

## **Factors Influencing Career Choice of Undergraduate Business Administration Students: A Comparative Study of Thailand and Malaysia**

<sup>1</sup>Phathara-on Wesarat, <sup>2</sup>Abdul Halim Abdul Majid and <sup>2</sup>Mohmad Yazam Sharif

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Prince of Songkla University, Pattani Campus,  
94000 Pattani, Thailand

<sup>2</sup>School of Business Management, Universiti Utara Malaysia,  
06010 Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia

---

**Abstract:** According to the cooperation agreement among member countries of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), there has been an increase in the number of the movement of professionals from country to country. Undergraduate business administration students are qualified for future business careers. In Thailand and its neighboring country like Malaysia, business administration programs are available at the university level. They can easily exchange human resources in the field of business administration. However, student's decisions to choose or not to choose the particular careers (i.e., career choice) depend on some factors. This study aims to find out what factors influencing career choice of undergraduate business administration students at the two universities: Prince of Songkla University (PSU). Thailand and Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) Malaysia. The study adopted a quantitative research method to explore the relationship between independent variables (nationality, gender, age and grade point average) and dependent variables (own education, career benefits, chance and free choice). The results of the study are useful for students, educational institutions, employers and policy makers.

**Key words:** ASEAN, business administration, career choice, career decision-making, universities

---

### **INTRODUCTION**

Globalization in the 21st century encourages the movement of professionals around the world. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) aims to promote collaborations among ASEAN member countries. Its efforts include economic cooperation and integration. Since 1999, the ASEAN consists of ten member states: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. By the end of 2015, the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) was established for economic reasons. AEC facilitates the movement of professionals across the ASEAN member countries (Sangwichitr, 2014). Consequently, professionals could decide whether they need to work in their home country or move to other ASEAN countries. This seems like employers have more sufficient pool of qualified applicants while employees have more career choices. Nevertheless, many organizations stills face high turnover rate because their employees lack motivation to continue a lifelong career with them.

Considering two ASEAN member countries, Thailand and its neighboring country like Malaysia, they can easily exchange human resources to serve their national development. But unemployment still exists in both countries. In Thailand, 35.6% of unemployed people were higher education graduates while Malaysian graduates made up 35.3% of those who were unemployed (Leo, 2016). Causes of unemployment are usually related to an economic downturn and job seekers themselves. Many job seekers are unable to make an effective career decision.

**Problem statement:** Now a days university students have more career alternatives than they did in the past. All business organizations need qualified employees to work for them so as they would achieve a high performance. Undergraduate business administration students are valuable people who have a basic knowledge of business administration. In the future, they could helpful for pursuing business activities of firms. However, they may have difficulty choosing a career. Some students did not adopt a rational approach to evaluate their career options but they believed in information obtaining from people

they know (e.g., friends, family, significant others) (Helyer, 2011). Then, they often make wrong choices in choosing a career.

Whereas most studies of career choice have more focused on career choice of school students than university students, it should be noted that university students are highly valued for the development of the country. Students are expected to prepare themselves before entering labor market in order to effectively choose suitable career options (Mihail and Karaliopoulou, 2005). Their chosen career choice should be matched with their skills, abilities, personality types or other significant factors that make them feel satisfied with their career choice.

**Research questions:** The research questions posed in this study are:

- Is there a statistically significant difference in factors that influenced career choice between Malaysian and Thai students?
- Is there a statistically significant difference in factors that influenced career choice based on demographic characteristics (i.e., gender, age, year of study, grade point average)?

**Research objectives:** This study has two specific objectives:

- To determine factors influencing career choice of undergraduate business administration students
- To compare between career choice of undergraduate business administration students at PSU and UUM

**Literature review:** In this study, career choice is defined as an individual's decision-making task which aims to match his or her needs (or preferences) to the occupational choice (Gokuladas, 2010). Several theories are helpful to understand factors influencing career choice of students. Roe's theory states that most students choose occupations from one particular group of occupations (Jena *et al.*, 2011). Roe identified eight groups of occupations that can be classified into two main types: people-oriented jobs and not people-oriented jobs (Jena *et al.*, 2011). Meanwhile, Krumboltz's theory highlights the importance of individual's learning experiences in career choice (Jackson and Nutini, 2002). Student's learning experiences may limit or facilitate their career choice (Jackson and Nutini, 2002). They cannot be interested in those career alternatives that they never learn.

