Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development 2024, 8(16), 10202.
https://doi.org/10.24294/jipd10202

Article

International education programme and career expectations in an emerging country

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CITATION

Namraksa S, Kraiwanit T, Yuenyong N, et al. (2024). International education programme and career expectations in an emerging country. Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development. 8(16): 10202. https://doi.org/10.24294/jipd10202

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 9 November 2024
Accepted: 16 December 2024
Available online: 23 December 2024

Abstract: This study investigates the career expectations of individuals in Thailand's emerging economy, emphasizing the critical factors that shape these expectations within the context of a rapidly evolving labour market in the digital era. A quantitative approach was employed, collecting data from 1230 Thai respondents through convenience sampling, utilizing a structured survey as the primary research instrument. Data analysis involved the use of percentages, means and logistic regression to provide a comprehensive understanding of the findings. The results indicate that factors such as gender, age, monthly income, professional identity, values, culture and technology usage (including devices like laptops, social media platforms, home internet access and usage hours) significantly influence career expectations. Understanding these influential factors is crucial for developing targeted strategies to enhance career satisfaction, preparedness and overall competitiveness in an increasingly globalized and digital economy. By addressing the unique needs and aspirations of the Thai workforce, particularly in this digital age, stakeholders can cultivate a more responsive and adaptive professional environment, ultimately contributing to national economic growth in the digital era.

Keywords: career prospects; post-graduation expectations; digital age
JEL Classification: I21; J24; O15

1. Introduction

The shift to a digital economy has significantly transformed the labour market, altering demand for specialists and enhancing the overall efficiency of the market. Digital technologies have infiltrated various facets of life and social interactions, emerging as a crucial trend in the evolution of our economic and social systems. While digital transformation offers numerous opportunities, it also presents challenges, including job losses due to automation and the replacement of human labour with machines. Furthermore, the rapid evolution of the labour market complicates the planning and forecasting of labour demand across nearly all sectors of the economy. The rise of informal labour relations in the digital economy exacerbates social insecurity among workers, underscoring another serious drawback of this transition (Riazantseva and Parshukova, 2023). Education is vital for investing in human capital, positively influencing the development of individuals' skills, knowledge and competencies. By providing educational opportunities, we can cultivate a workforce of skilled and qualified employees. Investing in talented, experienced and skilled

personnel is essential for achieving success and generating favourable outcomes within organizations (Huyen et al., 2024).

Thai schools following the national curriculum emphasize Thai cultural heritage, language and values, aiming to instil a strong sense of national identity in students. The curriculum is structured according to Thai educational standards, focusing on foundational knowledge across a wide range of subjects, including Thai language and culture. In contrast, international schools in Thailand offer globally recognized programmes such as the International Baccalaureate (IB), British A-levels, or American Advanced Placement (AP), which are designed to prepare students to become global citizens and pursue higher education on an international scale. These programmes promote critical thinking, creativity and a more personalized learning experience, often in a multilingual environment where English is the primary language of instruction (Catellya, 2023; Namraksa and Kraiwanit, 2023, 2024; Pearce, 2023).

The presence of international schools in Thailand has raised the standard of educational quality, prompting Thai schools to innovate and enhance their teaching methods. This has fostered healthy competition, leading to a positive exchange of educational practices and benefiting the education system as a whole. While international schools focus on global standards, Thai schools continue to play a crucial role in shaping students' sense of identity and instilling cultural values. These schools remain essential for fostering a sense of community and preserving the rich traditions of Thai society. The decision to attend either a Thai school or an international school in Thailand is influenced by various factors, which reflect deeper questions about identity, aspirations, and the role of education in a globally connected yet culturally grounded context. Both educational pathways offer distinct advantages, catering to different needs, and contribute to a vibrant and diverse educational landscape in the country. International schools are often seen as providing access to a broader, more globalized perspective, while Thai schools are rooted in the country's cultural and educational philosophy (Phumphongkhochasorn et al., 2021; Scott and Guan, 2023).

The growing trend of international schooling in Thailand underscores the significant role education plays in shaping future opportunities. As globalization continues to impact educational systems worldwide, understanding the factors that influence individuals' decisions to choose international education is essential. Such an exploration can provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and international schools to better meet the needs of students and families. Moreover, the decision between attending a Thai school or an international school is often driven by economic and social factors. International schools, with their higher tuition fees, are typically more accessible to higher-income families, expatriates, or those who view international education as an investment in their children's futures. This choice reflects broader societal trends, with each educational option serving different aspirations and life goals.

