

Factors Involving Cambodian Students' Choice in Social Science Learning Track at High School in Svay Rieng Province

Souphorn ROTH^{1*}, Robraw ANN (PhD)²

1*Corresponding Author: Hun Sen Kampongchork High School, Svay Rieng, Cambodia,
rothsouphorn@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-2090-9290>

2. National Institute of Education, robraw.ann@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-7898-3560>

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Abstract

The study aimed to identify factors for students to choose social science major. The methodology research was used by quantitative method. The sample used in this study was six high schools which located in three districts/towns. These samples were 300 students studying in grade 11 to 12. The result of this study was shown that factors of students' choosing social science major was the interest in the subject for students' personality factor (internal factor) which was the highest percentage (18%). Among them, the need for study, the need for learning various skills and the need for work were the internal factor which was the highest percentage. In addition to curriculum and examination factors, the factor influencing the choice of a social science major was 18% for rich in research documents.

Keywords: *Social science, internal factor, external factor, curriculum*

1. Introduction

In our world, education was the key to a better life for every child and the foundation of a strong society (Lake, 2015). Incheon Declaration (2015) stated that education was a fundamental human right and a right that could lead to other rights. To fulfill this right, all countries must ensure the universal right to quality, inclusive and equitable education, which should be free and compulsory for all.

The 1993 Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia recognized the right of all citizens to quality education. Article 65 of the Constitution stated that the

State would protect and promote the right of citizens to quality education at all levels and would take all necessary measures to ensure that this education reached all citizens (Kingdom of Cambodia, 1993). In line with the Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia, the Cambodian Education Law, which was promulgated in December 2007, stated that every citizen had the right to receive at least nine years of quality education free of charge in public schools (National Assembly, 2007). The Royal Government of Cambodia accepted the view that education was a fundamental right that played an important role in enabling citizens to achieve all-round development. Therefore, in the Fourth Phase of the Royal Government's Rectangular Strategy, the education sector had been identified as one of the priorities among others (Royal Government of Cambodia, 2018).

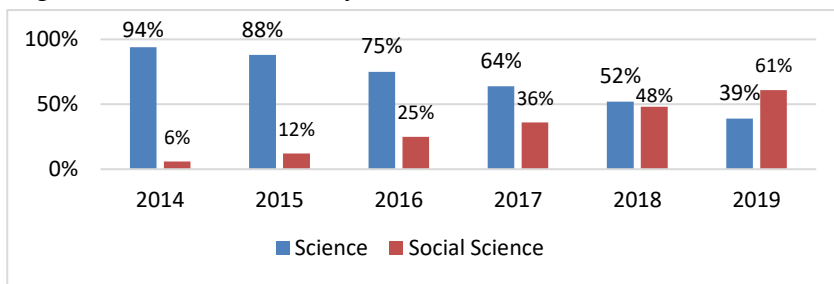
Today, the Royal Government of Cambodia has been paying great attention to human resource development (Royal Government of Cambodia, 2018). In response to the Royal Government's 4th Quadrangular Strategy, the first pillar "Strengthening the Quality of Education, Science and Technology", the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports had an important role in developing people into complete individuals who had equal growth in knowledge, skills, attitudes and physical fitness (Royal Government of Cambodia, 2018).

On October 11th, 2011, His Excellency Im Sethy, the Minister of Education, signed the implementation of a new curriculum divided into two: a science major and a social science major for grades 11 and 12 (MoEYS, 2011). The selection of these courses is based on students' preferences, without passing an aptitude test, and the selection is based on the form that the school distributes to fill. The selection of these two majors encourages students to choose courses according to their abilities and preferences.

In recent years, students at high school level had turned to choose social science major for their studies. As Figure below, it was shown that the number of students, who had chosen science and social science, had changed in recent years. For students in science major in 2014, they had chosen up to 94%, while social science students had only 6%. From year to year, the number of students who had chosen social science had continued to increase, while the number of students who had chosen science major had also decreased. In 2019, the number of students who had decided to choose science had decreased to 39%, and the number of students who had chosen social science had increased to 61%. If we looked at the growth in each year, we would see that the number of students who had chosen social science had increased by up to 55% in the last 5 years. In view of the problems mentioned above, the researcher decided to choose the topic

“Factors Involving Cambodian Students’ Choice in Social Science Learning Track at High School in Svay Rieng Province” to conduct a research study with the following objectives.

