



Career Self-Orientation Competence Among High School Students in Hanoi

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Abstract

This article focuses on understanding students' career self-orientation competence, based on quantitative and qualitative data collected from high school students at some schools in Hanoi. The quantitative database is taken from survey of high school students, while the qualitative database is drawn from in-depth interviews with high school students across different grades and school types. The article presents the main results of the research. First, it lays out the research basis, including the subject, object, and scope of the study, together with the theoretical basis of career self-orientation competence and an overview of related domestic and international research. Second, it presents the current status of students' career self-orientation competence, covering their knowledge of jobs, self-assessment ability, and confidence in career decision-making. Third, the research concludes by identifying career self-orientation competence and proposes some recommendations to increase the student's competence.

Keywords:

Career self-orientation, competence, career orientation, high school students.

1. INTRODUCTION

Choosing a suitable career path is one of the most important decisions a young person makes, and for high school students this decision arrives at a moment when their sense of self, their academic identity, and their understanding of the labor market are still forming.

National data point to a persistent mismatch between what students choose to study and the careers they eventually pursue. A study by VNU International School found that, on average, 21.43% of Vietnamese university graduates work outside their field of training, with the mismatch exceeding 60% in fields such as humanities and arts, natural sciences, and agriculture-forestry-fishery (G.Nam, 2022) (Mai et al, 2023) argue that poor career orientation among students wastes time, effort, and money, while also contributing to a lower quality workforce that affects national socio-economic development.

Vietnamese researchers trace much of this mismatch back to weaknesses in career guidance education at the general education level (Mai et al., 2023). The 2018 curriculum formally recognizes career orientation competence as a component of student autonomy and self-directed learning, to be built cumulatively through all subjects and experiential activities, particularly in the final years of basic education (Mai et al., 2023). This makes high school, not university, the stage at which the competence should already be taking shape. If students leave high school without having developed self-awareness of their interests, abilities, and values, and without practice in exploring occupational information and making reasoned career decisions, the consequences documented above (wrong-major enrollment, mismatch, unemployment) become far more likely.

For the above reasons, the purpose of this article is to provide a clearer perspective on the career self-orientation competence of students at some high schools in Hanoi, this research provide an empirical, context-specific picture of where students currently stand, to identify the factors influencing their competence, and to generate evidence-based recommendations for schools and educators seeking to strengthen career guidance, helping students make career choices that are better informed, more personally suited, and less likely to result in the costly mismatches as stated above.

2. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

2.1. Subject, object, and research scope

This research will study the concepts, awareness, and current level of career self-orientation competence in high school students.

This article is presented based on the results of the research: "Career Self-Orientation Competence Among High School Students in Hanoi," conducted from May to October 2025. The research focuses on understanding students' self-awareness, their knowledge of the world of occupations, and their ability to make and carry out career-related decisions.

2.2. Research methodology

The research uses quantitative and qualitative research methods through surveys conducted online using Google forms and in-depth interviews with some students. After collected data were cleaned and processed on Stata data processing software version 14.

3. THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL BASIS

3.1. Key Concepts

In the Vietnamese 2018 General Education Curriculum, competence is defined as an individual's combined ability to mobilize knowledge, skills, and attitudes to successfully carry out a type of activity in a specific context, with the level of success judged by observable outcomes. Within competence-structure research, two common approaches are a "resource-based" approach, in which competence is the integration of knowledge, skills, and attitudes expressed through understanding, doing, and behaving and a "component-based" approach, in which competence is broken down into components, elements, and observable behavioral indicators that can be used as evidence of achievement (Mai et al., 2023).

Self-orientation refers to the individual's own active process of understanding themselves, their interests, abilities, personality traits, and personal values, and using this self-understanding, together with an awareness of external factors (family circumstances, social trends, labor-market demand), to set goals and choose a direction for future study or work. Career tree theory frames this as the "roots" (interests, abilities, personality, and values) that must be strong before the "fruit" (career success) can grow, while Systems Theory Framework (STF) emphasizes that this self-understanding always develops in interaction with external, contextual factors rather than in isolation (Mai et al., 2023).

Synthesizing the two concepts above, this study defines career self-orientation competence as a student's ability to (1) accurately perceive their own interests, abilities, personality, and career values together with the factors influencing them; (2) actively explore and understand the world of occupations; and (3) make and carry out a reasoned decision and plan regarding their future academic or career direction consistent with their personality, family circumstances, and the needs of society.

