

FACTORS INFLUENCE STUDENTS' CHOICE OF ACCOUNTING AS A MAJOR

Vu Phan Hoai – Tuyen Nguyen Kim Thi – Hien Cao Thi Thanh

Abstract

The study is to investigate factors influencing the students' choice of accounting major. Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) are used to explore students' behavior of choosing their major. The research sample consists of 430 students of accounting and non-accounting major in Ton Duc Thang University, Vietnam. Research sample includes the survey subjects who are non-accounting students but belong to the economic sector with accounting for an accounting recognition to obtain clearer identification and more valuable assessment than only examining accounting students. The study results show that factors affecting the students' major decisions are career opportunities, stability and advancement. Besides, acquaintance relationship also significantly affects students' major decisions. The study also shows significant differences between male and female in perceptions on the accounting profession. These findings provide useful insights for policy makers, professional accounting bodies and academic institutions to develop strategies to promote the accounting program for college students.

Key words: Accounting, Theory of Reasoned Action, Theory of Planned Behavior

JEL Code: A20, A21, A22

Introduction

Trend of globalization and internalization has brought about many opportunities for integration and development, and broadened economic landscape into impropriety, complexity and volatility to keep abreast with the current development, the world seriously needs more experts for the resolution, knowledge and innovation. Thus, accountants who are integral to business and economies are seen to be the best profession able to face these new challenges. This scenario therefore raises tremendous demand for accountants. However, the existing number of qualified accountants is far behind the required number. (Zakaria et al.,

2012). In recent years, the declining of accounting students has become a major concern to the accounting profession (Hunt et al., 2004).

Vietnam has made a great advance on integration road into WTO and trust of foreign investors into the Vietnamese market also increase significantly. We have the opportunity to receive more investment capitals from famous companies and corporations around the world. However, the pressure of competition between domestic firms will be increasingly fierce, thus, accounting becomes a powerful and effective management tool to which any firm have to pay much attention. Requirements of transparent financial information, “clean” accounting data to attract more investors will open a wide market in order to orient and develop the accounting market in Vietnam, and universities should focus on improving the quality of accounting education for students (State audit - accounting services market in Vietnam - reality and solution, 2016). The selection of accounting major should be paid more attention to attract people who have talents and passion in accounting to ensure a quality human resource in the future.

However, the accounting subject was viewed as difficult, dull and boring apart from the perception that the profession did not guarantee lucrative income. In addition, the successive corporate scandals and malfeasance to great extent had tarnished the accounting profession and thus lead to accusations that accountants were lacking of integrity. This accusation damaged the accountants’ reputation in the eyes of the public and thus discouraged students from pursuing studies in this discipline (Zakaria et al., 2012).

According to the report on Gender equality in practice, recruitment and promotion in Vietnam in 2015, Vietnam has long owned a high percentage of women participation in labor force. Approximately 73% of Vietnamese women are present in the labor force (one of the highest percentages in the world) according to the report on Labor and Employment Investigation in Vietnam in 2013 (Hanoi, General Department of Statistics, 2014). Women working in the fields of accounting, personnel and administrative accounted for 70% which shows a big difference between men and women in the selection of the accounting sector.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to examine factors influencing students’ choice of accounting to deal with the pressure of the accounting industry at the present and in the future and determine whether there are significant differences between male and female accounting students in their choice of accounting.

1 Literature review

(Zakaria et al., 2012), data were collected via survey of which were sent to accounting students of University Teknologi MARA Kelantan, Malaysia with 340 students responded. The results were analyzed using SPSS 17 and from the findings, it can be concluded that both attitude towards accounting program and subjective norms are positively related in influencing students' decision to choose accounting as an academic program. The study also showed that referent groups had a significant influence on students' choice of discipline. It was based on the theory of reasoned action model to construct behavioral measures (TRA).

(Mohamod et al., 2014), the findings of this research study reveal that students that aim to pursue a challenging career; that are influenced by other people related to their career decisions; and that have greater academic performance in accounting will be interested in pursuing a career in the field of accounting. A survey was conducted in a total of 250 business administration students who took the Introduction to accounting course during the spring 2013 semester at a state university in Turkey.

(Simons et al, 2003), this paper provides a comprehensive summary of the published research, principally from accounting, regarding the choice-of-major decision. studies examining the relative importance of various factors, principal factors in the area of student expectations include: earnings, career opportunities, career characteristics, characteristics of the major. In addition, the study provided the overall of fundamental theory mainly mentioned in the article of theory of reasoned action model to construct behavioral measures.

