

PIM07613

Reference groups and choices of vocational education: Case of Thailand

Nattavud Pimpa
School of Education
RMIT University
Nattavud.pimpa@rmit.edu.au

AARE 2007 International Education Research Conference
Research Impacts: Proving or Improving?
Fremantle, Western Australia
University of Notre Dame Australia
25-29 November 2007

Reference groups and choices of vocational education:
Case of Thailand

Abstract:

Low prestige attached to technical vocational education and training and its inherent inequities are a common phenomenon in Thailand. This study aims to identify factors influencing Thai students' choices of vocational education. The results confirm five key influencing factors: personal attitude, curriculum, potential employment, attractiveness of campus, and tuition fees. Furthermore, this study indicates that teachers from secondary school and parents can strongly influence students' decision to go to vocational institutions. In summary, it is recommended that stakeholders in vocational education in Thailand should continue promoting a good image of vocational education and its students to the society. Since vocational education has suffered from being perceived as a second class education and thus militates against effective learning, marketing communication is strongly recommended as an effort to create an on-going understanding with students and community of its relevance and importance.

Keywords: *Marketing for Education, TVET, Education Choice, Thailand*

Introduction

As Fullan (1992, p. 109) asserts "educational change is technically simple and socially complex". Whatever the plans on paper, the process of leading people through change on such a scale presents challenges which require micro-political as well as pedagogic skills. Changes in policy for vocational education are linked to national aspiration and achievements in human resource development and economic growth worldwide. The Thai government has continued to enhance the capacity of vocational education sector in order to meet the increasing demands for skilled manpower (MOE, 2006). In 2007, Thailand's Ministry of Education aims to achieve a 20% increase in the number of vocational students' enrolment (MOE, 2006). The government has seen the necessity to adapt the educational system to the development and labour needs of the country.

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) refers to a range of learning experiences which are relevant to

the world of work and which may occur in a variety of learning contexts, including educational institutions and the workplace. It includes learning designed to develop the skills for practising particular occupations, as well as learning designed to prepare for entry or re-entry into the world of work in general (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2007). TVET has been given much promotion and priority and support to enhance the new policy changes. Various types of training programmes are offered and administered by the Thai Vocational Education Commission.

Eight levels of studies ranging from semi-skilled level, offered to students who have completed the lower secondary level, to technical teacher training programmes (degree level), open to holders of Higher Certificates of Technical Education with high academic records and a desire to become technical teachers at colleges and vocational training centres have been programmed by the Ministry of Education to suit the student's previous academic background (MOE, 2006).

With rapid transformation of societies in social, political, economic, technological, and education atmospheres in Thailand, there has been a major change in people's perception on the need for and nature of TVET. New challenges have begun to emerge, while old ones reemerge. Unfortunately, TVET is not necessarily favoured by all. Foster (1965) challenged the vocational school myth and called it "*vocational school fallacy*." Foster and Blaug (1973) clearly argued that vocationalisation cannot be a remedy for educated unemployment:

"It cannot prepare students for specific occupations and reduce mismatches between education and the labour market; academic streams promise higher wages than vocational streams; accordingly demand for vocational education might not exist"

Furthermore, vocational schooling may create "a sense of second class citizenship among both teachers and taught which militates against effective learning" (Blaug, 1973; MOE, 2006). With the succinct, clear and powerful arguments of Foster, Blaug and others, it was hoped that the issue was buried. Few countries have given up their efforts in developing elaborate systems of VET. After all, it has inherently a powerful appeal. Many countries have set ambitious targets. For example, China had a goal of expanding vocational education so that at least fifty per cent of the enrolments in secondary education would be in vocational education in the near future; India has a similar target of reaching 25 per cent; and Bangladesh 20 per cent (Tilak 2002).

The World Bank's sector policy paper on education (World Bank, 1999) attacked school curricula as excessively theoretical and abstract, insufficiently oriented to local conditions, and insufficiently concerned with attitudes and with manual, social and leadership skills; and accordingly the Bank also suggested increasing vocationalisation of the curricula of academic schools (Tilak 2002).

