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# **The Role of Open Day in Career Counseling for High School Students: A Case Study at FPT University, Vietnam**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Career Counseling for High School Students is one of the crucial tasks of education worldwide in general and in Vietnam in particular. And Open Day programs are one of the most popular. In this study, the author analyzes the vital role of Open Day in the case study at FPT University. From there, detect and make suggestions to improve the program's quality. The author has surveyed and interviewed the organizers of the program and high school students who have participated in the program, combined with comparisons with document sources to give specific results. Accordingly, there are four main goals that a university aims to when organizing a program, including: (1) To help participants better understand the FPT university, (2) To help participants to understand clearly the major they plan to study, (3) To help participants gain practical experiences at the FPT university, and (4) To help participants discover what future jobs they would be suitable for themselves. And besides that, there are other important goals that many program participants are aiming for.

Keywords: Open day; Career counseling; Vietnam

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## **1. Introduction**

In recent years, in Vietnam, choosing a major or a school to study after graduating from high school has changed dramatically. Decisions are made not purely from the advice of teachers, parents, or seniors but rather from the high school students themselves. That means that their initiative in seeking information and self-determination is increasing. In addition to online information about training majors, career opportunities or highlights, and rankings of universities and colleges provided through online channels, face-to-face activities are significant. And we cannot deny the intuitive and highly influential role of face-to-face activities in education in general and in teaching in particular (Widodo et al., 2020).

Because of that, many academic units organize Open Day programs regularly for high school students in general and students in grade 12 in particular. Open Day is understood as a day when an organization such as a school, college, or factory allows members of the public to go in and see what happens there (according to the Cambridge dictionary). Many universities and colleges are constantly renewing themselves in Open Day activities in Vietnam. It can be the most attractive and valuable for high school students, among which are: FPT University. Here, Open Day is usually held on weekends, when students do not have class hours, and it lasts almost all year round, except for times when students have to review and have time to study and take the exams at the end of the semester. The length of the program is usually only one day, but full of activities to help maximize students' understanding of the major and the school in which they want to join. In this article, the author will analyze the role of Open Day in more detail. The author has new suggestions for these activities to be more effective for high school students and university admissions.

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## **2. Literature Reviews**

A university Open Day concept is exceptionally familiar to many universities and students in Western countries. According to Konieczna & Gruca (2018), Open Day is an impossible event that all students need to go through before choosing the Pedagogical University of Cracow as their destination for three to four years of college. Or according to Wegner & Rolka (2018), Open Day has helped students participating in the program unwittingly discover things that they never even thought of before, such as a new field of study, a discovery about who they are - strengths, weaknesses through some activities in the program. From there, they have a clear decision for their study path and future orientation.

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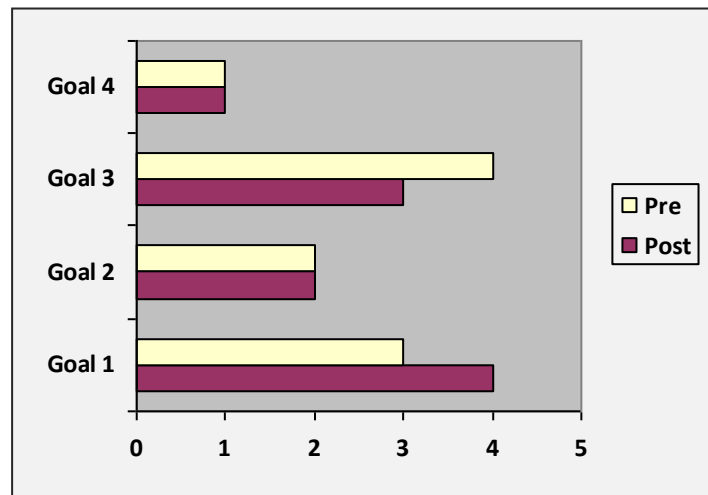
In addition, according to Rut (2020), even when facing the significant impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, education must continue, and Open Day programs are also an indispensable part, precisely. For that reason, at the Institute of Biology Pedagogical University of Krakow, Virtual Open Day programs are both a temporary solution and a great innovation of the times, associated with digital technology and the development of the era of technology 4.0. This is a necessity in many areas of life, including education. Specifically, this case is the problem of choosing a school, an academic field to study and improve themselves.

