Factors Influencing Students' Decision-Making in Choosing Foreign Language Majors: A Case Study at Fpt University - Can Tho Campus

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Abstract

This research explores the dynamics influencing students' decision-making processes when selecting foreign language majors at FPT University - Can Tho Campus. A questionnaire designed to encapsulate key determinants such as Market Trends, Employment Opportunities, Interests, Confidence in Self-Competence, and Influential Networks served as the primary instrument for data collection. The study adopted a robust simple random sampling approach, surveying 340 participants and achieving a noteworthy 76.2% feedback rate, resulting in 259 valuable observations. Executed in March 2023, the survey adhered to Bollen's 5:1 criterion, ensuring a robust data foundation with a minimum requirement of 5 observations per measurement variable and an aggregate exceeding 100. This research unfolds through a systematic two-step process, commencing with a qualitative exploratory phase followed by a conducted quantitative analysis. Rigorous evaluations of reliability and measurement scales employed the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, with stringent criteria for variable exclusion. The subsequent exploratory factor analysis informed the conclusive phase, employing multivariate regression for model testing with significance levels between 1-5%. The outcomes illuminate positive coefficients for all variables, affirming their collective positive influence on the dependent variable. The nuanced hierarchy of impact, delineated through standardized Beta coefficients, provides valuable insights into the factors steering students' decisions within the realm of foreign language majors. The findings affirm the initial hypotheses, contributing nuanced perspectives to the understanding of the multifaceted considerations shaping students' choices in this academic domain.

Keywords: *Foreign language majors, sstudent, fpt university, vietnam.*

1. Introduction

In the era of globalization, there is an increasing demand from businesses for graduates in language-related fields who have received formal training to meet the needs of buying and selling goods, exchanging commodities, and collaborating with international enterprises. Consequently, in today's reality, high school graduates often choose their professions based not only on academic achievements but also on the labor market demands, aptitudes, and personal interests. Main and Ost (2011) underscore a perceptible societal shift away from traditional occupational trends within the realms of education and human resource

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management. This transformation is not only indicative of a paradigmatic alteration in career preferences but also signals a reevaluation of the dynamic interplay between academic pursuits and the demands of the contemporary professional landscape.

This transformative trend is notably pronounced in the provinces of the Mekong Delta. In addition to a multitude of public universities administered by the Ministry of Education and Training, private institutions have emerged, offering a plethora of language programs. A prime exemplar is FPT University, distinguished for its offerings in English, Japanese, Korean, and Chinese language studies.

However, despite the diverse linguistic opportunities provided by institutions like FPT University, there exists a notable gap in the comprehensive quantification and exploration of the myriad factors that influence students' decisions to pursue foreign language majors. Consequently, this research endeavor is embarked upon with the overarching goal of not only elucidating but also quantifying these factors, thereby contributing to a nuanced understanding of the determinants guiding students' choices in selecting foreign language majors at FPT University. This inquiry is particularly focused on students within the Mekong Delta region, aiming to provide insights that extend beyond the constraints of current knowledge in the field.

2. Literature Review

In the context of globalization, the intricate interplay between the globalized economy and the nuanced transformations of language roles has been expounded by Heller (2003). This acknowledgment underscores the pivotal role of formulating language policies as they relate to shifts in societal paradigms, with language policies themselves being considered a subset of broader social policies (Danis, A., 1999).

The past decade has seen a surge in the phenomenon of globalization and the establishment of a new world trade order. This global shift has significantly increased the demand for language professionals specializing in various languages to serve as bridges for international cooperation. The impact of this trend has transcended geographical boundaries, permeating the educational landscape of Vietnam and emphasizing the critical importance of global language education with a diverse linguistic trend. This education serves not only as a means to produce language specialists but also plays a role as a catalyst for nurturing a generation of global citizens with fluent language abilities, a multitude of soft skills, and broad economic knowledge capable of navigating, connecting, and analyzing the complexities of the global business environment (Starkey and Tiratsoo, 2007; Gomez-Samper, 2009).

