



## The Examination of the Factors Determining Career Engagement for Students Preparing for a Social Job

Andrea JUHÁSZ-KLÉR, Erika VARGA

[Kler.Andrea@gtk.szie.hu](mailto:Kler.Andrea@gtk.szie.hu), [Varga.Erika@gtk.szie.hu](mailto:Varga.Erika@gtk.szie.hu)  
(Szent István University, Gödöllő, Hungary)

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**Abstract:** *The higher education courses for social experts started more than 25 years ago in Hungary. Since then more than 20 thousand students have earned a degree in social areas. Some of them quit their original jobs whereas a lot of these specialists still provide support as human assistants and regard their profession a career. Due to the huge amount of experience accumulated in both education and practice since then, in our empirical research an answer was sought to the question which personal and professional competencies determine the long-term engagement to a career and how the competency experience of the students correlates with their further career aspirations. In the research nearly 500 responses from students from 8 different Hungarian higher education institutions were analysed by applying questionnaires and tests accepted in international practice together with our own measures. Data were collected about the students' career decision self-efficiency experiences, their personality traits and also about the question how they see their future profession. Based on our results the students who had a definite idea of their future professional career even during their studies and were determined with improved professional and personal competencies during the training made up a distinct group and were more dedicated to their career. On the basis of our analyses it was empirically proved that the training types which provide opportunities for the conscious monitoring of personal and professional competencies by encouraging the student with their career adjustment are of great significance.*

**Keywords:** career decision, self-efficacy, learning experiences, personality traits

## *Introduction*

The examinations monitoring the characteristics of students in newly established majors in higher education represented a unique way of career socialisation research in the past decades (Csehné-Papp, 2009; Czeglédi & Juhász, 2013; Juhászné-Klér & Budavári, 2010).

The empirical examinations on those concerned in social trainings in higher education primarily studied the motifs of career selection, social intelligence of the professionals and their different role interpretations as well as the special features of target groups in social work and activities connected. However, the exploration of different personality traits by using psychological instruments only appeared in few researches (Billédi, 1999; Juhászné-Klér, 2013; Koltayné-Billédi, 2000, 2001). Regarding the fact that the success of readiness and preparation for a career is greatly influenced by the personality traits of the young in addition to their interest in the career and a high level of empathy, an attempt was made to explore the single personal aspects of career engagement by means of instruments widely and successfully used in international research.

## *Theoretical background*

The basis of Bandura's (1997) theory on personal self-efficacy was the realisation of the fact that it is not enough to realise the objective to be reached in order to be successful in acting- it is also important to be sure of ourselves that we are able to achieve what has been targeted. Bandura defines perceived self-efficacy in the following way: *"...people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances"* (Lent & Brown, 2006:15). Accordingly, one of the important conclusions of Bandura's model is that modifying self-efficacy expectations results in a change in behaviour for which several empirical proofs are provided by theoretical examinations (Bandura, 1997). The definition of self-efficacy has also played an important role in career development in further scientific publications. Lent, Brown and Hackett (1994) in their social-cognitive career model interpreted the factors influencing the process of career decisions integrated by summarising the results of the empirical research carried out so far. They had the following objectives while compiling their model:

- fine tune the correlated constructions (e.g. self-image, self-efficacy etc.)
- provide a more detailed explanation with some aspects of career management (e.g. satisfaction, stability etc.) and
- interpret the correlations between the single construction (self-efficacy, interest, skills etc.).

