

# What College Students Look for When Applying for Their First Job

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## Abstract

A good career decision making leads to fulfil students' working achievement. Having options is good; however, knowing what is important to students in selecting their first jobs is necessary as well. Therefore, the purposes of this study were to investigate the influencing factors affecting students' career decision making. An online-based survey was distributed to 101 respondents. The questionnaires consisted of different factors affecting their job selection decision making. A study was conducted by applying Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). The findings presented into 3 constructs: (1) Achievement, Engagement, and Opportunity, (2) Working Environment, and (3) Social factor. This can be the suggestion for the organizations to know what students are looking for and to adjust themselves to the current students' viewpoints.

**KEYWORDS:** career decision making, college students, first-job selection, social factor, working environment

## 1 INTRODUCTION

People of all ages are constantly involved in decision-making. People look at a set of available options and attempt to make the best possible choice. However, decision-making is sometimes difficult because most options have both benefits and drawbacks. Rarely can people find the perfect option that fully meets all the decision-making criteria. High school and college students are not exceptions. Indeed, they must deal with some complex and far-reaching decisions that typically involve large sums of money. High school students must choose a college or university to attend, which can lead to substantial amounts of student debt upon graduation. Early-year college students (freshmen and sophomores) must choose a major to study, and late-year college students (juniors and seniors) must make career choices. Choice of major and choice of career will impact a persons future earning power.

The internet is full of blogs that discuss career paths for college students, and most university websites offer guidance for selecting majors as well as making career choices. College students in Thailand face the same types of decisions. However, Thai students must deal with an additional factor: studying in a Thai program or studying in an international (English-based) program. The aim of this study is to determine what types of criteria Thai international

college students use to make career choices, and then look at the relative importance of the common criteria.

This paper is divided into the following sections: 1) Introduction, 2) a brief review of relevant literature about student career choices, 3) the research methodology used for this study, 4) data analysis 5) a discussion of this papers findings, 6) the paper's conclusions, and 7) references.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

A website called thailandeducation (Career Guide 2022) says the main goal of a career is to help a person reach their personal goals in life, and for students, thinking about a future career starts when they choose a college major. Furthermore, the website suggests that a career choice depends on a persons interests, knowledge, and college coursework.

According to Ozlen and Arnaut (2013), "Student decision-making has attracted the attention of research in the last two decades, particularly concerning education and career choices." They also reported student career decision-making processes have received both theoretical and empirical coverage in the literature, and most models suggest that the career decision-making process occurs in a series of defined phases as reported by Gati, Shenhav, & Givon (1993) and Peterson, Sampson, & Reardon (1991). As an example, a model of career decision-making developed by Germeijs and Verschueren (2006) suggests that students generally follow a six-task process: (1) orientation to choose, (2) self-exploration, (3) broad exploration of the environment, (4) in-depth exploration of the environment, (5) choosing an alternative, and (6) committing to a particular career choice.

In an article for TES Magazine, Ari Bloom discusses the impact of globalization on international education with Professor Stephen Ball, Institute of Education in London. Professor Ball suggests that when expats living in a foreign country choose to send their children to international schools, local people living in that foreign country also choose to send their children to international schools (Bloom, 2008). This very phenomenon can be seen throughout Thailand. Many Thai parents choose to send their children either to international schools or to schools that have English-based programs. Given the impact of globalization on Thailand, a number of Thai universities offer international colleges, including Burapha University located in Bangsaen, Thailand.

In a paper that studied the career aspirations of Thai children in an international school in Bangkok, Thailand, the authors suggested that documenting occupational goals from many distinct regions and backgrounds is important (McDevitt et al 2021). That study focused on children up through high school grade 12, and the researchers found that "the most important issues in deciding on jobs were interests in particular academic subjects, interests in tasks related to the job, the fit between personality and the needs of the job, confidence in achieving a job, and the need to make a decent salary". (McDevitt et al 2021).

Although college students make career choice decisions when they choose a major of study, many of the students may make different career choice decisions when they graduate college. An article published by the Bangkok Post quoted a survey conducted by the UK-based market research agency YouGov. The survey found that out of 1233 Thai college graduates, 52% of them actually work in fields that are unrelated to their university degree.

(Degree of Certainty 2019).

The literature does not seem to provide much research into how Thai college students studying at international colleges make career choices as they prepare to graduate.

### 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted at Burapha University International College (BUUIC) by surveying third year, fourth year, and beyond fourth year BUUIC students. The online surveys were distributed at the college by using a purposive sampling method. The surveys asked each person in their last two years of college to provide the factors affecting their decisions when selecting their preferred job in the future. Overall, 101 surveys were completed and returned. Data collection took place in November 2022. The respondents completed the 15-minute survey with (1) part of demographic profile, (2) factors influencing the job selection when they graduate and (3) the recommendation.