Performance of the Asian Countries in Vocational Education (1970 to 1990s), based on enrolment in Vocational Education as % of Total Enrolments in Secondary Education)	
<i>Ignored vocational education throughout (Less than 3%)</i>	<i>Maintained reasonably high levels of enrolment throughout (Above 10%)</i>
Bangladesh India Myanmar Pakistan Saudi Arabia Malaysia Kuwait	Indonesia Israel Japan South Korea Papua New Guinea Thailand Turkey
<i>Progressed significantly*</i>	<i>Fared badly**</i>
China Iraq Jordan Syria	Hong Kong Lao United Arab Emirates Qatar Oman Saudi Arabia
* increase by at least five percent points. ** Base/current levels are less than 3 per cent and experienced decline over the years; countries with high enrolments, but experienced decline over the years are not included here. Source: Based on Table 1.	

Table I: *Performance of the Asian Countries in VET (World Bank 1999)*

Table I indicates that, in most Asian countries, vocational education is an important segment, not at secondary, but at upper secondary level. It may, in fact, be non-existent at lower secondary level in many countries in the region. The enrolments in vocational education as a proportion of enrolments in senior secondary level are indeed high in quite a few countries of the region on which data is available. Furthermore, UNESCO-UNEVOC (2007) indicates some key Global statistical monitoring of TVET with several particular challenges such as:

- Improving coverage by ensuring that all forms of TVET are included: education and training; formal education, non-formal education and informal learning; public and private sector or community provision.
- Distinguishing TVET from other types of education, such as general and pre-vocational education; or adult education. A related challenge would be clarifying sponsorship of TVET programmes by Ministry, public or private provision, etc.
- Counting enrolments in these programmes, while dealing with the issue of part-time and short courses in order to avoid double counting of those taking several part-time courses simultaneously or several short courses back to back in the same year.
- Developing indicators (such as Gross Enrolment Ratios and Net Enrolment Rates) or other appropriate indicators for monitoring participation in TVET.

Previous international studies (i.e. studies from Venezuela, Israel, Turkey) confirm that investments in TVET are beneficial for the individual and for the society ([Bennell, 1996](#); [Bishop, 1998](#); [Fiszbein and Psacharopoulos, 1993](#); [Neuman and Ziderman, 1991](#)). [Tunali \(2005\)](#), using Turkish data from the 1988-1998 period, finds that vocational education offered some advantages in terms of labour market outcomes, specifically by rendering females (but not males) more likely to participate in the

labour market, as well as offering some protection against unemployment. Most studies estimate the mean return to education using ordinary least squares (OLS) estimation ([Sakellariou, 2003](#)), which is interpreted as the return to additional schooling for an individual with mean ability. Recently, an increasing number of studies have investigated the pattern of returns to an additional year of education along the earnings distribution. These studies provide a strong support of the benefit of TVET to national economic.

Thailand is one of the industrial countries in the Asia-Pacific region that requires a number of skilled labours. One of the major tasks of the current government in Thailand is to improve the vocational qualification standard for the international and national market. The Office of Vocational Education Commission (OVEC) in Thailand formulated the Thai Vocational Qualification (TVQ), wherein vocational competencies are divided into five levels (MOE 2006). The TVQ places emphasis on competencies, the accreditation of prior learning and experience, the promotion of public-private sector cooperation in providing additional skills training for workers in various enterprises so as to raise labour productivity to international levels, and enhancing the global competitiveness of Thailand.

Although the attempt has been made to create quality in vocational education, OVEC reported that social attitudes to vocational education are not encouraging. Negative attitudes to manual work severely dampen the demand for vocational education. Furthermore, TVET is conceived as a system of education for the poor, and for the educationally backward sections that are not eligible for admission into higher education (OVEC 2006). This view perpetuates inequalities in the system.

Low prestige attached to vocational education and its inherent inequities are somewhat a common phenomenon in Thailand. The suspicion that vocational curricula provide "*a second-class education and track some individual's lower class or lower caste, racial minorities and women - away from academic education and access to jobs of the highest pay and status*" (Grubb, 1985) became quite strong over the years and became obvious through some public policies of ill-treatment of vocational education in educational planning and resource allocation, while contributing to the strengthening this belief (Tilak 2002).

Presently, in Thailand, people are valued for what they know more than what they actually produce. Employers demand more educated people, who are equipped with new sets of knowledge and skills, to perform high value-added forms of business activities to continue to compete in the global market. Fewer young people start their careers with vocational education, but more working people acquire vocational education for enriching and updating their industry-specific knowledge and skills. The drastic changes in industry and society require the Thai vocational education institutions to define their new roles and to create new values to a new composition of stakeholders, and, their performance will be evaluated by a new set of criteria and standards.

