



# Vocational Orientation and the Need for Establishing Career Counselling Office in Vietnamese Schools

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**Abstract:** School psychology is a field that has been receiving a lot of attention recently in Vietnam as it prepares to restructure the general education curriculum. In particular, vocational orientation and career counseling are most concerned due to the emergence of new subjects in the educational curriculum - Experimental and Vocational Orientation Activities. The objective of this study is to investigate the current situation of vocational orientation problems and the need for career counseling of Vietnamese high school students to provide evidence to develop the school counseling activities and the School Psychology in Vietnam. This is a quantitative study used a questionnaire to examine the current situation of vocational orientation problems and the need for career counseling of 1200 high school students in Vietnam to illustrate the importance of vocational orientation work. The results showed that Vietnamese high school students faced many vocational orientation problems and wanted support from school counselors. But the reality did not meet the needs of students: Vietnamese schools lacked a team of school counselors both in quality and quantity, also lack of school counseling offices in almost high schools. This result is expected to contribute to the development of the School Psychology in Vietnam, but firstly, to promote the establishment of counseling office at least one office per school.

**Keywords:** Career counselling, vocational orientation problems, school counseling, counseling office, school psychology

## 1. Introduction

Vocational Orientation (VO) is one integral activity for high school students (HS). Every human-being comprised of rather stable characters and psychological features appropriate for some particular occupational groups. If human beings choose the correct career matching their capacity and social needs, they can develop their capacity to almost and devote

more to the country. However, not anyone could recognize this mutual relation, especially students who lack life experiences and self-judgment skills correctly (Gati & Saka, 2001; Witko, Bernes, Magnusson & Bardick, 2009). HS's decision to choose the most appropriate career is a hard and complicated task. The more difficulties and tensions that HS had, the higher the needs of being counselled or guided on how to choose a career in a scientific way appeared. In response to this tension, the youth tried to transfer this responsibility onto another person, even delayed or avoided making the final choice; eventually, he/she could present a decision but not very optimal (Tuoi Tre Newspaper, 2016). The adverse emotional condition also affected career decision because this state motivated themselves in seeking help, thus, lessening the chances for lack-of-information decisions (Zingnews Newspaper, 2016). It is a challenge for HS's career choices to be appropriate to the personal capacity and social need. If they chose their desired career, but out of social need, negative consequences might occur. In fact, in the 2018-2019 Vietnamese school-year, hundreds of students in Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam) were warned with their academic results and forced to discontinue their study at university (Tuoi Tre Newspaper, 2019), the primary reason was due to their inappropriate career choice.

Vietnam is in the process of implementing a new general education program, with the emergence of a new educational activity called Experimental and Vocational Orientation Activities. VO is paid more attention to schools and organized into career-specific educational activities for students. This VO educational activity is applied to both secondary and high school levels to equip the basic knowledge about careers, as well as orienting students to choose careers according to their capacity and interests (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018). This renovation would be a chance for developing the VO work, or the career counselling work in a Vietnamese school. In many countries, schools have two separate counselling offices: psychological counselling offices and career counselling offices, for example, the school counselling model of both psychological counselling offices and career counselling offices of the US (Dahir, 2001), Japan (Yagi, 2010), Australia (Galliot & Graham, 2015). In Vietnam, many international schools have applied this model, such as RMIT's university system, with two specialized offices, led by two psychological and career counselling professionals; Dinh Thien Ly Secondary and High School, belonging to Lawrence Sting Group, also has two separate counselling offices (Hong, Son, My, & Loc, 2018). However, in the public education system, public schools from primary school to university in Vietnam only have one counselling room and one or two experts to do both psychological counselling and career counselling functions (Hong, Son, My, & Loc, 2018). Many schools even use school counsellors who are teachers of Literature, History, Geography, and Civic Education to run this work (Nguyen, 2017). As a result, in Vietnam's recent years, VO work and career counselling work have not been sufficient.

