

# Vocational Maturity Among Class XI Students of Lakhimpur District in Assam: A Mixed-Method Study

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## ABSTRACT

Vocational Maturity is the readiness to make informed, age-appropriate decisions, which is crucial for secondary students transitioning to higher education and a successful future. In the modern landscape, students are torn between prestige-based career paths and emerging niche industries, which makes it necessary to put focus on the idea of vocational maturity. This study aims to investigate vocational maturity among class XI students of Lakhimpur District in Assam. This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design. A total of 150 class XI students were taken as the sample for the quantitative phase of the study, while for the qualitative phase, 10 students were selected from the sample. The quantitative phase of the study was carried out by a descriptive survey method through the Vocational Attitude Maturity Scale (VAMS-M). A semi-structured interview was employed to gather qualitative data. The findings indicate that participants exhibit low vocational maturity, and significant statistical differences were observed across academic streams. Through the interview findings, it could be revealed that high reliance on familial and academic authority (elders and teachers) is the primary decision-making filter for the students. While students demonstrated active information-seeking via digital platforms, their actual aspirations remained tethered to extrinsic rewards and societal expectations.

**Keywords:** Vocational Maturity, readiness, class XI, career paths, decision making, successful.

Every individual has their own idea of vocation or career they should choose as per their capability, which would help empower them in their later life. The term "vocation" might be better saved for jobs that are selected and pursued for a long time because they fit the person's skills, interests, values, desires, personality, and drive for success (Deighton, 1971). Vocational decisions are a crucial part of a student's life, helping them build a successful future. NPE (1986) also agrees with it as it mentions how vocational education is important as it provides technical power, which in turn raises the economic growth of the country. To choose an appropriate career, an individual needs to have a good level of vocational maturity, as Westbrook *et al.* (1988) emphasize that choosing an appropriate occupation is considered a hallmark of

vocational maturity. Benshoff *et al.* (1990) recognized vocational maturity as having four key elements: the capacity of vocational planning to utilize available resources, accepting responsibility for the decision, knowledge of desired vocations, and the effectiveness of career-related decision making. Salami (2008) conceptualizes vocational maturity as an individual's readiness to make well-informed, age-appropriate career choices despite existing societal opportunities and constraints. Therefore, this study enlightens the students, teachers, as well as parents, to monitor their child's needs to select

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an appropriate vocation or a career, as, according to Stern (2017), most of the time, students go wrong while choosing a profession for themselves. The previous studies by Agarwal (2019), Pandey & Manral (2017), Vatsa (2001) found that girls have a better and average level of vocational attitude maturity than boys. Nafeesa *et al.* (2019) confirm a positive correlation between internal locus of control and vocational maturity, and findings of Adekeye *et al.* (2017) reveal significant correlations between career maturity and academic needs achievement, as well as parental socio-economic status. The study also suggests the need for targeted interventions and early career counseling to enhance students' overall career maturity.

In the context of Assam, Chaudhury and Saikia (2020) identified that most high school students in Sonitpur district exhibited average vocational maturity, with no significant gender differences. This research aims to bridge the gap by investigating the vocational maturity of Class XI students in Lakhimpur District, a remote area with limited vocational awareness, as the stage of secondary education emerges as a critical period for the development of career maturity (Sirohi, 2013). This study will inform educational policies and counseling services to better address the needs of local students.

### Objectives of the Study

- ❑ To study the level of vocational maturity among class XI students.
- ❑ To study the differences in vocational maturity among class XI students with respect to gender, locale, and academic stream.
- ❑ To study the student's vocational concepts that form their approach to career planning and decision-making.

### Hypotheses of the study

- ❑  $H_0$ 1: There is no significant difference between male and female students of class XI in vocational maturity.
- ❑  $H_0$ 2: There is no significant difference between urban and rural students of class XI in vocational maturity.
- ❑  $H_0$ 3: There is no significant difference among class XI students of the Arts, Science and Commerce stream in vocational maturity.

### Delimitation of the study

- ❑ The study is delimited to class XI students of Lakhimpur district, Assam.

### METHODOLOGY

**Research Approach:** The present study adopted a mixed-method research approach to gain a deeper understanding of vocational maturity among students. This approach integrates both quantitative and qualitative data, facilitating comprehensive analysis (Creswell, 2014). The study followed a Convergent Parallel Design, wherein quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously and later merged to provide a holistic perspective on the research problem.

