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Factors affecting the students' choice to study Tourism and Hospitality Management major: Case study of a college in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam

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Abstract

This study aims to identify and analyze the factors affecting the students' choice to study the key international program- Tourism, Travel and Hospitality Management at Kien Giang College – is one of the oldest colleges in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. Data in the study were collected from 209 students majoring in Tourism and Hospitality Management. Then, the data were processed with reliability assessment of the scale, exploratory factor analysis, Pearson correlation analysis, and multiple linear regression analysis. The results show that there are 06 factors affecting the students' choice to study the key international major - Tourism, Travel and Hospitality Management of students at Kien Giang College, including: Promotional information, career opportunities, personal interests & abilities, college reputation, reference objects, and study benefits. Thereby, some recommendations are proposed to attract more students to this international key program in the future.

Keywords: *The Mekong Delta, Tourism and Hospitality Management major, students' choice to study, Vietnam*

INTRODUCTION

In the process of social development, people's needs are increasing, in addition to eating, drinking, resting, etc. entertainment and recreation have been paid more attention recently, especially the need to travel. In the past, people mainly traveled independently with family and friends, but today they are gradually shifting to package tours or tours organized by travel companies. This is

convenient for many items such as just choosing the time and destination, the rest such as hotels, food and convenient transportation, etc. are all prepared and implemented by the travel company. Therefore, the major of Tourism and Hospitality Management was born and developed.

In the Mekong Delta, Vietnam, Kien Giang College (KGC) is one of the colleges with a history of formation and development of nearly 60 years (established in 1965). Without exception, the major of Tourism and Hospitality Management is one of the training majors of the Faculty of Tourism and Foreign Languages, KGC. Every year, the Faculty provides a large number of human resources for tourism and travel services for the labor market in Kien Giang province in particular and the Mekong Delta in general, contributing to promoting the development of the service and tourism industry. Especially, in recent times, the Tourism and Hospitality Management major at KGC has been identified by the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs as a key international training major in Decision No. 1769/QĐ-LĐTBXH dated November 25, 2019, which is considered an opportunity and strength in enrollment for the college in the coming time for this major. However, due to the change in the enrollment form of the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam, training institutions are allowed to enroll students based on the results of the national high school graduation exam and consider admission based on the specific enrollment project of each school; However, this admission method has both advantages and disadvantages for universities and colleges, especially the competition between schools (Truong et al., 2019). Therefore, this is also a major obstacle and difficulty for KGC in the upcoming enrollment. Therefore, to meet the enrollment target set for the year, it is necessary to innovate and improve many issues, including changing plans and strategies in career guidance and enrollment counseling. For training institutions to be able to build and propose effective and appropriate solutions, the most important thing is to identify the factors affecting the chosen industry, profession, and school. In order for the Faculty of Tourism and Foreign Languages in particular and KGC in general to effectively recruit students for the profession of Tourism and Hospitality Management as well as the basis for developing training facilities, fostering the quality of candidates, developing facilities and techniques for learning, etc. contributing to attracting students, improving competitiveness with other training facilities in the province. The purpose of this research is to study and analyze the factors affecting the students' choice to study the Key International Program - Tourism and Hospitality Management of students at KGC; thereby, many recommendations are proposed to encourage the provision of additional information as well as practical arguments for college in particular and relevant parties in general to make appropriate decisions related to training in the industry, especially in recruiting students in the future is better.

The next part of this paper is the presentation of the research model; the research method includes the presentation of the questionnaire design, data collection and processing; then the presentation of the research results; the final part is the conclusion and recommendations.

RESEARCH MODEL

Educational training is considered a special service - training service, so the decision to choose a training service is made mainly by the learner, when they feel interested and satisfied to make a decision. Choosing a university, college as well as a major is very important for students; that choice can be influenced by many different factors from inside and outside (Truong et al., 2019). Identifying and evaluating the factors affecting the decision to choose a major is important for the existence and development of the school. Choosing a major is of interest to many researchers

both domestically and internationally. For foreign works, there are famous works on the choice of study majors such as the research results on the choice model of university students by Chapman (1981) showing that there are two factors affecting the choice of university including (1) characteristics of family and individual students and (2) some external factors (influential individuals, fixed characteristics of the university and the university's communication efforts with students). According to the study of Burns (2006), information sources, school characteristics, personal choice and social interaction affect the choice of agricultural, food and natural resources universities of African American students. In addition, the results of Pendergrass (2008) show that factors of interest, high income, having relatives/friends working in the industry, large labor market demand, high-tech industry affect the career choice of students in aviation schools. In addition, according to Aguado et al. (2015), the factors affecting the choice of school and the level of interest of students in maritime programs: quality of education, environment, personal choice preferences and accessibility to schools.

