

Factors influencing career mobility decisions and career expectations among the 1980–2000 workforce in Vietnam: The role of career orientation in lower secondary education

 Nguyen Thi Huong^{1*},  Thanh Anh Minh²,  Mai Thi Phuong³,  Ho Huyen Trang⁴

^{1,3,4}The Viet Nam National Institute of Educational Sciences, Vietnam; huongnt@vnies.edu.vn (N.T.H.)

phuongmt75@gmail.com (M.T.P.) hohuyentrang86@gmail.com (H.H.T.).

²University of Education - Vietnam National University, Hanoi, Vietnam; minhthanh77.edu@gmail.com (T.A.M.).

Abstract: This study examines the long-term impacts of lower secondary school career orientation experiences on the adult career mobility decisions and career satisfaction of the Vietnamese workforce born between 1980 and 2000. Employing a quantitative survey design with a sample of 1,059 working individuals, the research integrates Savickas's Career Construction Theory, Human Capital Theory, Boundaryless Career Theory, and the Systems Theory Framework to evaluate structural and individual career determinants. Descriptive results indicate an overreliance on theoretical career instruction (Mean = 3.43) and minimal practical exposure (Mean < 3.00 for facility field trips). Inferential statistical analyses demonstrate that while early practical exploration frequencies do not significantly prevent adult job-hopping ($p = 0.591$), and adult job-matching with childhood preferences does not dictate long-term satisfaction ($p > 0.05$), the early formation of a distinct vocational interest during lower secondary education acts as a critical anchor, triggering significantly higher career satisfaction across all dimensions in adulthood (Mean = 4.00 vs. 3.29, $p = 0.000$). For job-changers ($n = 213$), career insecurity (28.87%) and workplace conflicts (25.09%) were primary push factors. Developing distinct early vocational interests acts as a vital psychological anchor for long-term career fulfillment. Results emphasize transitioning from theory-heavy guidance toward structured, technology-driven, and personalized career counseling models.

Keywords: Career mobility, Career orientation, Career satisfaction, Lower secondary education, Millennial workforce, Vietnam.

1. Introduction

In the context of digital transformation, globalization, and rapid labor market volatility, workers increasingly tend to adjust their jobs or undergo career mobility to seek work environments that better align with their capabilities, personal values, and career development goals. Individuals born between 1980 and 2000 are considered the primary workforce of the Vietnamese economy, while simultaneously representing the demographic cohort with a higher rate of career mobility compared to previous generations. Extant research indicates that this generation prioritizes career advancement opportunities, positive work environments, work-life balance, and work meaningfulness; they demonstrate a high propensity to change jobs when these expectations go unmet [1, 2].

Career mobility decisions are not only driven by workplace factors, such as promotion pathways, financial compensation, the work environment, or job satisfaction, but are also shaped by cumulative experiences during personal development. Numerous studies have affirmed the critical roles of family dynamics, social support, career decision-making self-efficacy, and the career exploration process in long-term professional development [3, 4]. However, a foundational yet underresearched factor is the experience of career orientation during lower-secondary education, a pivotal period when students begin

to develop self-awareness, construct understandings of the vocational world, and formulate future academic choices.

In Vietnam, although the 2018 General Education Program has integrated vocational education as a core component of secondary schooling, current literature primarily focuses on evaluating career guidance activities for active students or analyzing factors that drive turnover intentions among employees. Scant empirical research has examined the long-term relationship between the quality of lower-secondary career orientation and adult career mobility decisions, person-environment fit, or career development expectations. This critical literature gap severely limits the empirical foundation required to assess the long-term efficacy of career guidance policies within general education.

Driven by these requirements, this study analyzes the factors influencing career mobility decisions and career expectations among the 1980–2000 workforce in Vietnam, while clarifying the pivotal role of lower-secondary career-orientation experiences in subsequent professional development. By operationalizing Career Construction Theory alongside its complementary frameworks, this research expects to contribute empirical evidence regarding the determinants of career mobility within the Vietnamese context. Concurrently, it provides a scientific foundation to enhance general-education career-guidance policies and assist enterprises in constructing strategic frameworks for human-resource development, utilization, and retention.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Career Construction Theory and Complementary Theoretical Frameworks

Savickas [5] and Savickas [6] Career Construction Theory (CCT) serves as a critical framework to explain the lifelong process through which individuals proactively construct and adjust their vocational trajectories. According to CCT, career development is not a static phenomenon but rather a continuous career story, wherein individuals constantly reconstruct their life narratives during transitional phases to enhance their adaptability within volatile environments. This adaptability is structurally constituted by four core dimensions: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence [7]. By developing a consistent narrative identity, workers can transform occupational experiences into deep personal values, establishing a robust cognitive framework to adapt and thrive even amid turbulent market contexts [8, 9]. Furthermore, CCT defines career adaptability as an essential self-regulating mechanism that empowers individuals to proactively overcome external barriers by continuously optimizing their self-coping strategies [7].

To elucidate the multifaceted nature of career flexibility and career mobility, defined as the tendency to move across roles, industries, or organizational boundaries, a comprehensive integration of complementary theoretical frameworks is required. Human Capital Theory provides a foundational baseline to explain the mechanism driving the transition from career mobility to social mobility, asserting that early investments in education and skill acquisition reinforce long-term job satisfaction and professional pride [10]. Additionally, Boundaryless Career Theory enriches CCT by focusing on the contemporary propensity to work beyond traditional organizational boundaries, emphasizing the capacity for both physical and psychological mobility to achieve professional success [11]. Finally, the Systems Theory Framework (STF) offers a multidimensional, metatheoretical lens demonstrating that career trajectory dynamics are driven by the simultaneous interaction of individual, social, and macro-environmental contextual factors [12–14]. The convergence of these theoretical frameworks establishes a rigorous scientific foundation to deeply analyze the career adjustment decisions of the Millennial workforce in Vietnam.