3.2. Overview of related researches

Career orientation among adolescents has drawn growing international research attention, particularly regarding how well-formed and coherent students' career direction actually is by the time they must choose their major. Hor et al. (2024) designed and tested a school-based career counseling program, Life-World Design, aimed at strengthening secondary school students' "future orientation" in Hong Kong during COVID-19. Using a quasi-experimental design with 377 students across eight schools, the study found the program effective in helping students find value in their future careers, build a stronger sense of internal control, and take more proactive steps toward their career goals. Working with a different population, Khattab et al. (2022) examined 841 students aged 12-14 in Qatar and found that adolescents' career orientation tends to develop in a fragmented and incoherent way. Students may consider work important without this belief translating into greater career certainty or clearer aspirations.

Within the Southeast Asian region, comparable patterns can be seen in senior secondary students. Suryadi et al. (2018) surveyed 278 students across general and vocational senior high schools in Jakarta and found that nearly all general-track students intended to pursue university study, while vocational-track students were more divided between further study, employment, and entrepreneurship. Beyond formal academic research, current practical commentary in Vietnam reinforces the urgency of this issue at the high school level. Many Vietnamese high schools now formally prioritize career guidance work, but noted that a common practical obstacle is the lack of teachers trained specifically in career counseling, with the responsibility often falling on homeroom teachers who lack specialized preparation, leaving many students unclear about their own interests and prone to following the choices of peers or family instead (Gia Đình University, 2023). Similarly, students who choose a major hastily, driven by trends, perceived high income, or heavy marketing rather than genuine self-understanding, face a higher risk of academic disengagement, poor performance, and eventually working outside their trained field, and recommended that students deliberately reflect on their interests and strengths and seek career counseling before deciding (Education & the Times, 2025). All the above researches and reports point to the gap that many Vietnamese high school students are reaching pivotal decision points without adequately developing career self-orientation competence, which is why this study takes place.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1. Characteristics of survey subjects

Through conducting a questionnaire survey with high school students in Hanoi, the results showed that:

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of surveyed students

Study Participants: High School Students	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	51	33.6
Female	101	66.4
Education level		
Grade 9	38	25.0
Grade 10	35	23.0
Grade 11	58	38.2
Grade 12	21	13.8
School type		
Public	58	38.2
Private	24	15.8
International	64	42.1
Other	6	3.9
Academic performance		

Excellent	84	55.3
Good	42	27.6
Average	19	12.5
Below average	7	4.6

Source: Survey results of the Author, 2025

Table 1 shows that the students participating in the study were 66.4% female and 33.6% male. Regarding the grade level of participating students, 11th grade students account for the majority with 38.2%, the lowest is 12th grade with 13.8%, while grade 9 and grade 10 students account for 25.0% and 23.0%, respectively.

Of all 152 students participating in the study, data from the survey showed that most of the participating students came from international schools, accounting for 42.1%, students from public schools accounted for 38.2%, private school students made up 15.8%, and the smallest group, at 3.9%, came from other types of schools.

The majority of participating students self-reported an excellent level of achievement, accounting for 55.3%, followed by good performance at 27.6%. Students with average academic performance made up 12.5%, while the smallest group, at 4.6%, reported below average performance. This distribution indicates that the sample skews toward higher achieving students, which should be taken into account when interpreting the study's findings on career self-orientation competence, as academic performance may itself be associated with a student's level of self-awareness and career planning behavior.

4.2. Current status quo of career orientation competence

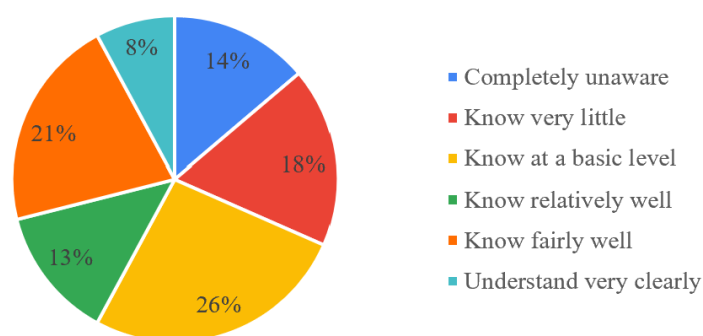


Figure 1. Students' level of knowledge regarding career fields and industry groups

Source: Survey results of the Author, 2025

Figure 1 showed that students' understanding of career fields shows a wide spread across all levels, with only about 8% of students reporting that they "Understand very clearly," having comprehensive knowledge and grasping development trends, while roughly 21% reported knowing fairly well and 13% knowing relatively well. The largest group, however, sits at the lower end of the scale, with around 26% of students knowing only at a basic level,

18% knowing very little, and 14% reporting that they are "Completely unaware" of career fields.