Career selection is one of the most critical and challenging decisions students face when planning their future. It involves a complex interplay of various factors and demands a thoughtful decision-making process. Choosing a college or field of study is a pivotal step in shaping one's life, success, and career. Numerous factors influence this decision, such as costs, socio-economic status, expectations, and more, each carrying varying degrees of importance. These choices significantly impact an

individual's career trajectory and future success. Therefore, career selection is a crucial decision with far-reaching implications for a person's future. A single wrong decision can alter an individual's path entirely, making career choices particularly daunting. On a larger scale, this personal action is reflected in the economic prosperity of a nation. Individuals who find themselves unsuited to their workplace tend to be less productive and efficient, ultimately failing to achieve their goals (Ouano et al., 2019)

This study aims to address the gap in academic research regarding students' career expectations and income opportunities within the context of the digital economy. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following research question: what are the career expectations of graduates in the digital era? To frame this inquiry, the study employs a conceptual framework that integrates theories of human capital and labour market dynamics, clarifying the relationship between educational experiences and career outcomes. The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform policymakers, educators and students about the effects of digital transformation on career trajectories. The statistical analyses include both descriptive and inferential methods; descriptive statistics summarize participant demographics, while inferential statistics, such as chi-squared tests and logistic regression, examine relationships and predictions. The logistic regression analysis begins with a baseline model and incrementally incorporates predictor variables. The model's effectiveness is evaluated using a classification table to assess its fit, predictive power and accuracy. The study analyzes data collected from students to gain insights into their expectations and the factors influencing them. Ultimately, the findings aim to enhance our understanding of how education can better prepare individuals for successful careers in an increasingly digital landscape.

2. Literature review

2.1. Expectancy and decision theory

Vroom (1964) articulated that expectancy is a personal behaviour driven by the need for a rationale behind engaging in activities to achieve desired rewards. This expectation stems from the perceived value of incentives such as prizes, money or other forms of reward. When these incentives hold significant value for an individual, and when they believe they possess the capability to achieve them, they are more likely to be motivated to take action. Essentially, expectancy evaluates the likelihood that a specific action will lead to the anticipated outcome.

Choosing a career is a significant decision for students, requiring careful and thoughtful consideration of the factors that influence their choice. The career path young people choose can have a profound impact on their lives in many ways. This study explores some of the key factors that affect students' career decisions. Parents play a crucial role in supporting their children's career development. This support can take various forms, akin to social support. For instance, parents may allow their children to choose their own career paths while providing guidance, encouraging exploration of career interests, and assisting with reflections on their choices. Parental support significantly influences children's career trajectories. Parents' career aspirations can facilitate their children's achievement of professional goals through

role modelling and relevant learning experiences. Research has demonstrated positive correlations between parental support and adolescents' career development across diverse cultural contexts, including Italy, the United States, South Korea and China (Cheung, 2024; Lim, 2019; Zhang et al., 2019). Breetzke and Bohndick (2024) emphasize the critical role of the interaction between expectations and values in predicting student achievement. However, as students transition to higher education, their expectations and values undergo significant changes, necessitating an expanded application of this interaction to understand their impact better.

Career decision-making self-efficacy is rooted in Bandura's (1977) concept of self-efficacy, which refers to an individual's belief in their ability to complete specific tasks or achieve goals. This belief influences cognition, motivation and behaviour. Betz and Hackett (1981) later applied self-efficacy to the career domain, suggesting that individuals' judgements of their abilities significantly shape their behaviour. In this context, evaluating one's own capabilities to achieve career goals can impact behavioural outcomes. Taylor and Betz (1983) integrated career decision-making with self-efficacy, proposing that individuals form beliefs about their ability to perform the tasks necessary for making career decisions. Over time, researchers expanded this concept to explore the relationships between career identity, interests, decision-making and other factors. Thus, career decision-making self-efficacy plays a critical role in career development, explaining various psychological factors such as motivation, behaviour and attitudes related to career progression (Du et al., 2024). Career choice is influenced by multiple factors, including personality, interests, self-concept, cultural identity, and socio-economic status. Key factors such as interests and self-efficacy strongly impact career anchors like managerial competence, autonomy, and pure challenge. Students often choose careers based on their inherent interests and motivations. Additionally, external factors like family environment, economic conditions, and personality traits play a significant role in shaping career decisions. Research shows that social relationships, job satisfaction, and socio-economic status also contribute to the choices students make (Bhattacharjee and Marak, 2021).

The educational landscape has transformed dramatically in recent years. The proliferation of private and foreign institutions has diversified educational offerings, with technological advancements playing a central role in curricula. This evolution has created opportunities for students from various socio-economic backgrounds, many of whom now pursue careers in emerging fields such as IT, e-commerce and entrepreneurship (Sharma, 2024). While older generations, like Generation X, prioritized education for job security, younger generations are focusing more on developing social skills and critical thinking abilities. This shift reflects a fundamental change in educational priorities, with a greater emphasis on holistic personal and professional development rather than traditional career-focused goals. Generation Z, considered the first generation to grow up in the digital age, is highly familiar with technology, having used social media since childhood. Growing up in a technologically advanced world, many have become accustomed to and reliant upon it. For this generation, the pursuit of their dream job and opportunities to develop their skills are key motivational drivers (Magano et al., 2020). They are independent and flexible, and, unlike previous generations, they are more tolerant of diversity, accepting differences in social status, skin colour, religion and ethnicity (Kapil and

Roy, 2014). Pandita (2022) found that members of Generation Z hold high expectations for their careers and exhibit qualities such as independence, self-assurance and flexibility in their working styles and preferred educational paths. With an inventive mentality, they often employ unconventional methods to achieve their goals and prefer workplaces that quickly adapt to technological changes and encourage innovation (Bucovetchi et al., 2019).