2.2. Factors Influencing Career Mobility Decisions

The workforce born between 1980 and 2000, universally conceptualized as the Millennial generation, exhibits distinct career-related behaviors and values that heavily drive their turnover intentions and career mobility decisions. First, individuals within this cohort prioritize career advancement and continuous professional development. Research indicates that Millennials are highly

unlikely to maintain long-term organizational commitment if their expectations for skill enhancement and rapid upward mobility go unmet, often choosing to hop jobs to escape stagnant roles [1, 15, 16]. This desire for rapid growth makes the absence of clear promotion pathways a primary catalyst for voluntary turnover [17, 18]. Furthermore, their engagement is deeply intertwined with professional growth, meaning that when development expectations stall, turnover intentions accelerate [19].

Beyond vertical advancement, the quality of the work environment and workplace relationships function as critical structural determinants of retention. Millennials highly prioritize positive, open, and collaborative organizational climates; conversely, negative perceptions of these elements significantly trigger turnover intentions [20, 21]. Specifically, person-organization fit, the alignment between individual values and corporate culture, exerts a far more potent influence on a Millennial's decision to stay or leave than their fit with immediate supervisors or workgroups [21]. Parallel to cultural alignment, work-life balance and schedule flexibility have emerged as nonnegotiable requirements. Members of this generation actively seek occupational roles that allow for a seamless integration of professional and personal spheres, and they demonstrate a high propensity to quit if this equilibrium is compromised, directly impacting their long-term performance and job satisfaction [22, 23].

Finally, career mobility decisions among this 1980–2000 cohort are strongly dictated by the interplay of financial compensation, job-induced stress, and psychological value orientations. While Millennials deeply value socially meaningful work, competitive financial compensation and robust benefits packages remain essential structural anchors; perceived inequities in distribution or stagnation in wages rapidly erode organizational loyalty [24, 25]. Moreover, in high-stress sectors, operational stagnation, career fatigue, and job insecurity serve as strong predictors of voluntary exit [26]. When traditional employment fails to fulfill these multifaceted needs, Millennials frequently pivot toward self-employment or independent professional roles [27]. Psychosocially, this generational cohort displays higher turnover intentions when driven by extrinsic values such as income and social status, whereas those anchored in intrinsic rewards, such as work meaningfulness and self-actualization, exhibit higher retention, provided these values are structurally supported by the organization [2, 28].

2.3. The Role of Career Orientation in Lower Secondary Education

At the lower secondary school level, career guidance serves foundational systemic functions that heavily dictate long-term vocational trajectories. Structurally, early career orientation facilitates career development by enabling students to identify personal interests, core values, and distinct capabilities, which in turn empowers them to make highly informed decisions regarding future academic and vocational pathways [29]. Furthermore, timely exposure to career guidance curricula significantly enhances academic engagement and overall school performance by explicitly bridging classroom learning with concrete, real-world career opportunities [30]. Beyond enhancing engagement, effective and structured career guidance programs provide a critical safeguard in preventing student dropout; they sustain intrinsic academic motivation and structurally align student learning goals with their broader vocational aspirations [31].

Consequently, these operational functions yield substantial psychological and developmental benefits for students. Early career counseling equips individuals with critical cognitive tools, substantially improving their career decision-making capabilities, whether they eventually pursue higher education, enter vocational training, or directly transition into the workforce [29, 32]. Moreover, specialized career education interventions have been shown to elevate student self-esteem, self-efficacy, and positive attitudes toward enterprise, all of which are vital components of overall career readiness [31]. Broadly speaking, career guidance catalyzes comprehensive personal growth by directly linking formalized schooling to wider, long-term societal goals, such as active citizenship, social inclusion, and sustainable employability [33].

Despite these demonstrable benefits, the global implementation of lower secondary career education faces persistent access barriers and systemic challenges. A primary concern is equity; many students suffer from limited or nonexistent access to professionally trained career counselors, creating severe

geographic and demographic disparities in counseling effectiveness [30, 34]. Additionally, while classroom teachers occupy a central role in delivering career curricula, they frequently lack the specialized training and institutional resources required to execute this function effectively, often reducing their role to that of a "pastoral firefighter," overwhelmed by immediate student crises rather than proactive guidance [30, 35]. These issues are further compounded by deep-seated systemic barriers, where institutional shortcomings, school type, and regional socioeconomic differences collectively hinder the standardized delivery of high-quality career guidance [35, 36].

In the context of Vietnam, although the 2018 General Education Program has officially integrated career education as a core component, practical execution remains highly restricted, particularly within public schools and rural communities. While secondary students display strong interest in vocational counseling and find current activities structurally clear, there remains an urgent need to elevate widespread awareness regarding its actual long-term efficacy [37]. Interestingly, Vietnamese parents generally acknowledge the profound importance of career guidance but paradoxically display a noticeable lack of active, practical engagement in supporting these school initiatives [37].

Furthermore, while a substantial body of literature has explored turnover intentions among the Millennial workforce in Vietnam [2], a glaring empirical gap remains: few studies have explicitly connected early lower-secondary career orientation experiences to adult career mobility decisions and subsequent professional success. Most domestic research remains purely descriptive or narrowly confined to university student samples, lacking large-scale quantitative data from active workers born between 1980 and 2000. The present study bridges this critical literature gap by deploying survey data from 1059 working individuals. By combining CCT and the person–environment fit model, this paper systematically analyzes the long-term relationships among early career guidance, adult job-hopping drivers, and current career expectations.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Data Collection Methods

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach that primarily relied on a structured questionnaire survey combined with limited qualitative, open-ended responses.

The questionnaire consists of two main parts:

- Part 1: Demographic information and background (school type, academic performance in Grade 9, parents' occupations, current and past career information, reasons for job changes).
- Part 2: Experiences with career-orientation activities during lower secondary school, influencing factors in career choice, participation in career-related activities, preferred occupational groups, knowledge of training institutions, and current career satisfaction and expectations (using 5-point Likert scales).

Data were collected through both online and offline methods. The questionnaire used a combination of closed-ended questions (multiple-choice and Likert-scale items) and several open-ended questions to allow respondents to elaborate on reasons for job changes and other personal insights. Ethical considerations were strictly followed, including informed consent, voluntary participation, and assurance of confidentiality. All responses were anonymized and used solely for research purposes.