However, the accessibility of high-quality language education has become a challenge, especially for the middle-class demographic, as the costs associated make it financially difficult for many families (Riasat et al., 2011). Despite these financial constraints, high-quality language education continues to be a lucrative industry for many universities, evident in the sustained demand and a considerable number of graduates securing good employment opportunities (Thomas, 1973).

Nevertheless, in the current economic environment marked by a diminishing job market, the employability of recent graduates has become a central concern and a focal point of deliberation (Jamillee, 2011).

A comprehensive examination of various sources and a thorough review of literature pertaining to the subject reveal that the issue of career choice has been explored by a multitude of authors from diverse perspectives within experimental studies

Mei Tang et al. (2008) applied Hackett et al. (1994) Social Cognitive Career Development Theory to scrutinize the factors influencing high school students' career choices. Their research unearthed that factors such as academic experience, self-assessment of vocational competence, and anticipated benefits and outcomes during career development significantly influenced the decisions of high school students in selecting their fields of study.

Bromley H.K. (2004) undertook a survey involving 384 adolescents (including 174 males and 174 females) aged 14 to 18. The findings illuminated that both schools and families can play pivotal roles in influencing the career choices of adolescents, whether directly or indirectly. Teachers, for instance, have the capacity to identify talents and capabilities, encouraging students to participate in extracurricular activities, career-oriented work, or industrial visits. The influence of parents on providing suitable support for career choices is substantial, with additional impacts stemming from siblings and friends.

Michael Borchert (2002), based on a survey of 325 high school students from Germantown High School in Wisconsin, concluded that within the three primary groups of environmental, opportunity, and personal characteristic factors influencing career choices, personal characteristics exerted the most significant influence on the vocational choices of high school students.

Chapman D.W (1981) proffered a comprehensive model for the career choices of students. Based on descriptive statistical results, he demonstrated that two main groups of factors had a substantial impact on students' decisions regarding school choices. The first group comprised family and individual characteristics, while the second group encompassed specific external factors such as fixed characteristics of universities and universities' communication efforts with students. Moreover, numerous studies have utilized the research findings of Chapman D.W and expanded upon various models to investigate the myriad factors influencing students' decisions in selecting schools.

According to Cabera and La Nasa (cited in Marvin J. B., 2006), beyond future academic expectations, the anticipation of future job prospects also constitutes one of the influential factors in the decision-making process regarding school choices for students. This multifaceted exploration illuminates the intricate web of factors shaping students' decisions and underscores the need for a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics involved in choosing a career path and an educational institution.

3 Research Model

Based on previous research literature and qualitative investigations, the author proposes five influential factors affecting the choice of foreign laguage majors at fpt university- can tho campus. these factors encompass market trends, the prevalence of numerous enterprises, employment opportunities, and students' interests (figure 1). The research hypotheses are formulated as follows:

Market trends: the economic and social development trends of the locality and the nation significantly impact the decision-making process regarding career choices for

today's youth. this is an essential factor contributing to the delineation of career directions for learners. the younger generation is increasingly concerned with the socioeconomic development of their locality and country, often opting for professions with current demand, promising job opportunities, and high prospects for remuneration. this reality naturally leads to the attraction of a considerable workforce to certain fields, while other fields may not garner the same level of interest. for the foreign language majors, driven by the expanding need for international trade and collaboration, the linguistics field is anticipated to be a priority for students in the mekong delta. therefore, the research posits the following hypothesis:

H1: *Market trends positively influence students' decision-making in choosing foreign language majors at FPT university - Can Tho campus.*

Employment Opportunities: Factors conducive to students' career development, such as job opportunities, increasing income, job stability, and a dynamic professional work environment (Felton et al., 1994; Tan and Laswad, 2006), play a crucial role. However, Jacking and Calero (2006) present divergent views based on experimental research results. Building on this, the research formulates the following hypothesis:

