

The Impact of Economic Constraints and Career Adaptability on Decent Work Perception Among Undergraduates: The Case In Vietnam

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Abstract:

Among a sample of 507 university students in Vietnam, this study investigated the impact of economic constraints and career adaptability on decent work perception on the grounds of the Theory of Working Psychology (PWT). Utilizing SEM methodology, this study discovered that economic constraints have a positive relation to career adaptability; economic constraints and career adaptability are both positively associated with decent work perception. These relationships differ from previous studies, which showed a negative relationship between economic constraints and decent work and between economics constraints and career adaptability. Nevertheless, this study offers reasonable explanations so that the results are acceptable in the context of Vietnam. Based on the primary findings, some recommendations are given to assist college students in increasing their prospects of finding quality work.

Key Word: decent work, PWT, economic constraints, career adaptability, students.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Decent work, initially proposed in 1999 by the International Labor Organization (ILO), has quickly acquired popularity around the world and has proven its critical role in achieving sustainable development goals. On the World Day of Social Justice in 2014, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon proclaimed: “*As experience has shown, merely economic growth is insufficient. More actions must be taken to empower people via decent work, to support workers via social protection, and to ensure that the poor and marginalized have their voices heard.*” However, despite global attempts to maintain the human right to work in dignity, equality, and safety, many workers around the world face precarious jobs, delayed wages, and poor working conditions. To address this issue, not just the government's macro-level efforts are needed, but each worker must also have a clear grasp of what constitutes decent work in order to protect their own interests.

Students have an integral role to play in the labor market as they are the ones who shape the future labor market. Thus, studying their perception of decent work and the factors affecting it is important. Recent years have seen a number of studies on decent work, however, just a few studies regarding decent work perception among students are carried out (Wang *et al.*, 2019; Ma, Huang and Autin, 2021; Wei, Chan and Autin, 2021), especially in the context of developing countries.

The Psychology of Working Theory (Duffy *et al.*, 2016) provides a framework to understand the impact of contextual forces on decent work and its outcomes. Given that PWT is a suitable and widely used tool in understanding decent work, many studies tried to extend PWT in diverse context to have a deeper insight to decent work. Decent work plays a core role in PWT, referring to quality jobs in five aspects: Safe working conditions, proper relaxation time, adequate income, health-care coverage, and job ideals that align with family values.

There has been support for PWT in samples of different countries and diverse groups, such as: Chinese working adults (Wang *et al.*, 2019); workers with Chiari malformation in America (Tokar and Kaut, 2018); low-income employees in Turkey (Kozan *et al.*, 2019); sexual minorities (Allan *et al.*, 2019). However, there is still

a dearth of research on decent work perception among university students, particularly students in developing countries. To fill this research gap, this study examines the impact of economics constraint, an important contextual factor in PWT, to future decent work perception among students in Vietnam. This relationship is mediated by a psychological mechanism - career adaptability.

II. EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Economic constraints to decent work perception

Economic Constraints is one of the two contextual variables in PWT, which is defined as the limited economic resources that individuals have experienced across their entire life (Duffy *et al.*, 2016). Existing studies mostly agreed with this definition (England *et al.*, 2020; Ma, You and Tang, 2020; Ma, Huang and Autin, 2021). Economic constraints are originally proposed to conversely influence decent work perception for two reasons. Considering that a poor family can hardly facilitate with achievement and career development, children born in those families do not get access to decent work preparation. Secondly, economic barriers also lead to limited access to study tools, lack of opportunities for career exploration, as well as subjective feelings about social class – this is also a reason for their negative attitudes toward people around them (McLoyd, 1998). As a consequence, individuals experienced economic constraints believe that their opportunities to attain decent work are sparse.

H1: Economic constraints is negatively correlated with decent work perception among Vietnamese students.