When asked to name common career fields, students' interview responses tended to cluster around a small set of highly visible jobs like “teacher, lawyer, business, doctor, accountant, and marketing” (Female, grade 10) and “business and e-commerce” (Female, grade 12), echoing the survey finding that a large share of students' knowledge about jobs remains at a surface, category-name level rather than a deep understanding of the full range of available fields and industries.

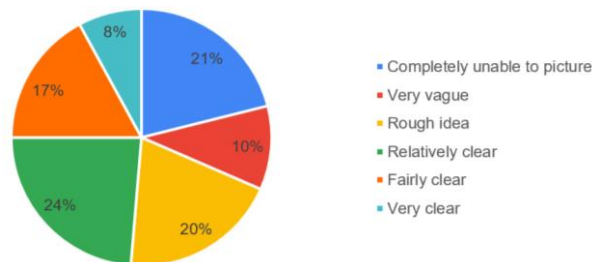


Figure 2. Students' clarity of understanding regarding specific tasks in their preferred career fields

Source: Survey results of the Author, 2025

A similar pattern appears in Figure 2 regarding students' clarity about the specific work involved in occupations they are interested in. Only 8% of students reported having a "Very clear" picture, with a detailed understanding of the process and real-world experience, while 17% of students described their understanding as "Fairly clear." Meanwhile, 21% of students said they are "Completely unable to picture" what the job actually involves, and 10% of students described their understanding as "Very vague," having only heard the job title without knowing its content.

Data from Figures 1 and 2 show that Hanoi high school students' understanding of careers remains uneven and, for a substantial portion, superficial. Students are far more likely to have only heard of a career field in passing than to actually understand what the day-to-day work involves. Notably, the share of students who report "Completely unaware" or comparably weak understanding is consistently higher when the question shifts from general knowledge of career groups (Figure 1) to specific knowledge of the actual work within a field of interest (Figure 2). This suggests that students' occupational awareness tends to stay at the surface level of field names and categories without a concrete sense of what that career actually requires.

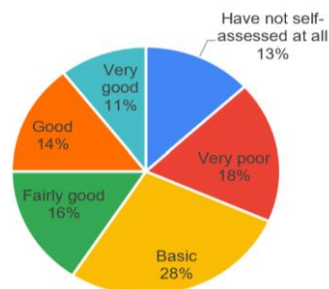


Figure 3. Students' self-assessment of their strengths, weaknesses, interests, and career values

Source: Survey results of the Author, 2025

Based on the findings presented in Figure 3, 11% of students demonstrated a "Very good" level of self-assessment, possessing a clear and complete self-profile to guide their career direction and decision-making. In addition, 14% of students rated their self-assessment ability as "Good," and 16% categorized it as "Fairly good." Conversely, 28% of students reported only a "Basic" level of self-awareness, identifying certain strengths, weaknesses, interests, or values but doing so incompletely. At the lowest levels, 18% of students described their self-awareness as "Very poor," while 13% of students indicated they had "Not self-assessed at all," having never evaluated or identified these personal attributes.

Table 2. Students' level of confidence in future career decision-making

Level of confidence	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Not confident at all	22	14.5
Highly insecure	30	19.7
Low confidence	24	15.8
Fairly confident	40	26.3
Confident	24	15.8
Very confident	12	7.9

Source: Survey results of the Author, 2025

This deficit in self-awareness corresponds with students' confidence in career decision-making, as depicted in Table 2. Only 12 students felt "Very confident," reporting complete certainty and readiness to take responsibility for their choices. Meanwhile, 24 students identified as "Confident," and 40 students reported being "Fairly confident," showing a willingness to make decisions despite occasional hesitation. On the opposite end of the scale, 24 students exhibited "Low confidence," 30 described themselves as "Highly insecure" marked by persistent worry and reliance on external opinions, and 22 reported being "Not confident at all," hesitating to make any career-related decisions.