(Uyar, 2011), the study carried out a survey of 179 students and of the 179 respondents, 69 plan to work in the accounting field (38.5%), and 110 plan to work in a non accounting field. The correlation analysis indicated that three factors that play role in career choice in accounting field have a positive significant association with student success in the accounting course. These factors are "interest in accounting", "perceived job opportunities", and "suitability of abilities".

(Odia & Ogiedu, 2013), this study examined factors affecting students' career choices of accounting in Nigerian university. This study conducted a survey with a sampling of 300 undergraduates from three universities. The results discovered that factors affecting students' career choice of accounting are numerous but they can be group into personal, reference and job factors. The findings indicated that personal and job factors such as students' interest and motivation in the subject, job prospects and high pay, performance in secondary school are the most influencing factors of students' choice of accounting. In particular, male students were

found to be more influenced by the reference factors than their female counterparts in the choice of accounting.

(Wally-dima, 2013), this study examined the factors that have influenced students at the University of Botswana to select accounting as a major. The population was the final year accounting students at the University of Botswana who were all majoring in accounting. The total population of the target group was 113 and was made up of two main groups of students who were coming from Bachelor of Accountancy (BACC) and from Bachelor of Arts (BA) double major in accounting and economics degree programme offered by the Faculty of Social Sciences. The finding suggested that the major factors influencing students to take accounting include availability of advancement opportunities, personal interest in the subject, availability of employment after graduation, passion for the profession and high earnings compared with other professions. The finding also revealed that majority of the students made the choice to major in accounting after high school but before entering the university and about a third of the respondents made the decision at high school.

(Porter & Woolley, 2014), a survey sample population of 311 accounting and non-accounting students conducted an examination of the factors affecting students' decision to major in accounting. The findings found that accounting students place more emphasis on career objectives and less emphasis on the intrinsic characteristics of their major than non-accounting students. The difference in opinion on intrinsic characteristics—accounting students think that accounting is better intrinsically than non-accounting students, and non-accounting students thinking their own major much more intrinsically rewarding than accounting – was a more powerful predictor than differences in opinion on career outcomes. The study was based on Theory of Reasoned Action model to construct behavioral measures (TRA) (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), and the theory expanded form TRA is Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991).

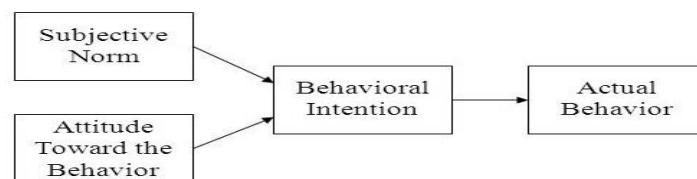
The previous study examined whether there is any significant difference in the students' perception of accounting career. The study has been conducted with 90 students pursuing post-graduation in Panjab University in 2014. The results do not show any significant difference between male and female students perception in accounting career choice. This study also examined students' perception on important criteria in salary, determination and factors which they perceive to be important in the chosen career. The results provided useful insights to relevant institutions in formulating plans so as to overcome gender differences in perception on accounting career (Khanna, 2015).

2 Methodology

The study on students' choice of accounting based primarily on two theories about the relationship between awareness and behavior. TRA (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) suggests that behavior of individuals is created based on their attitude and perception. Individuals who aware behaviors consistent with social norms will have a positive attitude and ability to perform the behavior. Positive social norms are formed by individual such as father, mother, wife, and teachers, people who that individual respect. In this study, TRA assumes that students who choose accounting major based on attitude toward benefits of accounting profession and subjective recommendations from family and relatives on accounting profession are more likely to choose the accounting discipline (Porter & Woolley, 2014). TPB (Ajzen, 1991) added factor perceived behavior control. perceived behavior control affects behavior of an individual in performing such behavior. In this study, the TPB added the prediction that if students believe in ability and availability that they can succeed in learning and accounting profession, they will tend to choose this discipline.