H2: *Employment opportunities positively influence students' decision-making in choosing foreign language majors at FPT university - Can Tho campus*

Interests: Defined as regular activities or habits that bring joy and excitement to individuals, interests emerge as a pivotal factor in students' choice of majors (Jackling and Kenerley, 2000; Law and Yuen, 2012). Similarly, interests are identified as a significant predictive factor in students' choice of profession (Jackling and Calero, 2006). Therefore, the research suggests the hypothesis:

H3: *Interests positively influence students' decision-making in choosing foreign language majors at FPT university - Can Tho campus*

Confidence in Self-Competence: According to Bandura's theory (1997), confidence in self-competence is an individual's perception of the psychological and physiological characteristics that meet the demands of a specific job and ensure its success. Confidence in self-competence is derived from four sources: personal experience, social learning, social encouragement, and emotional states. Building on Bandura's theory and previous experimental research results, the research formulates the following hypothesis:

H4: *Confidence in self-competence positively influences students' decision-making in choosing foreign language majors at FPT university - Can Tho campus*

Influential Networks: Advice from family members, relatives, teachers, and friends is predicted to impact students' intentions regarding career choices (Tan and Laswad, 2006). Similarly, Auyeung and Sands (1997) demonstrated that parents, teachers, alumni, and friends are influential groups affecting the career choices of Asian students due to the influence of cultural traditions and their decision-making orientation towards family. Therefore, the research suggests the hypothesis:

H5: *Influential networks positively influence students' decision-making in choosing foreign language majors at FPT university - Can Tho campus.*
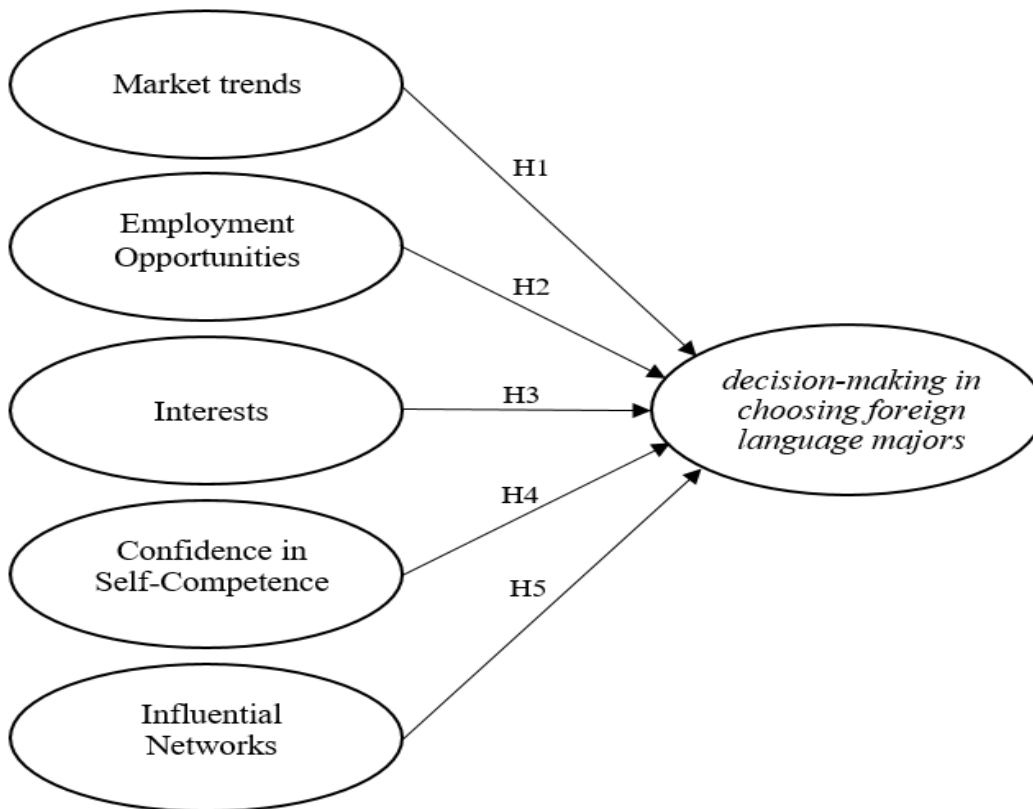
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