Figure 1: Students' Chosen majors: Science and Social Science



This research aimed to understand the factors influencing social science major selection among social science students.

2. Literature Review

Students' choice of major for study at the high school level was influenced by internal factors, external factors, and curriculum and examination factors. The choice of the majors in high school was strongly influenced by gender roles, interests, values, abilities, and future academic outcomes (Akpan, 1986). Similarly, Galotti (1999) also found that college students’ choice of subjects was influenced by internal factors such as gender, interests, values, abilities, and future academic outcomes. Furthermore, Porter and Umbach (2006) also found that the most important factor in choosing major was the students’ own personality.

Gender was a significant factor in students’ choice of major (Huruma, 2015). Another study, Calkins and Welki (2006), had shown that students’ choice of majors differed by gender. In this study also found that female students chose majors based on the specific subject they were studying in class, while male students chose majors based on the job market demanding related to the major they were studying. Moreover, Dickson (2010) also showed that gender had a significant impact on students’ choice of majors in college. Male high school students preferred science majors more than female high school students, and they were more likely to choose majors in higher education (Miller et al., 2006). They found that gender biased students towards choosing science or social science majors in college. Similarly, a study by Wiswall and Zafar (2015) also found significant differences between male and female students in their choice of the science and the social science major. Another study by Osagie and Alutu (2016) on science and

technology career choices found that female secondary school students were more interested in the science major than male secondary school students. In contrast, a study by Hansberry and Moroz (2001) in Australia found that female secondary school students preferred the social science major while male secondary school students preferred the science major.

Students' personal interests were a factor in their decision to choose majors (Calkins & Welki, 2006; James, 2007; Wally-Dima, 2013). According to Calkins and Welki (2006), the most influential factor in students' choice of subjects was their own interest in choosing the major. In their study, they stated that 93% of students, they had chosen were based on their interest in the major. A similar study found that 93% of male students also chose majors based on their interests (Huruma, 2015). In a similar study, studied in Finland and Portugal also found that personal interests and preferences were factors in students' choice of majors (James, 2007). High school students were highly interested in the science major even though they had little knowledge about the major (Wally-Dima, 2013). Students' ability were a factor in their decision to choose majors of study at the high school level (Huruma, 2015). This study showed that 94% of female students chose a course of study based on their ability in science subjects. Other studies also found that students' ability factors and interests were important factors in choosing a course of study at university (Beggs et al., 2008).

The needs for the future education and employment were important factors in the decision-making process of individual students in choosing a particular major for further studies in college (Tripney et al., 2010). In Cambodian context, a study by Voeng (2014) showed that economic knowledge was the main factor in students' decision-making process for further studies in higher education. A study by Sofi (2016) found that secondary school students in India chose the science major or the social science major with employment needs in mind when they graduated. This study examined several factors such as gender, family economic status, and student ability, but only the career needs of students after graduation were found to be more important than other factors in determining the majors of secondary school students in India (Sofi, 2016). A similar study by Adeyemi (2009) found that students who chose geography as an elective subject in high school in Botswana were interested in their careers. The study found that 95% of students chose the subject based on their job expectations after graduation. A similar study by Voeng (2014) found that first-year students at a university in Phnom Penh chose social sciences or English as their major because of job requirements.

Parents or guardians of students contributed to the decision of students to choose their major for study (Boudarbat & Montmarquette, 2006). They stated that the educational level of the parents had a significant influence on the choice of majors for their children. Similarly, a study by Goyette and Mullen (2006) found that the educational level of the parents had a significant influence on the choice of major for their children in science and social sciences. In the Cambodian context, a study by Yep (2008) found that 11% of the decision to choose a major for students pursuing higher education was due to labor market needs and 59% to parental factors. Thus, in Cambodian society, parents really had an influence on their children's decision to study in higher education. One study showed that parental income could influence their children's decision to choose a major. Akarsu and Kariper (2013) showed that parental level of knowledge and family economic status were among the other factors that contributed to the decision to study the science major.