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) which was developed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) presented a

useful framework for examining factors influencing career choice of students. Based on TRA Model, student's intentions to pursue a career depend on their attitudes and subjective norms towards that career (Law, 2010). In addition, Ajzen (1991) reformulated the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) from TRA. TPB explained that an individual's intention to perform a specific behavior is influenced by attitude towards behavior, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control (Heuer and Kolvereid, 2014). The TPB has been applied to the studies of career-related behaviors.

Furthermore, Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) has been used for the research on career choice by many scholars (Blanco, 2011). The SCCT states that an individual chooses one career over other career alternatives because it supports the sense of self-efficacy and corresponds to outcome expectations (Woods *et al.*, 2016). Finally, Holland's theory is useful for matching an individual's personality type to work environment (Woods *et al.*, 2016). It identified six types of personality and work environment that are known as the RIASEC model (consisting of realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising and conventional).

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The respondents were business administration students (i.e., BBA students) consisting of 199 Thai students and 145 Malaysian students selected from Prince of Songkla University (PSU) and Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM). This study measured 14 factors influencing career choice. These factors were originally developed by Ozbilgin *et al.* (2005). The 14 factors have been tested by the researchers in the past such as Agarwala (2008) and Ng *et al.* (2008). In a study by Ng *et al.* (2008), the 14 factors were grouped into four categories as follows:

- "Own education" includes five items (skills and abilities, education and training, training and education opportunities in the career, success stories of friends/family and knowledge of the labor market)
- "Career benefits" consists of four items (financial rewards in the career, quality of life associated, promotion opportunities and financial/economic condition)
- "Chance" includes three items (chance, luck or circumstances, lack of access to other career options and ease of access to a career)
- "Free choice" is composed of two items (a free choice in making career decisions and the love of a career)

A questionnaire was used for data collection. All items mentioned above were measured with a five-point Likert

scale. It ranged from “1 = strongly disagree” to “5 = strongly agree”. The independent variables were nationality (Thai and Malaysian), gender, age, year of study and grade point average. The dependent variables were four categories of factors influencing career choice that consist of own education, career benefits, chance and free choice.

## RESULTS

Based on demographic distribution of the respondents, 77.3% of respondents were females while 22.7% were males. Most respondents were 19-22 years old (71.2%). Their year of study were ranged from third year (31.4%), first year (31.1%), second year (29.9%), fourth year and above (7.6%) respectively. Most respondents received a Grade Point Average (GPA) of 3.01-4.00 (64%), followed by 2.01-3.00 (36%).

**Factors influencing student’s career choice comparing between thai and malaysian students:** This study presents the data analysis of the research question 1: Is there a statistically significant difference in factors that influenced career choice between Malaysian and Thai students? It was necessary for the study to test for the equality of the variances between two groups. Box’s M test for homogeneity of dispersion matrices were produced in order to ensure the appropriateness of the use of the MANOVA analysis. All variable interrelations were tested at  $p < 0.05$ . Table 1 provides the results of variance analysis.

Table 1 presents that all dependent variables (comprising “own education”, “career benefits” and “free choice”), except “chance” showed the influence on career choice. Next, MANOVA was calculated for the “own education” dependent variables with the independent variables of nationality. The overall Hotelling’s Trace was significant at  $F = 13.318$  ( $p = 0.000$ ). Table 2 provides these results.

There were significantly differences in “own education” dependent variables (skills and abilities, education and training, training and education opportunities in the career, success stories of friends/family and knowledge of the labor market) that influenced career choice between Thai and Malaysian students.

The MANOVA evaluated the influence of the independent variables of the nationality on the four dependent variables related to “career benefits”. The overall Hotelling’s Trace was significant at  $F = 20.634$  ( $p = 0.000$ ). Table 3 provides these results.

