn ngành học đại học và nghề nghiệp của học sinh trung học phổ thông, dựa vào nghiên cứu các nhân tố ảnh hưởng đến việc lựa chọn ngành học của học sinh. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy xu hướng chọn ngành, nghề của học sinh hiện nay đều tập trung vào các ngành "hot" và nghề nghiệp với mức thu nhập cao. Kết quả nghiên cứu cũng chỉ rõ 11 nhân tố ảnh hưởng đến sự lựa chọn ngành học đại học và nghề của học sinh. Trong 11 nhân tố, có 2 nhân tố "Lời khuyên của thành viên gia đình" và "Cơ hội việc làm tương lai" có ảnh hưởng lớn đến sự lựa chọn của học sinh. Những kết quả này có thể giúp giáo viên và chuyên gia tư vấn nghề nghiệp hiểu rõ hơn về các nhân tố ảnh hưởng đến sự lựa chọn ngành học đại học của học sinh. Dựa trên kết quả này, bài viết đề xuất một số ý kiến đối với giáo viên, chuyên gia tư vấn nghề nghiệp và phụ huynh, cũng như những người liên quan trực tiếp đến việc lựa chọn ngành học đại học và nghề nghiệp của học sinh.

  Từ khóa: *học sinh trung học phổ thông; nhân tố ảnh hưởng; lựa chọn ngành học đại học và nghề nghiệp*