At the same time, the model includes the relevant experimental, learning and cognitive processes from the point of view of career development. In addition to the components of behaviour and thinking other factors also appear that can describe how and in what way the personality can change and develop in career and how these factors control

their behaviour. Theory primarily links the experience of self-efficacy with four sources: 1. personal performance, which has the strongest impact of all, 2. learning through models, 3. social justification and support, 4. psychic and emotional status of low anxiety. All of these sources have a significant impact on all of the efforts to understand and shape our career self-efficacy experience (Lent & Brown, 2006). According to this, the development of perceived self-efficacy can be one of the most important objectives of the professional socialisation process. The acquisition of an adequate pattern of behaviour relevant for the job by all means enhance the experience of perceived self-efficacy especially if the person concerned is given a regular feedback by using the qualitative indicators of activity. *Practising the skills and social feedback play an especially great role in activities and jobs where role expectations are more insecure and professional skills can only be developed by social learning.* The so-called assisting professions are like this with special regards to those that have been created in our country during the past few decades and their job role repertoire is not fixed (Juhász-Klér, 2014).

### *The examination*

Based on the theoretical models presented before the main objective of our research was to explore the personality traits that define the career engagement of students preparing for a social career in Hungary. Our hypotheses were as follows:

1. The career decision self-efficacy of students correlates with such personality traits as conscientiousness, agreeableness and emotional stability
2. The students' career fit plays a role in the strength of correlation between the examined personality traits and career decision self-efficacy (in connection with their personality-job fit)
3. Experiencing the career decision self-efficacy as a student also plays a significant role in career engagement in addition to conscientiousness as a personality trait.

Our model focussed on the following aspects of the elements of the socio-cognitive career model: personality traits- learning experiences -self-efficacy-outcomes and expectations.

### *The sample*

Altogether 497 students were involved in the examination who were asked to fill in the questionnaire voluntarily and anonymously. The students were provided with an opportunity of a feedback within the framework of an individual consultation. Students were recruited from 5 institutions (University of Debrecen, Faculty of Healthcare, Eszterházy Károly College, Eötvös Loránd University- Faculty of Social Sciences, Szent István University-Faculty of Arts and Sciences, University of Miskolc - Faculty of Arts and Sciences, University of West Hungary- Faculty of Apáczai Csere

János, University of Pécs-Faculty of Illyés Gyula, College of Religion in Veszprém).

When creating the sample, we were striving to select respondents from different regions of the country so that our results and conclusions would not only be applicable to the limited scope of social trainings in higher education. Regarding gender, we can say that only 11.1% of the sample were male (55 persons) while 88.9% (442) females. About half (51.5%) of the respondents (256 persons) study social work in a bachelor course, 38% (189) study socio-pedagogy BA and 10.4% (52) attend a master course. Full-time students comprise 41.4% (206) of the sample while 58.5% (291) are correspondent students. Age varies between 18 and 61, the average age is 28.91 (deviation: 9.47 years). 7.8% (29 persons) of the students live in the capital, 26.2% (130) in a city in the countryside while 33.4% (166) on a town and 32.6% (162) in a village. Twenty-six percent of the students (129 persons) are active in their jobs. Based on the data about the qualification of the parents we can see that most of the students come from families where the parents do not have a degree in higher education and even more than one-third of the mothers (34.9%) and nearly every second father (47.3%) do not even have a general certificate of secondary education.

Our research results justify the data of many examinations published earlier according to which a great part of students preparing for a social career may be 'first generation intellectual worker' in their family (Mányai & Bass, 2006; Hegyesi & Nagy, 2001; Albert, 2006). However, this demographic characteristic refers to the fact that the educational successes of the young concerned are not only an important step (or collateral) in social mobility but also a remarkable milestone for the family. The qualification of the parents in the case of the full-time and part-time students shows a significant difference, which obviously has to do something with the generation gap between the two groups of students as the full-time students are apparently younger so there were different chances of education for their parents than in the case of the older generation. Only 7.8% of the respondents live in the capital, 26.2% in cities in the countryside and 66% in towns or villages.