**Research Participants:** A sample of 150 students was selected using single-stage cluster random sampling, ensuring adequate representation from various academic streams. For the qualitative phase, 10 students were chosen through purposive sampling to obtain deeper insights into vocational maturity.

**Research Instrument:** The study employed the Vocational Attitude Maturity Scale (VAMS-M), developed by Dr. Manju Mehta, as the primary tool for data collection.

**Interview.** A semi-structured interview was employed to gather qualitative data. The interview process prioritized participants' comfort and confidentiality.

### Data Analysis

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods. Quantitative data, collected through structured surveys, were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics using SPSS version 22.0 to identify significant differences. Qualitative data, obtained from semi-structured interviews, were examined using thematic analysis to uncover patterns and insights.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### The overall level of vocational maturity among class XI students

The data presented in Table 1 indicate that most (37%) participants have low vocational maturity,

**Table 1:** Table showing overall vocational maturity among class XI students

Score Range	F	%	Interpretation
4 & below	2	1%	Very Low
5 to 8	31	37%	Low
9 to 13	117	31%	Average
14 to 17	27	31%	High
18 & above	6	0%	Very High

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

**Table 2:** Results of the t-test examining the difference in vocational maturity concerning gender

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t (148)	p	Remark
VAM	Male	98	11.0	3.13	-0.406	0.685	Not Significant
	Female	52	11.2	3.32			

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

**Table 3:** Results of the t-test examine the difference in vocational maturity concerning locale.

	Locale	N	Mean	SD	t (148)	p	Remark
VAM	Rural	81	11.3	3.26	0.884	0.378	Not Significant
	Urban	69	10.8	3.10			

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

likely due to a lack of guidance from teachers and parents during their development phase. This contrasts with Choudhury & Saikia (2020), who found an average level of vocational maturity among students.

### Differences in Vocational Maturity among Class XI students concerning Gender

An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether this difference was statistically significant. The results showed that the t-value ( $t(148) = -0.406$ ) was not significant at the 0.05 level, as it was less than the critical value of 1.98 at 148 degrees of freedom. Therefore, the null hypothesis fails to be rejected. This aligns with findings from Choudhury & Saikia (2020) and Panakaze *et al.* (2024). Both genders appear to approach vocational choices similarly, likely due to equal career guidance. However, Sharma (2013) reported gender differences, with male students significantly influenced in their career choices.

### Differences in Vocational Maturity among class XI students concerning the locale

An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether this difference was statistically

significant. The results showed that the t-value,  $t(148) = 0.884$ , was not significant at the 0.05 level, as it was less than the critical value of 1.98 at 148 degrees of freedom. Additionally, the p-value (0.378) exceeded the 0.05 threshold, indicating that the difference is not statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis fails to be rejected. This aligns with Pandey & Manral (2017), who reported no significant locale difference in vocational maturity. However, this contradicts Kumar (2015), who suggested that rural students were less career-mature than urban students.

### Differences in Vocational Maturity among Class XI students concerning the Academic stream

From Table 4, the mean scores and standard deviations for vocational maturity among students from different academic streams were as follows: Science ( $M = 12.5, SD = 2.72$ ), Arts ( $M = 10.3, SD = 3.29$ ), and Commerce ( $M = 10.6, SD = 3.11$ ). These values indicate that Science stream students demonstrated higher vocational maturity compared to their counterparts in Arts and Commerce streams. To examine whether these differences were statistically significant, a one-way ANOVA was

**Table 4:** Results of the ANOVA examining the difference in vocational maturity concerning streams

	Group	N	Mean	SD	F	df1	df2	p
VAM	Science	44	12.5	2.72	6.93	2	147	0.001***
	Arts	53	10.3	3.29				
	Commerce	53	10.6	3.11				