Economic constraints to career adaptability

Career adaptability refers to individual's readiness and resources to cope with current and future employment responsibilities. Career adaptability can be considered as a bridge connecting economic constraints and decent work perception. Being constrained economically has been found to lower career adaptability (Duffy *et al.*, 2016). The reason is attitude toward career is nurtured from a young age in families with a strong economic base and high social position. In other words, a family with a strong financial foundation is essential for future career adaptability (Diemer and Blustein, 2007). In contrast, economic hardship hinders young people's ability to adapt in their career by reducing access to careers and being psychologically unprepared for future careers. Later, in the Theory of Working Psychology, the relationship between economic constraints and career adaptability was hypothesized to be negative (Duffy, 2016). Empirical studies developed later have backed up the theory's assertions. People with economic challenges, according to Ma et al (2020), have insufficient psychological resources to conduct job exploration, resulting in low career adaptability. Tokar (2018) also demonstrated that economic constraints have a negative impact on career adaptation. Given that the majority of research have verified the negative impact of economic constraints on career adaption, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Economic constraints is negatively correlated with career adaptability among Vietnamese students.

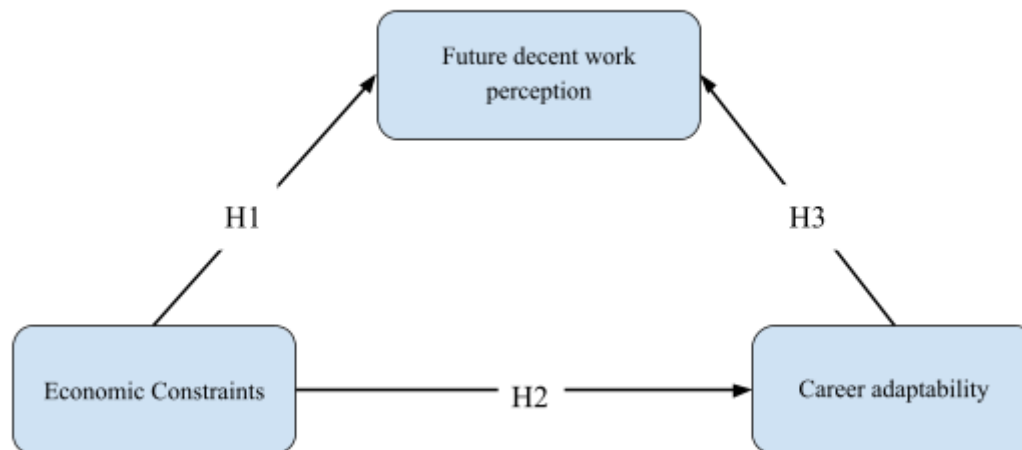
Career adaptability to decent work perception

Many studies indicate that career adaptability positively influences decent work perception. Career development perspectives from Douglass and Duffy (2015) suggested that in university students, a higher level of career adaptability leads to job maturity and the ability to find good jobs. Individuals' high adaptation to work might encourage favorable views toward present and prospective employment (Porfeli and Savickas, 2012). Duffy (2016) argued that a higher level of adaptability in work encourages favorable attitudes toward present and future careers in this Psychology of Working Theory (PWT). On the grounds of PWT findings, Ma et al., (2021) employed a study to test PWT's applicability among nursing college students and found a positive relation between career adaptability and future decent work perception. In light of existing findings, our last proposition is given below:

H3: Career adaptability is positively correlated with decent work perception among Vietnamese students.

Research paradigm

Figure 1: Research paradigm



III. RESEARCH METHODS

Respondents and data collection

The survey's participants are students studying economics or engineering at Vietnamese universities/academies. The data is assured to be kept confidential and only be used for research purposes. We acquired 550 datasets and eliminated those that contained incorrect school information, a total of 507 valid datasets were collected after all.

Scale development and questionnaire design

The Scale of Decent Work Perception with 5 observed variables is adjusted from the scale of (Autin *et al.*, 2017), whose decent work perception of individuals will be assessed on the following aspects: safe working conditions, access to health care, adequate compensation, hours of work and rest, organizational values that match family and social values. Economic constraints scale is referenced from the ECS scale of (Duffy *et al.*, 2019), which economic constraint is defined as the lack of economic resources (household income), this factor plays a role as a barrier to finding decent work. Career Adaptation Scale with 4 questions adapted from the scale of Ma *et al* (2019).

The questionnaire is designed in 2 parts. Part 1 includes 28 questions related to 3 variables of the research model. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree". Part 2 includes 7 questions related to personal information of students including: gender, school year, school, background, parents' education, family background, work experience.

