

Factors Affecting Career Guidance and Counselling Activities for Middle School Students in the North Central Region of Vietnam

Dang Van Hai^{1,*}, Nguyen Thi Huong², Pham Van Son³, Ho Thi Thuy Le⁴

¹Nghe An Department of Education and Training

²Vinh University

³Ministry of Education and Training

⁴Nghe An Department of Education and Training

*Corresponding author: haidv@nghean.edu.vn

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Abstract According to Viet Nam's 2018 General Education Curriculum, career guidance and counselling is a critical factor that plays an important role in achieving the goal of comprehensive education and contributes to the effective implementation of job orientation for students after high school, meeting the needs of national human resources in the context of international integration. The article analysed the factors influencing career guidance and counselling for middle school students, specifically assessing the content and form of influence of factors on career guidance and counselling for middle school students. From that, the researchers have surveyed to investigate the impact of these factors on career orientation counselling activities for students in secondary schools in the North Central region of Vietnam. The research serves as empirical evidence to improve the quality of vocational education for secondary and high school students in this area.

Keywords: occupational education, students, secondary school

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1. Introduction

In the 2018 General Education Program in Vietnam, career orientation plays a vital role in realising the goal of comprehensive education and job counselling for middle school students. The excellent implementation of career orientation is the foundation to help students determine their career future based on suitability to their competence, strengths and social requirements, in line with local and national socio-economic development requirements, meeting the needs of improving the quality of national human resource training, regional and international integration. Especially in the trend of international integration is deepening and in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, career orientation for students faces many opportunities and challenges.

In recent years, career orientation for high school students has achieved many positive results, contributing to actively developing human resources and meeting socio-economic development requirements. However, the proportion of human resources in our country is imbalanced in structure and qualifications. According to

the Employment Labor Report 2019 of the General Statistics Office [1], by the end of 2019, the number of unemployed people in the country was 1.1 million, of which: The number of unemployed young people aged 15-24 accounted for 42,1%; in the group with college and university qualifications and above, 243.804 people, accounting for 22% of the unemployees. The report also assesses that while the number of unemployed people, in general, is on a declining trend, the number of workers with college and university qualifications or higher who have no jobs tends to increase and become the group with the highest unemployment rate in the technical qualification levels of the labour force (respectively 7.1% and 14,9%).

The career orientation and counselling for middle school students are still not adequately taken care of by the educators and managers at many levels. Some implementation places are haphazard, including the provinces in the North Central region. Vocational education management plays a vital role in improving the effectiveness of vocational education and meeting the requirements in the current context. It is the responsibility of all levels of management in the national education system.

2. Research Content

2.1. Concepts

2.1.1. Career Guidance

Career guidance is a term that scientists have introduced to different concepts from different perspectives:

According to UNESCO: "Career guidance is the process of providing learners with information about themselves, the labour market and orienting learners to make the right career choices" [2].

At the macro level, career guidance is a system of measures of the impact of the State, the organisation of activities of various agencies in society, helping people to choose and determine their professional position in their lives.

According to the training document for teachers implementing the 10th-grade Vocational Education book program, Vietnam, in high schools: "career guidance is considered the work of a collective of teachers and pedagogical groups to educate students in choosing a career, helping them decide their future career based on scientific analysis of their abilities, interests and human resource needs of the productive industries in society" [3].

From the perspective of the labour force, the author Cao Van Sam: "Career guidance is the determination of the suitability of each specific person based on determining the compatibility of their psycho-physiological characteristics with the requirements of a certain profession for workers" [4].

From the educational perspective, Pham Tat Dong : "Career guidance is the activity of pedagogical collectives, officials of different agencies and factories, conducted to help students choose the right career by the capacity, interest, physical and psychological needs of individuals with the human resources needs of society. Career guidance is a part of the education - learning process in the school" [5].

According to the Education Law 2019, Vietnam [6], "Career guidance in education is a system of measures conducted in and out of educational institutions to help students have knowledge of the profession, the ability to choose the profession based on combining the aspirations and preferences of individuals with the needs of using social labour".