3.2. Sample and Sampling Strategy

This study employed a combined strategy of convenience sampling and snowball sampling to approach and collect information from survey participants. The inclusion criteria for the research sample required individuals to be born between 1980 and 2000, currently engaged in the labor market or possessing practical work experience after completing general education, and fully voluntary in contributing their information to the study.

Table 1.

Demographic characteristics of the research sample (n = 1059).

Variables	Coding in survey	Count	Percent
TypeSchool	Public	1041	98.3%
	People-founded	10	0.9%
	Private	8	0.8%
TypeClass	Regular class	585	55.2%
	Advanced class	474	44.8%
Gender	Female	698	65.9%
	Male	361	34.1%
Ethnic group	Kinh ethnic group	1034	97.6%
	Other ethnic groups	25	2.4%
Change job	Yes	213	20.1%
	No	846	79.9%

Regarding the demographic characteristics of the 1,059 workers in the sample, the public school system accounted for an overwhelming majority with 1,041 students (98.3%), whereas non-public and private schools comprised only minor fractions, at 0.9% (10 individuals) and 0.8% (8 individuals), respectively. The classroom structure exhibited a relatively balanced distribution between standard classes with 585 individuals (55.2%) and selective classes with 474 individuals (44.8%). In terms of gender, female workers constituted the majority with 698 individuals (65.9%), while male workers accounted for 361 individuals (34.1%). The ethnic composition was predominantly concentrated in the Kinh ethnic group with 1,034 individuals (97.6%), while other ethnicities accounted for only 2.4% (25 individuals). Notably, the analysis of career mobility behavior indicated that 20.1% (213 workers) had changed jobs at least once since entering the labor market, whereas the vast majority, at 79.9% (846 workers) had maintained stable employment since graduation up to the present.

3.3. Data Analysis Methods

Quantitative data were processed and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26.0. The analytical process began with data screening and cleaning to detect missing values, handle outliers, and evaluate normality assumptions. Following validation, descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means (Mean), and standard deviations (SD), were computed to summarize demographic profiles, outline participation patterns in career guidance activities, and map current career satisfaction and future expectations. To ensure psychometric robustness, reliability analysis was performed by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all multi-item Likert scales, using a threshold where values above 0.70 were deemed acceptable [38].

Inferential statistical techniques were deployed to investigate behavioral and psychological patterns within the workforce. Independent samples t-tests evaluated significant differences in continuous variables between two distinct groups, specifically comparing career satisfaction scores across genders and examining the divergence in career outcomes between individuals with clear vocational interests during secondary school and those without. For categorical variable testing, indicators measuring practical exploration were transformed into composite scores and recorded into low, medium, and high involvement levels. A Pearson chi-square test of independence was then applied to evaluate whether actual job change frequencies varied significantly across these three discrete levels of career guidance involvement. All statistical tests were interpreted using a strict two-tailed significance criterion of $p < 0.05$.

4. Results

4.1. Current Status of Career Orientation in Lower Secondary Education

Initial descriptive statistics indicate that up to 77.6% of the workers in the research sample participated in vocational training during their lower secondary education, whereas the proportion of

individuals who did not attend vocational training accounted for only 22.4%. Although the rate of access to secondary vocational education was relatively high, a deeper analysis of the extent and modalities of participation in specific career guidance activities in Table 2 delineates a distinct pattern of divergence.

Table 2.

Participation Level in Lower Secondary Career Guidance Activities (1–5 Likert Scale).

Items	Never	Rarely	Occasional	Frequent	Very frequent	Mean	SD
Through the teaching of basic science subjects	9.0%	10.7%	26.9%	35.2%	18.2%	3.43	1.17
Through career guidance sessions	16.1%	20.0%	41.4%	19.7%	2.8%	2.73	1.04
Through extracurricular activities	14.3%	22.3%	32.0%	17.6%	13.9%	2.95	1.23
Through the teaching of technology and productive labor	12.6%	19.4%	36.3%	26.3%	5.6%	2.93	1.09
The school organizes field trips to craft villages and production facilities	28.6%	17.8%	28.0%	19.7%	5.9%	2.57	1.25
Through career counseling	25.3%	20.4%	27.6%	20.3%	6.4%	2.62	1.24

The integrated format "Through the teaching of basic science subjects" recorded the highest mean score at 3.43 (SD = 1.17), with a total of 53.4% of respondents rating its occurrence as either "frequent" or "very frequent." This reflects the traditional trend in Vietnamese education during the prior period, when vocational content was primarily integrated indirectly through classroom theory. Conversely, more specialized and practical activities were considerably limited. Specifically, vocational orientation sessions yielded a mean score of only 2.73 (SD = 1.04), with 41.4% of responses selecting the "occasional" level. More concerning, practical connection models, such as field trips to craft villages and production facilities, registered the lowest score (Mean = 2.57; SD = 1.25), accompanied by 28.6% of respondents asserting that they had never participated. The "Vocational Counseling" format also exhibited a modest mean score of 2.62 (SD = 1.24), with as many as 25.3% of subjects having had no prior access. These findings demonstrate that career guidance during the 1980–2000 period was predominantly confined to providing foundational knowledge within the classroom, lacking interactive solutions and intensive experiential practices.

Table 3.

Facilities visit for learning and practicing vocational skills.