Data from these figures demonstrates a strong link between students' self-awareness and their career decision-making confidence. A comparable proportion of students reported low or absent self-awareness as those reporting low or nonexistent confidence. This suggests that high school students in Hanoi who struggle to recognize their personal strengths, weaknesses, and values also lack trust in their own judgment when selecting a career path. Ultimately, these findings point to limited self-awareness as an underlying factor driving broader challenges in career self-orientation.

Data from in-depth interviews reflected similar gaps in students' self-awareness. One participant highlighted the challenge of navigating career choices without structured guidance and reliable resources: *"It's usually hard without guidance from teachers or family because it's so broad. I couldn't find a source of information I could be sure was accurate about different careers. I didn't know what I really liked or what my own strengths and weaknesses were. I didn't know whether I should prioritize what I'm good at or what I like"* (Female, Grade 10). Furthermore, another participant expressed how vocational uncertainty directly impacted her decision-making confidence regarding future financial stability and career viability: *"Sometimes I was unsure at first whether I'd even be able to find a job in that field... I used to think about going the academic route but wasn't sure if it would be financially stable"* (Female, Grade 11).

Table 3. Students' level of anxiety regarding future career choices

Level of worry	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Not worried at all	1	0.7
A bit worried	25	16.4
Moderate worry	43	28.3
Quite worried	39	25.7
Very worried	44	28.9

Source: Survey results of the Author, 2025

Another participant, who was further along in the career selection process, described the psychological and emotional burden associated with decision-related pressure: *"I feel a bit rushed sometimes, and I've been gradually losing motivation and direction because there are so many deadlines to keep track of... it's a bit overwhelming"* (Female, Grade 12). These qualitative accounts indicate that even students who have established a tentative career trajectory continue to experience the career choice anxiety reflected in Table 3, driven by the compounding pressures of an underdeveloped and evolving self-concept.

As illustrated in Table 3, a substantial majority of students experienced elevated levels of anxiety regarding their future career choices. Only a single respondent ($n = 1$) reported feeling "Not worried at all," whereas most of the sample clustered at the higher end of the spectrum. Specifically, 44 students reported being "Very worried," characterized by persistent pressure and decision-making paralysis due to a fear of making errors, while 39 students described themselves as "Quite worried," frequently relying on external validation before making decisions. Additionally, 43 students experienced "Moderate worry," marked by noticeable anxiety that occasionally induced hesitation, and 25 students reported being "A bit worried," maintaining the capacity to decide despite occasional concerns.

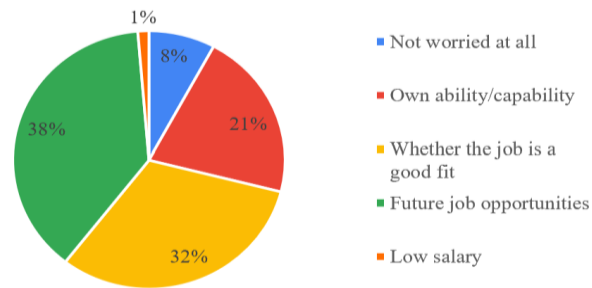


Figure 4. Sources of students' anxiety regarding future career choices

Source: Survey results of the Author, 2025

When identifying the primary determinants of this anxiety in Figure 4, respondents predominantly cited systemic and external factors over intrinsic personal attributes. The leading source of concern was "future job opportunities" (38%), followed closely by uncertainty regarding "person-job fit" (32%). A smaller subset of 21% of students attributed their primary anxiety to their "own ability/capability," whereas only 1% of students identified "low salary" as their chief concern. Notably, 8% of respondents indicated experiencing no worry regarding the specific factors listed in this item.

Synthesizing the empirical evidence from Figures 1 through 4 and Table 2 and 3 provides a comprehensive overview of the current baseline of career self-orientation competence among high school students in Hanoi. Occupational knowledge regarding career fields and specific job responsibilities remains limited across a major segment of the sample. Similarly, self-awareness of personal strengths and values is predominantly basic or underdeveloped, contributing to correspondingly low career decision-making confidence. Critically, the primary drivers of student anxiety—namely, uncertainty regarding future labor market opportunities and vocational compatibility—represent the exact domain-specific challenges that robust career self-orientation competence (encompassing accurate self-knowledge, occupational literacy, and decision-making self-efficacy) is designed to mitigate.