2.1.2. Career Orientation

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the theory of career guidance and counselling in secondary and high schools has been studied by scholars worldwide.

Currently, career orientation is considered a part of comprehensive education. Researchers around the world have proposed some basic concepts as follows:

According to Hoyt, career orientation is a process that helps students acquire vocational knowledge, use the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes while working, and be satisfied with other activities in life" [7].

Ginzberg, E; Ginsburg, S.W; Axelrad, S, & Herma has researched the management of Career Education programs; in the book "*Occupational choice: An approach to the general theory*" (1951), pointed out that career orientation in middle school is the need of time to prepare a skilled workforce by apply vocational training programs

of educational institutions. The study has also emphasised the consideration of various aspects of career orientation that promote skills and technical learning for the future workforce [8].

In the study by Herr, E. L., & Cramer, S. H. The book "*Career guidance and counselling through the life span: Systematic approaches*" (1996) presented the problem of career orientation and lifelong career counselling under a systematic approach; this system is built upon the consideration of the relationship between career orientation and effective workforce planning and development, state policies which influence career orientation, quality of career orientation, etc. to help workers choose and develop lifelong careers [9].

Schmidt, J.J., in his book "*Counselling in school: Essential services and comprehensive programs*" (1996), pointed out that career counselling is an essential service in schools. This educational program helps students choose their careers to use the future workforce effectively. The work also mentioned the development of various new occupations in modern times. The specialisation will be beyond the stage of industrial production, and the career system will become more complex. Therefore, school career counselling services must always be comprehensive [10].

Author Eugene Joseph Martinez (1980), "*The effects of the experimental career counselling approaches on the career decision - making and career Maturity of Chicano college students*" the University of Chicano, the author has researched approach to career counselling Experimental career for career choice decision-making to choose the right job for secondary school students based on the educational streamlining mechanism according to students' needs and skills. Thereby, the program provides career-oriented education on students' skills, labour capacity and needs; it forms a career consciousness for students and builds the basis for later vocational training. In particular, the authors emphasised that for the career orientation program to be highly effective, the general education programs in the school must be positively related to real-world situations, especially for technical subjects [11].

Holland, J.L. (1997), in "*Making a vocational choice: A theory of vocational personalities and work environment*", argues that practical career orientation needs to start right from elementary school for children to form a career awareness. Students studying at the middle school level need to be oriented based on their previous professional understanding. Career guidance education needs to be diverse in content, in which the organisation of career clubs will help students have the opportunity to discuss, debate, and gain insight as well as to find and discover for themselves, explore and negotiate issues related to future careers; encourage self-choice of employment [12].

Norman C. Gysbers, in the book "*Career Guidance and Counselling in Primary and Secondary Educational Settings*" (2008), pointed out that: "Each student has unique talents and interests. The flexible education system will help students express their skills most comprehensively, he said, adding that career orientation needs to be introduced early in education. Career counselling should be integrated into age-appropriate educational activities from middle school to post-

secondary. In the study, he also pointed out that career orientation consists of three stages: Occupational Awareness, career discovery, and Career execution plan. The career orientation process helps each person realise their own identity, discover their superiority, and learn the benefits of professional values to pursue, thereby having feasible plans to develop a career towards building social-emotional capacity to help students become proactive, flexible and adaptable to future habitats [13].

In the study of vocational training policy, Mary J. Heppner (2009), "*Career counselling: contexts, processes, and techniques*," referred to the policy of developing special high schools and establishing a type of technology college which serves junior high school graduates. Students can participate in vocational training courses through links between the school and local employers [14].

For Mary McMahon and Wendy Patton in *Career Counselling: Constructive Approaches* (2006), the authors studied the content related to modern career orientation as well as the factors influencing career orientation as well as the problems of adapting to the new environment when asking for a future career when there is a change [15].