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

**Table 5:** Results of Inter-Stream Differences using Tukey HSD Multiple Comparison Analysis

DIMENSION	ACADEMIC STREAM	MEAN DIFFERENCE	p-VALUE	SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE
VAL	Arts vs. Science	0.19	0.45	No
	Arts vs. Commerce	-0.008	0.99	No
	Science vs. Commerce	-0.20	0.39	No
IMJC	Arts vs. Science	0.27	0.28	No
	Arts vs. Commerce	0.51	0.012	Yes
	Science vs. Commerce	0.24	0.32	No
APJC	Arts Vs Science	0.48	0.011	Yes
	Arts vs. Commerce	0.36	0.06	No
	Science vs. Commerce	-0.11	0.75	No
LJACJP	Arts vs. Science	0.40	0.014	Yes
	Arts vs. Commerce	0.25	0.17	No
	Science vs. Commerce	-0.15	0.49	No
IVC	Arts vs. Science	0.29	0.32	No
	Arts vs. Commerce	0.49	0.039	Yes
	Science vs. Commerce	0.20	0.53	No
VU	Arts vs. Science	0.34	0.027	Yes
	Arts vs. Commerce	0.17	0.37	No
	Science vs. Commerce	-0.17	0.37	No
LI	Arts vs. Science	0.011	0.99	No
	Arts vs. Commerce	0.048	0.93	No
	Science vs. Commerce	0.03	0.95	No
CFVC	Arts vs. Science	0.19	0.14	No
	Arts vs. Commerce	0.002	1	No
	Science vs. Commerce	-0.18	0.12	No

**Note:** VAL-Vocational Aspiration Level, IMJC- Influence and Money in Job Choice, APJC- Altruism and Passivity in Job Choice, LJACJP- Lack of Job Awareness and Change in Job Performance, IVC- Indecisiveness in Vocational Choice, VU- Vocational Understanding, LI- Lack of Independence, CFVC- Chance Factor in Vocational Choice.

conducted. The results revealed that the F-value ( $F(2, 147) = 6.93, p = 0.001$ ) was significant at the 0.05 level. Since the obtained p-value (0.001) is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected.

### Inter-Stream Differences in Vocational Maturity

The results presented in Table 5 indicate that a significant difference was found in IMJC (Influence and Money in Job Choice) and IVC (Indecisiveness in Vocational Choice) between Arts and Commerce students. Arts and Science students showed a

significant difference in APJC (Altruism and Passivity in Job Choice) ( $p = 0.01$ ), LJACJP (Lack of Job Awareness and Change in Job Performance) ( $p = 0.01$ ) and VU (Vocational Understanding) ( $p = 0.02$ ). In the previous study by Gash & Khan (2016), it was interpreted that there is a significant difference in vocational maturity concerning different vocational streams (ITI, Polytechnic and NIT level courses) while in the present study, the results revealed that there is a significant difference in the vocational maturity of Science, Arts and Commerce concerning, the vocational maturity towards class XI students.

Based on qualitative findings, most students were found to be prioritizing career paths that ensure stability and growth, aligning their stream choices with long-term career aspirations. This aligns with the findings of (Uzuagu *et al.* 2023) that career choice is influenced by future job opportunities. Most students showed focus purely on passion and interest, indicating vocational aspirations driven by intrinsic motivation, as the career aspirations and growth objectives of Gen Z are shaped by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Barhate & Dirani, 2022). While some students make independent decisions regarding their future, many consult family members, teachers, newspapers, and online resources to make informed career choices. This suggests that external guidance plays a crucial role in career decision-making. External factors, such as parental expectations, shape career choices as family influences are interlinked with career decisions (Umar, 2014). The majority of the students also revealed they want to pursue their chosen career path, showing commitment. However, some might change plans if their first choice is not feasible, indicating adaptability. These adaptive behaviors align with the findings of Saleem *et al.* (2014), who argue that exploring various career options before making a definitive commitment enhances the likelihood of achieving success and satisfaction within the chosen profession. Most students revealed that family members directly guide them or set expectations based on financial security and societal status. Job market opportunities also affect career choices, prioritizing economic viability over personal interest which aligns with the previous study, Vatsa (2001) found that socioeconomic status plays a vital role in vocational maturity while the study by Qonitatin & Kushtanti (2021) concludes that career maturity in adolescents is established when factors such as autonomy, attachment, and parental support are mediated by self-efficacy in career decision-making.

**Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings**

This section deals with the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings and drawing meta inferences from the integration of both forms of data. The results are presented in the following joint display.

Quantitative Findings	Qualitative Findings	Meta-Inference
37% participants have low vocational maturity. No significant demographic differences.	High reliance on familial and academic authority (elders and teachers).	<b>Convergence:</b> The low maturity isn't a lack of intelligence; it's a defense mechanism against a lack of information. Students narrow their choices to avoid the confusion of a world they haven't been taught to explore.
Significant differences were found in dimensions such as Influence and Money in Job Choice, and Indecisiveness in Vocational Choice between Arts and Commerce students.	Students have shown an inclination towards extrinsic rewards (high salary, prestige, spending money).	<b>Complementarity:</b> Family and teachers are the primary filters. Even when a student performs independent research, they often align the results back to what is "socially acceptable" or "prestigious".
Arts and Science students showed a significant difference in Altruism and Passivity in Job Choice, Lack of Job Awareness and Change in Job Performance and Vocational Understanding.	Students have shown inclination towards intrinsic values (helping others, passion).	<b>Divergence:</b> There is a significant disparity in how different streams perceive the purpose of a job. Science students lean toward high-stakes prestige or stability, while Arts students are navigating a space with more altruism but significantly less vocational understanding.

