



# Career Strategies for Current Students

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## Abstract

The paper deals with career plans and attitudes of college students and tries to reveal, whether they have already set a career strategy during their studies and are aware of factors and barriers that could influence its fulfilment. Overall, it seems that college students have relatively clear ideas and perceptions about their career strategy and are able to evaluate influencing factors of career choice as well as barriers to achieving their chosen or ideal career. Some partial, statistically significant, differences exist between groups regarding gender and field of study. Descriptive statistics and simple testing of statistical differences between answers of respondents' groups were employed.

*Keywords: career strategy, college students, career choice factors, career choice barriers*

*JEL: I20*

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## 1. Introduction and theoretical support

The paper deals with career plans and attitudes of college students and tries to reveal, whether they have already set a career strategy during their studies and are aware of factors and barriers that could influence its fulfilment. Knowledge of principles and influential factors of career strategy choice is important not only from research, behavioural or economic perspective or perspective of students themselves (in the way of their successful career), but also from perspective of schools (in the way of capacity building, marketing strategy, creating attractive study programmes as well as career choice support; Alexander et al., 2011).

Career choice is integral part of life of every person, can be perceived as transition from adolescence to adult and significantly influences the whole life (Mirza et al., 2018; Sharif et al., 2019; Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017; Creed & Hughes, 2012). Mirza et al. (2018) or Kazi & Akhlaq (2017) stress that career choice has to ensure ideally adequate living standards, productivity, goal achievement as well as moral or intellectual satisfaction, self-realization. Thus, career choice is very complex and difficult decision-making process, regarding wide range of influential factors, reflecting transformation of economy, post-industrial revolution, increasing possibilities, career mobility as well as competition or pressure for performance or leadership competences, globalization, or uncertainty (Mirza et al., 2018; Lyusova et al., 2019; Janeiro et al., 2014; Sharif et al., 2019; Creed & Hughes, 2012; Santos et al., 2020). Career choice could be very stressful, regarding not only its

importance for future life, but also regarding current issues like unemployment of youth, fluctuation, economic crisis impacts and instability, mismatch between competencies of workers and demands of employers or clients (as well as its changes), low incomes of youth workers etc. (Lyusova et al., 2019; Santos et al., 2020; Creed & Hughes, 2012; Janeiro et al., 2014; Alexander et al., 2011).

Choice of appropriate career strategy of students is evidently essential (Creed & Hughes, 2012) and requires significant stage of maturity of the person (inter alia self-management competences, professional and personal competences, know-how; Santos et al., 2020; Creed & Hughes, 2012). On the other hand, in case of students this choice must be done even before entering the labour market, without proper knowledge of its real conditions or demands (Sharif et al., 2019; Alexander et al., 2011; Kazi et al., 2017; Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017; unpreparedness of absolvents is cited also in Boo & Kom, 2020). Incorrect choice could be costly and frustrating (Kazi et al., 2017), although Lent et al. (2002) identified belief of students in gradual improvement during life and reaching ideal career. Students themselves are often uncertain about future, have low self-confidence or incorrect self-perception (Boo & Kim, 2020; Lent et al., 2002). Accordingly, various influential factors, internal or external, are coming on the scene (see table 1); career strategies could evolve and differ regarding stage of study or field of study, as well as gender (Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017; Mirza et al., 2018; Alexander et al., 2011); although, Lyusova et al. (2019) postulate relative stability of career strategy of individual over time. Students (e. g. according to findings of Lent et al., 2002 or Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017) see or want to see themselves in the centre of decision-making process, want to decide independently on external influences and so, more emphasis is placed on internal determinants of career strategy choice, as well as lower reliance on external help. Vrba (2023) also points out that career advisory is a part of welfare policies on example of Vietnam and therefore career opportunities and country welfare are connected to certain degree (Vrba, 2023). This is also further examined in the context of boarder welfare expenses from 2011 to 2018 by Vrba and Huynh (2023).