Education Choice and Influencing Factors

A number of studies have been conducted by various researchers on the factors influencing the choice of education in various countries. In the US, a study by Baird (1964, Cited by Bradshaw et al 2001) showed that the students' key

choice criteria are good environment, high academic standards and course availability while Brennan (2001) found that the key choice criteria are good faculty and high standards. He also identified quality of the institution and cost as the most important elements. Maguire and Lay (1981 cited in Bradshaw et al 1981) identified financial aid, peer influence, special program, and size of the institutions, location, athletic facilities and social activities as the most important factors in choosing an educational institution.

Mazzarol (1998); Krone et al (1981); and Morgan, Baron, and Bainbridge (2001) suggested the major influential variables are:

- 1) Location of the institution
- 2) Reputation
- 3) Courses that are available with the benefits that they offer
- 4) Career opportunities with employment
- 5) Course specifics (content, structure, method, and assessment)
- 6) School ambience and environment (distant from home, rural/urban place, atmosphere of the campus, facilities of the city)
- 7) Reputation of the institutions

The United Kingdom studies also showed that location, which refers to the town or city in the UK, is an important factor that can influence students' choice of institution. For example, a UK based study by Moogan, Baron and Bainbridge (2001) showed that if students wanted to remain at home and attend an institution locally, they started to prioritize according to the location (distance from home) of the institution, followed by courses on offered. Those wishing to study away from home looked at all the possible courses first and then the location and social variable would have greater weighting for this group. This study also found that the factors that are most influential in their choice of institution might change as the decisions made may be highly influenced by family, friends and others. Pimpa (2005) also confirms the importance of reference groups on students' choice of education. Most studies showed that the relative importance of the evaluative criteria changes over a period of time prior to making the choice of institution to attend.

Despite the fact that students' choice of education is complex and multi stage decision-making process, there has been a handful of academic research conducted in the area of TVET choice. A number of previous studies examined various factors influencing students' choice of basic or higher education (Pimpa, 2005). This research, therefore, aims to investigate factors influencing Thai students' decision-making to enrol in TVET institutions. Types and sources of influencing factors from personal (reference groups) and non-personal sources are the major focus of this study.

Research Questions

Based on the purpose of the study, three research questions have been postulated.

- What criteria do Thai students use to evaluate their decision to enrol in the vocational education institution?
- Which reference groups influence students' choices of vocational education?
- What are the pattern of relationships among influencing factors and reference groups?

Research Design and Methodology

Stage 1:

The purpose of this phase is to measure factors influencing Thai students' decision to enrol in vocational institution. It adopts a quantitative (or positivistic) approach. Samplings of this study are first year students who are currently enrolled in 15 TVET institutions in the East of Thailand. Researchers selected first year students because their choices are not painted by some other experiences, such as impression with the school, or friends at new school, which may change their thinking.

The researcher contacted 15 government vocational institutions and asked for permission to collect data from 2,215 first year students. A total of 412 completed questionnaires were returned, and used in the analysis. A profile of the sample is presented in Table II

Age	16-19 years (median 17 years)
Gender	Male = 51.8%, Female = 48.2%
Programs of Enrolment	Business, Tourism, Management = 51% Technical and Engineering = 49%
Grade point average from previous schools	Below 2.00 = 18.5%, 2.00-2.50 = 35.6% 2.51-3.00 = 29.3%, < 3.00 = 16.6%
Family Monthly Average Income	Less than 10,00 Thai Baht = 50.5% 10,000-30,000 Thai Baht = 42.5% Higher than 30,000 Thai Baht = 7.0%

Table II: Profiles of the students participating in this study

Instrument Development

The extensive literature reviewed was performed, in order to identify various factors influencing students' choice of VET education. Then, questionnaires were developed and divided into three parts: demographic information of the respondents, twenty items used response categories of 1 (least influence) to 5 (strongly influence) focusing on factors influencing choice of VET education, and fifteen items used response categories of 1 (least influence) to 5 (strongly influence) focusing on the influence from reference groups.

Validity measures the degree to which items on the research instrument actually relate to the content of the area or issue under investigation (Hair et al 1998). The content validity of the research instrument used in this research relates to the extent to which it examines various influencing factors on Thai students' choices of VET education. Hair et al (1998) suggests that the best way in which to ensure content validity is to subject the instrument to judgmental validation by experts in the area. In this case the experts were the deputy directors from the Office of Vocational Education, two research fellows at Graduate School of Commerce (Burapha University, the major university in the eastern Thailand), and three vocational students. Their feedback, both positive and negative, helped shape the final version of the questionnaire.