Career counselling (CC) is a hard and complicated process (Nuttavuthisit, 2017). If the career counsellor were not well trained in VO or career guidance, it would be difficult to do this work effectively. Besides, the VO depended heavily on social factors; if the society did not have a demand for that career, VO's result was also ineffective (Choi, Kim, & Kim, 2015). Therefore, this study's objective aims to discover the problems related to VO and the CC needs of high school students. The author will analyse the above issues and propose directions for designing CC processes for HS. The results of the study will provide the School Psychology in Vietnam with the information needed to form a CC model in schools, especially the CC office, preparing for the restructuring of the general education program.

## 2. The Essential Content in Career Counselling

In previous international studies, there were many contents of CC following the socio-cultural characteristics of countries applied to specific VO. Sharf (2016) studied career development theories and emphasized the importance of personality-based career choice. According to the author, conducting the tests and finding the personality traits which are suitable for the career are considered to be the most important and fundamental work, from the test results, the counsellor gave personal advice on which career to choose. By applying Holland's Career Theory in researches, Putri and Sari (2018) argued that the personality traits of a human being should be considered in unity with the professional environment. Therefore, when choosing a career, people tended to look for work environments in which people were shown the characteristics of their personality, expressed their ego, and tended to avoid working environments that did not match the personality traits.

From the perspective of the Psychoanalysis, experiences from early childhood would be closely related to later career choices and unconsciously played a vital role in the career decision-making process. The choice of career would help each individual satisfy his or her own needs (Zunker, 2002). Bolkan, Pedersen, Stormes, and Manke (2018) studied the factors that influenced students' career choices based on Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) with environmental, cognitive, and demographic factors (self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and academic goals). Lent and Brown (2019) applied SCCT which focused on occupational interest, choice, and performance in study also found that, the three original SCCT models (interest, choice, and performance) have generated a good deal on educational, career, and organizational behaviour. Based on SCCT, Brown and Lent (2019) defined the three aspects of VO as (i) characteristics and requirements of industries in society, (ii) labour needs of the labour market, (iii) characteristics of personality and personal psychophysiology. When the individual found a match on all three sides of the triangle, then he found the optimal career choice.

In Vietnam, CC developed slower than the international. Therefore, Vietnam has many advantages in learning and gaining experience from the world and initially gaining specific efficiency. Pham (2012) found that CC was to help students find "The domain of choosing an optimal career". When choosing a career, students must answer three questions:

What do I like to do? (Excited) What can I do? (Capacity) What do I need to do? (Social requirements, the labour market for the profession). That is “The domain of choosing an optimal career” (Ministry of Education and Training, 2008). Taking a closer look at the personal characteristics of CC, career personality is significant with the CC’s characteristics (Nguyen, 2005). Occupational personality consisted of 4 small internal structures, which were; (i) career trends, ii) Occupational competencies, iii) Characteristics of cognitive processes, personality, and (iv) Characteristics of temperament, sex, age, diseases are characteristics subjected to biological regulation. The above four structures played an essential role in guiding career selection and recruitment.

Currently, the psychological test is quite popular in Vietnam. It is an alternative for the students to find suitable with their personality and academic background. Most of the Vietnamese websites about CC or VO offered guidance in taking tests to find out which job was suitable for the students. In practice, the career counsellors also found that high school students were interested in taking career assessment tests to find out who they were, what their strengths and weaknesses were, and consistent with any industry in the career world (Huynh, 2017). According to psychologists, the use of the VO test for high school students is seen as a tool to support and create more persuasion in CC, helping students learn and discover themselves more thoroughly. Although the test has many advantages and high efficiency, it could not be considered as a single factor, the most important in CC for students and not to mention the issue of funding, copyright use of the test. The CC is also considering many factors such as personal circumstances, family, living environment, academic achievements, university benchmarks.

In the context that Vietnam is preparing to renovate the general education curriculum, school psychology is more concerned, including the CC and VO work. With the common educational goal of developing learners’ capacity through specific educational activities, the researcher acquired the contents of the previous CC and generalized them into career-oriented career contents based on developing the students’ capacity as follows: (1) Choosing a career matching personal hobby (coded as P1 in Result); (2) Choosing a career matching personal capacity (coded as P2 in Result); (3) Identifying living conditions with personal career (coded as P3 in Result); (4) Choosing a career matching social need (coded as P4 in Result); (5) Being independent and self-controlling in career choice (coded as P5 in Result). These five essential contents are also 5 VO problems that this study used to find out the current situation of VO problems, as well as the need for CC of Vietnamese HS.