Figure 1. The qualification of mothers

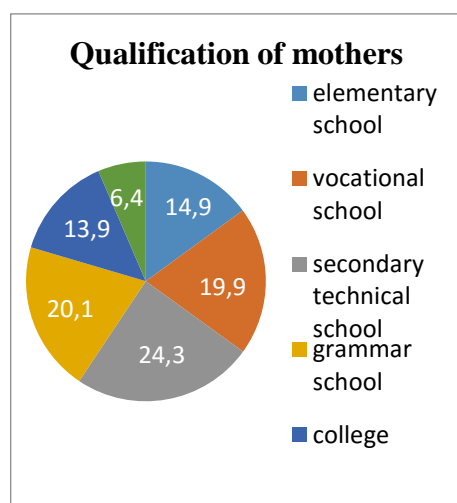
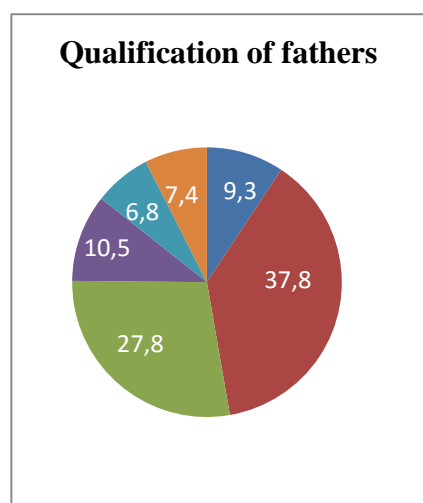


Figure 2. The qualification of fathers



## *Material and methods*

According to the original objectives of the examination a package of questionnaires was compiled in which an instrument developed on our own was also applied in addition to others successfully used in international scientific life. Apart from demographic and socio-cultural questions our instrument consisted of the following parts:

1. BIG FIVE INVENTORY\* - (BFI: John & Srivastava, 1999)  
This instrument consists of 44 items similarly to Big5 in order to measure general personality traits. While designing the questionnaire exploring the five great dimensions (*Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, Neuroticism, and Conscientiousness*) one of the objectives of the researchers was to construct such an instrument that can be filled in relatively quickly, applied flexibly so able to provide us with proper evaluation within a short period of time where the more differentiated personality analysis is not required. The questionnaire has also been used several times in Hungary nowadays and it showed good psychometric characteristics (Rózsa et al., 2012). The questionnaire was supplied by Sándor Rózsa.
2. CAREER DECISION SELF-EFFICACY SCALE SHORT FORM (CDSE-SF: Betz & Taylor, 1996)  
The questionnaire altogether contains 25 items that examine the extent a person assesses oneself successful and efficient in tasks concerning their own career. In the original version only four of the five scales (*self-appraisal, occupational information, goal selection, planning and problem solving*) were kept and occupational information was dropped out due to its statistical indicators.
3. STUDENT FIT, CAREER FIT Based on our examination model and our expectations we also wished to study the individuals' experience in connection with student fit and career fit and also their correlation as an important factor in career. To this end, two short lists of questions were compiled based on our preliminary examinations where opinions were asked first about the training, then career fit. (STUDENT FIT Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.748$ , CAREER FIT Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.816$ )
4. CAREER PLAN  
Another own instrument was worked out to measure loyalty in career where the plans of the respondents were monitored with special regard to their objectives and requirements. (Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.913$ )

## Results

During our examination the correlations between demographic and socio-cultural data as well as personality traits were examined.

With the increase of students' age the job-fit indicator significantly rises ( $r=.130$ ,  $p\leq 001$ ) so the older a student is, the more probable they have the necessary skills and personality traits for the job. At the same time, however, this correlation can also be explained by the fact that as the older students are predominantly part-time students, they have several years' of work experience so job-fit is also influenced by the concrete professional experience.

This hypothesis was proved by the Pearson correlation ( $r=-.120$ ,  $p\leq .001$ ) between the current job and the perceived fit as the students who are currently employed as professionals in social jobs significantly thought that their personality and skills fit the job requirements. However, the period spent in education did not show any correlation with fit, so it is only during field practice that students experience the extent of their fit to the professional job requirements.