In terms of internal consistency of the scale, standard deviations, means, and reliability values for the scales were performed (estimated by Cronbach's alpha coefficient). The standard deviation values are satisfactorily close to the expected values for a normal distribution of responses, and the Cronbach's alpha values are all well above the minimum recommended criterion of 0.70 (Hair et al, 1998), providing strong evidence for internal consistency of the scales.

Stage 2:

To further investigate the effect of choice factors on students' perception on vocational education, two focus group interviews were conducted. Each group had seven participants. The first group was recruited through researcher's network from vocational colleges in Choburi (in the east of Thailand), and then a snowball technique was employed to garner participants for the second groups. The researcher moderated the interviews. After a general introduction, in which the study was described as "Vocational Schools Experience", and bio-data collection, the moderator facilitated discussion on the choices of vocational education and how these are influenced by factors finding from the first stage of this study.

Results

Factors Influencing Students' Choice of Vocational Education

To determine factors influencing students' choice, factor analysis was performed to analyse the underlying dimensions of the evaluative criteria that were used by vocational students. Prior to that, the mean score of all variables were analysed. The extraction method used was principle component method. To determine the number of factors to extract, the latent root criterion was used because the number of variables is less than 50 (Hair et al 1998). According to this technique, researchers selected factors that are having eigenvalues that are greater than 1. To obtain the orthogonal rotation, varimax method was used in this study. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy of this analysis shows the score of 0.9212 indicating that the degree of intercorrelation and the appropriateness of using factor analysis as meritorious. Results of factor analysis are presented in Table III.

Principal components analysis revealed the presence of five components with eigenvalue exceeding 1. These five factors accounted for 63.62% of the total variance. All items show the factor loading ranging from 0.40 to 0.80. An inspection of the screeplot revealed a clear break after the fifth component. Using Catell's (1966) Scree test, it was decided to retain five components for further investigation.

Factor Label	Items	Factor Loadings	\bar{X}
Factor 1: Personal Attitude			
	I am interested in VET	0.801	3.04
	My personality suits VET	0.731	2.96
	I admired VET skills	0.643	2.99
	VET is for practical people	0.614	2.79
<i>Average Score</i>			2.95
Factor 2: Curriculum			
	VET curriculum is variety	0.795	3.20
	VET curriculum is modern	0.732	3.06
	I will be specialist in my field from VET curriculum	0.730	3.26
	VET emphasize modern technical and business learning	0.661	3.24
<i>Average Score</i>			3.19
Factor 3: Future Employment			

	VET will help me lead to the work I want to	0.496	3.16
	People with VET diploma is attractive in the labour market	0.462	3.23
	VET guarantee future employment	0.443	3.33
<i>Average Score</i>			3.24
Factor 4: Attractiveness of Institution			
	VET teachers are qualified	0.770	3.18
	VET institutions hold credibility and good image	0.759	3.14
	VET institutions provides modern learning materials	0.693	3.27
	Nice atmosphere and ambience	0.690	3.19
	Academic reputation of VET institutions	0.432	3.13
	Famous alumni	0.420	3.20
<i>Average Score</i>			3.18
Factor 5: Tuition Fees			
	Cheap tuition fees compare to university	0.522	3.01
	Scholarships provided by institutions	0.432	3.27
	Government scholarships for excellent VET students	0.401	3.06
<i>Average Score</i>			3.11

Table III: Factor Analysis of Influencing Factors

The first factor is labelled as '*Personal Attitude*' of which four items were loaded on it. The test on internal consistency of the items in this factor indicates the Cronbach's alpha score of 0.87.

The second factor is labelled as '*Curriculum*' of which four items were loaded on it. The test on internal consistency of the items in this factor indicates the Cronbach's alpha score of 0.88.

The third factor is labelled as '*Future Employment*' of which three items were loaded on it. The test on internal consistency of the items in this factor indicates the Cronbach's alpha score of 0.79.

The fourth factor is labelled as '*Attractiveness of Institutions*' of which six items were loaded on it. The test on internal consistency of the items in this factor indicates the Cronbach's alpha score of 0.87.

Finally, the fifth factor is labelled as '*Tuition Fees*' of which three items were loaded on it. The test on internal consistency of the items in this factor indicates the Cronbach's alpha score of 0.70.