4. Research Method

The designed questionnaire encompasses factors such as Market Trends, Employment Opportunities, Interests, Confidence in Self-Competence, Influential Networks, and students' decision-making in choosing foreign language majors. The data collection method involves simple random sampling, surveying 340 students at FPT University, Can Tho campus, with a feedback rate of 76.2%, corresponding to 259 observations. The survey was conducted in March 2023. Sampling is based on Bollen's 5:1 criterion, ensuring a favorable data analysis (Exploratory Factor Analysis - EFA), with a minimum requirement of 5 observations for each measurement variable and not fewer than 100 observations overall. The questionnaire assessing the factors comprises a total of 27 observed variables (using Likert scale questions); hence, the minimum required sample is 135. However, considering the quantity of collected responses and to enhance the study's reliability, 259 observations were selected for analysis.

The research is conducted in two steps: initially, a qualitative preliminary study followed by the formal quantitative study. The reliability and measurement scale of observed variables are assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The criterion for accepting the measurement scale involves removing variables with total inter-item correlation less than 0.3 and Cronbach's Alpha coefficient less than 0.6. Subsequently, the author proceeds with an exploratory factor analysis, and the final step involves model testing using multivariate regression with significance levels set between 1-5%.

5. Research Results

5.1 Results of the Reliability Test of the Measurement Scale with Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient

The initial research model encompassed five independent variable groups and one dependent variable group, totaling 27 observed variables, with the expectation of positively influencing students' decision-making in choosing foreign language majors at FPT University - Can Tho campus. However, upon subjecting the measurement scale to a reliability assessment using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient, it was discerned that within the variable group of Influential Networks, specifically, variable IN3 exhibited a total inter-item correlation coefficient below 0.3. Consequently, IN3 was excluded from both the factor analysis and the subsequent regression model.

Upon the reliability of the measurement scale through Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for each factor group, five independent factor groups and one dependent factor group were identified as reliable for subsequent factor and regression analyses. These factor groups include Market Trends, Employment Opportunities, Interests, Confidence in Self-Competence, Influential Networks, and Decision-making in choosing foreign language majors, encompassing a total of 26 observed variables that meet the predetermined criteria. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for these factor groups ranged between 0.639 and 0.832, affirming their internal consistency.

Table 1: The reliability coefficients of the scales in the research model

Factor	Cronbach's Alpha	Corrected Item - Total Correlation
Market trends	0.738	0.431 – 0.782
Employment Opportunities	0.832	0.623 – 0.748
Interests	0.762	0.617 – 0.695
Confidence in Self-Competence	0.740	0.524 – 0.643
Influential Networks	0.655	0.508 – 0.672
Decision-making in choosing foreign language majors	0.639	0.507 – 0.594

5.2 Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

The results of the EFA indicate that, with 5 independent factor groups and 1 dependent factor group, along with 26 observed variables identified after testing the measurement scale's reliability, further factor analysis will be conducted to assess the convergence of measurement scales within each factor group. This aims to extract major characteristics of each influencing factor.

Results of Factor Analysis for Independent variables: In the initial factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) coefficient reached 0.819, indicating the suitability of factor analysis for the research dataset. The Barlett's Test P-value was 0.000, less than 0.005, confirming the appropriateness of factor analysis. The Eigenvalue was 1.734, exceeding 1, and 5 significant factors were extracted, summarizing information effectively. The total variance extracted was 71.295%, surpassing 50%, indicating the adequacy of the EFA model. Therefore, the 5 factors condensed 71.295% of the variation in observed variables. The rotation matrix results revealed that 22 observed variables were grouped into 5 factors, with all variables having factor loadings greater than 0.5. However, the variable INT2 in the Interests group had factor

loadings greater than 0.5 in both factor groups, leading to its exclusion from the research model. The research team proceeded to conduct a second factor analysis.