4.3. Career selection methods

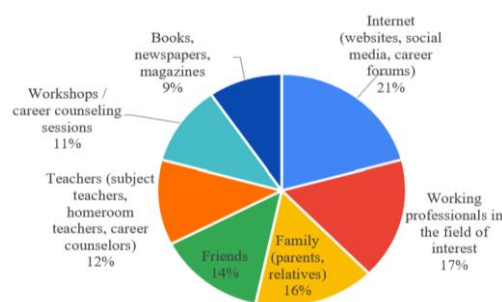


Figure 5. Primary sources of career information utilized by high school students

Source: Survey results of the Author, 2025

Based on the empirical findings presented in Figure 5, online platforms (comprising websites, social media, and career forums) emerged as a primary source of career information, utilized by 21% of respondents. Industry professionals working within students' fields of interest were cited by 17% of participants, while family members (parents and relatives) also

represented a major informational channel at 16%. Peer networks were selected by 14% of respondents, whereas formal institutional channels were utilized comparatively less. Specifically, educators (including subject teachers, homeroom teachers, and career counselors) were reported as primary sources by 12% of students, organized career workshops or counseling sessions by 11%, and traditional print media (books, newspapers, and magazines) by 9%.

These quantitative patterns were corroborated by qualitative interview data, which demonstrated a strong reliance on informal, self-directed inquiries over institutional channels. For instance, one participant described a multi-source approach involving *"teachers, relatives working in the field, and talking with friends"* (Female, Grade 10). Another participant detailed a more autonomous, digital strategy driven by the absence of localized social capital: *"I do a lot of consulting, research, and ask around on Discord, Reddit, ChatGPT"* and further noted *"stalking LinkedIn profiles of seniors"* because neither her parents nor school alumni had pursued her targeted career trajectory (Female, Grade 11). Similarly, a third participant described a structured digital search workflow: *"I go on university websites, look at the majors and minors, and read the descriptions... then I search on Google what jobs a degree in that field can lead to"* (Female, Grade 12).

Table 4. Students' Participation in School- and Organization-Led Career Orientation Activities

Participation Status	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Yes, has participated	76	50.0
No, has not participated	76	50.0

Source: Survey results of the Author, 2025

As detailed in Table 4, student engagement in formal career orientation activities organized by schools or external organizations was evenly distributed. Exactly half of the sample ($n = 76$, 50.0%) reported prior participation in school- or organization-led career orientation initiatives, whereas the remaining half ($n = 76$, 50.0%) indicated no prior involvement.

This equal distribution indicates that institutional access to structured career guidance remains non-universal among high school students in Hanoi. The fact that half of the surveyed cohort lacks exposure to formal career orientation programs represents a critical systemic gap, which likely contributes to the varying levels of occupational knowledge and decision-making self-efficacy documented in preceding sections.

This disparity in institutional exposure was similarly reflected in the qualitative interview accounts. For instance, one participant reported benefiting directly from her school's dedicated career counselors, who provided guidance on emerging industry trends and the anticipated impacts of artificial intelligence across various professions (Female, Grade 10). Conversely, another participant noted receiving minimal school-based support beyond generic

university admission advice, forcing her to rely primarily on independent inquiry (Female, Grade 11).

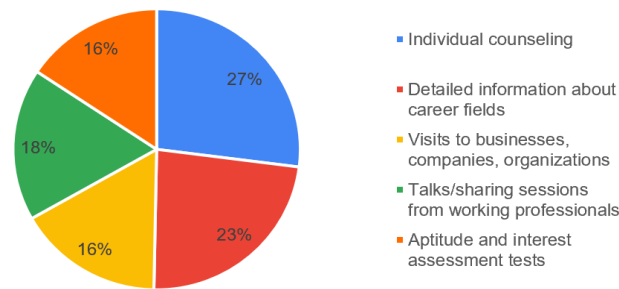


Figure 6. Desired Types of Support in the Student Career Orientation Process

Source: Survey results of the Author, 2025

Regarding preferred career development interventions in Figure 6, direct individual counseling emerged as the most requested form of support, selected by 27% of respondents. Detailed occupational information across career fields was requested by 23% of students, followed by guest lectures and knowledge-sharing sessions delivered by industry professionals (18%). Additionally, site visits to corporate enterprises or organizations were desired by 16% of students, while standardized psychological and vocational assessments (e.g., aptitude and career interest inventories) were selected by 16% of respondents.