When examining the qualification of parents there is a correlation with the mothers' qualification ( $r=-.112$ ,  $p\leq 005$ ). Based on the results it is the children of mothers with lower qualification who more intensely identify their skills and abilities as job fit. An explanation for this can be that a chance for a career given by obtaining a professional qualification is more inspiring and as they can emotionally be more dedicated to professional success, they try to justify the properness of their career choice in a cognitive way as a form of self-justification.

A further explanation can be that the older have more extensive professional experience so it is their mothers' generation first of all who has significantly lower level of qualification in the sample. The type of domicile did not have any impact on the given variable. When comparing the samples of full-time and part-time students we can also experience that there is no difference between the perceived fit of the part-time students and that of the full-time students even by knowing the fact that 40.9% of the part-time students are active in the job.

When examining training-fit the following correlations were found. While growing older, the students tend to assess their skills and personality as fit to training so it results in increasing their satisfaction with the training ( $r=.220$ ,  $p=001$ ). The experience of satisfaction with the type of training and fit is more expressed by part-time students than by full-time ones ( $r=.156$ ,  $p=001$ ) partly due to their age and professional experience gained earlier by many. Those who still work professionally in a social job are more significantly satisfied with the training ( $r=-.176$ ,  $p=0.01$ ). The professionals think that based on their previous professional experience the training contents and job forms provided by higher education are more or less relevant. However, a case for concern is the result that the time spent in training brings about a significant increase of dissatisfaction ( $r=-.110$ ,  $p=005$ ) even if the correlation is weaker. In the case of students in social training of higher education there is a difference of opinion about the training between the years and by increasing the number of semesters, criticism also grows towards the training, so the proportion of those dissatisfied with the course is increasing. We must also

add that neither the qualification of parents nor the type of domicile influence satisfaction with the trainings offered by colleges and universities.

While *analysing the single scales of career decision self-efficacy* we also examined what correlation exists with the general variables. Of the four sub-scales age is significantly positive with three although it is very weak. The strongest correlation exists with problem solving ( $r=.136$ ,  $p=0.001$ ), so students who are older assess their problem solving skills in their own career decision to be better. The next career decision self-efficacy scale that proved to be sensitive to age as an independent variable was self-efficacy where the value of correlation coefficient was  $r=.120$  at  $p=0.01$ . The impact of age is similarly positive on self-efficacy in planning as part of the career decision process ( $r=.091$ ,  $p=0.005$ ).

Based on our results it can be stated that while growing older, the students' personal competency experience develops in all activities in addition to setting career objectives that are decisive of the cognitive aspects of career decision. The qualification of parents and the type of domicile do not make a significant impact on career decision self-efficacy. There is no detectable difference between part-time and full-time students, either, with regards to career decision self-efficacy.

The period spent in a profession and the fact whether someone is currently employed do not have a significant impact on how one perceives their self-efficacy in career decision making. However, the impact of the period spent in training could be felt in all activities that influence the assessment of career decision self-efficacy. Older students assess their self-efficacy higher in career planning ( $r=.144$ , where  $p=0.01$ ) and they are more self-confident with higher self-esteem in career decisions ( $r=.117$ ,  $p=0.05$ ). Designating the objectives ( $r=.112$ ,  $p=0.05$ ) and problem solving ( $r=.101$ ,  $p=0.05$ ) as self-efficacy factors that influence career decision also show a weak but significant correlation. While growing older, students also have a modest increase in their self confidence in terms of career decision, which indicates that with more time spent in training a lot of students think that a social job as a career is a good choice for them their objectives are clearer and more concrete in career planning.

One of the most important objectives of our examination was to determine the personality traits that can basically contribute to the fact that students would think a social job as a career is a proper choice for them, they fit regarding both skills and personal requirement so they feel constantly engaged to work there. On the basis of literature on labour and career psychology as well as the analysis of international research results we decided to get to know the predictive power of CONSCIENTIOUSNESS, AGREEABLENESS and EMOTIONAL INSTABILITY of the personality traits in career decision self-efficacy described by the Big5 models.