2.2. Human capital

The theory of human capital emerged in the 1960s, building on foundational ideas from classical economists such as Adam Smith, Karl Marx, Jean-Baptiste Say and Irving Fisher Petty. Petty notably quantified the monetary value of individuals to assess national wealth comprehensively. In The Wealth of Nations, it is asserted that skills gained through training and education are vital assets that enhance productivity. Say emphasized the importance of viewing knowledge and expertise as forms of capital. In the context of the digital economy, human resources have become a critical element of economic and social growth worldwide. Productivity, driven by intellectual resources—knowledge and expertise—has become increasingly competitive (Grigorescu et al., 2021). The growth of productivity directly influences economic development. In both industrialized and developing nations, technological advancements, particularly digital transformation, are fundamentally reshaping markets and society, necessitating improved human resource management practices. Human resource development deserves special attention (Maltseva et al., 2021; Zaborovskaia et al., 2020). Digital transformation affects all facets of economic and social activities and must be integrated into existing human resource management processes and tools.

Human capital refers to the skills, knowledge, and experience individuals gain through education, training, and work, which enable them to perform specific tasks (Elang and Prabowo, 2021). It is recognized through formal education, often reflected in educational certificates (Irawan et al., 2022). Investment in education positively impacts income, but financial barriers, especially in developing countries, may limit access to education (Yubilianto, 2020). Chen (2002) notes that education investment is risky due to unpredictable future income and employment prospects, prompting parents to expect a high return on their investment. Education serves as both an investment in future income and future consumption (Sulisnaningrum et al., 2022), where skills and knowledge increase income potential, while education also provides personal satisfaction. However, educational investments do not yield immediate economic returns. Pursuing education expands individuals' social networks, particularly in formal education, where alumni networks strengthen social capital. Trust within these networks, along with values and norms learned during education, can enhance social capital, benefiting individuals' personal and professional lives (Han and Lee, 2020). Human capital assumes a new significance in the era of economic globalization, as evidenced by numerous studies highlighting its importance within the contemporary knowledge economy. The forces of globalization, driven by scientific and technological advancements—such as digital technologies, robotics and integrated manufacturing—are reshaping human civilization. In this context, human capital is crucial; the expansion of the digital economy relies heavily on knowledge,

expertise and capabilities rather than merely financial resources. Skills, particularly technological skills, are essential in the digital sector, which demands a highly skilled workforce. Zaborovskaia et al. (2020) emphasize that both creators and users of information and communication technologies must possess the necessary qualifications for these technologies to evolve effectively. Consequently, adaptability and a commitment to lifelong learning have become competitive advantages. Moreover, globalization requires human resources to be multilingual, flexible, educated beyond high school, computer literate, independent and innovative, all while continuously acquiring new skills and knowledge. Thus, while human resources play an indispensable role in economic growth and social development, their full potential must be harnessed to navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing global landscape (Huyen et al., 2024).

Education investment plays a vital role in driving both individual and socio-economic development. It significantly contributes to human capital accumulation and serves as a primary mechanism for shaping income distribution patterns. By enhancing individuals' human capital, education investment boosts their competitiveness in the labour market and directly impacts their income levels and potential for income growth by providing structured training in knowledge, skills, values and more. A strong positive correlation exists between education investment and income levels. Numerous empirical studies demonstrate that factors such as years of schooling, educational attainment and professional skills are closely tied to economic indicators like salary, employment status and social security benefits. This relationship remains stable and consistent across different socio-economic backgrounds. As a result, investing in education not only lays the foundation for higher income but also supports ongoing income growth throughout a person's career. In the era of the knowledge economy, various forms of education—such as higher education, vocational training and lifelong learning—further reinforce the link between education and income, making education investment a key strategy for improving personal income levels and overall quality of life (Xu, 2024).

2.3. Identity personality and values

In social psychology, identity is understood as the concept that shapes how individuals or groups understand themselves, with a dynamic nature that is subject to change over time. The evolution of identity is influenced by a variety of factors, including societal definitions and professional roles, highlighting its fundamentally social nature. Identity formation occurs at multiple levels: the macro level, encompassing social and political systems; the mid-level, reflecting community influences; and the micro level, focusing on family dynamics and interpersonal interactions. Together, these levels contribute to the development of both individual and group identities.

Personality, distinct from identity, comprises an individual's consistent traits and behavioural patterns, such as openness, boldness and adaptability. While these traits tend to remain stable over time, they offer only one dimension of a person's identity. Moreover, values play a critical role in shaping identity by serving as guiding principles that reflect how individuals define themselves and navigate their lives. For instance, an open-minded individual may experience conflict with someone who

values safety and tradition, illustrating how differing personality traits and values can lead to diverse behaviours and judgements.

As previously indicated, personality and values are integral components of identity. An individual's personality traits often correlate with their perceived values. For example, a person who embraces new learning opportunities may struggle to relate to those who prioritize security, demonstrating that personality traits and values fulfil different functions and are expressed in various ways, thus influencing judgements and behaviours (Sumetsittikul and Prajankett, 2018).

In the modern world, the identity of a graduate is centred on the ability to harness potential, equipping learners with essential skills for learning, living and working in the future. This endeavour is particularly challenging given the rapid changes in global social trends characterized by an overwhelming flow of information and diverse social networking channels. Today's challenge is to prepare learners with advanced skills and characteristics that exceed the demands of the past. The capability of learners to navigate their own lives will be increasingly critical in the future.