Friends were the most influential factor for students in choosing a course of study (Walmsley et al., 2010). Furthermore, another study examining the influence of personal and future career factors on career choice showed that friends were considered to be a factor influencing course choice (Al-Rfou, 2013). However, a study with Cambodian students showed that friends had the least influence on course choice, at only 1% compared to other factors (Yep, 2008). Teachers were a factor influencing students' perceptions of biology as a school subject (Kubiatko et al., 2017). This study, conducted at the secondary school level, found that biology teachers had a positive influence on both male and female students' attitudes towards biology. Another study by Athanasou and Petoumenos (1998) showed that teachers could influence students' motivation through specific aspects of their teaching, but more importantly, through their orientation. School factors also contributed to the decision to choose a major. Secondary school students in Tanzania decided to choose arts subjects due to the lack of resources in schools for science subjects, such as laboratories and science teaching and learning materials (Komba, 2014).

3. Methodology

This study was conducted using a quantitative method, using a survey questionnaire to collect data from the target group and to answer the research questions. There were 300 senior high school students in grades 11 to 12 were chosen in this study in which located six different high schools in Svay Rieng Province. 50 students were selected from each high school in three districts/towns in Svay Rieng Province. This study used a survey

questionnaire with closed-ended and open-ended questions. In preparing the questionnaire, the researcher prepared and modified the questionnaire from Huruma (2015) and Voeng (2014). The researcher made some adjustments and added some more points to be consistent with the researcher's topic. After collecting the data from the questionnaires by direct filling and Google Forms, the researcher used Microsoft Excel to analyze the data and create graphs and tables. All data collected were analyzed in percentages and explained by comparing the factors that contributed to the students' decision to choose the social science major. This analysis was based on indicators that had been identified as factors that contributed to the students' decision to choose the social science major.

4. Findings

In this chapter, the researcher presented the results of data analysis, interpretation and analysis of the data obtained through the questionnaire. The results obtained would be discussed on the main points that focus on the factors that determine the decision to choose the social science major by students in Svay Rieng Province.

4.1 Students' perceptions of internal factors

There were 300 students who participated in this study to answer internal factors influencing to choose their social science subject at their school.

Table 1: Students' perceptions focusing on internal factors (personality)

No	Items	N	%
1	Interest in the subject	282	18%
2	Excellent in social sciences	198	13%
3	Learn well in studies.	265	17%
4	Belief that subjects correspond to gender	116	7%
5	Subjects you want to study in college	244	16%
6	Learn other skills in the future	237	15%
7	Find a job in the future	225	14%
	Total	1567	100%

Based on the table 1 above indicated that "Interest in the subject" was the highest factor among all internal factors. There were 282 students, 18%, answered "yes". The lowest percentage of this result was "the gender-appropriate academic belief factor", only 7% which had 116 answering "Yes". And other factors had ranged from 13% to 17%.

In conclusion, the strongest factor influencing students' decision to choose the social science major was **“interest”**. And there were also two strong factors influencing to choose the social science major: **“ability to learn well in study”** and **“Subjects you want to study in college”**.

4.2 Students' perceptions of external factors

There were 300 students who participated in this study to answer external factors influencing to choose their social science subject at their school.

Table 2: Students' perceptions focusing on external factors

No	Items	N	%
1	Friends give advice	31	5%
2	Choose by friends	27	4%
3	Parents give advice	64	10%
4	Parents forced to choose	15	2%
5	Spending money on education	154	23%
6	The teacher instructed	36	5%
7	Very interested in teaching	246	37%
8	The principal advised	22	3%
9	The school only has social studies classes.	17	3%
10	Insufficient science materials	61	9%
	Total	673	100%

The table 2 above showed that “interested in teaching” factor was the highest factor which had 37%. And another “spending money on education” factor had 23% to agree the external factors influencing to their choice. Other factors had ranged from 10% to 2%. In conclusion, external factors had weak influenced on students to choose their subject at school. The “the teacher's interest in teaching” factor was the strongest factor, which had 37%.

4.3. Student perceptions of the curriculum and exams

There were 300 students who participated in this study to answer “curriculum and exams” factors influencing to choose their social science subject at their school.

