

VOCATIONAL COMPETENCE OF SUBJECT TEACHERS AT SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

The following article analyzes the career counseling of subject teachers at secondary schools as well as factors affecting career counseling and some proposals to improve career counseling capacity for instructors. Results of overall assessment of the subject teachers at secondary schools in three aspects: knowledge, skills and attitudes showed that more than 1/3 of the surveyed teachers rated their career counseling capacity inadequate. Some factors affecting teachers' career counseling such as: The attention of the leaders is paid to the activities of vocational guidance of instructors; funding for the training of vocational competence.

Keywords: vocational competence, secondary schools, counseling capacity

INTRODUCTION

Posing problem

Career counseling has a very important role to provide students with the right career direction and enabling students to choose careers accordingly. Especially for seniors, the orientation is more meaningful than ever as allowing them to choose a profession that really suits to them. In recent years, the Ministry of Education and Training has officially placed career counseling in the key program for high school students. Along with the decision, the Ministry has also opened many training courses for managers and teachers of vocational schools to help students perform effectively in practice. However, after the active support of the Ministry, is vocational competence of subject teachers have actually met the requirements of vocational training activities at such schools? The following article analyzes the vocational competence of subject teachers at high schools for a better overview of the activity.

PROBLEM SOLVING

Studied objects and methodology

Vocational competence (career counseling) of subject teachers is the ability to perform vocational activities under the mission of the instructors including: introducing students to relevant professions directly; learning about vocational interest of students; to in collaboration with head teachers advise students on choosing occupations while organizing extracurricular groups, building department room and vocational interests-related tours associated with the subject.

The results in this article are summarized from survey of 352 subject teachers who were randomly selected from five secondary schools in HCM including high schools of Quang Trung (Cu Chi), An Nhon Tay (Cu Chi), Nguyen Hien (District 11), Tran Quang Khai High School (District 11), Nguyen Thi Minh Khai High School (District 3). In addition, the team also added a support team of 60 school managers as a basis for complementary research results. In this study we use a combination of methods, such as methods of analysis and theoretical synthesis, methods of investigation by questionnaires and interviews and

mathematical statistical methods, of which the questionnaire method is the major while the remaining are complementary methods.

The scoring used in topics is the following: the levels of "very poor" (1 point), "poor" (2 points), "average" (3 points), "good" (4 points) and "very good" (5 points). Thus, in this study, the more the studied objects achieved higher points in a rating scale, the greater is their proficiency in such rating scale, and vice versa the less the studied objects achieved lower points, the smaller is their proficiency in such rating scale

Findings about vocational competence of subject teachers at secondary schools in Ho Chi Minh City

To analyze career counseling of subject teachers at secondary schools in Ho Chi Minh City, we mention below some of the contents as follows: assessment by instructors on their own career counseling, overall assessment of subject teachers' career counseling in terms of: knowledge, skills, attitudes and learning some of the factors affecting career counseling of the instructors. The results were as follows:

Subject teachers' assessment of their vocational competency particularly and subject teachers' in general

Table 1. Subject teachers' assessment of their vocational competency particularly

| <i>No</i> | <i>Level</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Ratings %</i> |
|-----------|--------------|------------------|------------------|
| 1 | Very low | 2 | 0.6 |
| 2 | Low | 4 | 1.1 |
| 3 | Medium | 172 | 48.9 |
| 4 | High | 170 | 48.3 |
| 5 | Very high | 4 | 1.1 |

Table 1 results showed the highest percentage (48.9%) at "medium" level where subject teachers were required to assess the career counseling. Besides, an equivalent percentage (48.3%) was at "good" level. While the remaining showed the very low percentage (only 2.8%) at different levels on the rating scale. From analysis results, it can be seen that the subject teachers were at a high level of consistency when assessing their career counseling, ranging from "medium" to "Good".

As an overall, as 170 instructors were rated "good" this is a good sign initially of subject teachers' career counseling at secondary schools. However, the gap between "medium" and "good" is not a small one. Thus, as 48.9% of instructors' self-evaluation to be at "medium" level, it's to consider together with administrators and homeroom teachers, subject teachers constitute the force in a special relationship particularly important for high school students.