Linear regression was used to check the impact of the single independent variables. The data of 155 students were analysed with regards to the fact that only questionnaires filled in completely in terms of personality traits were considered. In the first phase of multiple linear regression the multicollinearity of the independent variables of the single career variables (SELF APPRAISAL, GOAL SELECTION, PLANNING, PROBLEM SOLVING) and the normal distribution of residuum was

checked and multiple linear regression was calculated. The following table summarises the main findings:

Table 1. Correlations between career decision self-efficacy scales and single personality variables

career decision self-efficacy scales	significance level of multiple linear regression	F-trial	R <sup>2</sup>	independent variables	$\beta$ value	p
SELF APPRAISAL	p=0.000	14.669	0.281	CONSCIENTIOUSNESS	0.385	0.000
				EMOTIONAL INSTABILITY	-0.228	0.039
GOAL SELECTION	p=0.000	15.030	0.283	CONSCIENTIOUSNESS	0.208	0.000
PLANNING	p=0.000	11.064	0.229	CONSCIENTIOUSNESS	0.274	0.000
PROBLEM SOLVING	p=0.000	6.619	0.148	CONSCIENTIOUSNESS	0.269	0.000

Of the four career decision self-efficacy scales in the first column values correlated with the students' level of CONSCIENTIOUSNESS so this personality trait proved to be a general predictor. Students who are more responsible, reliable and persistent see themselves to be more self-confident in surveying their competencies, designating their career objectives, planning and problem solving in decision making. *In terms of career socialisation all this refers to the fact that the strength of CDSE correlates with such a personality trait that is based in socialising before youth.* The value of self-efficacy in terms of self-esteem positively correlates with emotional stability so *the young who are emotionally more instable really need some points of reference in assessing their abilities.*

In our examination we also wished to analyse the impact of the students' career fit on their career decision self-efficacy. To this end, we used the CAREER FIT scale whose impact was measured by partial correlations by controlling the correlation between the single personality traits and CAREER DECISION SELF-EFFICACY. The number of elements in the sample was: 452. The following table summarises the strengths of correlations between personality traits and career decision self-efficacy expectations through person-job fit and by controlling this variable.

Table 2. Correlations between the examined personality traits and career decision self-efficacy (CDSE) with and without a control variable

	value of correlation coefficient with cdse through 'fit-scale'	value of pearson correlation coefficient with cdse through 'fit-scale'
EMOTIONAL INSTABILITY	-.129	-.188**
CONSCIENTIOUSNESS	.268	.400**
AGREEABLENESS	.210	.313**



We can see while comparing the rows of the table above that the personal career fit of the student (fitting their skills to the career) has a statistically proven effect with regards to all examined personality variables on how they assess their career decision self-efficacy.

Based on our results EMOTIONAL STABILITY and CAREER DECISION SELF-EFFICACY are inversely related ( $r=-.184$ ,  $p\leq 0.01$ ). Students that are emotionally stable based on their results at the BFI scales experience higher self-efficacy in their career decisions so their self confidence in career decisions is also determined by their general psychic stability. Those who are in harmony with their environment and are more balanced will also be more confident in their career and are more satisfied with their choices. The fact that with the inclusion of CAREER FIT values the correlation between the two variables becomes weaker by 0.55 and becomes not significant refers to the fact that the impact of personality variable on career decision self-efficacy is influenced by the perceived job fit. The experienced student fit and the selected social career influences how the person's EMOTIONAL STABILITY affects self confidence in career decision. In consciously planned career socialising process it means that initiatives strengthening person-job fit and recognising as well as considering its factors can serve experiencing professional identity for people who do not tend to be engaged due to their constant personality traits. Regarding the content of career socialising training the correlation above draws attention to the fact that getting to know the elaborate career requirements and working out self-knowledge opportunities are an important part of success.

The role of CAREER FIT was proved in the correlation between CAREER DECISION SELF-EFFICACY and EMOTIONAL STABILITY, CONSCIENTIOUSNESS and AGREEABLENESS as the correlation between the variables was statistically changing. Our result thus justifies the hypothesis that the quality of perceived fit has a role in career identification.