Items	Never	Rarely	Occasional	Frequent	Very frequent	Mean	SD
Center for Continuing Education	39.7%	8.1%	11.2%	23.9%	17.1%	2.71	1.58
Vocational Training Center	36.6%	13.4%	31.4%	16.2%	2.4%	2.34	1.19
Manufacturing Enterprise	42.0%	15.0%	17.9%	13.1%	11.9%	2.38	1.43
Center for General Technical Education and Career Guidance	41.7%	14.0%	18.2%	20.4%	5.7%	2.34	1.35
Higher Education Institution	43.0%	12.1%	23.1%	16.1%	5.7%	2.29	1.32
Job Placement Center	43.9%	14.0%	18.4%	17.5%	6.2%	2.28	1.34
Visiting Traditional Craft Villages	37.3%	14.9%	21.9%	17.4%	8.5%	2.45	1.36

The deficit in practical experience is elucidated by the data in Table 3, where the mean scores for all criteria fall below 3.00, reflecting a limited connection between schools and society. Except for "Continuing Education Centers," which achieved the highest score (Mean = 2.71; SD = 1.58) due to the

compulsory nature of the vocational curriculum in general education at that time, other specialized institutions all recorded very high rates of "never" participating. Specifically, up to 42.0% of the subjects had never engaged with "Manufacturing Enterprises" (Mean = 2.38; SD = 1.43), and 41.7% had never visited the "Center for General Technical Education and Career Guidance" (Mean = 2.34; SD = 1.35). Similarly, the proportions of workers who had absolutely no prior access to "Job Placement Centers" and "Higher Education Institutions" accounted for 43.9% (Mean = 2.28) and 43.0% (Mean = 2.29), respectively. Even the most easily organized format, such as "Visiting Traditional Craft Villages," saw up to 37.3% of respondents selecting the "never" level (Mean = 2.45; SD = 1.36). These data reinforce the argument that workers belonging to the 1980–2000 generation were virtually isolated from the practical environment during their lower secondary school years, thereby diminishing their ability to identify the real-world demands of the labor market.

Table 4.
Independent Practical Exploration.

No.	Items	No		Yes	
		Count	Percent	Count	Percent
1	Socio-economic development orientations of the country and locality	763	72.0%	296	28.0%
2	Understanding personal capabilities and family occupational traditions	730	68.9%	329	31.1%
3	Future career orientation	467	44.1%	592	55.9%
4	Career guidance and career choice counseling	436	41.2%	623	58.8%
5	Finding labor market information	719	67.9%	340	32.1%
6	Gender issues in career choice	825	77.9%	234	22.1%
7	Exploring and visiting some industries and occupations in society	610	57.6%	449	42.4%
8	Field visiting some local universities, colleges, and vocational schools	547	51.7%	512	48.3%
9	Organizing exchange activities based on career guidance themes	566	53.4%	493	46.6%
10	Finding training information and guidance on preparing enrollment applications	467	44.1%	592	55.9%

Although school-based career guidance faced numerous barriers, data regarding autonomous practical exploration activities (Table 4) demonstrate the proactive efforts of workers in shaping their futures. The group of activities with a predominant "Yes" rate (over 50%) centered on enrollment procedures and short-term orientation at the end of school levels, topped by "Career guidance and career choice counseling" at 58.8% ($n = 623$). This was followed by "Future career orientation" and "Finding training information and guidance on preparing enrollment applications," both reaching 55.9% ($n = 592$). However, this proactivity revealed weaknesses regarding strategic and macro-level knowledge: 72.0% ($n = 763$) did not access information on local socioeconomic development orientations; the non-exploration rates for the labor market and personal capacity/family tradition were 67.9% ($n = 719$) and 68.9% ($n = 730$), respectively. Notably, "Gender issues in career choice" received the least attention, with 77.9% ($n = 825$) responding "No." These results indicate that the majority of workers during their lower secondary school years focused only on processing short-term information to facilitate their transition between school levels, lacking a comprehensive strategy to understand themselves and society, which led to the risk of making incorrect career choices and constantly changing jobs in adulthood.

4.2. Factors Driving Career Change Decisions

Within the subgroup of 213 workers who had experienced job mobility, the "push" factors acting as catalysts that triggered job-hopping behaviors exhibited multidimensional trends.

Table 5.

Push factors leading to job change.

No.	Reasons for job change	Count	Percent
1	Lack of interest in the work	33	11.34%
2	Excessive job difficulty	5	1.72%
3	Heavy workload	18	6.19%
4	Slow promotion	19	6.53%
5	Lack of time off on scheduled holidays	8	2.75%
6	Unfair treatment	18	6.19%
7	Workplace conflicts	73	25.09%
8	Future job insecurity	84	28.87%
9	Other reasons	33	11.34%
	Total	291	100.00%

Data in Table 5 demonstrate that "future job insecurity" was the strongest push factor, driving 28.87% of workers' decisions and reflecting the core need for career security among the 1980–2000 generation within a market economy. Additionally, interpersonal barriers in the workplace generated substantial psychological pressure, with up to 25.09% of workers citing conflicts with colleagues as their reason for leaving their former organizations.

Incompatibility regarding intrinsic values also propelled job mobility, as 11.34% of individuals left their previous employment due to a lack of interest in the work. Conversely, technical and professional barriers—measured by the indicator “excessive job difficulty”—accounted for the lowest proportion in the table, at only 1.72%. Factors pertaining to the administrative systems of former employers, such as limited career advancement (6.53%), inequitable compensation (6.19%), and a heavy workload (6.19%), exerted a moderate impact but directly eroded employee commitment. Furthermore, the “other reasons” category accounted for 11.34%, incorporating pragmatic personal factors such as relocating closer to home, contract expiration, or the desire to work in a field aligned with their general education and training. Overall, the job mobility experience of these workers represents a self-adaptive mechanism, transitioning from being pressured by their former organizational environments toward proactively pursuing a new pathway that optimizes security, workplace relationships, and personal passion.

4.3. Current Levels of Career Satisfaction and Growth Expectations

The descriptive statistics and independent-samples t-test results presented in Tables 6, 7, and 8 portray a generally positive overview of the career mindset among workers born between 1980 and 2000, while simultaneously revealing a profound gender-based divergence.

Table 6.Descriptive statistics for Career Expectations and Future Outlook indices (5-point Likert scale, $n = 1059$).