As a behavioral process, an expanded TRA flow model can be expressed as follows:

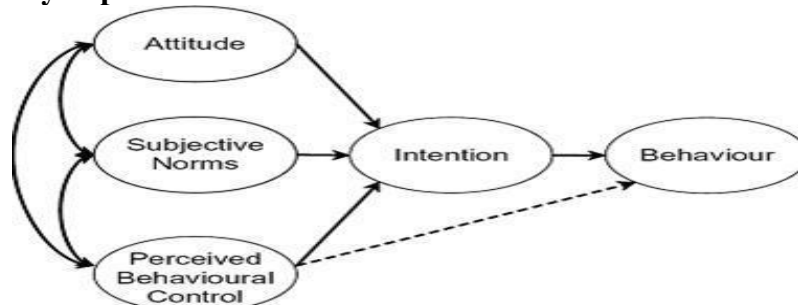
Fig. 1: The theory of planned behavior TRA model



Source: Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980

As a behavioral process, an expanded TPB flow model can be expressed as follows:

Fig. 2: The theory of planned behavior TPB model



Source: Ajzen, 1991

The study conducted a survey of 450 accounting and non-accounting students in Ton Duc Thang University, to examine and find out factors influencing their choice of accounting by answering the questionnaire regarding their perception of accounting. Of 450 surveyed students, 250 students are study in accounting major and 200 students are studying the fields

of Finance - banking, business administration, since these sectors have input mark with not much difference, and these students have to take some accounting courses in the training program to examine their opinions on accounting and compared with their major so that the research findings become clearer and more interesting.

Inheriting previous studies, the authors built the sample questionnaire bases on the study by Porter & Woolley (2014) consisting of four groups of factors that affect choice of accounting major including **Social Norm, Perceived Behavioral Control, Intrinsic Values, Extrinsic Values** and in-depth interviews of 20 students in first year, second year, third year 3, final year to examine the match of questionnaire with respondents in Vietnam. Almost all interviewed students understand the questionnaire, and agreed to put more open-ended questions to be able to recognize the issues outside the questionnaire affecting students' choice of major.

After collecting and checking data, the valid sample was 430 (95.6%), including 239 accounting students and 191 non-accounting students, statistics and test were conducted to explore the difference between male and female students regarding their opinions on factors stated.

3 Results

3.1 Descriptive statistics of samples

The Tab. 1 reports the description of respondent with 430 students from freshman to seniors who are studying economic field at Ton Duc Thang university such as faculty of Accounting, Business Administration, Finance and Banking. Female students accounts for 74% of total number of gender, meaning that female students tend to prefer studying economics than male students. Besides, accounting students accounts for 56% and non_accounting students accounts for 44% of the number of observation in the sample.

Tab. 1: Description of respondents

Year	YEAR		GENDER		CHOICE	
	Frequency	Percentage	Male	Female	NON-ACC	ACC
1	58	13.5	5	53	0	58
2	144	33.5	42	102	144	0
3	93	21.6	29	64	40	53
4	135	31.4	36	99	7	128
Total	430	100%	112	318	191	239
Percentage			26%	74%	44%	56%

Source: Field Survey (2016)

3.2 Analysis of variables descriptive statistics

3.2.1 Social Norm

Table 2 shows that Social Norm has a great influence on students' choice of major, which is expressed in a percentage agreed for all items. For accounting students, over 69% agree that advice and orientation of acquaintances, friends, teachers, parents had a significant influence on their decisions in the selection of specific discipline. For non-accounting students as stating their opinion about the accounting discipline, only 28% agreed for all items, which shows that reference significantly influence on students' choice of major in general.

Besides, students tend to choose the major according to evaluation from acquaintances (76%), the choice of friends (72%), teacher orientation (71%) and finally parents opinion (69%) represented by the ranking percentage for accounting students of reference subjects: 1st - acquaintances, 2nd - friends, 3rd – high school teachers, 4th – parents.

The female accounting students had a greater mean scores than the male accounting students on is factor parents.

Tab.2: Social Norm factors influencing students' choice of accounting

N	Questions	Non - Accounting					Accounting					Rank	I. t-test
		SD%	D%	A%	SA%	TA%	SD%	D%	A%	SA%	TA%		
1	Parents orient	4	63	29	5	33	6	24	60	9	69	[4]	F
2	Your acquaintances highly evaluate	0	45	52	3	55	3	21	66	10	76	[1]	F
3	Your friends select	2	42	55	1	56	2	26	63	9	72	[2]	M
4	Your teachers in high school recommend	6	65	27	1	28	4	24	63	8	71	[3]	M

Source: Field Survey (2016), M = mean score of male student greater than the female, F = mean score of female student greater than the male

3.2.2 Perceived Behavioral Control

Table 3 shows the responses of Perceived Behavioral Control on the choice of accounting students. Accounting and non-accounting students agreed that the accounting discipline had input scores slower than other disciplines with percentage of agreement of 73% and 72%, respectively. Besides, the two groups of students also said that accounting major were suitable for people who are good at math, with percentage of 54% and 52%, respectively.