Currently, Thai society is undergoing globalization alongside significant technological advancements. The influx of information promotes learning that drives changes in thought, beliefs and lifestyles within society. Therefore, it is vital to develop learners' skills for the twenty-first century, ensuring they possess both academic knowledge and practical life skills that enable them to lead fulfilling lives in society.

Family upbringing is a fundamental factor influencing the attitudes that are instilled or transmitted within the family, aiding individuals in adapting to different situations, which ultimately guides the development of identity. Accordingly, training and upbringing significantly impact the formation of students' identities. Furthermore, teachers play a crucial role in shaping students' identities, as they are integral to the educational process (Phannoi et al., 2014).

3. Research methodology

This study utilized a quantitative approach through structured surveys. The target population included Thai residents aged 18 to 24 years who graduated from international schools. Participants received a clear explanation of the study's objectives and were informed that they could withdraw at any time, adhering to the ethical guidelines outlined by Kasemrat and Kraiwanit (2023). Only complete responses were included in the analysis. Sample size determination used Yamane's formula, with a 0.05 significance level, a ± 5% margin of error, and a 95% confidence level, as suggested by Chutipat et al. (2023), Limna et al. (2022), Limna and Kraiwanit (2024), and Sitthipon et al. (2022), resulting in a minimum sample size of 384 individuals. A convenience sampling method was employed, distributing the online survey via platforms such as LINE, Facebook and Instagram, using the convenience sampling technique to conduct the survey from July to September 2024. The survey was sent out to 1500 participants; however, 70 responses were rejected and 200 were incomplete. As a result, after screening for completeness, 1230 complete responses were analysed. However, the analysis focused on the 562 responses from high school graduates or current students enrolled in international programs, as this group was

most relevant to the research objectives regarding career expectations and aspirations in the context of education in Thailand. Therefore, the 562 responses were considered the appropriate sample for the analysis.

The development of the survey instrument involved multiple steps: conducting a literature review and designing the questionnaire based on identified factors. Content validity was assessed through the index of item-objective congruence (IOC), retaining items with an IOC of 0.50 or higher while revising or excluding those below this threshold, in accordance with Rovinelli and Hambleton (1977). Reliability was determined using 30 test questionnaires, with Cronbach's alpha employed to measure internal consistency; a value of 0.70 or higher indicated acceptable reliability (Iacobucci and Duhacheck, 2003).

Independent variables include gender, age, monthly income and other income sources, and professional identity, which highlights how schools provide learners with specific skills and expertise. Additionally, values and culture are considered, encompassing public and national interests versus personal interests, as well as traits like honesty, sacrifice, perseverance, and ideals for the common good, alongside the preservation of beautiful Thai traditions, morality and integrity. Other factors include social media platform usage, notebook usage, average hours of internet usage per day, and monthly home internet expenditure. The dependent variable is the expected career in the digital economy.

Statistical analysis included descriptive statistics to summarize participant demographics, along with inferential statistics such as chi-squared tests and logistic regression to explore associations and predictions. Logistic regression began with a baseline model, progressively integrating predictor variables and evaluating effectiveness through classification tables assessing fit, predictive power and accuracy.

4. Results

From a sample of 1230 participants, excluding those who have already graduated and are currently employed, 562 respondents were high school graduates or current students from both Thai and international programmes (Inter; 0 = international programme, 1 = non-international programme, including bilingual programmes). The expected careers are presented in the following table.

According to **Table 1**, the survey results from a sample of 562 respondents reveal that 51.6 per cent of respondents expect to pursue careers as salaried employees after graduation. Meanwhile, 48.4 per cent of respondents expressed a desire to become startup business owners or engage in freelance work. These findings suggest that the majority of students are inclined towards traditional employment, while a smaller but notable group prefers entrepreneurial or independent career paths. This highlights the diverse range of career aspirations among the respondents.

Table 1. Percentage distribution by prospective career.

Expected career	Frequency	Percentage
Salaried (1)	290	51.6
Startup and freelance (0)	272	48.4
Total	562	100.0

As depicted in **Table 2**, the chi-squared value of 368.657 exceeds the critical value at a significance level of 0.05, given the presence of 20 degrees of freedom. This finding indicates that the dependent variable is significantly influenced by all the independent variables included in the model. Essentially, this suggests that the combined effect of the independent variables is substantial in determining the outcome of the dependent variable.

Table 2. Omnibus test of the model's performance using all the independent variables.

		Chi-squared	df	Sig.
	Step	368.657	20	0.000
Step 1	Block	368.657	20	0.000
	Model	368.657	20	0.000

A statistical model (logistic regression) is presented in **Table 3**. The model has an *R*-squared value of 0.642, indicating that it explains approximately 64.2 per cent of the variation in the dependent variable. Additionally, the significance value of 0.05 suggests that the relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable are statistically significant at the 5 per cent level.

Table 3. Model summary using all the independent variables.

Step	−2 log likelihood	Cox & Snell R squared	Nagelkerke R squared
1	409.864[a]	0.481	0.642

a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 6 because parameter estimates changed by less than 0.001.