In the second exploratory factor analysis, the KMO coefficient was 0.813, supporting the acceptance of factor analysis for the research dataset. The Barlett's Test P-value was 0.000, less than 0.005, confirming the suitability of factor analysis. The Eigenvalue was 1.529, exceeding 1, and 5 significant factors were extracted, summarizing information effectively. The total variance extracted was 70.738%, surpassing 50%, indicating the adequacy of the EFA model. Therefore, the 5 factors condensed 70.738% of the variation in observed variables. The rotation matrix results showed that 21 observed variables were grouped into 5 factors, with all variables having factor loadings greater than 0.5 in a single factor group. The results did not indicate any observed variable confusion between factor groups.

Table 2: Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis for Independent Variables

Variable	Factor				
	1	2	3	4	5
MT1			0.807		
MT2			0.857		
MT3			0.731		
MT4			0.874		
EO1	0.612				
EO2	0.652				
EO3	0.859				
EO4	0.752				
INT1					0.708
INT3					0.623
INT4					0.59
INT5					0.864
CSC1		0.760			
CSC2		0.791			
CSC3		0.617			
CSC4		0.862			
CSC5		0.696			
IN1				0.626	
IN2				0.586	
IN4				0.738	
IN5				0.651	

Results of Factor Analysis for the Dependent variable: Following the analysis of 4 variables belonging to the dependent variable group, 'students' decision-making in choosing foreign language majors at FPT University - Can Tho campus,' the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) coefficient was found to be 0.649, supporting the acceptance of factor analysis for the research dataset. The Barlett's Test P-value was 0.000, less than 0.005, confirming the appropriateness of factor analysis. The Eigenvalue was 1.835, exceeding 1, and one significant factor was extracted, effectively summarizing information. The total variance extracted was 61.937%, surpassing 50%, indicating the adequacy of the EFA model. Thus, the dependent factor was condensed, capturing 61.937% of the variation in observed variables.

Table 3: Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis for Dependent Variable

Variable	Factor
	1
DM1	0.715
DM2	0.792
DM3	0.685
DM4	0.687

5.3 Correlation Analysis Results

The Pearson correlation values between the independent variables, namely Market trends, Employment Opportunities, Interests, Confidence in Self-Competence, Influential Networks, and the dependent variable, Decision-making in choosing foreign language majors, range from 0.001 to 0.034. This range indicates a linear relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable. Notably, the variable with the strongest correlation to Decision-making in choosing foreign language majors is Confidence in Self-Competence (correlation coefficient $r = 0.739$). Additionally, there is no statistically significant correlation observed among the independent variables, considering a significance level of 5%. Therefore, the multicollinearity phenomenon can be disregarded when conducting regression analysis.

5.4 Results of Linear Regression Model

The results of the regression analysis reveal that all five factors within the scale have a significant positive impact on Decision-making in choosing foreign language majors, with P-values < 0.05 for all variables. Furthermore, the adjusted R-squared value is 0.612, indicating that 61.2% of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the five factors, while the remaining 38.8% is attributed to external variables and random error. Additionally, the P-value of the F-test is 0.000 (< 1%), indicating that the linear regression model fits the dataset well and is deemed valid for use.

The significance levels (Sig) of the t-tests for the regression coefficients of the independent variables are all less than 0.05, signifying that each independent variable contributes significantly to explaining the dependent variable. None of the independent variables are excluded from the model. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) for each variable is less than 2, indicating the absence of multicollinearity. The Durbin-Watson statistic is 1.684, falling within the range of 1.5-2.5, suggesting no first-order serial correlation. The mean value is approximately -6.34E-17, close to 0, with a standard deviation of 0.994, suggesting an approximately normal distribution of residuals.