No.	Items	Female		Male		Sig.
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
1	I believe that my career prospects are bright from this point forward.	4.04	0.93	4.16	0.83	0.030
2	I believe that the career I expect can be actualized starting now.	3.73	0.94	3.61	0.87	0.046
4	I believe that I can continue to expand my area of professional expertise in the future.	3.95	0.88	3.83	0.86	0.030
5	I believe that my future work will enable my personal growth.	4.00	0.92	3.84	0.95	0.008
8	I believe that I will continue to fully dedicate my maximum efforts to my work in the future.	3.98	0.92	3.84	0.92	0.014

Within the indicator group regarding career expectations and future outlook (Table 6), workers generally maintained a highly optimistic attitude. Notably, male workers demonstrated a significantly stronger belief in a bright prospect, with a mean score of 4.16 compared to 4.04 for female workers ($p =$

0.030). However, female workers demonstrated superior resilience and a more pragmatic mindset when evaluating their ability to actualize their expected careers right from the present (Mean = 3.73 compared to 3.61 for males; $p = 0.046$), their potential for future professional expansion (Mean = 3.95; $p = 0.030$), as well as their commitment to putting forth maximum effort into their work for personal growth ($p < 0.05$). This trend indicates that while male workers focus more on the goal of breaking through status boundaries, women of this generation concentrate on optimizing their adaptive capacity and mastering a practical professional trajectory.

Table 7.

Descriptive statistics for Current Career Satisfaction & Achievements indices (5-point Likert scale, $n = 1059$).

No.	Items	Female		Male		Sig.
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
3	I believe that my career to date is the cumulative result of expertise, technical skills, and human networks.	3.98	0.96	3.97	0.99	0.888
6	I believe that I have built a distinctive career that sets me apart from others.	3.73	0.99	3.69	0.92	0.590
7	I believe that I have established my career through my own capabilities.	3.99	0.94	3.86	0.95	0.036
9	I am completely satisfied with every aspect of my career to date.	3.81	0.94	3.79	0.95	0.780
10	Up to the present moment, I am truly satisfied with the achievements made toward my established career goals.	3.79	0.94	3.72	0.91	0.262

The autonomy of female workers is further distinctly reinforced when analyzing current levels of satisfaction and achievement evaluations in Table 7. Although no statistically significant differences were observed between genders regarding the perception of a career as a cumulative long-term result ($p = 0.888$) or overall satisfaction levels ($p = 0.780$), female workers recorded significantly higher scores than their male counterparts in asserting that they built their careers through their own capabilities (Mean = 3.99 versus 3.86; $p = 0.036$). Parallel to this high level of self-reliance, the female worker group also exhibited a superior psychological state and intrinsic motivation in Table 8. They reported higher interest levels in their current work (Mean = 3.98; $p = 0.037$), a deeper sense of meaning in what they do (Mean = 3.99; $p = 0.032$), and consistently maintained a more enthusiastic daily work atmosphere (Mean = 3.90 versus 3.73 for males; $p = 0.006$).

Table 8.

Descriptive statistics for Intrinsic Motivation & Work Engagement indices (5-point Likert scale, $n = 1059$).

No.	Items	Female		Male		Sig.
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
11	I am interested in my current work.	3.98	0.94	3.85	0.89	0.037
12	I find meaning in the work I currently do.	3.99	0.98	3.85	0.99	0.032
13	I experience a sense of success in my work.	3.83	0.94	3.79	0.87	0.580
14	I always approach my work with enthusiasm.	3.90	0.95	3.73	0.96	0.006
15	I am fully utilizing my capabilities in my work.	3.93	0.95	3.84	0.89	0.138

The convergence of data proves that, following experiences of job mobility or career fluctuations, women of the 1980–2000 generation in Vietnam are achieving a state of occupational well-being and a profound liberation of intrinsic potential. They do not merely view work as a pure means of subsistence but actively transform it into a space for self-actualizing personal values independently and steadfastly. Conversely, the fact that scores for the level of satisfaction with specific established goals (Item 10) fell into the lowest group in the table and showed no gender differentiation ($p = 0.262$) reflects a shared central psychological trait: workers of the 1980–2000 generation consistently maintain highly rigorous expectations for themselves, continuously repositioning themselves to strive for higher developmental ladders rather than accepting temporary results.

4.4. The Relationship Between Lower Secondary School Career Guidance and Career Outcomes

4.4.1. Level of Participation in Lower Secondary School Career Guidance and the Likelihood of Career Change

To evaluate the relationship between the level of participation in practical career guidance activities during general education and subsequent job mobility behaviors, this study conducted a frequency distribution analysis combined with a chi-square test across the entire sample of 1,059 workers.

Table 9.

Statistics on the level of participation in lower secondary school career guidance and the likelihood of career change.

		Experiential activities			Sig.
		Low participation	Moderate participation	High participation	
No job change	Count	409	207	230	0.591
	Percent	78.7%	80.5%	81.6%	
Job change	Count	111	50	52	
	Percent	21.3%	19.5%	18.4%	

Detailed statistical data in Table 9 reveal a relatively clear linear shift in the behavior of the respondents surveyed. Within the group of workers with low levels of practical experience during their lower secondary school years, the rate of job-changing behavior reached its peak at 21.3%, corresponding to 111 individuals ($n = 111$). This indicator exhibited a gradual downward trend to 19.5% ($n = 50$) in the moderate participation group and touched its lowest point at 18.4% ($n = 52$) among those with high levels of engagement in practical career guidance activities.

Although these descriptive percentages reflect a beneficial direction of secondary career guidance toward career sustainability, the chi-square hypothesis test registered a two-tailed asymptotic significance value of $p = 0.591$. Because this value far exceeds the standard statistical significance threshold of 0.05, the study concludes that the differences in job mobility rates among the three groups with varying levels of guidance participation are not statistically significant within the sample surveyed. This empirical finding reflects a historical characteristic of the 1980–2000 generation of workers in Vietnam. Merely increasing the frequency of participation in practical experiential activities during the earlier period did not possess sufficient intrinsic strength to thoroughly deter job-hopping behavior when workers confronted the powerful external pressures of the modern job market.

4.4.2. Lower Secondary School Vocational Group Interests and Subsequent Career Fit

To elucidate the long-term consequences of the trend in shaping adolescents' vocational interests, this study conducted independent-samples t-tests based on two aspects: the degree of alignment between the current job and the preferred vocational group during lower secondary school (Table 10), and whether individuals possessed distinct vocational interests during this schooling period (Table 11).

Table 10.