### 3. Methodology

A quantitative study approach was used with the questionnaire to discover the situation of the study’s objective. The questionnaire met the following survey criteria; (i) The questionnaire needed to have under 30 items for the situation survey, to avoid excessive length and information; (ii) Participants were HS from grade 6 to grade 12 (13 to 18 years old), including both genders; (iii) Participants had to commit participation until the end of the study to guarantee the data’s consistency. The designed questionnaire included:

- a) Participant’s information including questions about necessary information: gender, year of birth, educational level, grade, and the family situation (who living with).
- b) The questionnaire content a system of questions to collect data about the current situation of VO problems (VOP) in the school and the need for CC (NCC). Questions about the current situation of VOP included ten items; questions about NCC included ten items. After the pilot survey on 200 HS from Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam), ten items that did not match the current VOP of HS were eliminated, the final questionnaire was established with ten items with the reliability Cronbach’s Alpha was 0.845. Answers for all items were designed as a 5-point Likert scale (Croasmun & Ostrom, 2011) for the participants to choose.

#### 3.1. Participants

Participants were selected randomly from 7 high schools in Vietnam, with a total of 1565-students. After removing unsatisfactory responses, the final participants were 1200, which was distributed, as shown in the below table (see Table 1).

**Table 1 - An Overview of Participants**

Content		N	%
Gender	Male	449	37.4
	Female	751	62.6
Educational level	Lower-high school	726	60.5
	Upper-high school	474	39.5
	Both father and mother	1026	85.5
Living condition	Father	35	2.9
	Mother	52	4.3
	Relatives/Others	87	7.3

### 3.2. Data Analysis

Students' responses are evaluated on five levels and coded by SPSS for windows 20.0 software. Level 1 is from 1 to 1.80 points, which belongs to *Totally none/ Totally unnecessary* level; level 2 is from 1.81 to 2.61 points, which belongs to *Under moderate/ Unnecessary* level; level 3 is from 2.62 to 3.42 points, which belongs to *Moderate/ Optional* level; level 4 is from 3.43 to 4.23 points, which belongs to *Difficult/ Necessary* level; level 5 is from 4.24 to 5 points, which belongs to *Very difficult/ Very necessary* level. Example: VOP<sub>1</sub> – vocational orientation problems reach level 1; NCC<sub>1</sub> – the Vietnamese HS need of career counselling reach level 1.

The SPSS for Windows 20.0 software was used to process research data with the help of calculations as mean, standard deviation, percentage, frequencies calculations, ANOVA test, Pearson Correlation test, which were used for qualitative evaluations.

## 4. Result

### 4.1. Vocational Orientation Problems and the Need for Career Counselling of Vietnamese High School Students

The results of the current VOP and the need for CC of Vietnamese HS were presented in Table 2 (see Table 2).

**Table 2 – The Current Vocational Orientation Problems and the Need for Career Counselling of Vietnamese High School Students**

Items	Levels										M		SD		Rank		
	VOP <sub>1</sub>	NCC <sub>1</sub>	VOP <sub>2</sub>	NCC <sub>2</sub>	VOP <sub>3</sub>	NCC <sub>3</sub>	VOP <sub>4</sub>	NCC <sub>4</sub>	VOP <sub>5</sub>	NCC <sub>5</sub>	M <sub>VOP</sub>	M <sub>NCC</sub>	SD <sub>VOP</sub>	SD <sub>NCC</sub>	R <sub>VOP</sub>	R <sub>NCC</sub>	
P1	N	311	138	156	150	366	284	207	313	160	315	2.79	3.43	1.353	1.308	2	2
	%	25.9	11.5	13.0	12.5	30.5	23.7	17.3	26.1	13.3	26.3						
P2	N	229	134	239	194	392	220	172	289	168	363	2.84	3.46	1.282	1.360	1	1
	%	19.1	11.2	19.9	16.2	32.7	18.3	14.3	24.1	14.0	30.3						
P3	N	267	237	242	179	469	296	149	316	73	172	2.60	3.01	1.140	1.333	4	5
	%	22.3	19.8	20.2	14.9	39.1	24.7	12.4	26.3	6.1	14.3						
P4	N	317	176	217	193	406	368	187	271	73	192	2.57	3.09	1.205	1.267	5	4
	%	26.4	14.7	18.1	16.1	33.8	30.7	15.6	22.6	6.1	16.0						
P5	N	308	203	192	127	413	329	180	311	107	230	2.66	3.20	1.255	1.331	3	3
	%	25.7	16.9	16.0	10.6	34.4	27.4	15.0	25.9	8.9	19.2						
<b>M<sub>x</sub></b>											<b>2.70</b>	<b>3.24</b>	<b>1.022</b>	<b>1.142</b>			