According to the 2018 General Education Program, Vietnam: Career orientation counselling is an educational activity-oriented, designed and guided by educators, creating opportunities for students to continue to approach reality, positive experience emotions, exploit previous experiences and mobilise synthesis of knowledge and skills of subjects to perform assigned tasks or solve practical problems related to school, family and social life appropriate to age; through that, transforming experiences into new knowledge, new understanding, new skills, contributing to promoting creative potential and adaptability to the future life, environment and career. Vocational education contributes to the formation and development of critical qualities, general competencies and specific competencies for students; Activity content is built on the individual relationships of the student to himself, society, nature and the profession [16].

Thus, the above concepts all think that career counselling in middle school is the activities and measures to help learners navigate the right career to choose the right job for society's needs. It is possible to understand that "*career counselling is a set of pedagogical activities that have the purpose and plan for learners to raise awareness and provide them with knowledge and skills about the career system so that they can take the initiative in selecting and developing career plans for themselves.*"

2.2. Factors Influencing Career Guidance and Counselling for Middle School Students in the Current Context

2.2.1. Objective Factors

2.2.1.1. State guidelines and policies on career guidance and counselling activities

The state's policies on education, career guidance and counselling and vocational trainings are legal guidelines, methods, procedures and documents established to support and promote education in general and career guidance and counselling management activities in particular towards

the most effective goals. Therefore, this factor helps the subjects involved in career guidance and counselling management to perform their tasks well while encouraging and motivating them to participate in career guidance and counselling activities according to shared goals, promoting positivity and overcoming limitations in managing career guidance and counselling.

On the contrary, if the state's policies and policies are not synchronous, overlapping, contradictory, and inconsistent with practice, it will lead to the management of career guidance and counselling activities encountering many difficulties such as lack of transparency and inefficiency.

2.2.1.2. Level of socio-economic development

Socio-economic factors greatly influence the education and management of career guidance and counselling for middle school students. They are both a means and a result of mutual influence. Socio-economic development engenders the development of career guidance and counselling management, making an essential contribution to improving productivity and labour efficiency.

In particular, career guidance and counselling management have a reciprocal relationship throughout the unified socio-economic process. A proper socio-economic development policy and strategy will provide conditions and raise awareness amongst investors and stakeholders to improve the effectiveness of career guidance and counselling management. Conversely, career guidance and counselling will create a premise and resources to promote socio-economic development if well solved.

In the current context, with the development of science and technology, improving the effectiveness of career guidance and counselling is the investment in the development of human resources, creating continuous and sustainable development for the economy and society.

2.2.1.3. Cultural traditions and community perceptions

Cultural traditions are good values typical of the nation, creating an identity for that nation. Therefore, cultural values and traditions become the principles of ethics and ideology and form the awareness of the community in the process of historical movement. Thus, traditional cultural values significantly impact public perception, the participation of forces in career guidance and counselling and career guidance and counselling management for middle school students. If a nation has a tradition of hard working and creativity, people and forces in society will always devote attention and investment to education and management activities of career guidance and counselling to build and develop the country for the advancement of people and culture.

2.2.1.4. Labor market, industry forecast

Management of career guidance and counselling is linked to the needs of the labour market, which is an indispensable trend in taking advantage of the market to benefit educational institutions, learners and the labour market. Managing career guidance and counselling activities not only ensures the quality of human resources for the economy but also addresses unemployment problems, raises income for workers, and contributes to the shift in the economy.

Career counselling not only ensures technical labour resources for the economy but also contributes to job creation, rising living standards for people, contributing to

labour restructuring and implementation of fair policies in vocational training. Therefore, aligning career counselling with labour market needs is an effective solution to developing career counselling in the new context.

In addition, the information and forecasting system on the labour market dramatically affects the management of vocational education. If information is updated regularly and accurately, the management of career guidance and counselling will ensure high efficiency and practicality, meeting the needs of the labour market. However, if the information lacks accuracy, market demand forecasting does not provide scientificity, and the organisation, management of career guidance, and counselling will lack direction; this is also one of the reasons for the current shortage of local labour.