*Concerning the students' plan of career socialising we can conclude that person-job fit as a key experience can be decisive in successful career socialisation.* It is supported by the fact that better fit can modify self confidence in career decision self-efficacy as influenced by all the three constant personality traits examined by BFI.

The students' impact of CAREER DECISION SELF-EFFICACY on CAREER PLANNING was checked by Person's correlation. The data of 442 students were incorporated. We found a significant correlation of medium strength ( $r=.465$ ,  $p=0.01$ ) between two variables so the students who feel to be more competent in career decisions also feel more engaged in a social career.

Table 3. Correlation between career decision self-efficacy and students' career plan

		CAREER DECISION SELF EFFICACY	STUDENTS ' CAREER PLAN
CDSE	Pearson Corr. Sig. (2-tailed) item number	1  458	<b>.465**</b> .000 442

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

*The students' experience in training about the adequate career is likely to justify the students' working out a more detailed professional role repertoire by maintaining their interest and coping with the further challenges of the professional socialising process.*

Table 4. Correlation between career plan and the single personality variables, career fit and student fit

		CAREER PLAN	CONSCIEN- TIOUSNESS	CAREER FIT	STUDENT FIT
CAREER PLAN	Pearson Corr. Sig. (2- tailed) item number	1  470	<b>.346**</b> .000 255	<b>.724**</b> .000 467	<b>.556**</b> .000 461

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

A further question of our research was to find out what personality variables correlate with CAREER PLAN as a dependent variable. Several points were considered in selecting personality traits before decision making. On the one hand, we were looking for a variable that is likely to be a good predictor of engagement based on organisational psychology research. On the other hand, we wanted to test such variables that prove to be important personality traits in social careers if we analyse career requirements. Thirdly, we also wanted to select a variable that was proved to have a predictive power in self-efficacy as our central construct at the earlier stages of the research.

As a result of correlation analysis, we can conclude that CONSCIENTIOUSNESS ( $r=.346$ ,  $p\leq.01$ ) is clearly correlated with students in social higher education who image this career for themselves in the long run. More conscientious students are more likely to image their future in a social career in the long term.

We also analysed the students' opinion about career fit and person-job fit and how it correlates with their career plan. Based on our results these two variables correlate with further career plans. When examining STUDENT FIT the value of CAREER PLAN correlation coefficient was  $r=.556$  with  $p\leq 0.01$  while the correlation between CAREER FIT and CAREER PLAN was  $r=.724$  where  $p\leq 0.01$  so these two variables are strongly correlated. *Students with proper career fit and conscience are planning a long-term engagement in social career* – it is not by surprise but by all means a reassuring result as far as the future of this job is concerned.

## Summary

Our first hypothesis of correlating conscientiousness, emotional stability and agreeableness with career decision self-efficacy was partly accepted as conscientiousness could be identified as a general predictor (likewise to the results of Barrick et al., 2002, and Digman, 1990). Emotional stability correlated with self-efficacy.

Our second hypothesis about the role of career fit in personality traits and career decision self-efficacy was accepted so the environmental impacts can, in real, modify the power of personality traits on competency experience in decision making. From this aspect the correlation in the social-cognitive carer model on student samples was justified.

Our third hypothesis was also proved as long-term career plans and engagement in a career show correlation with conscientiousness, student fit and justification of career decision. The correlations suggested by the social-cognitive model of Lent, Brown and Hackett (1994) were proved empirically on university students of social trainings. That is why it is worth paying more attention on the conscious development of the above-mentioned personality traits and working out its environmental conditions (e.g. proper amount of feedback on the development level of career competencies, mentoring, the systematic explorations of stress factors in self-efficacy etc.) in education. Regarding the fact that partly internationally acknowledged instruments adapted from abroad and several instruments developed on our own were successfully used in the research, their further use on other target groups can be another direction of our research in the future.

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