Career strategy choice is thus in accordance with social cognitive theory (Boo & Kim, 2020; Lent et al., 2002; Creed & Hughes, 2012; Alexander et al., 2011; Janeiro et al., 2014), that puts the individual, the environment, and the behaviour in mutual interaction. Career strategies could be categorized according to various criteria, some of them are as follows:

- Mirza et al. (2018) distinguish primarily between career strategy by choice, or by force respectively. The later is more reactive to external influential factors.
- Active strategy or passive (evasive) strategy is mentioned in Boo & Kim (2020).
- Boo & Kim (2020), Lent et al. (2002); Creed & Hughes (2012) distinguish problem-solving strategy, emotional-oriented strategy, and support-seeking strategy. Lent et al. (2002) add reframing of mindset strategy to this categorization.
- Janeiro et al. (2014) mention categorization based on attitudes of decision-makers and distinguish adaptive strategy (characterised by future orientation, self-confidence and efficacy), superficial strategy (characterised by presence and past orientation, reliance on external help), uncertain strategy (characterised by presence orientation, reliance on own abilities but low self-confidence) and pessimistic strategy (characterised by absence of vision and low self-confidence and efficacy).

**Table 1: Influential factors of career strategy choice**

<b>Internal influential factors</b>	<b>External influential factors</b>
Interests	Requirements of labour market and employability
Personal characteristics and personal values, emotional profile	Socio-economic background, family (some authors stress essential influential role of mothers towards daughters; authoritative role or leadership of fathers; its role plays also parental education, income, and occupation) and collective support
Perceptions about career or job status, prestige, its social benefits as well as potential social roles conflicts	Educational background, influence of teachers and peers (who can help to get oriented in options or to adequately self-evaluate)
Professional, social, and intellectual prerequisites, knowledge, and competences	Actual or vicarious opportunity
Self-efficacy and self-evaluation	Stereotypes, socio-cultural narratives and patterns, prejudices
Information adequacy, sufficiency, and compliance	Future income perspective, development perspective and challenging character
Working experience	Media and fashion manners
Self-presentation	Consultation and informative and interventional programmes, guidance (more effective seem to be long-term interventions compared to ad hoc, one-time ones)
Current stage of life	Resource intensity (financial, time, knowledge etc.) of career strategy
	Characteristics and conditions of the career or job, stability

Source: Alexander et al. (2011), Mirza et al. (2018), Sharif et al. (2019), Kazi & Akhlaq (2017), Creed & Hughes (2012), Lyusova et al. (2019), Janeiro et al. (2014), Santos et al. (2020), Kazi et al. (2017), Boo & Kim (2020), Lent et al. (2002)

Because of employability and mutual influences, career strategy choices are usually compromising (Creed & Hughes, 2012; Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017), the most effective strategies combine several practices (cognitive and attitudinal) to better reflect challenges of current world (Lyusova et al., 2019; Janeiro et al., 2014). Effective career strategy choices and overcoming barriers result in more successful career life and overall adaptability and resilience (Creed & Hughes, 2012; Janeiro et al., 2014). Moreover, experience with career strategy choices could contribute to overcome pessimism, uncertainty, and superficial approach (Janeiro et al., 2014).

## 2. Methodology of the research

The research was carried out via questionnaire survey and its evaluation using descriptive statistics and evaluation of statistical significance of differences between the answers of individual groups of respondents.

Using online questionnaire tool Survio, the survey was carried out between college students of humanities, natural sciences, technical and agricultural fields, and arts. Research sample consists of 532 fully completed questionnaires. Questionnaire tool targeted at basic characteristics of respondents, their career strategy choice and idea about ideal career, factors influencing their career strategy choice and barriers to achieving it, role of college in chosen career strategy fulfilment.

Primarily, respondents' answers were processed using descriptive statistics. The findings were visualized in tables and figures (presented in the next section). Secondly, Student's t-test was applied to reveal potential statistically significant differences between answers of male or female respondents. Accordingly, analysis of variance ANOVA was applied to reveal potential statistically significant differences between answers of respondents with various fields of study and in various age groups. Identified differences and p-values are presented in the next section.

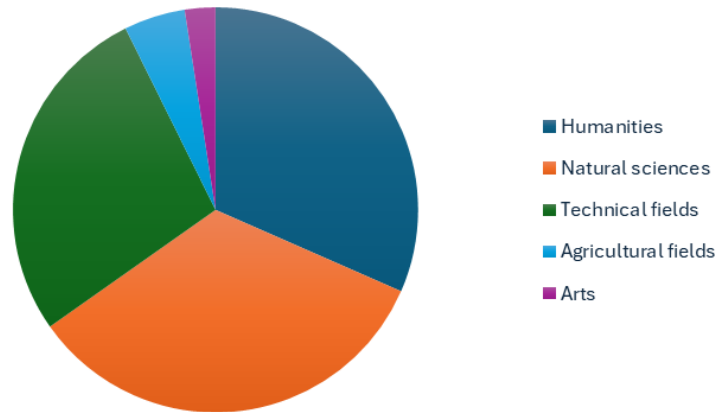
## 3. Findings from questionnaire survey

This part introduces findings from questionnaire survey, based on abovementioned methodology. Firstly, let us look at some basic statistics of respondents. Table 2 provides information about gender and age of respondents. Gender decomposition is relatively balanced, most of respondents are under 25 years old. Figure 1 adds information about the respondents' field of study. Thus, majority of respondents is represented by students of natural science, humanities, technical fields respectively.