2.2.1.5. *Career information and communication activities*

Information sources on industries, labour, socio-economic development and human resource development orientations... and management of career guidance and counselling activities impact each other. If the information was inaccurate and not scientifically grounded and the communication about the profession was not widely disseminated, the management of career guidance and counselling activities would not be effective and did not meet the labour market requirements.

2.2.1.6. *Human resource development orientation and planning*

Human resources play a decisive role in socio-economic development and contribute significantly to the implementation of industrialisation and modernisation of the country, especially in the current context. In particular, restructuring the economic component in the direction of modernisation has posed challenges to the quality of human resources to ensure a reasonably distributed and high-quality labour structure.

Therefore, the development of human resource development planning is an essential factor affecting the management of career guidance and counselling activities. Human resource development planning is the direction and orientation for the management of career guidance and counselling activities by the trajectory and objectives set for human resources to build sufficient human resources in terms of quantity, quality assurance and reasonable structure to meet the requirements and tasks of socio-economic development. Suppose human resource development planning is not in line with socio-economic development directions. In that case, the development of career guidance and counselling plans and management organisations for students will not be highly effective and impractical, which results in an imbalance in labour structure.

2.2.2. Subjective Factors

2.2.2.1. *Educational environment, facilities and equipment for career guidance and counselling*

The educational environment, conditions of facilities and equipment are the means and conditions for managers to perform their roles and perform their tasks well. The career guidance and counselling environment include all elements of facilities, techniques, and social relations... that directly affect the management of career guidance and counselling for middle school students. Therefore, building a healthy, safe, autonomous, and equitable

educational environment will positively impact administrators, teachers, and students. The career guidance and counselling environment is also a place for students to express themselves, experience and practice their skills and professional ethics. Building good career guidance and counselling environment will create a foundation for orientation and thinking for future career high school students.

Therefore, secondary schools need to have an investment interest, apply the conditions for this operation, and promote the management process of career guidance and counselling for secondary school students to achieve management objectives.

2.2.2.2. *Organizing the management apparatus for career guidance and counselling*

To manage career counselling activities, secondary schools need to have an apparatus to manage career counselling activities; this apparatus has the task of developing implementation plans and inspecting and supervising career counselling activities, advising principals to plan and provide solutions to improve the efficiency of management of career counselling activities. If this apparatus does not work effectively, the task of career counselling will not achieve the objectives and requirements of the education and training sector.

2.2.2.3. *Qualifications, professionalism and sense of responsibility of managers and teachers*

The awareness, qualifications and competencies of management staff and teachers are among many important factors directly affecting the management of career guidance and counselling for students.

Managing career guidance and counselling for students is an essential task of the education system as a whole and not individually. Recognising the role and position of career guidance and counselling as well as their responsibilities for the management of career guidance and counselling activities will help management staff and teachers to develop their enthusiasm for education, self-study, research and professional training, meet the requirements of innovation in management methods, contributing to improving the quality of career guidance and counselling. In addition to awareness, managers and teachers who want to perform the task of managing vocational education activities correctly need to have professional competence. Capacity to help managers plan, define goals; organise the selection of content, methods, and forms of education; direct and test the evaluation of career guidance and counselling,... In particular, each manager and teacher must have skills to grasp the psychology of middle school students and help students believe, thereby giving career orientation on their capabilities and aspirations as well as the actual conditions and labour needs of the locality. Therefore, the management of career guidance and counselling requires that each manager and teacher of the school should be trained, thoughtfully guided, and scientifically about the school's career guidance and counselling tasks, mainly sticking to local and national human resource development goals.

2.2.2.4. *Program and content of career guidance and counselling*

The contents and programs of career guidance and counselling affect the management of career guidance and

counselling. If the range and program are diverse, practical and creative, focusing on practice time and professional experience, it will promote students' self-study, self-research, and professional skills. On the other hand, if the contents and programs of career guidance and counselling are purely theoretical and dogmatic, it will decrease the management efficiency of career guidance and counselling, and management will be limited and lack flexibility.