The M<sub>x</sub> of VOP is 2.70 – evaluated at a moderate level. The M<sub>x</sub> of NCC is 3.24 – evaluated as an optional level. This data demonstrates the fact that Vietnamese HS has VOP and the needs in CC, but the level is not so urgent. The question of why students' VOP and needs in CC reach this level should be researched deeply for further explanations. Nevertheless, the proportion shows a significant number of students who have difficulty in VO and the necessary needs in CC. With the purpose of a deeper understanding of the VOP and NCC, the difference test were used to verify the gender, educational level, and living conditions in connection with VOP and NCC (see Table 3).

Regarding gender indicator,  $P_{VOP} = .044$  and  $P_{NCC} = .002$  affirm the significant difference between male and female students. Male students had more troubles in VOP, but they seemed to have less need for CC than female students. On the contrary, female students had less VOP, but they had more need for CC than male students. Meanwhile, educational level indicator,  $P_{VOP} = .008$  and  $P_{NCC} = .001$  affirm the significant difference between lower-high school students and upper-high school students. Upper-high school students faced more problems in VO and had more need for NCC than lower-high school students. Then, living condition indicator,  $P_{VOP} = .001$  and  $P_{NCC} = .001$  affirm the significant difference among the different living conditions. Those students living with both parents, with their mother, and with relatives, did not present the difference with statistical meaning. Those students living with fathers compared to the other living conditions revealed the difference in VOP and NCC with statistical meaning.

**Table 3 – Difference Test among the Gender, Educational Level and Living Conditions in Connection With Vocational Orientation Problems and the Need for Career Counselling**

Sources		M		ANOVA test			
		M <sub>VOP</sub>	M <sub>NCC</sub>	P <sub>VOP</sub>	P <sub>NCC</sub>	F <sub>VOP</sub>	F <sub>NCC</sub>
Gender	Male	2.76	3.10	0.044	0.002	21.43	1.24
	Female	2.64	3.31				
Educational Level	Lower-high school	2.78	3.48	0.008	0.001	9.03	12.46
	Upper-high school	2.62	3.07				
	Both father and mother	2.70	3.19				
Living condition	Father	1.91	4.13	0.001	0.001	5.55	12.65
	Mother	2.85	3.58				
	Relatives/Others	2.77	3.21				

#### 4.2. The Correlation Between the Vocational Orientation Problems and the Need for Career Counselling of Vietnamese High School Students

The questionnaire results showed that Vietnamese HS have problems with VO, and they also need CC. Statistically, the researchers want to find a correlation between VO and CC needs of Vietnamese HS. The Pearson correlation test were used, and the result was presented in Table 4 (see Table 4).

**Table 4 – Correlation coefficient between the VOP and NCC of Vietnamese HS**

	Vocational orientation problems	Need for career counselling
Vocational orientation problems	1	.567**
	-	.001
Need for career counselling	.567**	1
	.001	-

\*\**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)*

With  $p = .001$  affirms the correlation between the VOP and NCC of Vietnamese students. The more problems in VO, the students faced, the more need they had to have counselled to find out the suitable career for them. Therefore, the questionnaire results are statistically significant.