The measured items were assessed by deploying a 5-point Likert scale ranging between 1 and 5 where 1 was least important and 5 was most important. This data was analyzed using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to investigate and identify which factors could be common factor that presented the relationship among those factors. Moreover, the data was assessed to determine which factors were robust and which ones should be eliminated because of poor performance. The questions that were included in the demographic profile, part one of the survey, are shown in Table 1. These questions recorded the following demographic aspects: gender, age, year of study in the university, college major of study, hometown location, and work experience.

### 4 DATA ANALYSIS

The quantitative survey consisted of 25 items that were used to assess what factors influenced student decision-making related to selecting their future careers. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was applied to this study. The poor-performing items were removed from the original 25 items, and the remaining 15 items were analyzed and regrouped into three constructs.

The removed items mentioned some reasons affecting the students' decision making for their future careers, for examples, the company reputation, the company uniform, their family's expectation, their family's persuasion, and etc.

Data checking methods for EFA fall into Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) (Dziuban & Shirkey, 1974; Kaiser, 1960) and Bartlett's sphericity test (Bartlett, 1950; Dziuban & Shirkey, 1974). The KMO value presents sample adequacy while Bartlett's test of sphericity is used to show that the elemental correlation matrix is not the identity matrix. KMO correlations above 0.7 are considered suitable for the analysis of EFAs as shown in Table 2. For this study, KMO measures of sampling adequacy was at 0.730

Several approaches to factor extraction have been proposed for data analysis. The most commonly used methods to extract factors were principal component analysis (PCA) and principal axis factorization (PAF). However, PCA was deployed as the default factor extraction method (Costello & Osborne, 2005). Several factor retentions have been developed, including

**Table 1: The Demographic Profile**

Variables		N = 101	Percent
Gender	Male	35	34.6
	Female	58	57.4
	LGBTQ+	5	5.0
	Not specified	3	3.0
Age	18-20 years old	30	29.7
	21-23 years old	66	65.3
	24 years and older	5	5.0
Year of Study	Year 3	58	57.4
	Year 4	38	37.6
	Year 5 and higher	5	5.0
College Major	International Business Management	43	42.6
	Digital and Creative Marketing	9	8.9
	Finance	2	2.0
	Logistics and Supply Chain Management	21	20.8
	Hospitality and Tourism Management	11	10.8
	Global Business Communications	9	8.9
	International Human Resources	3	3.0
	Fine Arts	3	3.0
Hometown	Bangkok and Metropolitan Region	10	9.9
	Central Thailand	15	14.9
	Eastern Thailand	57	56.4
	Western Thailand	4	4.0
	Northern Thailand	2	2.0
	Southern Thailand	2	2.0
	Northeastern Thailand	11	10.9
Work Experience	Yes	49	48.5
	No	52	51.5

**Table 2: The metrics for representing KMOs correlation level**

KMO correlation	Sample Adequacy
0.00 - 0.50	Unacceptable
0.50 - 0.60	Miserable
0.60 - 0.70	Mediocre
0.70 - 0.80	Middling
0.80 - 0.90	Meritorious
0.90 - 1.00	Marvelous

cumulative percentage of sample variance, Kaiser criterion, scree test, and parallel analysis. The factor rotation method consists mainly of two types: (1) orthogonal and (2) oblique. Varimax was applied for this test. After the rotation method was chosen, the number of components within the set of factors was determined. Then, a calculation was performed to decide how well each variable explains each item by studying the loading values.

## Exploratory Factor Analysis

Table 3 provides an assessment of factor loadings and the composite reliability for each new construct. The three constructs were considered based on the observed and tested criteria used in selecting future jobs after students graduate from college. Composite reliability scores for the individual constructs ranged between 0.635 and 0.832. The value which is significantly greater than 0.700 was recommended (Hair et al., 2010), while Fornell and Larcker (1981) recommended a CR value of 0.600 or more. Regarding the results, scale items were deemed reliable for the intended population. As shown in Table 3, the results were developed using 15 items that were regrouped into the three extracted constructs.

## 5 DISCUSSION

After using a modified measurement model, regrouped-variable constructs were developed. The assessment of factor loading and composite reliability for each new construct are found to be greater than 0.700. The items with a factor load of less than 0.500 were considered as weak index items for use as common factors. The common factors were assigned labels to show the potential attributes of individual factor. This study finds that three new constructs affected how BUUIC late-year students make decisions about their future careers. Each of the three new constructs are discussed below.