Moreover, similar results obtained where general subject teachers of high schools were required to assess career counseling

Table 2. Subject teachers' evaluation of career counseling in general

| No | Level | Frequency | Ratings % |
|----|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1 | Very low | 2 | 0.6 |
| 2 | Low | 23 | 6.5 |
| 3 | Medium | 171 | 48.6 |
| 4 | High | 149 | 42.3 |
| 5 | Very high | 7 | 2.0 |

Table 2 showed the two highest levels remained "medium" with 48.6% and "good" with 42.3%. However notably, instructors' career counseling was rated "weak", "poor", a percentage of 7.1%. Accordingly, the instructors at these levels need to quickly take steps to intervene and develop for preventing from failure of meeting the requirements of students who seek career counseling or vocational teaching, not to mention cases of unprincipled career counseling that may influence the career choices of students.

General assessment of vocational competence of subject teachers in three aspects: knowledge, skills and attitude

Vocational competence is the ability to perform career counseling activities relative to the determined issues and objectives. Career counseling includes knowledge, skills and attitude in vocational activities.

Table 3. Overall assessment of vocational competence of subject teachers in three aspects: knowledge, skills and attitude

| No | Level | Frequency | Ratings % |
|----|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1 | Very high | 6 | 1.7 |
| 2 | High | 140 | 39.8 |
| 3 | Medium | 133 | 37.8 |
| 4 | Low | 67 | 19 |
| 5 | Very low | 6 | 1.7 |

The general evaluation of the instructors' career counseling in three aspects: knowledge, skills and attitude- has indicated that about 41.5% of instructors have assessed their career counseling to be at high level and very high level. More than 1/3 of surveyed teachers rated their career counseling at medium level. Low rate and very low is accounting for more than 20%. Hence the need to take measures to improve subject teachers' career counseling to reduce low and very low levels, especially the medium level is accounting for a high percentage in the surveyed sample.

Results are shown in more detail in the following chart:

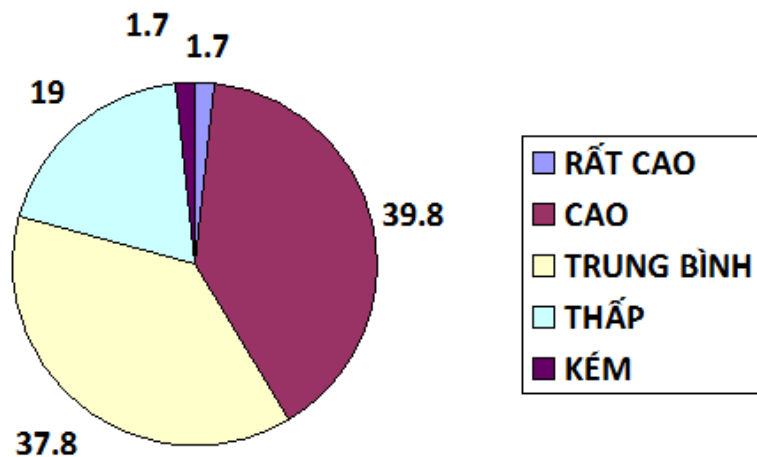


Chart 1: Overall assessment of vocational competence of subject teachers in three aspects: knowledge, skills and attitudes