Table 4: Regression analysis results

Independent variable	Hypothesis	Beta	P-value	VIF	Result
Market trends	H1	0.272	0.019	1.000	Accepted
Employment Opportunities	H2	0.316	0.002	1.000	Accepted
Interests	H3	0.225	0.000	1.000	Accepted
Confidence in Self-Competence	H4	0.382	0.001	1.000	Accepted
Influential Networks	H5	0.193	0.000	1.000	Accepted
Adjusted R²			0.612		
Durbin Watson			1.684		

In conclusion, the assumptions of normality, homoscedasticity, and linearity are not violated. The regression coefficients are all positive, indicating that each of the five independent variables included in the regression analysis positively influences the dependent variable. Based on the magnitude of the standardized Beta coefficients, the order of impact from strongest to weakest is as follows: Confidence in Self-Competence (Beta = 0.382), Employment Opportunities (Beta = 0.316), Market trends (Beta = 0.272), Interests (Beta = 0.225), and Influential Networks (Beta = 0.193). Consequently, all five initial hypotheses are accepted.

6. Discussion

The analysis of the survey outcomes sheds light on the intricate dynamics influencing students' decision-making processes when opting for foreign language majors at FPT University - Can Tho campus. Notably, three pivotal factors, namely Confidence in Self-Competence, Employment Opportunities, and Market trends, emerge as the linchpins dictating the choices of aspiring linguists. This nuanced revelation resonates profoundly with the contemporary educational landscape.

Confidence in Self-Competence surfaces as a paramount element, unveiling a significant hurdle faced by students aspiring to delve into foreign language majors. The apprehension tied to one's perceived competence becomes a defining factor in the decision-making process. The empirical evidence gleaned from the survey underscores a prevalent scenario where a considerable cohort of students, despite harboring a genuine interest in foreign language majors, grapples with self-confidence issues, dissuading them from pursuing their linguistic aspirations.

Employment Opportunities and Market trends emerge as formidable influencers, reflecting the pragmatic mindset of contemporary students. The survey discerns a prevailing awareness among students that the pursuit of higher education is intricately linked to securing a profession that ensures not only personal sustenance but also supports their families in the future. This pragmatic outlook positions Employment Opportunities and Market trends as focal points in the decision-making matrix, often surpassing the significance attributed to personal Interests.

Interestingly, the traditional influence of social networks, often deemed pivotal in decision-making, assumes a diminished role in the context of career selection for foreign language majors. The study underscores the increasing independence and autonomy of the current generation Z. While familial and peer opinions are acknowledged, they do not wield substantial influence over the individual career trajectories of students. This trend signifies a paradigm shift, with self-reliance and personal aspirations emerging as the primary determinants in the decision-making landscape.

In conclusion, the multifaceted factors impacting students' decisions illuminate the evolving nature of career choices in the realm of foreign language majors. Understanding the intricate interplay of Confidence in Self-Competence, Employment Opportunities, Market trends, and the diminishing influence of traditional networks is imperative for educational institutions and policymakers seeking to align academic offerings with the evolving aspirations of the current student demographic.

7. Conclusions

The study has constructed and validated a model encompassing factors influencing the Decision-making in choosing foreign language majors, represented by five independent factors.

According to the survey results, all five factor groups exert statistically significant and positively oriented impacts on the dependent variable. These factors include Self-Competence, Employment Opportunities, Market trends, Interests, and Influential Networks. Based on the research findings, all five initially proposed hypotheses are accepted.

Drawing insights from the study outcomes, FPT University – Can Tho campus, as well as other higher education institutions offering language programs, would benefit from curriculum innovation. This innovation should be informed by international benchmarks and aligned with the psychological preferences of the Generation Z demographic. The aim is to facilitate a gradual adaptation to university learning methods and environments, mitigating psychological barriers that may hinder students from pursuing language-related disciplines. By doing so, institutions can enhance the attractiveness of language majors, fostering a more compelling choice for students in this field of study.

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