### **Factor 1: Achievement, Engagement, and Opportunity**

One way to highlight that an individual is a good fit for a specific role and industry is to discuss existing accomplishments relevant to that individual's prospective field. Accomplishments may show that a person is aware of the obligations and responsibilities of the desired position and may be prepared to handle them. This idea is relevant to the concept of organizational commitment, which is defined as an individual's attitude to an organization when they have a strong belief and acceptance of the organization's aims and values. This commitment of an individual is considered to be an effort on behalf of the firm and shows a strong desire to maintain membership in the company (Mowday et al., 1982). Highly committed (existing and prospective) employees are willing to stay with firms and to put forth a lot of effort for their work and for their goals in the company (Luthans, McCaul, Dodd, 1985). According to Meyer & Allen (1991), the three types of organizational commitments that influence employees when seeking a job are job affection, work continuance, and normative commitment. Job affection is considered to be the more effective gauge of how employees commit to an organization. The employee who has a stronger affective engagement is likely to be motivated, to have better work performance, and to contribute more than other employees (Brown, 2003). Work continuance reflects the costs of an employee leaving the company. Therefore, employees are primarily associated with a company through work continuance (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Normative commitment is viewed as a sense of obligation by an employee to work continually.

**Table 3:** Rotated component matrix, the three extracted common factors, and composite reliability of the re-grouped constructs

No.	Variables Items	Factor Load Matrix			Composite Reliability	Extracted Common Factors
		1	2	3		
5	Job advancement affects job selecting decision-making.	0.692			0.832	Achievement, Engagement, and Opportunity Factor
10	Forward-looking organizations are essential to job selecting decision-making.	0.672				
4	Job security plays an important role in job selecting decision-making.	0.666				
6	Opportunities for future advancement influence job selecting decision-making.	0.652				
15	Family attention has no effect on job selecting decision-making.	0.610				
9	An organization that emphasizes the importance of participation affects job selecting decision-making.	0.576				
24	Work experience or internship experience affects job selecting decision-making.	0.541				
1	Work achievement affects job selecting decision-making.	0.524				
7	Job title effects job selecting decision-making.		0.569		0.637	Working Environment Factor
14	The organizations location affects job selecting decision-making.		0.564			
13	A good organizational culture and work environment affect job selecting decision-making.		0.558			
2	Salary and benefits affect job selecting decision-making.		0.519			
21	The persuasion of friends affects job selecting decision-making.			0.628	0.635	Social Factor
22	A group of friends who have good, stable jobs and are appreciated and accepted influenced job selecting decision-making.			0.599		
20	Friend's advice influences job selecting decision-making.			0.591		



An employee who has a high level of normative commitment believes that he or she should stay with the company (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

### **Factor 2: Working Environment Factor**

There are different sources of working environment factors processing information. High-involved job seekers are more likely to consider the internal elements of a company before interviewing with that company (Abedin et al., 2021). Literature claims that factors such as work security, work stability, and financial benefits associated with a specific job are the main determinants for career-choice selection (Siddiky & Akter, 2021; Kabil et al., 2018; Shahzad et al., 2018). Siddiky & Akter (2021) suggested that cultural factors and gender-specific factors sometimes determine job choices. For example, some people may choose a profession because of company policies that allow employees to spend more time with their family. Another example is female employees may believe that part-time work hours are necessary for their potential happiness (Smith et al., 2015).

### **Factor 3: Social Factor**

Career choices decisions are made in the context of society and the economy. Many career theories, such as Social Cognitive Theory and Social Learning, suggest that other elements are involved in career-choice decisions. Events in people's lives may have an impact on the options they have and even, to some extent, determine what type of career or job they should select. The inexperienced undergraduate respondents to the survey used for this paper preferred and relied on social factors when making job-selecting decisions. However, more experienced employees tend to pay more attention to economic values such as salary and compensation because they can make comparisons between a potential new job and their previous work experiences (Thiranagama & Dileesha, 2020). Students in developing countries such as Bangladesh were compelled by their families, their neighborhoods, and their social environments when choosing their professions (Siddiky & Akter, 2021; Suhi et al, 2021; Matin et al., 2018).

## **6 CONCLUSIONS**

In this study, the factors of late-year university students' job-selecting decisions were examined using the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) method. This study concludes that three important aspects influence how students choose their future jobs. The first aspect is achievement, engagement, and opportunity, which relates to their work success, their job participation, and their opportunity for future growth. The second aspect addresses work environment factors, including organizational culture, work environment, and benefits that the employees could receive. The third aspect covers social factors including influence by students' families and advice from students' friends.

From the organization's point of view, if an employer needs to be more competitive and raise their attractiveness among recent college graduates who are seeking jobs, then the employer must enhance job advancement and recognize their employees' achievement. Firms must show that they have opportunities that will be desirable for the younger generation of workers. Internal work environment dimensions such as the firm's culture, work environment, location, and employee benefits are important features for recently graduated job seekers. Moreover, the social factor is one of the most important criteria influencing the

respondents' job-selecting decision making.

The results of this study can provide guidance for organizations that are recruiting future employees based on the late-year university students' perceptions and decision making. Although the findings are very useful, this article also has some limitations. One suggestion for further study is to collect a higher number of the respondents across various college locations and then examine the relationships between individual constructs.

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