Table 1: The results of variance analysis

Variables	Nationality	Mean	SD	F (Sig.) <sup>a</sup>
Own education	Thai	3.7829	0.49055	-
	Malaysian	4.1055	0.37188	40.898
	Total	3.9184	0.47170	0.000
Career benefits	Thai	4.0436	0.56752	-
	Malaysian	4.2130	0.39991	8.776
	Total	4.1148	0.51016	0.003
Chance	Thai	3.4485	0.57344	-
	Malaysian	3.3451	0.43572	3.068
	Total	3.4051	0.52181	0.081
Free choice	Thai	3.7896	0.50141	-
	Malaysian	4.1217	0.39095	40.788
	Total	3.9291	0.48615	0.000

Table 2: Univariate F-tests for Thai and Malaysian samples for “own education”

Variables	Nationality	Mean	SD	F (Sig.) <sup>a</sup>
Skills and abilities	Thai	3.7252	0.59175	-
	Malaysian	4.1250	0.41654	48.170
	Total	3.8945	0.56013	0.000
Education and training	Thai	3.8686	0.62040	-
	Malaysian	4.1563	0.55223	19.561
	Total	3.9904	0.60852	0.000
Training and education opportunities in the career	Thai	3.9265	0.59975	-
	Malaysian	4.2931	0.44997	38.037
	Total	4.0818	0.57027	0.000
Success stories of friends/family	Thai	3.7024	0.68386	-
	Malaysian	4.0625	0.68275	23.051
	Total	3.8549	0.70527	0.000
Knowledge of the labor market	Thai	3.7347	0.62153	-
	Malaysian	3.9479	0.55460	10.691
	Total	3.8250	0.60257	0.001

Table 3: Univariate F-tests for Thai and Malaysian samples for “career benefits”

Variables	Nationality	Mean	SD	F (Sig.) <sup>a</sup>
Financial rewards in the career	Thai	4.0700	0.66519	-
	Malaysian	4.1936	0.57760	3.102
	Total	4.1213	0.63230	0.079
Quality of life associated	Thai	3.9402	0.62116	-
	Malaysian	4.3551	0.41523	46.694
	Total	4.1127	0.58161	0.000
Promotion opportunities	Thai	4.1052	0.67561	-
	Malaysian	4.2435	0.51417	4.096
	Total	4.1627	0.61663	0.044
Financial/economic condition	Thai	4.0965	0.60875	-
	Malaysian	4.0642	0.53649	0.250
	Total	4.0830	0.57919	0.617

<sup>a</sup>Significance level  $< 0.05$

There were significantly differences in “career benefits” dependent variables (quality of life associated and promotion opportunities) that influenced career choice between Thai and Malaysian students.

The study evaluated the influence of the independent variables of the nationality on the three dependent variables related to “chance”. The overall Hotelling’s Trace was significant at  $F = 7.541$  ( $p = 0.000$ ). Table 4 provides these results.

Table 4: Univariate F-tests for Thai and Malaysian samples for “chance”

Variables	Nationality	Mean	SD	F (Sig.) <sup>a</sup>
Ease of access to a career	Thai	3.5907	0.62057	-
	Malaysian	3.5544	0.64288	0.270
	Total	3.5753	0.62938	0.603
Chance, luck or circumstances	Thai	3.8044	0.62886	-
	Malaysian	3.5337	0.50729	17.707
	Total	3.6901	0.59509	0.000
Lack of access to other career options	Thai	3.0026	0.88167	-
	Malaysian	2.9202	0.75019	0.805
	Total	2.9678	0.82853	0.370

<sup>a</sup>Significance level <0.05

There was a significant difference in one of “chance” dependent variables namely “chance, luck or circumstances” that influenced career choice between Thai and Malaysian students. The analysis of the influence of the dependent variables of the nationality on the two dependent variables related to “free choice” shows that the overall Hotelling’s Trace was significant at  $F = 23.169$  ( $p = 0.000$ ). Table 5 provides these results.

Table 5 addresses that there were significantly differences in “free choice” dependent variables (a free choice in making career decisions and the love of a career) that influenced career choice between Thai and Malaysian students.

**Factors influencing student’s career choice based on demographic characteristics:** This study presents the data analysis of the research question 2: Is there a statistically significant difference in factors that influenced career choice based on demographic characteristics? Firstly, the influence of the independent variables of gender on the four dependent variables was evaluated. The overall Hotelling’s Trace was not significant at  $F = 1.567$  ( $p = 0.183$ ). Table 6 provides these results.

Secondly, the MANOVA evaluated the influence of the independent variables of age on the four dependent variables. The overall Hotelling’s Trace was significant at  $F = 2.872$  ( $p = 0.004$ ). Table 7 provides these results. Table 7 presents that all dependent variables (including own education, career benefits and free choice), except “chance” showed significant differences among ages (15-18, 19-22 and 23-26 years old).