Comparison of current satisfaction/achievement evaluation levels based on the alignment between current job and preferred job during lower secondary school.

No.	Items	Non-aligned		Aligned		Sig.
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
3	I believe that my career to date is the cumulative result of expertise, technical skills, and human networks.	3.99	0.98	3.92	0.95	0.250
6	I believe that I have built a distinctive career that sets me apart from others.	3.69	0.98	3.78	0.94	0.140
7	I believe that I have established my career through my own capabilities.	3.99	0.94	3.85	0.95	0.036
9	I am completely satisfied with every aspect of my career to date.	3.81	0.95	3.77	0.93	0.500
10	Up to the present moment, I am truly satisfied with the achievements made toward my established career goals.	3.79	0.94	3.72	0.90	0.240

Statistical results in Table 10 reveal a noteworthy reality, as most indicators measuring current career satisfaction and achievements show no statistically significant differences between the groups of workers whose jobs are "aligned" and "non-aligned" with their lower secondary school interests ($p > 0.05$). Workers in both groups highly evaluated their current careers as the cumulative result of expertise and relationship networks (Mean = 3.99 for the non-aligned group and 3.92 for the aligned group; $p = 0.250$), and they maintained comparable levels of overall satisfaction ($p = 0.500$). The only statistically significant difference lies in the career self-reliance indicator (Item 7), where the non-aligned group achieved a mean score of 3.99, significantly higher than the 3.85 of the aligned group ($p = 0.036$). This suggests that workers who have to transition into a field different from their childhood aspirations tend to exert higher levels of personal effort to assert their competence and adapt to the new environment.

Table 11.

Comparison of current satisfaction/achievement evaluation levels based on the presence of vocational interests during lower secondary school.

No.	Items	Without vocational interests during lower secondary school		With vocational interests during lower secondary school		Sig.
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
3	I believe that my career to date is the cumulative result of expertise, technical skills, and human networks.	3.29	1.22	4.00	0.95	0.000
6	I believe that I have built a distinctive career that sets me apart from others.	3.21	1.20	3.73	0.95	0.002
7	I believe that I have established my career through my own capabilities.	3.29	1.24	3.97	0.93	0.000
9	I am completely satisfied with every aspect of my career to date.	3.21	1.15	3.82	0.93	0.000
10	Up to the present moment, I am truly satisfied with the achievements made toward my established career goals.	3.24	1.21	3.79	0.92	0.001

In contrast to the alignment observed between the aligned and non-aligned groups, the test results in Table 11 present a crucial scientific breakthrough when comparing the group "with vocational interests during lower secondary school" and the group "without vocational interests during lower secondary school." All five indicators measuring satisfaction and achievement evaluation recorded a profound and highly statistically significant discrepancy ($p = 0.002$). Individuals who completely failed to develop any vocational interests or inclinations during their lower secondary school years exhibited a severe decline in evaluation scores across all dimensions, fluctuating at low levels from 3.21 to 3.29. Concurrently, their SD reached a very high threshold, ranging from 1.15 to 1.24, reflecting a state of substantial psychological polarization and indeterminacy.

Meanwhile, the group that had clearly shaped their vocational interests during secondary education achieved significantly superior mean scores, approaching positive thresholds from 3.73 to 4.00, accompanied by noticeably more stable and tighter standard deviations. The most distinct evidence is found in the indicator regarding expertise and relationship accumulation (Item 3), which reached a maximum value of 4.00 in the group with interests, overwhelming the score of 3.29 in the group without interests ($p = 0.000$). Similarly, the level of comprehensive satisfaction with the current career (Item 9) in the group with interests stood at 3.82, significantly higher than the 3.21 of the baseline group ($p = 0.000$).

The convergence of data between the two tables delivers a core scientific message: for the long-term development of the 1980 - 2000 generation of workers, whether they grew up working "in the right field," as desired during lower secondary school, is not the decisive factor for career satisfaction, as adaptive capacity helps them find value in new positions. Instead, possessing a distinct vocational interest early on serves as the actual springboard that structures personality, activates career-oriented

thinking, and creates a prerequisite for individuals to know how to accumulate human capital and social networks to achieve high satisfaction in adulthood.

5. Discussion and Recommendations

5.1. Discussion

Empirical findings from this study provide profound insights into the career trajectories of the 1980–2000 generation of workers in Vietnam, establishing a long-term connection with the quality of lower secondary school career guidance. The highest mean score belonged to the indirectly integrated format through science subjects (Mean = 3.43), reflecting a systemic barrier within the traditional educational structure, where teachers functioned as "pastoral firefighters", lacking specialized resources to implement intensive career guidance. This situation aligns with the warnings of Rice and Hooley [30] as well as Robertson et al. [35] regarding how the deficiency in professional training confines orientation work to theoretical spaces. Consequently, students were isolated from the practical environment (Mean < 3.00 across all indicators for vocational facility field trips in Table 3). This defect forced lower secondary school seniors to channel their personal efforts into short-term activities serving examinations and school-level transitions (Table 4), rather than constructing a comprehensive strategy to understand personal capacity and societal human resource demands.

The lack of an early practical cognitive filter left direct consequences in adulthood, generating complex career mobility trends. Within the subgroup of workers who had experienced job-hopping, the emergence of "job stability" (28.87%) and "conflict with colleagues" (25.09%) as the strongest push factors (Table 5) reflects a deep psychological characteristic of the 1980–2000 generation. This result simultaneously supports the finding of Muthuswamy [26] regarding the weight of career insecurity anxiety, while also aligning with the arguments of Yang et al. [2] and Deschênes [21] that this generation is willing to leave enterprises if their expectations for a positive environment and distributive justice are not met.