Qualitative interview insights provided operational specificity regarding how these preferred interventions could be structured in practice. Participants recommended implementing recurring counseling sessions focused on "personal branding, career surveys, and personality tests" (Female, Grade 11). Educational pathways support was also highlighted, with suggestions for comprehensive higher education fairs featuring "20 to 30 universities" to enable direct engagement with admissions representatives, paired with alumni panels sharing international study experiences (Female, Grade 12). Other participants emphasized university-led informational sessions, job fairs (Female, Grade 12), and tailored diagnostic exercises designed to help students "explore their personality, strengths, and which career fields match those factors" (Female, Grade 10). This qualitative emphasis on personalized, diagnostic guidance strongly corroborates the quantitative finding identifying individual counseling as the primary student need.

4.4. Solutions for Enhancing Career Self-Orientation Competence

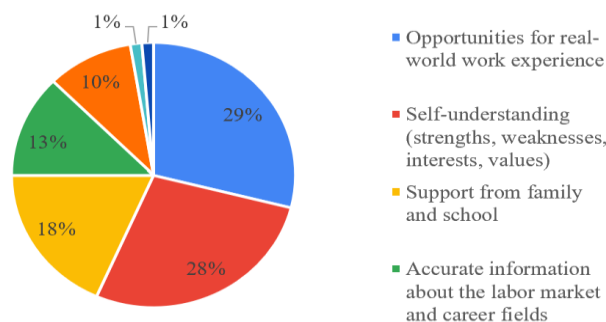


Figure 7. Factors students believe are most important for helping high school students orient their careers better

Source: Survey results of the Author, 2025

When evaluated regarding the most critical factors facilitating effective career decision-making in Figure 7, respondents most frequently prioritized opportunities for experiential learning and real-world work exposure (29%), closely followed by intrinsic self-awareness concerning personal strengths, weaknesses, interests, and values (28%). Support systems derived from family and educational institutions were selected by 18% of participants, whereas access to accurate labor market intelligence and occupational field data was cited by 13%. A smaller cohort (10%) identified decision-making and problem-solving competencies as paramount, while a minority of participants specified a composite of all listed variables (1%) or financial compensation (1%).

These empirical findings suggest that from the student perspective, direct experiential exposure and robust self-knowledge are perceived as significantly more decisive for effective vocational orientation than passive information dissemination alone. This outcome aligns directly with the empirical patterns illustrated in preceding figures, where deficits in self-assessment and decision-making self-efficacy were identified as the primary vulnerabilities in students' overall career orientation competence.

The qualitative interview data strongly reinforced these quantitative observations, with multiple participants independently identifying self-understanding as the central determinant of career alignment. One participant asserted that the single most vital element was *"understanding yourself, knowing what you like, what you want to pursue, and what you want to do in the future"* (Female, Grade 10). Another participant emphasized a multi-faceted approach incorporating *"strengths and weaknesses to orient yourself by, ikigai, and family finances"* (Female, Grade 11). Furthermore, a third participant proposed a structured tri-factorial framework comprising *"internal factors"* (self-assessment of personal preferences or elimination of undesirable options), *"external human factors"* (filial support and dedicated mentorship), and *"environmental factors"* (regional economic industry strengths and post-secondary trajectories) (Female, Grade 12). Collectively, these qualitative accounts substantiate the survey findings, demonstrating that students view self-demarcation and authentic experiential engagement as the bedrock of effective career self-orientation.

Table 5. Students' Recommendations for Enhancing Career Orientation Activities

Proposed Activity	Number (n)
Increase quantity and quality of individual counseling	118
Create opportunities for company visits and internships	118
Provide self-study tools and materials	112
Integrate career-orientation activities into the official curriculum	83
Self-directed exploration	83

Family support	77
More talks/workshops with experts and working professionals	67

Source: Survey results of the Author, 2025

In Table 5, students' top proposals for strengthening career orientation activities center on two areas tied for the highest response: increasing the quantity and quality of individual counseling and creating opportunities for company visits and internships, each selected by 118 students. 112 students suggested providing self-study tools and materials, while 83 students preferred integrating career orientation activities into the official curriculum and encouraging self-directed exploration. 77 students proposed family support, and 67 students opted for more talks or workshops with experts and working professionals.