Non-accounting students stated that accounting had less pressure (57%), whereas accounting students agreed (48%).

Non-accounting students are very difficult to study subjects of accounting major, only 28% agreed that they could study well subjects of accounting major, which is in line with reality, students of finance and business administration say that accounting subjects are not

their major subjects, so the extent of attention to subjects are not high. Meanwhile, the number of accounting students who learn well accounting subjects is very high (72%).

The male accounting students had a greater mean scores than the male accounting students on all of items.

Moreover, there are significant differences between male and female accounting students on their opinion of input scores, major pressure, and suitability for people good at math.

Tab. 3: Perceived Behavioral Control factors influencing students' choice of accounting

S/ N	Questions	Non - Accounting					Accounting					rank	I. t-test
		SD %	D %	A %	SA %	TA %	SD %	D %	A %	SA %	TA %		
1	Input scores of accounting major is relatively slower than other majors	4	24	66	6	72	5	22	65	8	73	[1]	M**
2	Learning accounting major has less pressure	5	39	50	7	57	5	47	42	6	48	[4]	M*
3	Accounting major is suitable for people good at math	4	44	46	6	52	3	43	48	5	54	[3]	M*
4	You can study subjects of accounting major well	6	65	27	1	28	4	24	63	8	72	[2]	M

Source: Field Survey (2016) ** significant at 10% level * significant at 5% level M= mean score of male student greater than female student, F = mean score of female student greater than male student

4.2.3 Intrinsic values

Table 4 shows intrinsic values of accounting student in accounting nature has a significant influence on their choice of accounting major in which more than 69% of accounting students said that accounting major is interesting, creative and exciting.

Results reveal that non-accounting students have interesting evaluation on accounting discipline as 71% of accounting students agree that their major is not boring, meanwhile, 54% of non-accounting students agree with that opinion, 76% accounting students agree that accounting career is an exciting profession, meanwhile, non-accounting students also state accounting career is an exciting profession at the rate of agreement of 67%, 69% of accounting students said their accounting career create will stimulation to overcome the challenges, and non-accounting students agree with this at the percentage of 65%.

Female accounting students has a greater mean scores than male accounting students for the opinion of accounting is not boring.

Tab. 4: Factors of intrinsic values influencing students' choice of accounting

N	Questions	Non - Accounting					Accounting					rank	In. t-test
		SD%	D%	A%	SA%	TA%	SD%	D%	A%	SA%	TA%		

1	Accounting subjects are not boring	8	38	52	2	54	7	22	61	9	71	[2]	F
2	Accounting profession is exciting	3	30	62	5	67	3	21	65	12	76	[1]	M
3	Accounting profession stimulates personal will to overcome challenge and personal creativeness.	6	29	57	8	65	3	28	58	11	69	[3]	M

Source: Field Survey (2016), M = mean score of male student greater than female student, F = mean score of female student greater than male student

4.2.4 Extrinsic Values

Table 5 shows the perception of extrinsic values the accounting profession. Up to 82% of accounting students agreed that after graduation they have a stable job, 78% agreed that the accounting profession have many job advancement opportunities, and 73% believed in job availability for the accounting sector after graduation. This shows that students choose accounting major since they are very interested in the ability to obtain a job, job stability and advancement possibility. However, most students agreed that starting salary of the accounting profession and the average income of accountants are not high, and only 36% of students agreed that starting salary of accounting profession is attractive.

Meanwhile, non-accounting students said that the accounting profession has a job availability (72%), job stability (67%), job advancement (65%), and the number of non-accounting students who agreed the high average salary and starting salary of accounting profession is higher than the number of accounting students.

Tab.5: Extrinsic values factors influencing students' choice of accounting

N	Questions	Non – Accounting					Accounting					rank	I. t-test
		SD %	D%	A%	SA %	TA %	SD %	D%	A%	SA %	TA %		
1	Job availability after graduation	4	24	66	6	72	5	22	65	8	73	[3]	M**
2	Job stability after graduation	4	29	59	8	67	2	16	78	5	82	[1]	M
3	Accounting profession has an attractive starting salary	5	47	41	6	47	7	57	31	5	36	[5]	M
4	Average income of accountants is high, in general	5	39	50	7	57	5	47	42	6	49	[4]	M*
5	Accounting profession has a job advancement opportunity	3	32	63	3	65	2	20	71	7	78	[2]	M*

Source: Field Survey (2016) ** significant at 10% level * significant at 5% level M= mean score of male student greater than female student, F = mean score of female student greater than male student

Male accounting students had a higher mean scores than female accounting students on all of items. Moreover, there are significant differences between male and female accounting students regarding their perception of a job availability, average income, advancement opportunity of accounting profession.