## 5. Discussion

Based on the collected data, it was found that Vietnamese HS has been having problems in VO. According to Pham (2012), the current CC model in Vietnam was in development and was managed by personal experiences. Le (2019) concluded that CC being performed at schools currently was mainly managed by the school counsellors who might be trained fundamentally in VO major or even multi-tasking officers inexperienced with CC task; as a result, the deployment of this task had certain shortcomings, and CC was not so competent as expected in Vietnam. In some Vietnamese high schools, the fact that head teachers (of grade 11 or 12) were in charge of VO work (Phu, 2007) raised a massive concern for the potential risks towards students once these head teachers did not grasp evident and adequate knowledge related to CC task. Previous studies presented the three crucial steps in VO progress: (i) Being aware of personal capacity, strongpoints and hobby; (ii) Figuring out more information related to career options with occupational needs as well as identifying those potential careers appropriate for personal capacity; (iii) Planning further details towards this particular career (Pham, 2011). If any counsellors followed these three steps, the potential problems that students might face could be decreased.

Nevertheless, from the results, “Choosing careers matching personal character” and “Choosing careers matching hobby” - the most problematic issues - were the two problems belonging to step (i) in VO progress (Pham, 2011). This raised the question of whether the current VO work in Vietnamese schools has been deployed effectively, whether career counsellors completely grasped the whole progress besides adequate capacity, knowledge, and VO skills to assist students. Huynh (2011a) researched students' judgment of career orientation efficiency at high schools in Binh Duong province (Vietnam) and indicated that students had high needs in discovering the most appropriate careers matching personal character, capacity, and hobby. School career orientation mission was conducted based on this foundation: students must be counselled to identify personal capacity first; then, to identify the particular occupation for future career efficiency. However, some students could not choose their desired career due to family pressure and expectation (Zellweger, Sieger & Halter, 2011). Many parents desired their children to follow traditional family careers or parents were too worried about their children's future to recommend safe, stable careers with affordable income (Amani &

Mkumbo, 2018). This result shared similarity in the ranking level of NCC with the previous study by Zellweger, Sieger & Halter (2011), Amani & Mkumbo (2018). It provided essential information for school counsellors when working with students on VO work or when forming a process and model for career counselling in school: Care must always be given to family factors in a career decision.

Male students faced more VOP than female students. This conclusion was rather logical based on the comparison of differences in psychological features. At teenager age, boys had ambitious plans with dreams, intentions, tremendous career planning with ultimate subjective without considering other aspects (family financial condition, personal study capacity, social career need) (Do, 2014); or boys' ego developed so actively, and they had the tendency to confirm this towards family, school, and society (Nguyen et al., 2016); all of these demands and desires caused the state of being lost and unbalanced when facing the truth that their expectations were beyond reality (Huynh, 2017); at the start of teenager period, girls employed more mature thinking and awareness compared to boys at the same age (Huynh, 2011b). The reality showed that many girls were better at analysing the problem with more mature thinking and face fewer problems than boys in VO. Compared to the study by Gati and Saka (2001), there was one similarity in gender in career choice decisions among HS. Their study surveyed the connection between career orientation and career decision among 1,843 students in Israel: choosing a high school (grade 9), choosing optional courses (grade 10), and deciding army mission priority (grade 11). The results showed that boys faced more problems than girls in career choice conflicts from external indicators (family, school, society) and career belief (within students themselves). It should be concluded that male students, at the same age, would have more difficulties in VO than female students. Based on this crucial data, Vietnamese career school counsellors should be more considerate in providing the appropriate career counselling models towards students. Besides, female students had a higher NCC than male students. As analysed above, male students had more problems than females, but male students tended to solve problems by themselves to prove their egos whereas female students preferred to find help from relatives, friends, schools, especially school counselling experts. A study on the school counselling model in a Vietnamese school by Giang, Nguyen, and Mai (2017) indicated that the data from a private school counselling office received at least 120 cases per year, in which female cases account for 78%. The study by Flores, Ojeda, Huang, Gee, and Lee (2006) also shared similarities in the higher number of female cases visiting the school counselling office for assistance in VO than that of male students. This crucial data helped school career counsellors to pay more attention to students' gender to propose the most effective strategies in supporting students besides ensuring the equivalent (not too big) gap in the VO mission between different genders.