### 3. Methodology

To analyze the role of Open Day programs in career counseling for students in Vietnam, the author uses a combination of two qualitative and quantitative methods. Specifically as follows: the author has synthesized information from studies, books, and newspapers with topics related to the researched content; combined with observation and interview, exchange of ideas with 5 managers and admissions staff of FPT University; and with 25 high school students who participated in Open Day at FPT University. Then, the author analyzes their assessments to understand the role and importance of these activities. At the same time, the author listens to the feedback of students who have participated in the program, thereby analyzing and giving valuable suggestions to improve the program further, especially when the speed of development increases of current education in Vietnam is very rapid and significant. The implementation period is three months, with the survey and deployment on different means such as direct discussion and via Zalo - the most popular social networking channel in Vietnam now.

### 4. Research Results and Discussion

After in-depth discussion with 5 managers and admissions staff of FPT University, the author has found four main goals of most Open Day programs taking place at the school, namely (1) To help participants better understand the FPT university, (2) To help participants to understand clearly the major they plan to study, (3) To help participants gain practical experiences at the FPT university, and (4) To help participants discover what future jobs they would be suitable for themselves. Based on the above five purposes, the author surveyed 25 students participating in 5 different Open Day programs before the program started (**Pre**), and when the program ended (**Post**), the following results were obtained. For the questions "What do you expect the program to bring you? - Prioritize the following five goals" and "What did you get from the program? - Arrange in descending order, level 4 is the highest", the results are shown in Figure 1 below.



**Figure 1.** Levels of high school students' expectations and assessments before and after participating Open Day program

Based on the figure above, it is easy to see that among the four most important goals set forth by FPT University, two are more interested by the majority of students than goals 1 and 3. However, there is a slight contrast here. While the biggest expectation from the program is to be able to get a lot of practical experience at FPT University (goal 3), after participating in the program, what they achieve, the highest score (level 4) is that they learn a lot of unknown things about this school (goal 1). To some extent, we can see that this is a success for the school because it has met the primary goal of the program organizers. Thus, if we only stop at these two goals, there is more or less some harmony in determining the role of Open Day programs between the School (Supplier) and the Students (Customer). And according to Papparoidamis (2019), this is extremely important in many different business fields, including the education business. In this case, it can promote its correctness for a private university like FPT University. When researching and analyzing here, the author is entirely convinced and understands why Open Day activities are becoming more and more popular in Vietnam today; and firmly believes that it will continue to grow even more in the short future and day by day.

There are two goals in 2nd and 3rd place, respectively: understanding the major they plan to study and discover what future jobs students would be suitable for themselves. It's not hard to see why these two goals are low priority. Because, in the digital age with many sources of information, most high school students are qualified to learn about the profession they love or are suitable for. Some may also take tests from models or methods such as DISC, MBTI, Biometric, etc. From there, we can discover what your personality and ability will be suitable for in the future. However, not all students can afford the cost or precise instruction on these tools at home. Besides, the information found on the internet is invaluable, and its accuracy is not high, which is one of the severe difficulties for learners when they want to find out information. In addition, the story of "overeating" information is also one of the great difficulties that students face if they only find out information through one main channel, which is online. Therefore, these are also integral parts of Open Days, and they are fully supported in a dedicated, clear, concise, and freely. There was no change in priority between both goals before and after participating in the program in this study. From there, I further understood that the organizers also really understood the aspirations of the participants in the program.

In addition, the role of Open Day activities is also reflected in the analysis of the answers in the "Others" section of the question "What is your purpose when participating in the program?" The responses have been gathered and summarized in the following table.

**Table 1.** Other purposes of high school students when taking Open Day program at FPT University

Other purposes	Number of students	Percentage
(1) To receive many interesting gifts.	24	96
(2) For entertainment after stressful school hours.	22	88
(3) To make many new friends from different classes and high schools.	21	84
(4) To cultivate soft skills such as communication skills, public presentation skills, performing arts skills, etc.	20	80
(5) To meet excellent university students.	13	52

The results from the table above give us an overview, as there are five other main goals when participating in the Open Day program, all of which are above 50%. The most prominent is the purpose of receiving many exciting gifts from the program (96%). This makes perfect sense because high school students in Vietnam are under 18 years old, and most do not have any source of income other than family support. Therefore, gifts will always attract them, especially those that suit their needs and tastes. These can be mentioned as teddy bears, unique stationery, electronic devices, etc. Understanding this, many universities have spent a lot of money on this item to attract as many students to participate in the program as possible.