Notably, the crosstabulation test results in Table 9 indicate that the rate of job change gradually decreased as the level of practical experience increased (21.3% → 19.5% → 18.4%), yet this trend did not reach statistical significance ($p = 0.591$). This finding demonstrates that merely increasing the frequency of participation in superficial experiential activities in the past was not potent enough to deter job-hopping behaviors when faced with dynamic market pressures. Conversely, the test results in Table 10 and Table 11 substantiate a core principle: working in the exact field desired during lower secondary school does not dictate long-term satisfaction ($p > 0.05$ in Table 10), owing to adaptive capacity that enables individuals to self-adjust. However, possessing a distinct vocational interest early on triggers superior levels of comprehensive satisfaction (Mean = 4.00 versus 3.29, $p = 0.000$). This serves as robust empirical evidence supporting Savickas' CCT [5]: a clear, early interest helps shape narrative identity, accumulate consistent human capital, and optimize adaptive capacity to achieve sustainable occupational well-being in adulthood.

5.2. Recommendations

Based on the aforementioned empirical findings, this study proposes several strategic recommendations aimed at enhancing the quality of secondary career guidance within the context of the 2018 General Education Program and digital transformation trends:

Shifting the School-Based Career Guidance Model: The educational system needs to replace theoretical orientation formats with structured career guidance programs. Emphasis should be placed on designing deep, practical experiential activities and strengthening linkages between secondary schools, enterprises, and universities to dismantle students' isolation from real-world environments.

Applying Technology and Big Data: To bridge the macro-level information gap (which up to 72% of students could not access), it is essential to accelerate the implementation of electronic learning portfolios (e-Portfolios). Furthermore, machine learning algorithms and artificial intelligence (AI) should be deployed to analyze data and personalize career pathways based on real-time market forecasts.

Early Activation of Personal Vocational Inclinations: Schools and career counselors should utilize standardized psychometric scales to assist students in the early identification and cultivation of distinct vocational interests. This should be recognized as the foundation for developing sustainable career adaptability, rather than focusing solely on short-term enrollment procedures.

Synchronizing Supporting Resources: Specialized training and standardization policies must be enacted for dedicated counseling teachers to alleviate the burden of concurrent roles. Concurrently, career guidance programs must integrate the proactive involvement of parents to provide positive encouragement and social support, thereby empowering learners to make confident decisions.

6. Conclusion

This study underscores the profound, long-term developmental implications of early career orientation on adult labor market behaviors and psychological outcomes among the Vietnamese workforce born between 1980 and 2000. By operationalizing Career Construction Theory and its complementary frameworks, the empirical evidence indicates that traditional, classroom-bound vocational guidance models are structurally inadequate for navigating the complex individual, social, and contextual systems that drive modern boundaryless career movements. Critically, the investigation reveals that achieving a direct industry match with early adolescent aspirations does not dictate adult career fulfillment. Instead, early human capital investments that cultivate a well-defined vocational interest during lower secondary education serve as the fundamental catalyst for long-term career satisfaction, narrative identity formation, and proactive career adaptability during maturity.

Conclusively, the contemporary execution of Vietnam's 2018 General Education Program must prioritize a profound paradigm shift. To foster sustainable workforce retention and optimize national human resource development, lower-secondary educational institutions must dismantle traditional pedagogical isolation by embedding structured, experiential career guidance. Ultimately, the integration of advanced technological innovations, specifically, computerized electronic learning portfolios (e-Portfolios) and machine-learning algorithms, is imperative to bridge the strategic information gap, deliver real-time labor projections, and provide equitable, data-driven, and highly individualized career-counseling pathways that empower students to navigate an increasingly dynamic labor market.

Funding:

This research was funded by the Ministry of Education and Training under the ministry-level research project entitled *"Build electronic learning records and use machine learning algorithms to provide career counseling for middle school students"* (Grant Number: B2024.VKG.09).

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

Copyright:

© 2026 by the authors. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

References

- [1] E. S. W. Ng, L. Schweitzer, and S. T. Lyons, "New generation, great expectations: A field study of the millennial generation," *Journal of Business and Psychology*, vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 281-292, 2010. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-010-9159-4>
- [2] Y. Yang, H. M. Thu Hue, and S. Takeda, "Turnover intention among Vietnamese millennials in the workplace," in *Evidence-Based HRM: A Global Forum for Empirical Scholarship* (Vol. 12, No. 3, pp. 592-610). Emerald Publishing Limited, 2024.