As indicated in **Table 4**, the classification results reveal that the model, incorporating all potential independent variables, demonstrates the capacity to predict the key factors that influence an individual's decision to choose a career in the digital economy, achieving an accuracy rate of 84.2 per cent for cases, using a cut-off value of 0.500 (or 50%).

Table 4. Classification table for back-testing (including all the independent variables).

Observed			Predicted		
			Career in the digital economy		Percentage correct
			No	Yes	
Step 1	Career in the digital economy	No	250	40	86.2
		Yes	49	223	82.0
	Overall percentage				84.2

a. The cut value is 0.500.

Table 5. Coefficients of the logistic regression model with all independent variables.

Independent variables		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1[a]	Gender (X1)	1.748	0.298	34.466	1	0.000	5.745
	Age (X2)	−0.841	0.186	20.457	1	0.000	0.431
	Monthly income and other income sources (X3)	−0.557	0.254	4.808	1	0.028	0.573
	Professional identity: school provides learners with specific skills and expertise (V1)	0.830	0.295	7.905	1	0.005	2.294
	Values and culture: consideration of public and national interests over personal interests (V2)	0.439	0.203	4.661	1	0.031	1.551
	Values and culture: honesty, sacrifice, perseverance and ideals for the common good (V3)	−0.821	0.252	10.634	1	0.001	0.440
	Values and culture: preservation of beautiful Thai traditions, morality and integrity (V4)	−0.644	0.208	9.612	1	0.002	0.525
	Social media platform (X5)	−1.000	0.213	22.115	1	0.000	0.368
	Desktop computer (X6)	0.256	0.400	.410	1	0.522	1.292
	Notebook (X7)	−1.343	0.585	5.277	1	0.022	0.261
	Smartphone (X8)	1.909	1.323	2.083	1	0.149	6.746
	Tablet/iPad (X9)	−0.785	0.405	6.348	1	0.125	0.360
	Wearable device (X10)	−0.257	0.325	.627	1	0.429	0.773
	Internet usage period (X11)	0.353	0.207	16.905	1	0.652	1.346
	Average hours of use per day (X12)	−1.085	0.256	17.902	1	0.000	0.338
	Monthly home internet expenditure (X13)	0.474	0.238	3.981	1	0.046	1.606
	Monthly mobile internet expenditure (X14)	0.278	0.233	1.422	1	0.233	1.320
	Constant	−2.938	2.573	1.304	1	0.253	0.053

Independent variable(s) entered on step 1: X1, X2, X3, V1, V2, V3, V4, X5, X6, X7, X8, X9, X10, X11, X12, X13, X14.

The predictive regression (Equation (1)) using the coefficients from **Table 5** can be described by the following equation:

$$P = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-z}} \tag{1}$$

where P is expected salaried career and $Z = -2.938 + 1.784(X1) - 0.841(X2) - 0.557(X3) + 0.830(V1) + 0.439(V2) - 0.821(V3) - 0.644(V4) - 1.000(X5) - 1.343(X7) - 1.085(X12) + 0.474(X13)$.

The statistical significance of each independent variable is elucidated in **Table 5**. The findings reveal that concerning the dependent variable, which is an individual's expected career in the digital economy, gender, age, monthly income and other income sources, professional identity, values and culture, social media platform, notebook, tablet/iPad, internet usage period, average hours of use per day and monthly home internet expenditure are identified as significant contributors. In particular, when gender was changed from female (coded as 0) to male (coded as 1), expected career in the digital economy increased by 5.745. In other words, the study found that men were more likely to expect careers in the digital economy than women. Additionally, a one-unit increase in age reduced expected career in the digital economy from 1 to 0.431, representing a decrease of 0.569. A one-unit increase in monthly income

reduced expected career in the digital economy from 1 to 0.573, which corresponds to a decrease of 0.427. Similarly, a one-unit increase in professional identity significantly increased expected career in the digital economy by 2.294; a one-unit increase in values and culture: consideration of public and national interests over personal interests significantly increased expected career in the digital economy by 1.551; a one-unit increase in values and culture: honesty, sacrifice, perseverance and ideals for the common good use significantly increased expected career in the digital economy by 0.440; and a one-unit increase in values and culture: preservation of beautiful Thai traditions, morality and integrity significantly increased expected career in the digital economy by 0.525. A one-unit increase in social media platform use also reduced expected career in the digital economy from 1 to 0.368, representing a decrease of 0.632. In contrast, a one-unit increase in notebook use led to a reduction in expected career in the digital economy from 1 to 0.261, a decrease of 0.739 units. Furthermore, a one-unit increase in home internet spending resulted in a 1.606 increase in expected career in the digital economy.

From **Table 6**, it can be seen that the chi-squared value of 322.165 surpasses the critical value at a significance level of 0.05, considering the presence of 11 degrees of freedom. This observation signifies that the dependent variable is significantly influenced by all the independent variables encompassed within the model. In essence, this indicates that the combined influence of the independent variables carries substantive significance in determining the outcome of the dependent variable. The significance of these variables lies in their impact on expected career in the digital economy. Gender differences may lead to male respondents having greater expectations than females, reflecting societal norms or barriers to entry. Age serves as a factor, suggesting that younger individuals may be more aligned with emerging digital opportunities, while income levels correlate with access to resources and opportunities for digital careers. Additionally, a well-defined professional identity indicates that individuals who understand their role in a digital context are more likely to perceive themselves as suited for various career paths in this evolving landscape.