For domestic purposes, the study of Tran and Cao (2009) showed that there are 5 factors affecting the decision to choose a university, including: future job opportunities; university characteristics; factors about the individual student; personal factors that affect the student's decision and factors about available information that affect the decision to choose a university. As for the study of Nguyen (2012), it showed that the opportunity for joint training, career opportunities, reference objects, usefulness of knowledge, suitability to personal characteristics, and motivation for choosing a major are factors that affect the motivation to choose a business administration major of students. In addition, in the study of Phan and Nguyen (2017), the reference group; suitability with personal interests and abilities; reputation; learning benefits; career opportunities; learning costs; communication work have an influence on the decision to choose a training program with foreign elements at Hue University. Luu et al. (2017) showed that factors of future job opportunities and compatibility with personal characteristics, the orientation of influential individuals, admission opportunities, personal characteristics of students and university characteristics - influence the decision to choose a university. In KGC, Truong et al. (2019) presented research results, factors of interests, personal abilities and job opportunities; school reputation; learning benefits; and support policies and opportunities for articulation have an influence on the decision to study Hotel Management of students at College of Management. Besides, the study of Truong et al. (2022) show that there are 08 factors affecting the decision of students to study tourism at KGC: reputation of the school, learning environment, personal interests and abilities, for reference objects, promotional information, career opportunities, support and affiliate opportunities, and costs.

Based on the research model and criteria of previous studies, the study proposes a model of factors influencing the decision to study the Key International Program- Tourism and Hospitality Management, KGC, including 7 factors: Reference objects, promotional information, career opportunities, college reputation, personal interests and abilities, and study benefits (Figure 1).

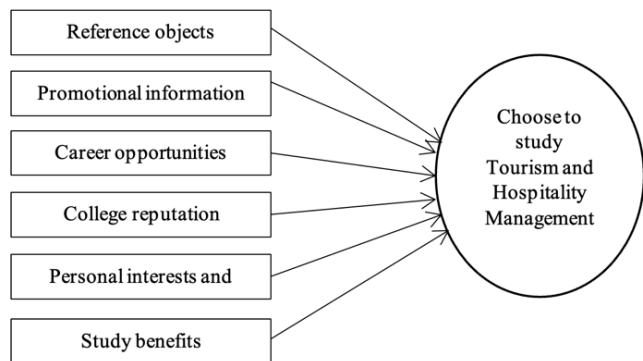


Figure 1. Research model

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Questionnaire design

The study used a questionnaire to collect primary data. The questionnaire consisted of two parts: Part 1 included questions related to the course and gender; Part 2 included questions related to factors influencing the choice of studying Tourism and Hospitality Management. The factors in the research model were inherited and adjusted by the author from studies related to students' choice of major and school. In particular, the reference objects were from studies by Chapman (1981), Cabrera et al. (2000), Burns (2006), Nguyen (2012), Le (2014), Phan and Nguyen (2017); The promotional information is referenced by the author from the studies of Tran and Cao (2009), Le (2013), Phan and Nguyen (2017), Truong et al. (2019, 2022); Career opportunities are referenced from the studies of Tran and Cao (2009), Nguyen (2012), Le (2014), Luu et al. (2017), Phan and Nguyen (2017), Truong et al. (2019, 2022); College reputation is referenced from the studies of Chapman (1981), Cabrera et al. (2000), Burns (2006), Tran and Cao (2009), Luu et al. (2017), Phan and Nguyen (2017), Truong et al. (2019, 2022); Personal interests and abilities are referenced from Chapman (1981), Cabrera et al. (2000), Burns (2006), Tran and Cao (2009), Le (2013), Luu et al. (2017) and Truong et al. (2019); and the study benefit factor is referenced by the author from the studies of Luu et al. (2017), Phan and Nguyen (2017), Truong et al. (2019, 2022). All are measured using Likert scale - 5 level.