Factors affecting subject teachers' vocational competence

Some difficulties in the vocational guidance for students

Table 4. Evaluation of some difficulties in the vocational guidance for students

| Items | Levels | | | | | | | | | | GPA | Ratings |
|--|-----------------|------|-----------|------|------------|------|--------|------|-------|-----|-------------|---------|
| | Very frequently | | Regularly | | Occasional | | Rarely | | Never | | | |
| 1. Not much information on various sectors | 38 | 10.8 | 130 | 36.9 | 159 | 45.2 | 25 | 7.1 | 0 | 0.0 | 3.51 | 5 |
| 2. No full-time staff (psychology - education) for career counseling | 51 | 14.5 | 127 | 36.1 | 155 | 44.0 | 16 | 4.5 | 3 | 0.9 | 3.59 | 4 |
| 3. Insufficient funds for organizing various vocational activities | 130 | 36.9 | 97 | 27.6 | 104 | 29.5 | 21 | 6.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 3.95 | 1 |
| 4. No expertise in vocational activities | 34 | 9.7 | 131 | 37.2 | 127 | 36.1 | 44 | 12.5 | 16 | 4.5 | 3.35 | 6 |
| 5. No synchronized combination of managers- teachers - Youth Union | 27 | 7.7 | 72 | 20.5 | 150 | 42.6 | 79 | 22.4 | 24 | 6.8 | 3 | 7 |
| 6. Pressure of dense curriculum | 83 | 23.6 | 140 | 39.8 | 69 | 19.6 | 54 | 15.3 | 6 | 1.7 | 3.68 | 2 |
| 7. No time for vocational activities | 94 | 26.7 | 78 | 22.2 | 139 | 39.5 | 29 | 8.2 | 12 | 3.4 | 3.61 | 3 |
| 8. Other causes | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| GPA | | | | | | | | | | | 3.53 | |

Survey data in Table 4 outlines a few difficulties in the vocational guidance for students including 7 items with GPA= 3:53 at a “very frequently” level. A few notable difficulties: Insufficient funds for organizing various vocational activities (GPA=3.95); Pressure of dense curriculum (GPA=3.68); No time for vocational activities (GPA=3.61); No full-time staff (psychology - education) for career counseling (GPA=3.59); Not much information on various sectors (GPA=3.51); No expertise in vocational activities (GPA=3.35); and finally No synchronized combination of managers- teachers- Youth Union (GPA=3). Thus it can be seen the main difficulties that subject teachers have to face are difficulties relative to material, time and expertise. To raise the subject teachers’ career counseling, we should restrict challenges that subject teachers are facing and create favorable conditions for subject teachers to provide vocational training in a scientific and effective manner

Factors affecting the subject teachers’ vocational competence

When considering the factors that affect the instructors’ career counseling, we studied 2 groups of objective and subjective factors. Specific results obtained are the following:

Table 5: Factors affecting subject teachers’ vocational competence

| Items | Levels | | | | | | | | | | GPA | Ratings |
|--|-----------|------|------|------|--------|------|-----|-----|----------|-----|------|---------|
| | Very high | | High | | Medium | | Low | | Very low | | | |
| 1. The attention of leaders is paid to the instructors’ vocational guidance activities | 148 | 42.0 | 126 | 35.8 | 62 | 17.6 | 7 | 2.0 | 9 | 2.6 | 4.13 | 1 |
| 2. Funding for the training for better vocational competence | 87 | 24.7 | 169 | 48.0 | 81 | 23.0 | 9 | 2.6 | 6 | 1.7 | 3.91 | 2 |
| 3. Facilities for vocational activities | 57 | 16.2 | 139 | 39.5 | 116 | 33.0 | 22 | 6.2 | 18 | 5.1 | 3.55 | 10 |
| 4. The State mechanism and policy on vocational activities for instructors | 59 | 16.8 | 143 | 40.6 | 112 | 31.8 | 21 | 6.0 | 17 | 4.8 | 3.59 | 8 |
| 5. Career counseling time for instructors | 55 | 15.6 | 157 | 44.6 | 109 | 31 | 17 | 4.8 | 14 | 4.0 | 3.63 | 7 |
| 6. Perceptions of instructors for vocational work | 58 | 16.5 | 165 | 46.9 | 74 | 21.0 | 30 | 8.5 | 25 | 7.1 | 3.57 | 9 |
| 7. Instructors’ ability to understand students’ psychological characteristics | 109 | 31.0 | 104 | 29.5 | 104 | 29.5 | 22 | 6.2 | 13 | 3.7 | 3.78 | 5 |
| 8. Instructors’ career counseling as demanded by students | 81 | 23.0 | 159 | 45.2 | 66 | 18.8 | 32 | 9.1 | 14 | 4.0 | 3.74 | 6 |
| 9. Career counseling skills of instructors | 69 | 19.6 | 187 | 53.1 | 63 | 17.9 | 25 | 7.1 | 8 | 2.3 | 3.81 | 3 |
| 10. Students’ integration skills through academic subjects | 84 | 23.9 | 158 | 44.9 | 77 | 21.9 | 23 | 6.5 | 10 | 2.8 | 3.8 | 4 |