Figure 7 and Table 5 suggest that students themselves see the solution to weak career self-orientation competence as primarily experiential and personalized such as more real-world exposure, more one-on-one counseling, and better self-study resources rather than more passive, one-way information delivery.

These proposals were echoed and elaborated on in the interviews. Suggested activities included more field-specific competitions to help students discover their strengths (*"more competitions that specialize in a particular field"*), university open days that let students experience an actual curriculum firsthand, and building a network of working professionals willing to share career and study insights with students (Female, grade 12). Another student proposed trying a wide range of extracurricular activities across different fields specifically to gain firsthand exposure to multiple career groups (Female, grade 10). These responses reinforce the survey's finding that students see experiential, exposure-based activities as the most valuable path to strengthening career self-orientation competence.

Many people expressed the necessity of early career orientation during high school. Most responses were strongly affirmative. One student replied, *"Absolutely"* (Female, grade 10). Another argued that earlier orientation directly benefits later choices: *"Yes, the sooner the better since high school affects university. There are people who feel lost once they get to university, so to avoid that, it should start as early as possible"*, adding that shy students without much support around them should ideally receive career counseling as early as grade 8 or 9 (Female, grade 12). Another student said that it was *"quite difficult"* to give a definite answer (Female, grade 12), suggesting that while most students see clear value in early orientation, some remain uncertain about exactly when or how it should begin.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research aims to assess the current level of career self-orientation competence among high school students in Hanoi, examining their occupational knowledge, self-understanding, decision-making confidence, and the sources and types of support they utilize through an online survey and in-depth interviews. A large share of students remains at only a basic or superficial level of understanding regarding career fields and specific job duties; self-assessment of personal strengths, weaknesses, and values is frequently incomplete or entirely

absent; and confidence in making career-related decisions is correspondingly low for many respondents. Qualitative interview data reinforced these findings, with students describing difficulty distinguishing between their interests and aptitudes, uncertainty about the financial viability of their chosen paths, and the compounding pressure of college application deadlines layered on top of an already uncertain sense of direction.

Students' own accounts of where this competence originates point to a heavy reliance on informal, self-directed channels, such as the Internet, peers, and occasional family input, rather than structured, school-based guidance. Half of the surveyed students reported never having participated in any career orientation activity organized by their school or an external organization. However, where students did have access to formal support such as school counselors, diagnostic personality assessments, or curated market trends, they described it as directly valuable in shaping a clearer sense of direction. When asked what would help most, students consistently prioritized two elements above all: opportunities for real-world work experience and a stronger understanding of themselves. This suggests that the career-related anxiety many Hanoi high school students experience is less a matter of personal disposition, and more a direct consequence of a career self-orientation competence that remains underdeveloped at this stage of schooling.

From this reality, communities, schools, families, and students themselves each have a vital role to play in strengthening this competence. Based on the findings above, this research proposes four main recommendations:

First, schools should expand access to individual career counseling, as this was the most highly requested form of support in both the survey and the interviews. Rather than relying on homeroom teachers who lack specialized training, schools should invest in qualified career counselors who can work with students one-on-one using standardized personality and aptitude assessments to help students build the self-understanding that this study identified as a foundational, and currently widespread, gap.

Second, local organizations and local authorities and schools should create more opportunities and long-term programs and career orientation policies for real-world exposure, such as company visits, internships, and job shadowing, rather than relying solely on one-way information delivery. Students in this study consistently rated direct workplace exposure above passive information sessions, and interviewees who had participated in such experiences described them as decisive in clarifying their career direction.

Third, career orientation content should be formally integrated into the core school curriculum rather than left to optional extracurricular activities, ensuring that not only those attending schools with well-funded counseling resources receive structured, consistent guidance starting from an early stage of secondary school. Interview responses indicated that orientation ideally should not be delayed until Grade 11 or 12, as college application deadlines and academic pressures by then leave little opportunity for genuine self-exploration.

Fourth, families should be encouraged and equipped to play a more active supporting role, for instance by facilitating conversations between their children and working professionals in fields of interest or simply engaging in open dialogue regarding their children's career thinking rather than leaving them to navigate it alone. Strengthening this family channel of support, alongside stronger school-based guidance, would directly address the gaps in self-

understanding and decision-making confidence that this study identifies as the central challenge facing Hanoi high school students today.

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