Next, we find that the two numbers are 88% and 84%, respectively, for the two purposes of students' need to participate in recreational activities and students' need to make friends when participating in the program. In Vietnam today, especially in five big cities where FPT University has its campuses, the types of entertainment, entertainment, or opportunities to make friends and acquaintances are not rare. Nevertheless, if these activities are organized scientifically, safe, and receive support from families and schools when students participate, Open Day is a great option. In addition, students do not have to pay any fees for these programs.

According to Pereira et al. (2017) and Tang (2020), soft skills are an essential part of student life and the career path ahead. For that reason, visionary and early-directed high school students are very interested in these soft skills. Therefore, in this survey, the author also received up to 80% of the respondents interested in cultivating these skills by participating in universities' events, typically the Open Day program. Through creative and engaging activities in the program, students can fully express themselves with strengths in the arts, performance, and mysterious talents or skills. They have been practicing hard for the past 18 years. Through it, they receive gifts from the organizers, compliments from the audience, and most importantly, recognition for their efforts. And, of course, those skills will follow them and their college and future earning journey.

As mentioned above, most of the current high school students have had the opportunity to learn about the school and the field they want to study very early. Among the things they know, it must be that concern for their predecessors is also crucial. They admire students who are now university students with excellent academic and training achievements. In addition, there are contacts to learn more about the school. To listen to the exact sharing of the school from the perspective of service users like them in the future, an Open Day is an excellent opportunity. High school students and university students can interact and exchange not only through text messages but also face-to-face, photographed together, personally taken by seniors to tour the campus, etc. This must be an exciting part not to be missed for potential students. Maybe, for the same reason, according to the above survey, there are only 13 choices (52%) for this purpose in the results.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Thus, as above, we have clearly analyzed the role of Open Day programs in career counseling for students in Vietnam from the perspective of both the school and the students. It is specifically expressed through the four main goals of the program. Thereby, it shows the current status of the organization of Open Day programs, specifically in this study at FPT University. Besides, there are quite a few things that we need to consider more from the perspective of educators or program organizers to maximize the remarkable effects of Open Day activities.

Firstly, the above research shows that there are at least five goals for participating in the program set by the majority of participants. Thus, the organizers need to skillfully integrate it into their program so that the program's primary purpose is still guaranteed and the aspirations of high school students are still met. Specifically, it can be mentioned that students are very interested in gifts, so it is necessary to invest carefully in this item. For example, instead of giving a gift that is only for entertainment purposes, we incorporate content related to knowledge in the high school curriculum instead of just paying attention to the use-value of the item. Gifts can be attached to the value of promoting a healthy lifestyle for young people, etc. And, of course, brand communication can ultimately accompany these gifts because it is one of the most effective ways business units generally use (Camilleri, 2020).

Secondly, the program organizers need to strengthen the parts of the program further to allow more students to present their skills, creating a valuable playground for them to develop to make the most of their energy and will. Because the speaker presentation usually takes up a quarter of the total program time at FPT University Open Day Programs. Instead, allow program participants to express their views, to express themselves. Doing this would reduce boredom during long listening sessions and stimulate the interest of other potential attendees. Of course, this is not an easy job. This is the only opportunity for many programs to introduce the school and the field of study to the students most completely and authentically. Therefore, it needs to be more ingenuity in the arrangements of the program organizers. One proposal is that instead of a Talk show, we organize an open discussion in groups of no more than 50 people so that participants actively seek information, and then share it in front of the collective; the moderator only synthesizes information and summarizes the topic.

Thirdly, valuable sharing from seniors are extremely important and meaningful for high school students. So why don't we promote more of these seniors' shares? Instead of standing on stage are just experts in the profession, teachers, or experts in the field of career counseling, it can include students studying at the school and alumni because the role of alumni is undeniable, especially in the field of higher education - according to research by Dillon (2017). To do that thoroughly, we can have training activities for this team of "speakers" before the program, update new information, disseminate program orientations, etc. Let their words on the stage be attractive, realistic, meaningful to the audience, and effective for the school's admissions work. This work takes a lot of time and money but is hugely influential. That is why higher education institutions need to consider and study the implementation plan seriously.

Ultimately, the organization of Open Days is usually the "responsibility" of universities. However, universities should also have a close relationship and coordination with high schools. From that, the program is organized in the most suitable ways for their students, with only direct teachers to understand the expectations, tastes, or problems of choosing a major or a school they face. Because the characteristics of each target group are different, it is not possible to use the same program for all participants. This collaboration requires more effort from both sides and an investment of time and effort. However, it is entirely doable and beneficial as just described.

## Acknowledgements

The author received much support from the manager, working at FPT University and high school students to complete the paper. Special thanks to you.

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