**Table 2: Gender and age of respondents**

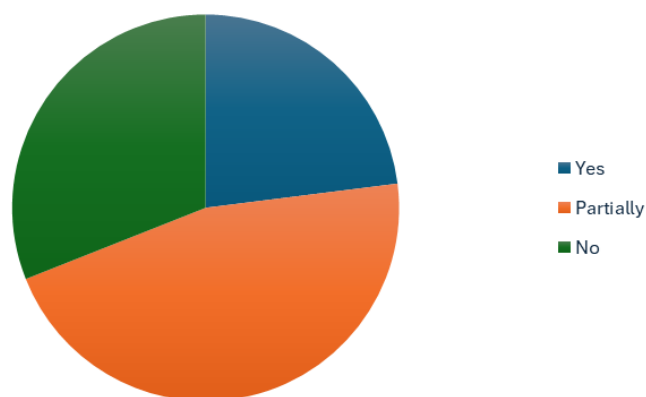
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	Female	Do not want to specify
287 (54 %)	215 (40 %)	30 (6 %)
<b>Age</b>		
20 and under	21 - 25	26 and more
180 (34 %)	290 (55 %)	62 (11 %)

Source: Own survey



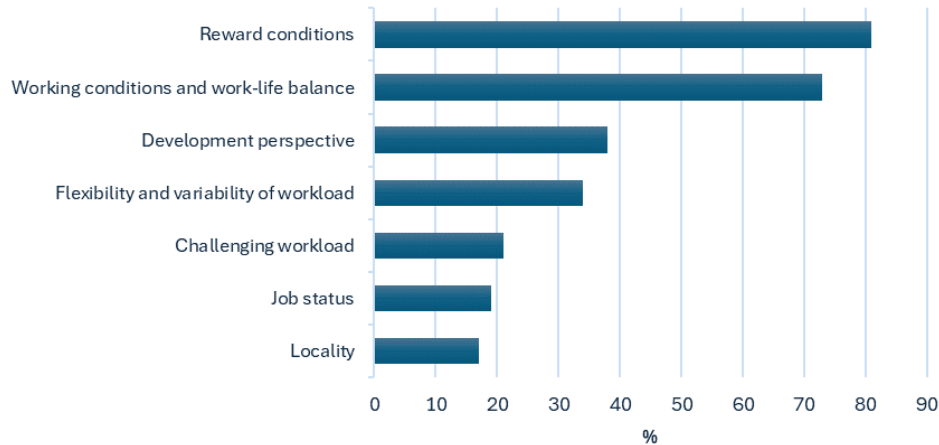
**Figure 1: Field of study**  
Source: Own survey

Almost three quarters of respondents claim that they have already chosen their career strategy after graduation or have relatively clear idea about their career direction (see figure 2). Accordingly, respondents are able to specify key, or most influential, characteristics of ideal career. Among these characteristics, mostly mentioned were reward conditions, working conditions and work-life balance, development perspective, flexibility and variability of workload respectively. Figure 3 expresses, how the characteristic appeared in the selection of respondents (as a percentage). There is relatively high compliance between chosen career strategy and ideal career imagination. Thus, approximately half of respondents indicated very high or high compliance; 28% of respondents admitted compromise solution. The question targeted only on respondents who indicated that they already have chosen their career strategy.