Table 6. Omnibus test of the model's performance using only significant independent variables.

		Chi-squared	**df**	**Sig.**
Step 1	Step	322.165	11	0.000
	Block	322.165	11	0.000
	Model	322.165	11	0.000

A statistical model (possibly regression) is presented in **Table 7**. The model has an R-squared value of 0.582, indicating that it explains approximately 58.2 per cent of the variation in the dependent variable. Additionally, the significance value of 0.05 suggests that the relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable are statistically significant at the 5 per cent level.

Table 7. Model summary using only significant independent variables.

Step	−2 log likelihood	Cox & Snell R squared	Nagelkerke R squared
1	456.356[a]	0.436	0.582

a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 6 because parameter estimates changed by less than 0.001.

From **Table 8**, the classification results reveal that the model incorporating all potential independent variables demonstrates the capability to predict the key factors that influence an individual's expected career in the digital economy, achieving an accuracy rate of 82.9 per cent for cases, using a cut-off value of 0.500 (or 50%).

Table 8. Classification table for back-testing (including only significant independent variables).

Observed			Predicted		
			Career in the digital economy		Percentage correct
			No	Yes	
Step 1	Career in the digital economy	No	243	47	83.8
		Yes	49	223	82.0
	Overall percentage				82.9

a. The cut value is 0.500.

The predictive regression equation of Model 1 using the coefficients from **Table 5** can be described by the following Equation (2):

$$P = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-z}} \tag{2}$$

where P is expected salaried career and Z = 2.284 + 1.707(X1) − 0.554(X2) − 0.604(X3) + 0.854(V1) +0.399(V2) − 0.885(V3) − 0.729(V4) − 0.873(X5) − 0.692(X7) − 1.054(X12) + 0.524(X13).

The statistical significance of each independent variable is elucidated in **Table 9**. The findings reveal that concerning the dependent variable, which is an individual's expected career in the digital economy, gender, age, monthly income and other income sources, professional identity, values and culture, social media platform, notebook, average hours of use per day and monthly home internet expenditure are identified as significant contributors. In particular, when gender was changed from female (coded as 0) to male (coded as 1), expected careers in the digital economy increased by 5.514. In other words, the study found that men were more likely to expected careers in the digital economy than women. Additionally, a one-unit increase in age reduced expected career in the digital economy from 1 to 0.575, representing a decrease of 0.425. A one-unit increase in monthly income reduced expected career in the digital economy from 1 to 0.546, which corresponds to a decrease of 0.454; a one-unit increase in professional identity significantly increased expected career in the digital economy by 2.348; a one-unit increase in values and culture: consideration of public and national interests over personal interests significantly increased expected career in the digital economy by 1.490; a one-unit increase in values and culture: honesty, sacrifice, perseverance and ideals for the common good led to a decrease in expected

career in the digital economy from 1 to 0.431, a decrease of 0.569 units; and a one-unit increase in values and culture: preservation of beautiful Thai traditions, morality and integrity led to a decrease in expected career in the digital economy from 1 to 0.482, a decrease of 0.518 units. A one-unit increase in social media platform use also reduced expected career in the digital economy from 1 to 0.418, representing a decrease of 0.582. In contrast, a one-unit increase in notebook use led to a decrease in expected career in the digital economy from 1 to 0.500, a decrease of 0.500 units. A one-unit increase in average hours of use per day also reduced expected career in the digital economy from 1 to 0.348, representing a decrease of 0.652. A one-unit increase in home internet spending resulted in a 1.688 increase in expectation of a career in the digital economy.

Table 9. Variables in the model using only significant independent variables.

Independent variables		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1[a]	Gender (X1)	1.707	0.276	38.233	1	0.000	5.514
	Age (X2)	−0.554	0.143	15.036	1	0.000	0.575
	Monthly income and other income sources (X3)	−0.604	0.233	6.752	1	0.009	0.546
	Professional identity: school provides learners with specific skills and expertise (V1)	0.854	0.277	9.513	1	0.002	2.348
	Values and culture: consideration of public and national interests over personal interests (V2)	0.399	0.178	5.033	1	0.025	1.490
	Values and culture: honesty, sacrifice, perseverance and ideals for the common good (V3)	−0.885	0.229	14.915	1	0.000	0.413
	Values and culture: preservation of beautiful Thai traditions, morality and integrity (V4)	−0.729	0.206	12.574	1	0.000	0.482
	Social media platform (X5)	−0.873	0.199	19.261	1	0.000	0.418
	Notebook (X7)	−0.692	0.295	5.493	1	0.019	0.500
	Average hours of use per day (X12)	−1.054	0.233	20.412	1	0.000	0.348
	Monthly home internet expenditure (X13)	0.524	0.157	11.157	1	0.001	1.688
	Constant	2.284	1.496	2.331	1	0.127	9.819

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: X1, X2, X3, V1, V2, V3, V4, X5, X7, X12, X13.