Data analysis

To evaluate the measurement and structural model, the four-step method of structural equation modeling is used. The measurement model used Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Cronbach Alpha to assess reliability and compatibility. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is used to assess the valid scale of the variables. Finally, the structural model tests the path effects and proposed significance. In addition, evaluations of mediation and moderation effects were carried out.

IV. RESULTS

Descriptive analysis

In general, 42% of the sample were male (213 students) and the rest were female (58%, 294 students). 326 students chose economics as their major, while the others chose science or engineering. 344 students were from rural areas, while the rest were from metropolitan areas. The contestants included 75 freshmen, 81 sophomores, 253 juniors, and 98 seniors. Most of these students (76,7%) have working experience (full time and part time).

Table 1: Sample demographics

Characteristics		Frequency	Percent(%)
1. Gender	Male	213	42
	Female	294	58
2. University Grade	Freshman	75	14,8
	Sophomore	81	16
	Junior	253	49,9
	Senior	98	19,3
3. Major	Economics	326	64,3
	Engineering	181	35,7
4. Background	Rural	344	67,9
	Urban	163	32,1
5. Parental Education	Secondary school or below	88	17,4
	High school	128	25,2
	Vocational training and associate's degree	63	12,4
	Bachelor's degree or higher	228	45
6. Working experience (part-time or full-time)	Yes	389	76,7
	No	118	23,3
Total		507	100

Measurement Model Testing

Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient and Exploratory Factor Analysis were used to test the measurement model.

The reliability of the variables was tested by Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. According to Nunally (1978), if the variables have the Cronbach Alpha index > 0.6 and the Corrected item-total Correlation index > 0.3 , the data ensures reliability. Based on the results of Table 1, the participating variables all satisfy the conditions.

Next, Exploratory factor analysis (EFA), Principal axis factoring extraction, and Promax rotation were used to evaluate the convergence value of the scale (except for the scales in the moderator variable). The KMO coefficient of the Bartlett test is used to measure the compatibility of the survey sample. The results (Table 1) show that the Decent work perception scale DW4 was rejected because of factor loading < 0.5 and scale DW5 was ejected after that because of factor loading < 0.5 . Finally, 12 observed variables are classified into 3 groups of factors. The KMO coefficient of the Bartlett test is 0.776 (ranging from 0.5 to 1). The eigenvalue of the factor group is more than 1. The Factor Loading of the factors are all > 0.3 , according to Hair et al. (2016), the data is said to be convergent.

Thus, after exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and Cronbach Alpha, the scale has 12 observed variables, converging into 1 independent variable, 1 intermediate variable, and 1 dependent variable. The above results show that the initial scales ensure validity and reliability.

Table 1: Standardized loadings and reliabilities.

Construct	Indicators		Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha
CA	CA1	Thinking about what my future will be like	0.714	0.768
	CA2	Making decisions by myself	0.599	
	CA3	Observing different ways of doing things	0.741	
	CA4	Taking care to do things well	0.630	
EC	EC1	For as long as I can remember, I have had very limited economic or financial resources	0.766	0.828
	EC2	Throughout most of my life, I have struggled financially	0.725	
	EC3	For as long as I can remember, I have had difficulties making ends meet	0.545	
	EC4	I have considered myself poor or very close to poor most of my life	0.760	
	EC5	For most of my life, I have not felt financially stable	0.694	
DW	DW1	At my future work, I will feel safe from emotional or verbal abuse of any kind	0.562	0.730
	DW2	My future employer will provide acceptable options for healthcare	0.838	
	DW3	I will be rewarded adequate for my future work	0.638	
KMO = 0,776 > 0,5; P=,000 (Bartlett' Test) Principal axis factoring extraction and Promax rotation. Eigenvalue of 3 factor group > 1. Note: EC: economic constraints; CA: career adaptability; DW: future decent work perceptions.				

The fit of the model by Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) is used to test with 3 variables Economic constraint (EC), Career Adaptability (CA), Future decent work perception (DW). According to Hair et al. (2010), the results are in good agreement with the experimental data: $\chi^2/df = 2,634 (< 5)$, CFI = 0,958; TLI = 0,945; GFI = 0,960 (> 0,9), RMSEA = 0,057 (< 0,06).