The higher the educational level students were in, the more problems related to the VOP they faced. This was logical because the vital activity at high school was vocational Orientation (Duong, 2008). VO was one crucial point, so it was unavoidable to face problems (Chiesa, Massei & Guglielmi, 2016). This was one crucial viewpoint to meet HS's needs, in which VO played a fundamental role in the educational program (Kuijpers, Meijers & Gundy, 2011). In the current educational situation, regarding the combination among social demands, students' needs, and family expectations, this issue of VO must be worth being paid attention, especially in the progress of applying for the new educational program in Vietnam.

Moreover, this result completely matched the scheme of the new educational content from the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (2018). At the high school level, students will be equipped with the knowledge and vocational orientation skills through the new subject "Experience and Vocational guidance." This new subject expectedly better assisting the career guidance mission in directing students with their choices appropriate with capacity, career hobby, and personal characters. Moreover, this subject will effectively support the school counsellor in assisting students to discover themselves, career interests, and identify the right career.

Phoenix (2019) explained that primary choice started from students' capacity and hobby to understand other market opportunities and career groups. Thanks to this step, students and their families could choose the right studied majors to gradually transform their natural strongpoints into successful chances in the future. Schröder, Schmitt-Rodermund, and Arnaud (2011) also emphasized the integral role of parents in accompanying students during this VO progress because, parents, with students' lack of determination or self-doubt, definitely assisted their children best to overcome these difficulties and become more mature. Therefore, family support was one definitive source in assisting students with correct VO. However, the lowest mean (1.91) of the VOP was in students living in the single-father family showed that how the students would live with fathers evaluate themselves while facing the fewest problems in VO to be solved? In Vietnam, there had been no detailed research on the impacts of family structure on children's VO. This issue needed to be paid more attention to other related researches.

With the results, it could be seen that the School Psychology in Vietnam has not been able to meet the students' expectations for an appropriate CC model. According to Nguyen (2017), the whole area of Southern Vietnam, the number of professional school counsellors in the academic year 2017-2018 was 1.09 people per school, the number of existing counselling office accounted for only 35.8% of the total area. Moreover, Vietnamese undergraduate education currently has no training in School Psychology; only three disciplines with close specialties are Psychology, Educational Psychology, and Social Work. The shortage of high-quality human resources is putting significant pressure on School Psychology in general, and the development of CC work in particular. Therefore, before the renovation of the new school education program, in order to develop the school psychology, it is necessary to set up at least one counselling office in each school with at least one school counsellor in charge. Also, this school counsellor must not only be well trained in

psychology, school psychology in general but also must be trained in CC in particular. This is a difficult task because the field of psychological counselling and career counselling are two fields that are close but have apparent differences in content and easily make the counsellor confused about the role, but this can be considered as the most effective and most appropriate solution to the reality of Vietnam. In the coming years, vital pedagogical universities with training in Psychology, Educational Psychology, and Social Work should have plans to attract students and ensure that the learning outcomes are meeting the needs, which are not only psychological counselling but also career counselling. Besides, the Ministry of Education and Training should consider further training in School Psychology to accelerate the development of this field of study in Vietnam.

## 6. Conclusion

This study presented the VOP that students were facing as well as students do have the NCC for these problems (how to choose career appropriate with personal capacity; how to choose career matching hobby; how to be independent and self-control in career choosing; how to choose a career matching social needs; how to identify the personal living condition in relation with career). In particular, the attention, connection, and support from the family is an especially important aspect of the VO process. Also, gender and educational levels are two equally important aspects of CC for Vietnamese HS. These are essential contents and need to be focused on CC as well as building a CC model in Vietnamese schools.

More than that, there existed a correlation between the VOP and NCC of Vietnamese HS. The more problems related to VO appeared, the higher the NCC became. Nevertheless, in the current reality Vietnamese school counsellor resource, the situation related to professional counselling experts is limited in quality and quantity criteria. As a result, the school counselling mission has not been deployed effectively with detailed planning. Through this study, the researchers would like to suggest that educational management levels should have more specific policies and strategies in supporting school counsellors and School Psychology besides employing a more general and detailed viewpoint towards high school students' career counselling task, especially when Viet Nam is preparing to renovate the new general education curriculum. CC must be enhanced in quality features in order to assist HS in solving VOP as well as support students in choosing an appropriate career with themselves, family, and society. First of all, setting up a separate counselling office at each school is the first thing to do.

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