Conclusion

The study indicated that factors that affect the choice of accounting major include the significant influence of acquaintances, friends, teachers, parents on the students' choice of discipline that coincides with (Zakaria et al., 2012), (Mohamod et al., 2014). This suggest that the accounting professional organizations and educational institutions should promote introduction of accounting programs and accounting work through talks, seminars on accounting profession to disseminate relevant information about the role, function and a better understanding of the accounting profession, not only for students but also for parents, consultants, teachers and the public.

Besides, the perceptions of job stability and job availability after graduation, and job advancement make students more likely to choose the accounting major, which coincide with the study by Porter & Woolley (2014), showing that students chose accounting because of extrinsic values of accounting profession rather than extrinsic values of the discipline. It can be seen that as introducing the discipline to students, it is required to show them a job stability and job advancement opportunity which is likely to be important information for their decisions is selecting accounting major.

The study also revealed some significant differences between average level of male and female students through perceptions of input scores, major pressure, suitability for people good at math, job availability, average income, and advancement opportunity.

References

- Ajzen, Icek, and Martin Fishbein. "Understanding attitudes and predicting social behaviour." (1980).148
- Ajzen, Icek (1991). "The theory of planned behavior". *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* **50** (2): 179–211. [doi:10.1016/0749-5978\(91\)90020-T](https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978(91)90020-T)
- Hunt, S. C., Falgiani, A. A & Intrieri, R. C. (2004).The nature and origins of students' perceptions of accountants. *Journal of Education for Business*, 79, 142-148
- Khanna, M., & Khanna, M. (2015). Gender Perception on Accounting Career, *1*(11), 376–381.
- Mohamod, Kasim, S. gaelle. (2014). Council for Innovative Research. *Journal of Advances in Chemistry*, *10*(1), 2146–2161.
- Odia, J. O., & Ogedu, K. O. (2013). Factors affecting the study of accounting in Nigerian Universities. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, *3*(3), 89. <http://doi.org/10.5901/jesr.2013.v4n3p89>
- Porter, J., & Woolley, D. (2014). An Examination of the Factors Affecting Students' Decision

- to Major in Accounting. *International Journal of Accounting and Taxation*, 2(4), 1–22. <http://doi.org/10.15640/ijat.v2n4a1>
- Simons, K., Lowe, D., & Stout, D. (2003). Comprehensive literature review: factors influencing choice of accounting as a major. *Proceedings of the 2003 Academy of ...*, (2000). Retrieved from <http://abeweb.org/proceedings/proceedings03/simons.pdf>
- General Department of Statistics. (2014). Report on Labor and Employment Investigation in Vietnam in 2013, Hanoi
- Uyar, A. (2011). Factors Affecting Students' Career Choice In Accounting: The Case Of A Turkish University. *American Journal of ...*, 4(10), 29–38. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&profile=ehost&scope=site&authy pe=crawler&jrnl=19422504&AN=70096168&h=LOfqumjuDO6WLMjzm0ubKC03E4X6adqOUP TGjOeRDxOjyp1MSXdaoirHFTBBrhzAcnRP5sWpOLWAuKljm5hOhg ==&crl=c>
- Wally-dima, L. B. (2013). Factors Influencing Students ' Choice of Accounting As a Major : the Case of Botswana Accounting Students, 3(4), 464–476.
- Zakaria, M., Wan Fauzi, W. N. A., & Hasan, S. J. (2012). Accounting as a Choice of Academic Program. *Journal of Business Administration Research*, 1(1), 43–52. <http://doi.org/10.5430/jbar.v1n1p43>

Contact

Vu Phan Hoai

Faculty of Accounting, Ton Duc Thang University

19 Nguyen Huu Tho Street, Tan Phong Ward, District 7, Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam

phanhoaivu@tdt.edu.vn

Tuyen Nguyen Thi Kim

Faculty of Accounting, Ton Duc Thang University

19 Nguyen Huu Tho Street, Tan Phong Ward, District 7, Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam

nguyenthikimtuyen@tdt.edu.vn

Hien Cao Thi Thanh

Faculty of Accounting, Ton Duc Thang University

19 Nguyen Huu Tho Street, Tan Phong Ward, District 7, Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam

caothithanhkien@tdt.edu.vn