- [3] S. Mate, M. McDonald, A. Morgan, D.-N. Hoang, M. Das, and N. Dinh, "Influences on career identity in Vietnamese students at an international university," *Australian Journal of Career Development*, vol. 26, no. 1, pp. 24–31, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1038416217697973>
- [4] M. Pham, B. Q. Lam, and A. T. N. Bui, "Career exploration and its influence on the relationship between self-efficacy and career choice: The moderating role of social support," *Heliyon*, vol. 10, no. 11, p. e31808, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e31808>
- [5] M. L. Savickas, *The theory and practice of career construction, in Career Development and Counseling: Putting Theory and Research to Work*, S. D. Brown and R. W. Lent, Eds. Hoboken, NJ, USA: John Wiley & Sons, 2005.
- [6] M. L. Savickas, "Career construction theory and practice," *Career Development and Counseling: Putting Theory and Research to Work*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 144–180, 2013.
- [7] M. A. Gregor, I. K. Weigold, G. Wolfe, D. Campbell-Halfaker, J. Martin-Fernandez, and H. V. G. D. Pino, "Positive predictors of career adaptability among diverse community college students," *Journal of Career Assessment*, vol. 29, no. 1, pp. 115–128, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072720932537>
- [8] J. Del Corso and M. C. Rehfuess, "The role of narrative in career construction theory," *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, vol. 79, no. 2, pp. 334–339, 2011. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2011.04.003>
- [9] J. Bimrose *et al.*, "Transforming identities and co-constructing careers of career counselors," *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, vol. 111, pp. 7–23, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2018.07.008>
- [10] H. Oh, M. Jeong, S. A. Lee, and H. H. Shin, "Career mobility to social mobility: The case of lodging employment and beyond," *Tourism Management*, vol. 111, p. 105253, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2025.105253>
- [11] K. Ghosh, A. McDonnell, and A. Irum, "A conceptual framework of the perceived marketability of independent professionals," *Human Resource Management Journal*, vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 197–213, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12520>
- [12] M. McMahon, "Career counseling: Applying the systems theory framework of career development," *Journal of Employment Counseling*, vol. 42, no. 1, pp. 29–38, 2005. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1920.2005.tb00896.x>
- [13] M. McMahon, "The systems theory framework of career development," *Journal of Employment Counseling*, vol. 48, no. 4, pp. 170–172, 2011. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1920.2011.tb01106.x>
- [14] W. Patton, *Career counseling: Joint contributions of contextual action theory and the systems theory framework. In Counseling and action: Toward life-enhancing work, relationships, and identity*. New York: Springer New York, 2014.
- [15] T. Kodagoda and N. Deheragoda, "War for talent: Career expectations of millennial employees in Sri Lanka," *Millennial Asia*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 209–228, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0976399621990542>
- [16] M. A. Trivedi and K. H. Jobanputra, *New generation, big desires—A conceptual framework on study on millennial preferred workplace attributes. In Digital Transformation and Sustainability of Business*. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2025.
- [17] I. Tetteh, A. Spaulding, and M. Ptukhina, "Understanding the job-hopping syndrome among millennial employees in the US food and agribusiness sector: a national survey," *International Food and Agribusiness Management Review*, vol. 24, no. 1, pp. 89–104, 2021.
- [18] C. A. Chavadi, M. Sirothiya, and V. MR, "Mediating role of job satisfaction on turnover intentions and job mismatch among millennial employees in Bengaluru," *Business Perspectives and Research*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 79–100, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2278533721994712>
- [19] O. X. Ying, A. Ahmad, W. N. Mohamed, and S. F. Padlee, "A Gen-Y study of work engagement as mediator between career development and turnover intention in Malaysia top companies," *Advanced Science Letters*, vol. 23, no. 9, pp. 8961–8965, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1166/asl.2017.10004>
- [20] M. Lavoie-Tremblay *et al.*, "Retaining nurses and other hospital workers: An intergenerational perspective of the work climate," *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, vol. 42, no. 4, pp. 414–422, 2010. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1547-5069.2010.01370.x>
- [21] A.-A. Deschênes, "An empirical examination of the millennials' intent to leave through various person-environment fit dimensions," *Psychologie du Travail et des Organisations*, vol. 26, no. 3, pp. 214–226, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pto.2019.12.002>
- [22] K. T. Smith, "Work-life balance perspectives of marketing professionals in generation Y," *Services Marketing Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 4, pp. 434–447, 2010. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332969.2010.510724>
- [23] A. Sultana and U. Das, "Generational differences in job satisfaction: A systematic literature review of millennials and generation Z," *Organizational Resilience and Leadership Issues in the Dynamic Era*, pp. 180–185, 2026.
- [24] L. Morris, "Quits and job changes among home care workers in Maine: The role of wages, hours, and benefits," *The Gerontologist*, vol. 49, no. 5, pp. 635–650, 2009. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnp071>
- [25] N. Daniels and R. Davids, "Retaining newly qualified chartered accountants: A South African case study," *South African Journal of Accounting Research*, vol. 33, no. 3, pp. 220–235, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10291954.2019.1638590>
- [26] V. V. Muthuswamy, "Job attribute as determinants of change in the career of IT professionals: An explanatory study," *International Journal of eBusiness and eGovernment Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 26–46, 2023.
- [27] M. Figueroa-Armijos and S. da Motta Veiga, "Predictors of early-career self-employment among millennials in the digital economy: The role of the Great Recession," *Small Business Economics*, vol. 54, no. 4, pp. 1083–1101, 2020.

- [28] R. Sahraee, H. Binti Abdullah, and F. Bagherian, "How psychosocial indicators push millennials to intend leaving their job: A study of generational differences in Iranian organizations," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Management Studies*, vol. 14, no. 4, pp. 681-698, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.22059/IJMS.2020.308501.674181>
- [29] B. Fitzenberger, A. Hillerich-Sigg, and M. Sprietsma, "Different counselors, many options: Career guidance and career plans in secondary schools," *German Economic Review*, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 65-106, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ger-2019-0027>
- [30] S. Rice and T. Hooley, "How can and should secondary school teachers be involved in building students' career knowledge and skills? A Delphi study of the expert community," *Journal of Education and Work*, vol. 37, no. 5-6, pp. 483-501, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2025.2456849>
- [31] M. Bonaiuto, V. Placidi, M. Geb, S. Faggioli, and S. Cataldi, "Career ToolVip24 effectiveness in enhancing self-efficacy, self-esteem, attitude toward enterprise and entrecomp dimensions in students from different european countries," *Ricerche di psicologia*, vol. 3, pp. 1-38, 2022.
- [32] C. Kamm, A. Gebhardt, P. Gonon, C. Brühwiler, and S. Dernbach-Stolz, "Learners' perceptions of a career guidance curriculum in different school-based support systems in Switzerland," *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, vol. 72, no. 3, pp. 375-395, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2019.1610474>
- [33] I. Soika, "Development of students' career management competency in vocational secondary schools. In A. Aboltins (Ed.)," in *Proceedings of the 13th International Scientific Conference Engineering for Rural Development (pp. 511-516)*. Jelgava, Latvia: Latvia University of Agriculture, 2014.
- [34] P. Jonck and E. Swanepoel, "Demographic variables influencing perceived effectiveness of career guidance during Life Orientation," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 297-304, 2015.
- [35] P. J. Robertson, S. Meldrum, and H. Earnshaw, "Careers work in Scottish state secondary schools: The guidance teacher as pastoral firefighter," *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, vol. 53, no. 2, pp. 287-302, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2025.2463444>
- [36] D. T. Le, L. Mai, and D. Bui, "Factors affecting the formation of career orientation capacity for secondary school students through organizing experiential activities," *Journal of Curriculum and Teaching*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 134-148, 2025.
- [37] H. Le Nguyen, A. T. Van Dam, and L. T. K. Ha, "Evaluation of the organization and effectiveness of career counseling for Vietnamese high school students," *Humanities and Social Sciences Letters*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 383-393, 2024.
- [38] J. C. Nunnally and I. H. Bernstein, *Psychometric theory*, 3rd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994.