Therefore, the contents and programs of career guidance and counselling must be diverse, rich and regularly updated, in line with the practice, integrated into the subjects and educational activities in the scientific direction, in line with the national industry development trends, meeting the labour market.

2.2.2.5. Psychophysiological, cognitive and competence characteristics of students

Middle school students include students ages 11-15 and older. This age group occupies an important place in their development. This is a transition period from childhood to adulthood, also known as adolescence. Adolescence is considered a difficult, complex and psychological conflict during their development.

During this period, the psychophysiological characteristics of middle school students greatly impacted career guidance and counselling management. With little life experience, their ways of thinking are not mature enough. Still, invariably they want to express themselves, so their awareness of future career orientation is easily influenced by external factors, especially from family and friends, leading to their career choices is not suitable to the interests, capabilities and needs of society, from which the career guidance and counselling activities for post-secondary students will also be challenging. Therefore, educational managers need to pay attention to the psychological characteristics of students to educate them on the objectives of career guidance and counselling management.

2.2.2.6. Coordination between school, family and society

Managing career guidance and counselling to help middle school students navigate their future careers holistically is a long-term and ongoing process in various settings involving social relationships. Therefore, the management of career guidance and counselling always requires the coordination and close association of many social forces and especially requires the proper attention

of schools, families, local authorities and businesses to help students better navigate the occupation and identify local labour market needs.

We all know that, in reality, the family and society positively and negatively impact students' perceptions. If implemented well, this factor will encourage and motivate them to participate in career guidance and counselling activities actively. On the contrary, it can also cause them to be doubtful about their career choice when there is a lack of proper coordination and unity in the impact of education management between the school, the family and society. The total impact of career guidance and counselling from schools, families and society is seen as a factor ensuring the successful management of education.

The coordination between families, schools and society can take many forms. The most fundamental issue is that all educational management stakeholders must promote a sense of responsibility and proactively create cooperative relationships to manage career guidance and counselling.

2.3. The Impact of Factors Affecting Career Guidance and Counselling in Secondary Schools in the North Central Region of Vietnam

We surveyed managers and teachers to assess the factors affecting career guidance and counselling for lower secondary students in North Central provinces, Vietnam. Each rating is expressed in 5 levels, corresponding to a score of 1,2,3,4,5. Each level has a certain average value (Very low: 1.00 to 1.80; Low: 1.81-2.60; Average: 2.61-3.40; Good: 3.41-4.20; Good: 4.21-5.0). Participants of the survey include 190 managers of the Department of Education and Training and secondary schools, 300 teachers at 50 secondary schools of the Departments of Education and Training: Vinh City, Do Luong District, Con Cuong District in Nghe An Province; Hau Loc District, Tinh Gia District in Thanh Hoa Province; Cam Xuyen District, Ky Anh Town in Ha Tinh Province.

2.3.1. Situation of the Influence of Objective Factors

The situation of the effect of objective factors on career counselling for middle school students in the current context shown in Table 1 is as follows:

Table 1. Impact of objective factors on career guidance and counselling for secondary students

No.	Contents	Degree of implementation			
		Managers		Teachers	
		(n = 190)		(n=300)	
		\bar{X}	Degree	\bar{X}	Degree
1	State guidelines and policies on career guidance and counselling activities	4.57	5	4.52	5
2	Level of socio-economic development	3.57	4	3.46	4
3	Cultural traditions and community perceptions	3.69	4	3.42	4
4	Labor market, industry forecast	3.85	4	3.85	4
5	Career information and communication activities	3.46	4	3.43	4
6	Human resource development orientation and planning	3.51	4	3.49	4
	X	3.78	4	3.67	4

The results of Table 1 shows that:

Firstly: All surveyed subjects assessed the objective factors affecting career counselling activities for middle school students in the current context with an average score of 3.67 to 3.78, which is quite influential (level 4).