Factors	Variables
Reference objects (RO)	RO1: Choice by recommendation from relatives and family
	RO2: Choice by recommendation from high school friends
	RO3: Choice by recommendation from those who studied tourism at KGC during the enrollment period
	RO4: Choice by recommendation from high school teachers
	RO5: Choice by discussion with career/admission counselors
	RO6: Choice by market, this is a "hot major"
Promotional information	PI1: Get information from the admissions fair

(PI)	PI2: Read information on the website
	PI3: Read information on social media
	PI4: Read information on flyers and brochures
	PI5: Watch information on TV
Career opportunities (CO)	CO1: There are many jobs to choose from that this major offers
	CO2: The major offers high-paying jobs
	CO3: It is easy to find a job after graduation
	CO4: There are many opportunities to work in foreign companies
College reputation (CR)	CR1: Reputation and quality of lecturers
	CR2: Quality of teaching staff
	CR3: The famous of training program
	CR4: Reputation of training program
	CR5: High evaluation of the degree institution's qualifications by employers
	CR6: Ability of students who have studied and are studying this program of the college
Personal interests and abilities (IA)	IA1: This industry suits my abilities
	IA2: This industry suits my interests
	IA3: This industry suits my personality
Study benefits (SB)	SB1: Convenient location of the training facility
	SB2: The training facility has a good learning environment
	SB3: The training facility has many extracurricular activities
	SB4: The facilities and teaching and learning equipment are guaranteed
	SB5: The infrastructure of the training facility is of good quality
	SB6: There is a policy to support ethnic minorities
	SB7: There is an opportunity to transfer after graduation
Choose to study Tourism and Hospitality Management (CT)	CT1: Studying Tourism and Hospitality Management is the right decision
	CT2: I feel satisfied with your current major
	CT3: I will recommend the college's Tourism and Hospitality Management major to my relatives and friends to study

Data collection and analysis

Convenience sampling method was used in this study. The study collected 235 observations who are students studying Tourism and Hospitality Management at KGC. The primary data collection period was from December 2021 to November 2023. After screening, 209 observations were retained, 26 observations were eliminated due to many questions being left blank; this sample size is consistent with the $n \geq 100$ opinion of Williams et al. (2010). The results showed that the five courses of Tourism and Hospitality Management at KGC were collected, including course 12 (27.8%), course 13 (29.2%), course 14 (18.2%), course 15 (8.6%), course 16 (16.3%). In addition, because this major is mostly attended by female students, the number of observations is 64.5% female, and 35.4% male.

The following data was encoded using SPSS 25.0 software with techniques used to analyze the data including: reliability assessment of the scale, exploratory factor analysis, Pearson correlation analysis, and multiple linear regression analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To determine the factors affecting the students' choice to study the Key International Program - Tourism and Hospitality Management at KGC, the study used the exploratory factor analysis method. First, the criteria and observed variables were evaluated using the Cronbach's Alpha. After evaluating 6 criteria with 31 observed variables, all had Cronbach's Alpha above 0.5 (acceptable), the Corrected Item - Total Correlation > 0.3 . Therefore, the remaining 31 observed variables ensured reliability. In addition, the 03 observed variables of the dependent factor (choice of Tourism and Hospitality Management major) also had Cronbach's Alpha > 0.6 and Corrected Item - Total Correlation > 0.3 ; therefore, the dependent factor also ensured reliability (Table 1).

Table 1: Reliability assessment of the scale

Factors	Cronbach's Alpha	Corrected Item - Total Correlation
RO	0.949	0.762 → 0.914
PI	0.846	0.606 → 0.719
CO	0.860	0.559 → 0.786
CP	0.922	0.529 → 0.867
IA	0.581	0.355 → 0.411
SB	0.971	0.702 → 0.951
CT	0.662	0.473 → 0.478

In the second step of the analysis, the author used the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) method to analyze and check the convergence of the observed variables in each factor. The results of the EFA analysis showed that the KMO and Bartlett tests = 0.789, Sig.= 0.000 (<0.05), total variance explained = 78.657% ($>50.0\%$); The data satisfied the EFA analysis. All 31 observed variables have factor loading coefficients > 0.5 (according to Hair et al., 1998, the factor loading coefficient should be ≥ 0.5 for practical significance) and were not disturbed and retained the original 06 factors (RO, PI, CO, CP, IA, SB) (Table 2). In addition, after analyzing the dependent factor's EFA, it showed that KMO = 0.661, Sig.= 0.000 and total variance explained = 59.800%; the data was satisfactory and the observed variables had no deletion.