5. Discussion

The findings of this research reveal significant insights into the career expectations of graduates in the digital era, specifically how these expectations align with the demands of the evolving digital economy. By refining the research question to “What are the career expectations of graduates in the digital era?”, the analysis highlights the multifaceted opportunities available for individuals today.

The results indicate that gender remains a crucial determinant in shaping career aspirations, with men expressing higher expectations of a career in the digital economy compared to women. This is consistent with existing literature that illustrates how traditional gender roles and social norms can influence career ambitions. Given the rapidly changing nature of the workforce, educational institutions must create more inclusive environments that empower all genders to pursue meaningful careers across high-demand fields. The study by Angwaomaodoko (2023) aimed to examine the impact of gender on academic performance and career ambitions among Nigerian

college students. The results revealed that gender differences did not significantly affect the academic achievement of these students. However, the study emphasized that students' perceptions of their gender significantly influenced their career ambitions, suggesting that support for career freedom often leads students to pursue careers outside traditional gender norms.

Age also emerged as a significant factor influencing career expectations, younger individuals demonstrating greater optimism about their career opportunities. This optimism may be linked to their familiarity with digital technologies and a natural adaptability to constant change. As the landscape of work evolves, understanding how age impacts career expectations can inform targeted career counselling and educational strategies tailored to different demographic groups. As reported by Sharma (2024) found that older generations typically view higher education as a direct route to employment, while younger generations see it as a platform for broader personal and professional development. There is also a growing expectation for technology integration in education, reflecting wider societal digital trends. Economic factors, such as tuition costs and potential debt, are increasingly influencing educational choices, driving newer generations toward greater financial pragmatism. Moreover, the digital era presents unprecedented opportunities for income generation beyond traditional employment. Graduates today can explore multiple avenues for revenue, leveraging the gig economy, freelance opportunities and entrepreneurial ventures enabled by digital platforms. This shift necessitates that career expectations evolve, aligning more closely with the dynamic demands of modern work environments. The emergence of new occupations, such as digital marketers, data analysts and app developers, further expands the career landscape. These roles demand not only technical expertise but also a willingness to innovate and adapt, underscoring the importance of equipping students with relevant skills (Sharma, 2024).

Financial aspects, including monthly income and additional income sources, were found to negatively influence career choices. Supporting this, Leurcharusmee and Sirisrisakulchai (2024) investigated the effects of household income on educational investment in Thailand using a quantile-on-quantile approach. Their findings show that Thai households increase their educational expenditures for each child by an average of 0.75% for every 1% rise in income. In contrast, low-income households demonstrate relatively low elasticity in their educational spending in response to changes in income. Xu (2024) found that income levels directly influence a family's ability to invest in education. High-income families typically have greater economic resources, enabling them to spend more on tuition, tutoring, extracurricular activities, and educational facilities. This financial capacity gives them more options in the education marketplace. Meanwhile, low-income families often struggle to cover education expenses and rely more heavily on free or reduced-price services from the public education system.

Shumba and Naong (2013) examined the relationship between family income and career choice among graduate students from three universities of technology in South Africa. Their results showed that respondents agreed that their family's financial status negatively impacted their ambitions and career choices, with the poorest group being the most affected. The findings suggest that many students' career choices depend on their parents' ability to support them in pursuing their desired career path. Students

from low-income families often opt for the most affordable career options when financial support for their ideal career is unavailable, unlike students from wealthier families. As a result, it can be inferred that some students limit their aspirations based on their family's financial circumstances. This dynamic contributes to the mismatch between graduates' qualifications and their employment prospects.

Perceptions of professional identity—specifically, the belief that education imparts essential skills—were positively correlated with career success, while values prioritizing public interests and social responsibility showed moderate positive associations. However, traditional values, such as honesty and integrity, were linked to decreased employment prospects, suggesting a complex interplay between personal values and career outcomes. Wu et al. (2024) found that path analysis revealed normative identity had no direct or indirect effects on career satisfaction or career calling. In contrast, affective and efficacy identities showed significant positive direct effects on career calling, while career calling had a significant positive direct effect on career satisfaction. Efficacy identity also demonstrated a significant positive direct effect on career satisfaction. Finally, both affective and efficacy identities had significant positive indirect effects on career satisfaction through career calling. Research by Phannoi (2014) indicates that positive relationships between teachers and students lead to better learning outcomes. Furthermore, the stronger these relationships, the more students can enhance their learning abilities to higher levels. Educational institutions also play a critical role in developing individuals to achieve a strong identity. They significantly influence students' lives, as the time spent in educational institutions provides opportunities for acquiring specific knowledge and high-level life skills that will be essential for their future careers.