The Influence of Reference Groups on Students' Choice of VET

Results in Table IV indicate that influencing factor from teachers from previous schools is the strongest personal influencing factors, followed by influencing factors from family and senior students who currently enrol in vocational institutions.

<i>Reference Groups</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>S.D</i>
Family	2.89	1.11
Relatives	2.73	1.06
Friends	2.74	2.96
Teachers	2.96	1.04
Senior Students	2.75	1.04

Table IV: Influencing Factors from Reference Groups

In terms of correlation among five factors influencing students' choice of VET institutions and influencing factors from reference groups, the results indicate an overall significant positive relationship among all factors. However, levels of strength among variables are diverse, as presented in Table V.

Factors Influencing Choices of VET	Family Influence	Influence from Relatives	Influence from Friends	Influence from Teachers	Influence from Senior Students
	R	R	R	R	R
Personal Attitude	.50**	.37**	.43**	.50**	.40**
Curriculum	.46**	.26**	.35**	.44**	.32**
Future Employment	.41**	.18**	.28**	.35**	.21**
Institution Attractiveness	.41**	.27**	.35**	.43**	.38**
Tuition Fees	.31**	.21**	.25**	.32**	.31**

** p < .01

Table V: Relationship among Variables

It reveals strong relationship between personal attitude and family influence ($r = .50, p < .01$), and personal attitude and influence from teachers from secondary schools ($r = .50, p < .01$).

Medium correlation was reported among influence from family and curriculum ($r = .46, p < .01$), future employment ($r = .41, p < .01$), institution attractiveness ($r = .41, p < .01$), and tuition fees ($r = .31, p < .01$), influence from relatives and personal attitude ($r = .37, p < .01$), influence from friends and personal attitude ($r = .43, p < .01$), curriculum ($r = .35, p < .01$), institution attractiveness ($r = .35, p < .01$), influence from teachers and curriculum ($r = .44, p < .01$), future employment ($r = .35, p < .01$), institution attractiveness ($r = .43, p < .01$), tuition fees ($r = .32, p < .01$), influence from senior students and personal attitude ($r = .40, p < .01$), curriculum ($r = .32, p < .01$), institution attractiveness ($r = .38, p < .01$), and tuition fees ($r = .31, p < .01$).

Finally, weak relationship was found between influence from relatives and curriculum ($r = .26, p < .01$), future employment ($r = .18, p < .01$), institution attractiveness ($r = .27, p < .01$), influence from friends and future employment ($r = .28, p < .01$), tuition fee ($r = .25, p < .01$), and influence from senior students and future employment ($r = .21, p < .01$).

Qualitative Findings

The results indicate that personal attitude is important for them if they are interested in pursuing their career immediately after education. They believed that vocational training will help them gaining some skills that traditional academic education cannot provide. Almost all of them believe that the generic technical skills and occupationally specific skills provided in vocational education increase students' productivity, skill transfer, job access, and job stability when vocational graduates find training-related jobs.

"I chose vocational college because I want to learn mechanical skills. I know this is going to

lead me to my dream job and the college offers the course I want” (15, male, mechanical engineering student)

“I see myself as a practical person, not really into year 12 and University. I need to do some study and work” (16, male, Tourism student)

Some participants expressed their positive feelings toward TVET because of its practicality and real-world education. They used words such as *‘real’, ‘practical’, ‘fast work’, ‘secured future’, ‘focus’, and ‘employment’* when compared TVET to basic education. Students in home economics and tourism seem to praise the value of vocational education that suits their personality.

“I learn cookery at my college and I know I will work in a goof hotel, or maybe overseas, after graduation. This education surely helps me to travel the world” (16, female, Home economics student)

Furthermore, most participants agreed that students’ social background play a pivotal role in their decision to enrol in the vocational college. Most of them perceived themselves as member of the low to middle socio-economics family. They seem to accept the fact that vocational education in Thailand is appropriate for students from poor socioeconomic (and academic) background. Since the cost of education is not expensive, completion time is acceptable (3 years for certificate and 4-5 years for diploma level). They identified higher education as the long-term plan for their lives. Most of them plan to obtain a degree after spending a few years at work.