Table 2: Rotated component matrix

Variables	Factors					
	SB	RO	CR	PI	CO	IA
SB6	0.961					
SB5	0.949					
SB4	0.943					
SB2	0.937					
SB1	0.934					
SB7	0.922					
SB3	0.735					
RO2		0.943				
RO5		0.941				
RO6		0.922				
RO1		0.911				
RO3		0.675				
RO4		0.637				
CR5			0.927			
CR6			0.908			
CR4			0.887			
CR1			0.837			
CR2			0.819			
CR3			0.513			
PI1				0.823		
PI4				0.772		
PI5				0.728		
PI3				0.681		
PI2				0.688		
CO3					0.893	
CO4					0.881	
CO3					0.805	
CO1					0.681	
IA3						0.731
IA2						0.716
IA1						0.629

After analyzing the factors, the author conducted a Pearson correlation analysis. The results of Pearson correlation analysis in Table 3 show that all Sig. of Pearson correlation of independent variables RO, PI, CO, CR, IA, and SB with dependent variable CT are less than 0.05. Thus, there is a linear relationship between independent variables and dependent variables, in which independent variable PI has the strongest correlation with dependent variable CT with coefficient $r=0.631$ and independent variable SB has the weakest correlation with dependent variable

CT with coefficient $r=0.384$. Therefore, all independent variables are included in multiple linear regression analysis.

Table 3: Pearson correlation analysis

		CT	RO	PI	CO	CR	IA	S B
CT	Pearson Correlation Sig.(2-tailed)	1						
RO	Pearson Correlation Sig.(2-tailed)	0.456 0.000	1					
PI	Pearson Correlation Sig.(2-tailed)	0.631 0.000		1				
CO	Pearson Correlation Sig.(2-tailed)	0.483 0.000			1			
CR	Pearson Correlation Sig.(2-tailed)	0.506 0.000				1		
IA	Pearson Correlation Sig.(2-tailed)	0.479 0.000					1	
SB	Pearson Correlation Sig.(2-tailed)	0.384 0.000						1

The study used the multiple linear regression analysis method to determine the strong and weak influence of each factor on the students' choice to study Tourism and Hospitality Management at KGC. The analysis results showed that all conditions were satisfied, including: adjusted $R^2 = 0.606$; Sig.= 0.000; Durbin - Watson value = 1.761 (the model does not violate the autocorrelation phenomenon); VIF coefficient <10 (no multicollinearity phenomenon). The analysis result adjusted $R^2 = 0.606$, meaning that 60.6% of the variation in the students' choice to study Tourism and Hospitality Management was explained by the factors in the model. From the analysis results, it can be seen that the students' choice to study Tourism and Hospitality Management at KGC depends on the factors in descending order: PI, CO, IA, CP, RO, and SB. The multiple linear regression equation is expressed as follows: $CT = -0.383 + 0.262PI +$

$0.240CO + 0.179IA + 0.159CP + 0.150RO + 0.128SB + u_i$ (Table 4). In which CT is the dependent factor (choice of studying Tourism and Hospitality Management), u_i is the error in the model.

Table 4: Multiple linear regression analysis

Model	Beta	Sig.	VIF
Constant	- 0.383		
RO	0.150	0,001	1,262
PI	0.262	0,000	1,673
CO	0.240	0,000	1,180
CR	0.159	0,001	1,368
IA	0.179	0,000	1,221
SB	0.128	0,000	1,111

Firstly, PI has a positive relationship with the students' choice to study Key International Program- Tourism and Hospitality Management, KGC. This is the factor that has the strongest influence on the dependent factor. This shows that in the coming time, schools need to pay more attention to information and communication activities to learners. This factor is similar to the research results of authors Tran and Cao (2009), Le (2013), Phan and Nguyen (2017), Truong et al. (2019, 2022).

Secondly, CO is a factor that has a positive influence on the students' choice to study Tourism and Hospitality Management, KGC. Learners always want to study a major that can easily get a job after graduation and is recruited by many companies. Therefore, the college need to have policies to announce the employment rate of alumni or strengthen business connections to create more job opportunities. The results of this analysis are similar to the research results of Tran and Cao (2009), Nguyen (2012), Le (2014), Luu et al. (2017), Phan and Nguyen (2017), Truong et al. (2019, 2022).

Thirdly, IA has a positive relationship with students' choice to study Tourism and Hospitality Management. Students will choose a major that suits their abilities and strengths. In addition, some students choose a major based on their interests such as traveling, experiencing culture and history in many localities, so they decide to study Tourism and Hospitality Management. Therefore, a psychological strategy is needed to attract students to choose this major. The results of this study are similar to those of Chapman (1981), Cabrera et al. (2000), Burns (2006), Tran and Cao (2009), Le (2013), Luu et al. (2017) and Truong et al. (2019, 2022).