Second: Among objective factors, administrators and teachers highly appreciate “State guidelines and policies on career guidance and counselling activities (level 5), and objective factors such as: “Socio-economic development level; Cultural traditions and awareness of the community”; “Labor market, industry forecast”; “Information on career and job orientation” and “human resource development planning” both have an influence on the management of vocational education and training and are assessed to be quite influential (level 4).

2.3.2. Situation of the Influence of Subjective Factors

The situation of the impact of the factors related to career guidance and counselling activities for middle school students in the current context shown in Table 2 is as follows:

Table 2. The level of influence of the factors related to career guidance and counselling for secondary students

No.	Contents	Degree of implementation			
		Managers		Teachers	
		(n = 190)		(n=300)	
		\bar{X}	Degree	\bar{X}	Degree
1	Educational environment, physical facilities, equipment for educational activities of the schools.	4.69	5	3.47	4
2	Organizing the management apparatus for career guidance and counselling	4.63	5	3.51	4
3	Qualification, professionalism and sense of responsibility of managers and teachers	4.67	5	4.72	5
4	Program and content of career guidance and counselling	3.59	4	4.64	5
5	Psychophysiological, cognitive and competence characteristics of students	3.66	4	4.51	5
6	Traditions and aspirations of the family	3.43	4	3.59	4
	X	4.11	4	4.07	4

The results of Table 2 show that:

Firstly: All surveyed subjects have a uniform assessment of the subjective factors affecting career guidance and counselling activities for middle school students in the current context, with an average score of 4.07 to 4.11, which is at a reasonably influential level (level 4).

Second: Among the subjective factors, there is no consensus on the evaluation of the influence of the subjects, with the management staff, the factors “Educational environment, physical facilities, equipment for educational activities of the school”, “Organizing the apparatus for managing career guidance and counselling activities” and “Professional qualifications, professionalism and sense of responsibility of management staff and teachers” was assessed as having the most decisive influence (level 5). As for teachers, in addition to agreeing with administrators on the element “Professional qualifications, professionalism and sense of responsibility of management staff and teachers”, then the two factors that teachers most appreciate are “Program, the content of career guidance and counselling” and “Psychophysiological characteristics, cognition and competence” of students” (Level 5). The other factors are all rated at 4.

2.3.3. General Assessment of the Current Situation

From the results of the survey on the status of factors affecting career guidance and counselling activities for middle school students in the present context, we see the following strengths:

The evaluation results show that the factors affecting the career guidance and counselling activities mentioned by the authors are entirely consistent with the current

reality. These factors can positively or negatively affect career guidance and counselling activities. Therefore, managers must know how to consider and evaluate the influence of factors to propose suitable solutions, not only the elements analysed in the survey but also other factors.

Thus, the evaluation level of each object shows the perspective and evaluation perspectives of each object differently. If managers are interested in organising professional education management, then teachers are interested in the program, content and the professional education management subjects. This is also the reason for incomprehensive and inconsistent proposals and implementation of solutions to career guidance and counselling activities in secondary schools. In addition, factors such as the mobilisation of resources for career guidance and counselling activities are left open. The coordination and linkage between secondary schools and vocational education institutions, enterprises, and businesses in the area are still inadequate; the activities to ensure career guidance and counselling activities for secondary students have not been paid attention to and implemented, so many administrators and teachers are not enthusiastic about their assigned tasks. Students do not have the conditions to effectively gain valuable insights into their desired professions by the educational and training sector's goals.

3. Conclusion

There are many factors affecting vocational education for secondary school students, including objective ones (State guidelines and policies; Level of development

Socio-economic development; Cultural traditions and awareness of the community; Labor market, industry forecast; Information and communication work on occupations; Orientation and human resource development planning) and subjective factors (educational environment, facilities and equipment; Organizing the apparatus of management; Professional qualifications, Professionalism and responsibility of management staff and teachers; Program and contents of career guidance and counselling; Psychophysiological characteristics, awareness and capacity of students; Tradition and aspirations of the family). These factors affect career guidance and counselling activities to various degrees. During management, career guidance and counselling, managers should pay attention to these factors to determine appropriate management measures.

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