Researcher also asked some participants regarding curriculum of their programmes. Most of them agree that prior to their enrolments they discussed curriculum issue with their teachers, siblings, and friends. Most participants agreed that the curriculum reflect a wide variety of issues and subjects, ranging from gaining basic skills that require few materials and little skill to vocational content in highly sophisticated level. They do not see a strong influence from their family members, in particular parents, on this issue. Guidance teachers seem to have a strong influence on this aspect of Thai students’ choice of vocational education. Most participants collected data regarding different vocational colleges’ curriculum, reputation, and facilities from their friends, sibling, and guidance teachers.

“My sibling who is studying at the college told me all about the place. It sounds like the programme is very interesting. I trusted him!”
(17 Female, Tourism student)

“It was difficult for me when I decided to do vocational study instead of year 10 because I knew nothing about the college. Luckily, my guidance teacher from my former school provided me with good suggestions and clear pathway” (16 Male, Commerce student)

In terms of future employment, most students agreed that they discussed this aspect with their parents and siblings. Five participants in this study expressed that different family members played different roles in influencing their decision making. Parents initiated the need for the family to have someone who spent only a few years at college and then find work to support the rest of family. Siblings provided them with information about programmes and place to study. Furthermore, friends and guidance teachers convinced them that vocational education is a good choice for rapid employment.

Interestingly, most students cited that activities and campaigns from the office of vocational education commission is one of the major factors convincing them to enrol in the vocational education institutions. Since 2005, the vocational

education commission has attempted different strategies to attract students to consider vocational education. One of the major strategies is “*re-imagining vocational education*”. Examples of activities for this project include free TVET seminars and workshops nationwide, working with the community during the tsunami disaster, establishing “fixed-it” centre as a free technical service provider to the community, collaborating with international agencies in key industrious areas such as petrochemical, information technology, agriculture, and aquaculture, and organising more social activities for the public such as “Gentleman Vocational Students Program” or “Mister and Miss Vocational Education pageant”. These activities help in re-imagining the status of vocational education in the Thai society.

“I went to the vocational education seminar last year and I was impressed by the quality of the institution. Vocational education is not only a poor grade education as people said.” (18 Male, Agriculture student)

“I think vocational education is not all about students who could not perform well in the academic world. That is a dull idea! I know I am smart and I am doing well in my study” (17 Male, Tourism student)

It seems that Thai students seem to be comfortable to enrol in the vocational education program that are accepted (or being seen as a goof program) by different reference groups in the Thai society. This situation is very similar to previous research in school choices in most countries in South East Asia which is categorised as collectivistic society.

Conclusions and Discussions

This research study confirms that the key criteria students used in confirming their decision-making to enrol in the vocational institutions are personal attitude towards vocational education, curriculum of the courses offered by institutions, potential for future employment after graduation, attractiveness of the campus, and tuition fees and scholarships. These factors should be strategically communicated to the potential students. With regard to the attitude towards vocational education, Thai Ministry of Education must carry on promoting a good image of vocational education and its students to the society. Since vocational education has suffered from being perceived as a second class education and taught which militates against effective learning, marketing communication, in an effort to create an on-going understanding with students and community, is strongly recommended.

With regard to curriculum, vocational institutions should emphasize on modernity of their curriculum, activities to develop students’ academic skills, teaching approach and how these help students to excel in their studies. However, vocational education need not necessarily be purely vocational and technical. It should also include general skills and attributes that are useful across a wide variety of occupations. This is particularly important in the rapidly changing economic systems.

Financial support, in the form of scholarship, apprenticeship, and assistance, should be one of the key tools to attract more students to enrol in the TVET programme. Both quantitative and qualitative results from this study confirm that Thai students will look for some financial supports from the institutions, government, or industries. The Ministry of Education should strengthen its collaboration

with industries, local communities, and international organisation to inject more scholarships (or financial aids) to students who may lack an opportunity to further their education after year 9. This form of assistance will help strengthening relationship among the institutions, community, and students.

To attract more students, vocational institutions must also highlight the quality of education that they are providing. This includes informing the target audience of the variety and number of programs, teachers, and prospect of future employment. Institutions can showcase in their promotional effort statistics on how soon the graduate generally obtains employment, the types of jobs and a brief profile of companies that employed them, as well as scholarships and financial aid available to students.

Various reference groups, both distant and proximal groups, play a pivotal role in influencing students' final decision to enrol in a vocational institution. Guidance teachers from their previous schools are the most influential points of contact. Different reference groups can influence students' choice in various ways. For example, guidance teachers can help by providing information on programs, institutions, and the benefit of attending vocational institutions. Friends can influence students by opining students' attitude on TVET programmes. At the same times, family members of students also play a significant role in influencing their decision making. Vocational institutions should communicate with them and educate them, in order to promote long-term understanding of vocational education.