Fourthly, CR has a positive influence on students' choice to study Tourism and Hospitality Management, KGC. The results on this College reputation factor are similar to the results of Chapman (1981), Cabrera et al. (2000), Burns (2006), Tran and Cao (2009), Luu et al. (2017), Phan and Nguyen (2017), Truong et al. (2019, 2022). The reputation of the school is always of interest to parents and students, they will choose a school with a good reputation, long history, many students have jobs after graduation, etc. This is also something to pay attention to when attracting many students to choose Tourism and Hospitality Management in the future.

Fifthly, RO is a positive and positive influence factor on the students' choice to study Tourism and Hospitality Management. This result is similar to the research results of Chapman (1981), Cabrera et al. (2000), Burns (2006), Nguyen (2012), Phan and Nguyen (2017), Le (2014). The reference objects of students are

very diverse, students can refer to their parents, high school teachers, admissions consultants, or classmates, etc. to choose Tourism and Hospitality Management.

Finally, the SB factor has a positive influence on the students' choice to study Tourism and Hospitality Management, which is the weakest factor among the six factors. This result is similar to the results of Luu et al. (2017), Phan and Nguyen (2017), Truong et al. (2019, 2022). Learning benefits always receive attention from learners when choosing a major or school, because it is related to the benefits that learners will receive when studying this major. Therefore, it is necessary to equip convenient facilities and have more beneficial policies for learners so that enrollment activities can be improved in the future.

CONCLUSION

Researching and identifying factors affecting the choice of majors at colleges and universities is always of great significance and importance, especially for colleges in the current context. The results of the research contribute to the basis for developing effective career guidance and enrollment strategies, contributing to determining the existence and development of the school, increasing competitiveness and affirming its position compared to other training institutions in Kien Giang province in particular and the Mekong Delta, Vietnam in general. The results of this research show that there are 06 factors affecting the students' choice to study the Key International Program - Tourism and Hospitality Management of KGC students in decreasing order of importance: Promotional information, career opportunities, personal interests & abilities, college reputation, reference objects, and study benefits. Of which, the promotional information factor has the strongest influence, the study benefits factor has the weakest influence. These factors have an influence of 60.6% on the dependent factor - students' choice to study Tourism and Hospitality Management at KGC. In order for KGC in general and the faculty in particular to be able to recruit effectively, attract more students to the key International major - Tourism and Hospitality Management in the coming time as well as affirm the position of the school, the study would like to propose the following recommendations:

- Continue to enhance the image and reputation of the faculty and the school through improving the professional skills and expertise of the teaching staff, have preferential policies and encourage lecturers to study to improve their qualifications, improve the reputation and quality of the teaching staff and the school to help graduates have enough capacity to take on jobs after graduation for employers, as well as announce provincial and national awards and certificates of educational quality accreditation, the rate of graduates having jobs.
- Strengthen practical learning activities outside the school, especially practical study tour programs, which can be divided into many small batches with increasing number of days from the Mekong Delta, Central Highlands, Central Heritage Road and Trans-Vietnam. At the same time, it is necessary to expand to the route of Three Indochinese countries or Thailand for international exchange and integration to meet the standards of the key international industry.
- Improve the learning environment through improving the infrastructure and technical facilities of the faculty and school, equipment for teaching and learning, improving

dormitories, traffic infrastructure, campus space, planting more trees on campus to create shade and aesthetics.

- The college, Faculty and Training Department need to strengthen links with partner enterprises of large domestic and international corporations to create jobs for students after graduation, as well as increase job consulting days, especially working abroad.
- Survey the needs of high school students to understand their interests and needs so that they can advise students about their careers so that they can choose a career that suits their interests and abilities.
- Department, Faculty, college, and the Communications and Admissions Department need to promote information related to the International Tourism and Hospitality Industry as a key international industry, especially on social networking sites and on the college's website, online consulting on social networks, television or Youtube. At the same time, it is necessary to promote attractive information, images, and videos about learning activities, practice, movement activities, teaching staff, student and lecturer awards, etc. to create a brand and attract students.

This study is not without certain limitations. First, the study was only conducted at one college in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam; Future research can expand the research area when surveying other colleges in the Mekong Delta region such as Kien Giang Vocational College, Can Tho Tourism College, An Giang Vocational College, etc. Second, the study still has 39.4% of factors other than the model and errors; Therefore, future research can add other factors such as costs, extracurricular activities, training programs, etc.

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