**Figure 2: Idea about career strategy**

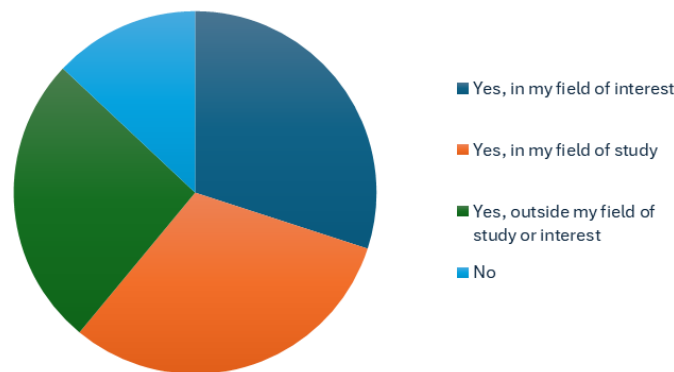
Source: Own survey



**Figure 3: Key characteristics of ideal career**

Source: Own survey

As can be seen in figure 4, most of respondents have experience of career and involvement in the labour market. Thus, it could be considered that respondents are able to realistically assess career options or strategies and confront the labour market offer and requires with their own ideas and plans. Moreover, approximately 60 % of respondents experienced in labour market are experienced in the field of study or area of interest.



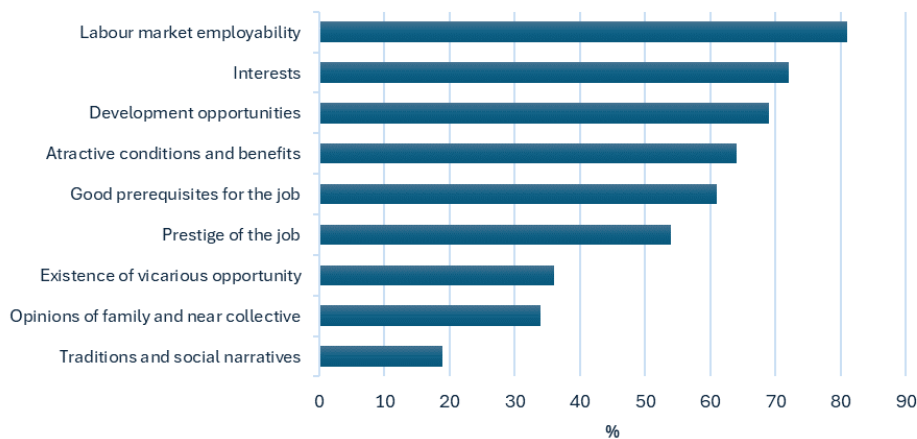
**Figure 4: Career experience**

Source: Own survey

A crucial part of the questionnaire survey concerned the perception of the main factors influencing the choice of career strategy and barriers to its achievement. Respondents were asked to choose up to three most relevant factors, barriers respectively. Figures 5 and 6 illustrates the results, again as percentage of respondents who have chosen addressed option.

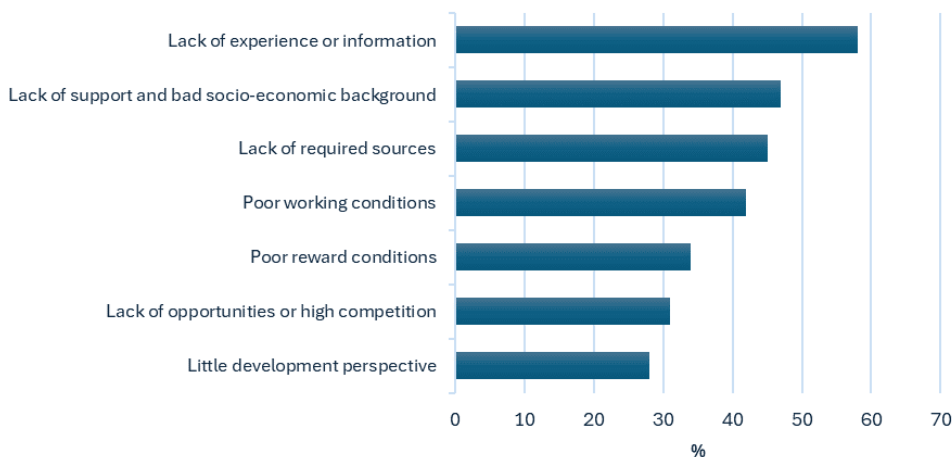
Labour market employability, personal interest, development opportunities, attractive conditions and potential benefits or convenient prerequisites for the job are the most perceived influential factors. Based on these factors, career strategy choice is basically made.

On the other hand, lack of experience or information, lack of support (specifically socio-economic background), lack of required sources or poor working conditions are most cited barriers in achieving or choice of career strategy. These barriers could be, in other words, perceived to be reasons of mismatch between ideal and chosen career strategy.