Cultural values, particularly the emphasis on public interests over personal gain, also play a significant role in career choices. The data suggest that individuals who prioritize communal values may have lower expectations in the digital economy. This raises important questions about how cultural narratives can be integrated into career guidance to elevate aspirations while respecting individual values. Altan (2021) discusses how the concepts of profession and career are increasingly tied to individuals' abilities to earn a living and align their personal characteristics with their chosen professions. She emphasizes that culture significantly influences career development, as self-knowledge is intertwined with cultural understanding. Cultural factors shape every aspect of an individual's career journey, from career choices to educational paths, behaviors, and planning. Altan highlights that various elements—such as gender, family structure, education, and environment—play critical roles in shaping careers, which are inherently active processes influenced by individual perspectives and cultural reflections. She argues that culture impacts self-discovery throughout the career process, from pre-professional decision-making to post-employment experiences. Ngamkham (2017) studied the factors influencing entrepreneurs' hiring decisions regarding graduates from the Accounting Department at Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat University in the academic year 2013. The study found that the most influential characteristics of graduates were professional ethics and interpersonal relationships, followed by morality, knowledge, academic ability, analytical skills, communication and technology use, and intellectual skills. Additionally, it was recommended that graduates develop English language skills, strengthen their

understanding of accounting principles, explore additional theories, and cultivate discipline. Graduates should also demonstrate qualities such as morality, volunteerism, a cheerful personality, discipline, punctuality, self-confidence, emotional stability, and the ability to adapt to various situations.

Finally, social media and technology use, such as laptops, negatively impact career success, as does excessive daily screen time. While higher costs for home internet service appear to increase job opportunities, these findings indicate that technology use is not entirely positive, highlighting the importance of guiding individuals to engage in productive technology that aligns with their career objectives. Technology adoption can increase student satisfaction and improve job performance, as confirmed by Alyoussef and Omer (2023), Klayklung et al. (2023), Muthmainnah et al. (2023) and Siripipatthanakul et al. (2022). This enhancement may increase students' career expectations. Cao and Yu's (2019) study on social media use in organizations found that excessive use for socializing and entertainment often leads to conflicts between technology use and work demands, while using social media for information sharing helps reduce employees' psychological stress. These technology-related conflicts and stress negatively affect work performance (Brooks, 2015). Building on this, Ali-Hassan et al. (2015) examined how different types of social media use—social, hedonic, and intellectual—impact work performance, with social capital serving as a mediator. Conducted through a large-scale survey within a multinational IT company, the study revealed that both social and intellectual technology use indirectly boost daily work performance and innovation. However, while the hedonic use of technology directly hampers work performance, it still fosters positive social relationships, which can have a mitigating effect on work productivity. In a separate study, Zhang et al. (2024) investigated the impact of career-oriented social media usage on career exploration among university students, using social comparison theory and self-regulation theory. The findings revealed that engaging with career-focused social media increases career anxiety, which in turn encourages career exploration. Moreover, social comparison orientation (SCO) strengthens this effect. The study contributes to the limited research on the effects of social media in career contexts by offering insights into how career-oriented social media influences career exploration. It also highlights implications for supporting university students transitioning into the workforce in the digital era.

Therefore, the results of this research underscore the need for adaptive educational frameworks that not only address the diverse influences on career expectations but also equip students with the skills to thrive in an ever-changing digital landscape. By understanding the complex interplay of gender, age, financial factors, professional identity, cultural values and technology usage, stakeholders can develop strategies that foster equitable opportunities for graduates as they navigate their career paths in the digital era.

6. Conclusions

The analysis identifies factors influencing individuals' career expectations in an emerging country, shedding light on the complex interactions among various independent variables. Gender is a significant determinant, men exhibiting higher

career expectations than women. Age and monthly income also play crucial roles, as increases in both correlate with lower career aspirations, suggesting that younger individuals and those with lower incomes tend to have more optimistic views regarding career opportunities. Additionally, professional identity and cultural values significantly shape career aspirations; a stronger emphasis on professional identity positively correlates with career expectations, while values that prioritize community and national interests appear to enhance career aspirations. However, certain cultural values, such as the preservation of traditional practices, negatively impact these expectations. The analysis of technology usage patterns reveals nuanced relationships: increased engagement with social media and notebook is associated with lower career expectations, whereas enhanced home internet access correlates with more favourable career outcomes.

While this research provides valuable insights into the dynamics influencing career expectations, it is important to acknowledge some limitations, such as the scope of the sample and potential regional biases. Future research activities could explore longitudinal studies to better understand how these factors evolve over time and their implications across different demographics. Overall, this study highlights the significant role of international education programs in shaping career expectations, particularly in the context of Thailand, which is undergoing rapid economic and technological transformations. The findings emphasize the need for strategic policies and interventions that address a range of factors, including access to education, technological adoption, cultural expectations, and economic disparities. These strategies should aim to enhance opportunities for students to develop skills and competencies that align with the demands of the digital economy. This includes designing curricula that closely reflect the needs of the global labor market and promoting the effective use of technology for learning and career exploration.

Author contributions: Conceptualization, SN, TK and NY ; methodology, SN, TK, NY and CA; software, SN, TK, NY, CA, SC and AP; validation, SN, TK, NY, CA, SC and AP; formal analysis, SN, TK, NY, SC and AP; investigation, SN, TK, NY, CA, SC and AP; resources, SN, TK, NY, CA, SC and AP; data curation, SN, TK, NY, CA and SC; writing—original draft preparation, SN TK NY CA SC and AP; writing—review and editing, SN TK NY CA SC and AP; visualization, SN, TK, NY, CA, SC and AP; supervision, TK; project administration, SN and TK; funding acquisition, SN, TK, NY, CA, SC and AP. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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