Table 2: Measurement scales' goodness-of-fit indices

Fit Index	Recommended Value	Measurement Model	Structural Model
χ^2/df	≤ 3	2.634	2.634
CFI	≥ 0.9	0.958	0.958
TLI	≥ 0.9	0.945	0.945
GFI	≥ 0.9	0.960	0.960
RMSEA	≤ 0.06	0.057	0.057

Structural Model Testing

The Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to test the proposed research hypotheses. Statistical indicators of model fit include $\chi^2/df = 2,634 (< 3)$, CFI = 0,958; TLI = 0,945; GFI = 0,960 (> 0,9); RMSEA = 0,057 (< 0,06). The final results show that all the indexes of the model meet the required level (Hair et al., 2010). The research hypotheses proposed were accepted at the 5% significance level. Economic constraints impact Career adaptability, and both impact Future decent work perception. The analysis results show the level of impact of three main factors: (1) Economic constraints have a positive effect on Career adaptability ($\beta = 0.29$,

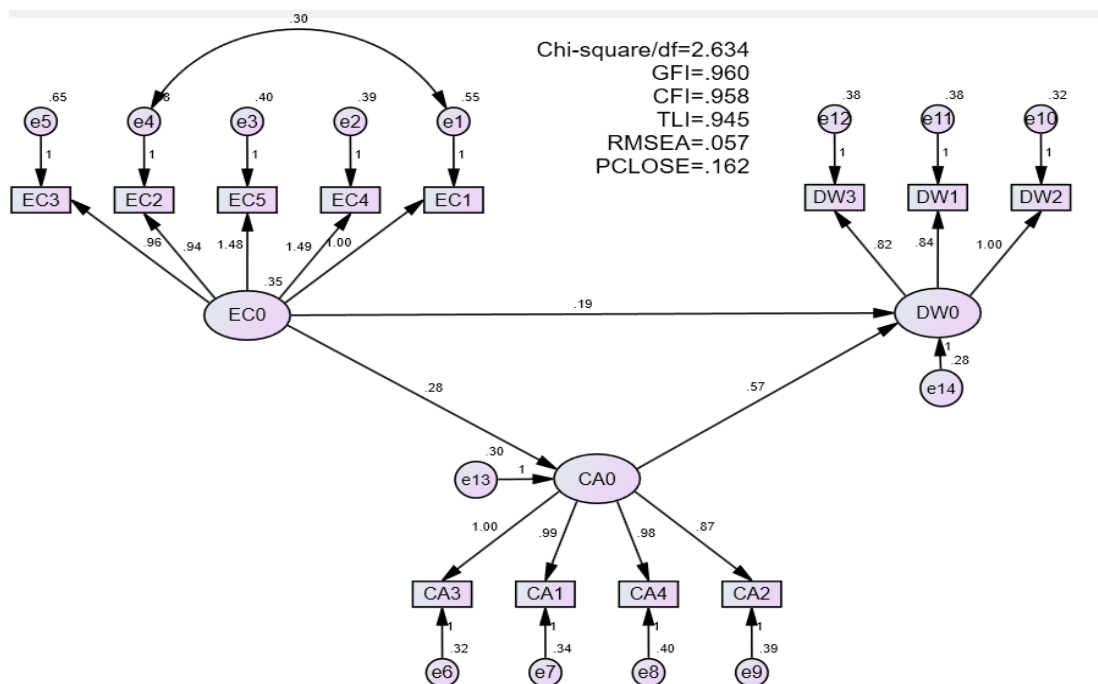
p < 0.001); (2) Career adaptability positively affects Future decent work perception ($\beta = 0.505$, p < 0.001) and (3) Economic constraints have a positive effect on Future decent work perception ($\beta = 0.17$, p < 0.001).