**Figure 5: Influential factors of career strategy choice**

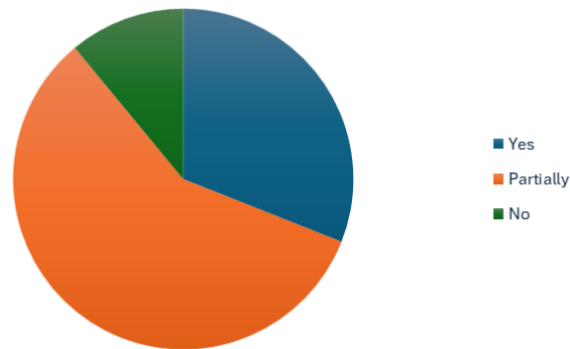
Source: Own survey



**Figure 6: Barriers of career strategy choice**

Source: Own survey

Questionnaire survey paid attention also to the role of college in fulfilment of career strategies of students. Thus, majority of respondents perceives that their college contribute to career strategy fulfilment, at least partially (see figure 7). The main specific beneficial roles that college plays are development of relevant knowledge and competencies (33 %), provision of practical and professional experience (32 %), networking with potential employers or partners (21 %) and information support (14 %).



**Figure 7: Contribution of college to career strategy fulfilment**

Source: Own survey

#### 4. Conclusion

To better understand the perceptions and ideas of students about their future career strategy, they were analysed differences between groups of respondents. Simple t-test and ANOVA were employed in this regard. The results of the evaluation of the statistical differences in the answers to the selected questions can be summarised as follows:

- Data show that it exists statistically significant difference in answers of male or female respondents in case of compliance of chosen and ideal career, in case of assessment of the key characteristics of ideal career, some factors influencing career strategy choice. It was not indicated statistical significance in case of career choice, career experience or contribution of college to fulfilment career strategy choice, as well as in case of some influential factors, namely labour market employability, attractive conditions and benefits or traditions and social narratives and opinions of the closest collective. In case of barriers to achieving chosen or ideal career, statistically significant differences in answers were not revealed. Overall, it appears that male respondents are more self-confident of their competencies or prerequisites to pursue their ideal career; are more likely to follow their ideal career strategy; and put more emphasis on well-appreciated job with higher social status, development possibilities. Female respondents seem to be less confident, pay more attention to vicarious solution, their prerequisites for the job.



- In some cases, it exists statistically significant difference between answers also regarding field of study of the respondents. It appears that students of technical fields have clearer idea about their future career path and also indicate greater compliance between chosen and ideal career strategy, their answers differ from other groups with p-value lower than 0.01. Students of humanities, arts and agricultural studies seem to be more sensitive to flexibility, variability of the job, as well as to opinions of collective, socio-economic background and social narratives (p-value lower than 0.05 compared to other groups). On the other hand, students of technical fields or natural sciences are more confident with their prerequisites to the chosen career strategy, are more aware of employability, competitiveness on labour market attractive career conditions or existence of vicarious opportunities (p-value lower than 0.05 compared to other groups). It was not indicated statistically significant difference between answers of respondents about perceived barriers to achieving chosen (ideal) career strategy. Interestingly, students of natural sciences or technical and agricultural fields were more likely to answer that college provide them good support in case of development of relevant knowledge and competencies or provision of practical and professional experience. However, statistical significance is weaker with p-value at 0.1 level compared to other groups.
- They were not indicated statistically significant differences in answers between individual age groups of respondents. The results are consistent with above introduced findings from questionnaire survey.

**Table 3: Statistically significant differences in answers according to gender**

	Male	Female	p-value
<b>Compliance of chosen and ideal career</b>	63% of responses in the high and very high category	48 % of responses in the high and very high category	< 0.05*
<b>Key characteristics of ideal career</b>	Greater emphasis on reward conditions, development perspective and challenging workload	Greater emphasis on flexibility, variability, working conditions and work-life balance	< 0.01**
<b>Factors influencing career strategy choice</b>	Greater emphasis on prestige of the job, development opportunities	Greater emphasis on existence of vicarious opportunity, prerequisites for the job	< 0.05*

Source: Own survey

Although it was done relatively simple survey concerning career strategies and perceptions between college students, it provides some useful and valuable information about needs and requirements of the generation entering the labour market. Information obtained can be used by employers, colleges, job centres and other relevant actors.

There is undoubtedly room for more comprehensive research on students' career strategies and their career perceptions, employing e. g. bigger sample of respondents, their socio-economic, personal, or social characteristics, more sophisticated statistical instruments (e. g. regression analysis). These are some possible recommendations for further research work.

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