Thirdly, the influence of the independent variables of year of study on the four dependent variables was evaluated. The overall Hotelling’s Trace was significant at  $F = 1.798$  ( $p = 0.027$ ). Table 8 provides these results. All dependent variables (including own education, career benefits, chance and free choice) showed no significant difference among different year of study. Fourthly, the MANOVA evaluated the influence of the independent variables of grade point average on the four dependent variables. The overall Hotelling’s Trace was

Table 5: Univariate F-tests for Thai and Malaysian samples for “free choice”

Variables	Nationality	Mean	SD	F (Sig.) <sup>a</sup>
A free choice in making career decisions	Thai	3.6236	0.49757	-
	Malaysian	3.9195	0.45351	31.770
	Total	3.7494	0.50057	0.000
The love of a career	Thai	3.9541	0.63348	-
	Malaysian	4.3460	0.52119	36.971
	Total	4.1207	0.61875	0.000

Table 6: Univariate F-tests for gender on career choice

Source/dependent variables	F-value	Sig. <sup>a</sup>
<b>Genders</b>		
Own education	3.079	0.080
Career benefits	2.422	0.121
Chance	0.849	0.357
Free choice	6.172	0.013

Table 7: Univariate F-tests for Age on Career Choice

Source/dependent variables	F-value	Sig. <sup>a</sup>
<b>Age</b>		
Own education	7.132	0.001
Career benefits	4.473	0.012
Chance	1.595	0.205
Free choice	8.922	0.000

Table 8: Univariate F tests for year of study on career choice

Source/dependent variables	F-value	Sig. <sup>a</sup>
<b>Year of study</b>		
Own education	0.544	0.703
Career benefits	0.911	0.458
Chance	1.779	0.133
Free choice	0.958	0.431

Table 9: Univariate F tests for grade point average on career choice

Source/dependent variables	F-value	Sig. <sup>a</sup>
<b>Grade point average</b>		
Own education	14.505	0.000
Career benefits	5.635	0.018
Chance	0.470	0.493
Free choice	5.388	0.021

<sup>a</sup>Significance level <0.05

significant at  $F = 5.464$  ( $p = 0.000$ ). Table 9 provides these results. All dependent variables (including own education, career benefits and free choice), except “chance” showed significant differences among grade point average levels (2.01-3.00 and 3.01-4.00).

## DISCUSSION

The study confirmed that all dependent variables such as “own education”, “career benefits” and “free choice”, except “chance” influenced career choice. This was consistent with a study of factors influencing career choice of management students in India by Agarwala (2008) that “chance” was not perceived as important influence on career choice. “Own education” (including five factors) had an impact on career choice but there were differences in the degree to which own education-related factors affect career choice, compared between Thai and

Malaysian students. All own education-related factors were statistically higher in Malaysian students than Thai students. Similarly, Said *et al.* (2004) maintain that Malaysian undergraduate students perceived the skills as important to career choice.

“Career benefits” related factors (quality of life associated and promotion opportunities) that influenced career choice were significantly differences, compared between Thai and Malaysian students. Both “quality of life associated” and “promotion opportunities” had a greater scores in Malaysian students than Thai students. Quality of life includes various determinants of quality of life that sustain an individual’s well-being (Natarajan and Angur, 2014). Enhancing employee quality of life can increase employee satisfaction (Rabianski, 2007). Besides that, the study showed the influence of promotion opportunities on career choice of Thai and Malaysian students that was consistent with a study by Chileshe and Haupt (2010). “Opportunities for promotion” was considered by students as one of the most important factors that has an impact on their career decisions (Chileshe and Haupt, 2010).

One of “chance” dependent variables namely “chance, luck or circumstances” was perceived as having higher influence on career choice of Thai students than Malaysian students. Consistently, Ozbilgin *et al.* (2005) state that “chance, luck and faith” played a role in career choice among Turkish students. They also suggest that students from collectivist cultures may place more value on external circumstances (Ozbilgin *et al.*, 2005). Even though Thailand and Malaysia are known as having collectivist cultures (Zhao and Chen, 2008), these two countries are probably different in the degree to which people hold collectivist cultures.

Two variables of “free choice” (a free choice in making career decisions and the love of a career) were perceived as having higher influence on career choice of Malaysian students than Thai students. This was consistent with a study by Agarwala (2008) that “free choice” and “love of career” had an important impact on student’s career choice. Particularly, students who had collectivistic orientation placed a greater value on these two factors than those students who have a higher level of individualism.