From the assessment of factors affecting subject teachers' career counseling, the majority of teachers rated at a high level with GPA of 3.8. Factors believed to affect the most are the attention of leaders is paid to the instructors' vocational guidance activities (GPA 4.13); followed by funding for the training of vocational competence (GPA 3.91); Career counseling skills of the instructors (GPA 3.81); students' integration skills through academic subjects (GPA 3.8); instructors' ability to understand students' psychological characteristics (GPA 3.78); instructors' career counseling as demanded by students (GPA 3.74); time for subject teachers' vocational competence (GPA 3.63); The State mechanism and policy on vocational activities for instructors (GPA 3.59); perceptions of instructors for vocational work (GPA 3.57) and finally facilities for vocational activities (GPA 3.55). Thus it can be seen the factors the most appreciated are solutions to overcome the difficulties shown in table 3.41: leaders' further attention should be paid to proposals and funding and reasonable period of time for investments in career counseling in a more serious and proper manner

A few suggestions to help improve subject teachers' vocational competence at secondary schools in Ho Chi Minh City

For the Ministry of Education and Training

1. First, the need to continue building a vocational education model in more detail to meet actual requirements
2. Second, the orientation is needed for high schools focusing in vocational education and considering this as an important and practical task. A control and monitoring mechanism is required for the implementation of this program in a specific manner as well as the integration in each specific subject.

For the Education and training Department of Ho Chi Minh City

1. There should be plans to direct examination and monitoring on a regular basis, for continuous vocational education, especially vocational competence of subject teachers to ensure that this work brings positive results for high school students.
 - There should be active support programs for high schools in career counseling for students, such as: fostering teachers, support video on career counseling and technical facilities for vocational education, support vocational tools etc
2. Research is required in collaboration with the Department of Interior to conduct recruitment specialists in psychological counseling - career for work at high schools and to conduct research to establish psychological, career counseling rooms at high schools, responsible by qualified staff for supporting on subject teachers' vocational competence
3. It is possible to conduct the data transfer of socio - economic development of the province and the demand for the labor, existing educational and vocational and newly established institutions... through linkages with other departments to provide local career counseling data and contribute to overcome perceptions such as: the University is the only route to success, admission to University is the best way, ... for instructors

For Managers

1. To raise the sense of responsibility and to maximize the role of subject teachers for students' vocational work. Administrative staff should help instructors recognize that vocational guidance for students is extremely important. Career counseling is effective and scientific as instructors themselves have the vocational competence
2. Managers must have a clear consciousness and should change the establishment of mission of education at schools

3. Strengthening vocational knowledge and vocational education for subject teachers, helping teachers have the relatively systematic knowledge of career counseling and vocational education to gradually changing perceptions and perspectives on "investment" for students on track and focusing on the issue of career counseling and vocational education
4. Help teachers have the simplest skills to assist students in the vocational guidance through activities such as: support for students seeking career information, help students understand themselves and determine strengths and providing advisory support in simple career problems

For Subject Teachers

1. The subject teachers should actively be equipped with the knowledge and skills and focus must be on together with consultants for implementation. In particular, they should focus on methods and forms of vocational education to be really positive and in line with the psychological characteristics of students.
2. Further attention shall be paid to the development of vocational education at secondary schools, especially the process when students ask for instructors' career counseling or a way to integrate career counseling content into subjects they are in charge.

CONCLUSION

Thus, the overall assessment of high school instructors' career counseling in the three aspects: knowledge, skills and attitudes- indicates that about 41.5% of instructors are at high and very high levels. More than 1/3 of surveyed teachers rated their career counseling at a medium level. Low and very low levels account for more than 20%. A number of factors affecting instructors' career counseling such as: The attention of the leaders to instructors' vocational guidance activities; followed by funding for the training of vocational capacity; career counseling skills of instructors; integration skills through technical subject; instructors' ability to understand the psychological characteristics of students. The study results showed that to improve subject teachers' career counseling at high schools, coordination of agencies at all levels is required, from the Ministry of Education and Training, Department of Education and Training of the city, the management staff as well as instructors.

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