This study confirms that in a collectivistic society, like Thailand, education stresses the skills and virtues necessary to be accepted among group members. Choice of vocational education in Thailand is related to "social approval" and "group identification". Students need to feel secured about being accepted by their social groups and networks. They need to know that what they are going to study is right and not oppose to social acceptance. This is a major concern for the Thai Ministry of Education to promote the value of group. Strategies to promote vocational education in Thailand should entail the need to preserve group harmony and consequently results in students' positive perception about TVET.

Global demands for skills have increased substantially in recent years as a result of scientific and technological advances, rapidly changing markets and the intensified global economic competition due to accelerated globalisation (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2007). This form of competition for skilled labour effects global economic transformation. An increasing proportion of countries are in direct competition in trade for more advanced goods and services within the global economy. To compete successfully in this global competition, the Thai government must strategically address significance of both formal and informal vocational training and skills training systems. This is the key challenges of responding to the new and different global labour market requirements.

References

- Bennell, P. (1996). General versus Vocational Secondary Education in Developing Countries: a review of the rates of return evidence, *Journal of Development Studies*, Vol. 33, pp.230-47.
- Bishop, J. (1998). Occupation-specific versus General Education and Training, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 59, pp.24-38.
- Blaug, M. (1973). Education and the Employment Problem in Developing Countries. (Geneva: International Labour Office)
- Bradshaw, G. Espinoza, S., and Hausman, C. (2001). The College Decision-Making of High Achieving Students. *College and University*, Vol.2, pp.15-22.
- Brennan, L. (2001). How Prospective Students Choose Universities: A Buyer Behaviour Perspectives, Unpublished Ph.D. thesis. The University of Melbourne.
- Catell, R. (1966). The Scree Test for Number of Factors, *Multivariate Behavioral Research*, Vol. 1, pp.245-76.
- Fiszbein, A., Psacharopoulos, G. (1993). A cost-benefit analysis of educational investment in Venezuela: 1989 update, *Economics of Education Review*, Vol. 12 No.4, pp.293-8.
- Foster, P.J. (1965). *The Vocational School Fallacy in Development Planning*. In: Anderson and Bowman (eds.)
- Grubb, W.N. (1985). The Convergence of Educational System and the Role of Vocationalism. *Comparative Education Review*, Vol.29, pp.526-548.
- Hair, J.F., Anderson, R.E., Tatham R.L., and Black, W.C. (1998). *Multivariate Data Analysis 5th Edition*, California: Prentice-Hall International Inc.
- Krone, F., Gilly, M., Zeithaml, V., and Lamb C.W. (1981). *Factors Influencing the Graduate Business Schools Decision*, American Marketing Service Proceedings, pp.453-456.
- Mazzarol, T. (1998). Critical Success Factors for International Education Marketing. *International Journal of Educational Management*, Vol.12, pp.82-90.
- Neuman, S., Ziderman, A. (1991). Vocational schooling, occupational matching, and labor market earnings in Israel, *Journal of Human Resources*, Vol. 26 No.2, pp.256-82.
- Ministry of Education, Thailand (2006). *The Annual Policy for Ministry of Education*, Bangkok: Kurusapha.
- Moogan, Y.J., Baron, S. and Bainbridge, S. (2001). Timing and Trade-off in the Marketing of higher Education courses. *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*, Vol.19, pp.179-87.
- Pimpa, N. (2005). A family affair: The effect of family on Thai students' choices of international education. *Higher Education*, Vol. 49, pp.431-48.
- Psacharopolous, G. (1987). To Vocationalize or Not to Vocationalize: That is the Curriculum Question. *International Review of Education*, Vol.33, pp.187-211.
- Tilak, J. (2002). *Vocational Education and Training and Asia: The Handbook on Educational Research in the Asia Pacific Region* (eds. John P Keeves and Rye Watanabe, Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Tunali, I. (2005). *General vs. vocational secondary school choice and labor market outcomes in Turkey, 1988-1998*, paper presented at EALE/SOLE Conference.
- UNESCO-UNEVOC (2007). *Participation in Formal Technical and Vocational Education and Training Programmes Worldwide - An Initial Statistical Study*. Paris: UNESCO.
- World Bank (1999). *Priorities and Strategies for Education*. (Washington DC.)