## CONCLUSION

Mainly, it was found that there were significantly differences in some factors influencing career choice between Thai and Malaysian students. These factors were skills and abilities; education and training; training and education opportunities in the career; success stories

of friends/family; knowledge of the labor market; quality of life associated; promotion opportunities; chance, luck or circumstances; a free choice in making career decisions; the love of a career. Although this study collected data from Thailand and its neighboring country, Malaysia where are known as having similar cultural values (collectivism), the research findings confirmed that Thai and Malaysian students had different ideas or opinions about career choice.

## REFERENCES

- Agarwala, T., 2008. Factors influencing career choice of management students in India. *Career Dev. Int.*, 13: 362-376.
- Ajzen, I., 1991. The theory of planned behavior. *Organiz. Behav. Hum. Decis. Process.*, 50: 179-211.
- Blanco, A., 2011. Applying social cognitive career theory to predict interests and choice goals in statistics among Spanish psychology students. *J. Vocational Behav.*, 78: 49-58.
- Chileshe, N. and T.C. Haupt, 2010. An empirical analysis of factors impacting career decisions in South African construction industry: Male and female high school student’s perspectives. *J. Eng. Des. Technol.*, 8: 221-239.
- Fishbein, M. and I. Ajzen, 1975. *Belief, Attitude, Intention and Behavior: An Introduction to Theory and Research*. 1st Edn., Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA., USA., ISBN-13: 9780201020892, Pages: 578.
- Gokuladas, V.K., 2010. Factors that influence first-career choice of undergraduate engineers in software services companies: A South Indian experience. *Career Dev. Int.*, 15: 144-165.
- Helyer, R., 2011. Aligning higher education with the world of work. *Higher Educ. Skills Work Based Learn.*, 1: 95-105.
- Heuer, A. and L. Kolvereid, 2014. Education in entrepreneurship and theory of planned behavior. *Eur. J. Training Dev.*, 38: 506-523.
- Jackson, M.A. and C.D. Nutini, 2002. Hidden resources and barriers in career learning assessment with adolescents vulnerable to discrimination. *Career Dev. Q.*, 51: 56-77.
- Jena, S., C. Anna and D. Kamil, 2011. New paradigm for the system of professional focus of young people in accordance with trends in the labour market. *J. Competitiveness*, 3: 3-12.
- Law, P.K., 2010. A theory of reasoned action model of accounting student’s career choice in public accounting practices in the post-Enron. *J. Appl. Accounting Res.*, 11: 58-73.

- Leo, M., 2016. What you didn't know about fresh graduate unemployment in Malaysia. Malaysia. <https://eduadvisor.my/articles/what-didnt-know-fresh-graduate-unemployment-malaysia-infographic/>.
- Mihail, D.M. and K. Karaliopoulou, 2005. Greek university students: A discouraged workforce. *Educ. Training*, 47: 31-39.
- Natarajan, R. and G.M. Angur, 2014. Innovative ability and entrepreneurial activity: Two factors to enhance quality of life. *J. Bus. Ind. Marketing*, 29: 469-475.
- Ng, E.S., R.J. Burke and L. Fiksenbaum, 2008. Career choice in management: Findings from US MBA students. *Career Dev. Int.*, 13: 346-361.
- Ozbilgin, M., F. Kisku and N. Erdogan, 2005. Explaining influences on career choice: The case of MBA students in comparative perspective. *Int. J. Hum. Resour. Manage.*, 16: 2000-2028.
- Rabianski, J.S., 2007. Employee quality of life in corporate location decisions. *J. Corporate Real Estate*, 9: 50-64.
- Said, J., E.K. Ghani, A. Hashim and N.M. Nasir, 2004. Perceptions towards accounting career among Malaysian undergraduates. *J. Financial Reporting Accounting*, 2: 17-30.
- Sangwichitr, K., 2014. Strategic investments and competition under uncertainty in the ASEAN/AEC: Real options and game theory. Ph.D Thesis, Alliant International University, Alliant School of Management, San Diego, California.
- Woods, S.A., F.C. Patterson, B. Wille and A. Koczwara, 2016. Personality and occupational specialty: An examination of medical specialties using Holland's RIASEC Model. *Career Dev. Int.*, 21: 262-278.
- Zhao, J. and L. Chen, 2008. Individualism, collectivism, selected personality traits and psychological contract in employment: A comparative study. *Manage. Res. News*, 31: 289-304.