Table 3: Standardized solution of structural modeling analysis

Hypotheses	Standardized Path Coefficients	S.E.	C.R.	Supported
H1 EC → CA	0.290***	0.057	4.993	Supported
H2 CA → DW	0.505***	0.073	7.761	Supported
H3 EC → DW	0.170**	0.021	3.050	Supported

Note: *** P-value < 0,001
** P-value < 0,01

Figure 2: Final structural model



Testing of Mediating Effects

The bootstrap method in 95% confidence interval with 1000 iterations was used to test the influence of the mediating variables Career adaptability (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Results were shown by Table 4 that the indirect impact of Economic constraints on Future decent work perception ($\beta = 0,147$, p < 0,001). Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted. The results have proved that Career adaptability has an indirect effect on reducing the impact of Economic Constraints on Future decent work perception.

Table 4: Indirect Effects from Structural Model

Parameter	Direct Effect	Specific Indirect Effect	Standardized Total Effect	Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
EC → CA → DW	0.170**	0.147***	0.317***	0.076	0.238

Note: *** P-value < 0.001
** P-value < 0.01

V. DISCUSSION

With a view of validating the PWT model with diverse samples and examining the hypothesis within the PWT, data was collected from university students in Vietnam. Overall, the results confirmed three findings and added new insights to the PWT.

Firstly, economic constraints have a positive correlation with decent work perception. Students experiencing financial hardship tend to show a higher level of decent work perception. Those students feel optimistic about their ability to get a quality job and hold belief in securing decent work after graduation. The result is statistically significant, but inconstant with previous studies (Tokar and Kaut, 2018; Ma, You and Tang, 2020; Ma, Huang and Autin, 2021). However, this result can be explained by their adversity quotient. Noting that living in difficulties may be a motivation for those students to make efforts with a view to securing a better life. The ability to overcome harsh situations, turn challenges into opportunities is a crucial contributing factor to success. This finding can be considered as a significant contribution to the PWT as well as related studies in Vietnam and developing countries in general.

Secondly, economic constraints indirectly affect decent work perception via career adaptability. That means career adaptability acts as a mediator in the model. Namely, economic constraints are positively related to career adaptability (1) and career adaptability positively relation to decent work perception (2). Results from the relationship (1) showed that students living in economic hardships tend to have higher adaptability in work, which is different from previous studies (England *et al.*, 2020; Ma, Huang and Autin, 2021). Economic constraints act as motivation in lieu of barriers in this case. Putting students in limited economic situations indeed boosts their adaptability in life. This ability, in their future careers, is the key factor to help them obtain decent work (Duffy *et al.*, 2016). Results from the relationship (2) shows that students with higher degree of career adaptability are better at work performance, thereby having a better chance of achieving success as compared to those with lower degree of career adaptability. This is in line with a majority of empirical studies (Autin *et al.*, 2017; Tokar and Kaut, 2018; England *et al.*, 2020; Ma, Huang and Autin, 2021).

VI. CONCLUSION

This study aims at exploring the impact of economic constraints, career adaptation on the perception of decent work among undergraduates in Viet Nam. Utilizing SEM methodology, this study indicates that economic constraints have a positive relation to career adaptability; economic constraints and career adaptability both have positive relation with decent work perception. In contrast, previous research has found a negative association between economic limitations and decent work, as well as a negative relationship between economic constraints and career adaptability. Nonetheless, this research provides logical reasons for the findings, making the findings acceptable in the context of Vietnam. Some recommendations are provided based on the key findings to aid college students in boosting their chances of finding decent work.

VII. RECOMMENDATION

Firstly, based on the finding that economic constraints are positively associated with decent work perception, we propose that social employment organizations and universities should launch special programs for students. It is necessary to help them reduce their economic burdens, and on the other hand, encourage students to confront difficulties, boost their motivation to get out of difficult situations. The assistance should be in form of orientation and self-reliance programs instead of charity programs.

Secondly, based on the positive impact of career adaptability on decent work perception, appropriate measures can be provided by improving their work volition. Career adaptability is considered as a malleable psychological structure, therefore, to enhance student applicability, academic consultants can focus on the four edges of career adaptability and assess the strengths and weaknesses of college students. Honing their own skills and experiences to confidently face obstacles in their future working life should be emphasized. Activities that can assist students in adapting to their future careers can be provided by the school can be seminars, talk-shows, workshops to help students identify their strength points and overcome challenges in job interviews or in their future jobs.

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