Table 3: Students' perceptions of the curriculum and exams

No	Items	N	%
1	Previous years' high school diploma results	169	11%
2	Only 7 subjects are tested.	221	14%
3	Can pass the baccalaureate exam easily	152	10%
4	Social science subjects are easier to study than science subjects.	219	14%
5	Science subjects (physics, chemistry, biology, earth and environment) are optional subjects.	84	6%
6	Mathematics scores are equivalent to civics, history, and geography.	209	14%
7	Rich in research documents	277	18%
8	The exam is only given in the 12 th grade curriculum.	196	13%
	Total	1527	100%

The table 3 above showed that the 5th indicator, “science elective subjects (physics, chemistry, biology, and earth and environment) as elective subjects”, 84 students who answered yes, was 6%. It was the lowest percentage factor. In the 7th indicator, “rich research documents”, there were 277 students who answered yes, which was 18%. It was the highest percentage factor. And there were 2 higher indicators which students answered yes: the 2nd indicator, “Only 7 subjects are tested” was 14%, and the 4th indicator, “Social science subjects are easier to study than science subjects” was 14%. In summary, students decided to choose social science subjects to study that high school with higher percentages based on “rich in research documents” with 18%, “only 7 subjects are tested” with 14% and “Social science subjects are easier to study than science subjects” with 14%.

Table 4: Factors influencing students' choice of social science major

No	Items	%	Order
1	Internal factors	17%	1
2	External factors	50%	3
3	Curriculum and exam factors	33%	2

The table 4 above clearly showed that social science students who decided to choose their major was different from internal factors, external factors and curriculum and exams factors. For internal factors, the percentage was the highest compared to two other factors. For “curriculum and exams” factors was the second highest percentage after internal factors which had 64%, and the lowest percentage was external factors, which had only 22%. In conclusion, internal factors and “curriculum and exams” factors were factors in which influenced students to choose the social science major at an average level, while external factors are at the weak level. Thus, students choose majors for their studies based on both the internal factors, and “curriculum and exam” factors

5. Discussion

According to the results of this study and the theory presented in literature review above, it was found that students in grade 11 and 12 of secondary school who decided to choose the social science major considered internal factors, external factors, and curriculum and examination factors. These three factors contributed to the students’ decision to choose the social science major. The results of this study clearly showed that internal factors were the highest percentage of factors in the decision to choose the social science major for social science students compared to external factors and curriculum and examination factors.

Social science students decided to choose the social science major because they had needs for their future studies, careers, and jobs. According to the results of the study, the percentage of students between 75% and 81% decided to choose the social science major because of their future studies, careers, and jobs. In line with the study by Sofi (2016), it was found that students at the secondary school level in India chose the science major or the social science major considering their future employment. According to Tripney et al. (2010) showed that the demands of their college and work were factors in their decision to choose a major. A similar study by Voeng (2014), in Cambodia, studied first-year students at a university in Phnom Penh who chose the social science major or English as their majors, also because of work demands. In line with Holland’s theory, which states that students’ personality types are useful for making decisions about continuing their higher education and future careers (Holland, 1997). Etinger (2012) found that people often choose a major or a career based on their perceived fit with their personality, the environment of the major, and the job they are looking for.

The curriculum and exams seemed to have encouraged students to become interested in the social science major. According to this study, approximately 92% of students chose the social science major because this major had a plenty of research materials for self-study. Approximately 73% of students studying the social science major believed that social science major was easier to study and pass than the science major, that was the reasons why they chose the social science major. Furthermore, because of the curriculum which students studied in public schools with 10-core subjects, but at the national exam, only 7 subjects were taken. Regarding the results of the national grade 12 exam, it also contributed to encouraging students to choose the social science major. Approximately 56% of students decided to choose the social science major because they saw that the results of the national grade 12 exam showed that students' chosen social science major had more successful results than students' chosen the science major.

6. Conclusion

The results of the study showed that social science students who decided to choose social science major were internal factors, which were at an average level of 67%. On the other hand, curriculum and examination factors were also factors with a higher percentage after internal factors, which were also at an average level of 64%. These two factors were factors in choosing social science major for students with similar percentages. As for external factors, which were at a weak level, the factors in deciding to choose social science major for their studies were only 22%. In conclusion, according to the study results, the researchers concluded that students who decided to choose the social science major because their abilities were still limited in studying science majors. At the same time, social science students believed that the social science major were easier to study than the science major. Only 7 subjects (Khmer literature, mathematics, history, geography, ethics-civics, foreign language, and one elective subjects of these: chemistry, physics, biology, and earth and environment) were required to take the exam. The results of the diploma exam and the strictness of the exam made to students to choose social science majors for their study. Therefore, internal factors and curriculum and exam factors were indeed factors in students' choices in deciding to choose the social science major.

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