**CONCLUSION**

Low vocational maturity among Class XI students highlights the need for parental engagement with schools to support career development. Parents can understand the importance of their children's career aspirations by collaborating with schools. Educators and counsellors should promote a wide range of careers to all students, regardless of gender, and design inclusive, equitable guidance programs. Schools should involve parents in the career development process, providing tools and knowledge to support vocational maturity. Uniform career counselling services are needed for both rural and urban students. Enhancing vocational readiness will help secondary school students in Lakhimpur district, Assam, succeed in their future careers.

In summary, the study indicates that vocational maturity among students is predominantly influenced by external guidance and economic viability, rather than purely intrinsic motivations.

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**Appendix A: Thematic Analysis of Student Interview Responses**

Questions	Sample Responses	Extracted Themes
1. Can you share your thoughts and aspirations regarding your future career or job?	<i>"I am very much interested in Software Engineering, and I want to become one. I have heard that they earn a lot more money, and if I become a Software Engineer, I will be able to spend money without any repercussions."</i>	1. A job that provides stability in life. 2. Focused on the career path. 3. No thought.
2. How do you go about making decisions when choosing a career path or considering further studies?	<i>"I am the youngest in the family, and I have elders who are well-established. I take advice from them when needed, as they have much more experience than me."</i>	1. Take advice from family. 2. Look for job opportunities. 3. Exploring more of it. 4. Not chosen due to uncertainty.
3. What sources do you use to gather information about various career options?	<i>"I have my supportive family as well as teachers who inform me about different career options."</i>	1. Collect information from teachers and family. 2. Collect information through newspapers and the internet.
4. Can you describe a situation where you had to make an independent decision about your future, and what factors influenced that decision?	<i>"When I was in the 10th standard, I wanted to become a psychologist. Later, I researched more about the medical field and decided to pursue it."</i>	1. Make an independent decision. 2. Family influenced career choices. 3. Not decided.
5. How open are you to trying out different occupations or career paths before making a final decision?	<i>"I think if a person considers too many career paths at a time, it may bring confusion. From my perspective, we should focus on only two or three options to avoid distractions."</i>	1. Waste of time. 2. Open to the idea.
6. What factors (family, culture, money, societal expectations) play a role in shaping your career choices?	<i>"Becoming a doctor brings prestige. It has many perks. So, both family and societal expectations shaped my career choices."</i>	1. Family, culture, social expectations, and money influence career choices. 2. No pressure from anyone.
7. How would you describe your level of aspiration when thinking about your future job or career?	<i>"I am drawn to my passion, which is to help others and learn new things. If an occupation includes that, I am open to it."</i>	1. Just trying to fulfil the dream. 2. Depends on interests and capacity.
8. Do you believe that your aspirations and interests will impact your choice when selecting an occupation?	<i>"Yes, if I do not have interest, I will never go for it. I know the field I have chosen has a lot of competition, but I am here with my dreams."</i>	1. Depends on interests and skills. 2. Interests and priorities vary.
9. How do you handle uncertainty about the future, especially concerning your career?	<i>"Right now, I have decided to become a doctor. But if I fail, I will consider other options. For now, my focus is on pursuing my dream."</i>	1. Open to other options. 2. Goal achievement. 3. No overthinking.
10. Can you reflect on a time when you found it challenging to make a decision about your future, and what did you learn from that experience?	<i>"When I chose Science in XI standard, I struggled to find career options beyond Engineering and Medicine. I realized I need to explore more."</i>	1. Yet to face any challenges. 2. Finding a definite career path is a challenge.
11. Were your career choices shaped by chance or choice?	<i>"From the beginning, I knew what I wanted to do, but I did not know which career options would provide those opportunities."</i>	Career choices were shaped by personal choice.
12. How independent are your career choices from other people's expectations?	<i>"It will be different from expectations. Audio engineering is new to many, and if I wanted to please others, I wouldn't have chosen it."</i>	1. Independent decision, no pressure from others. 2. Dependent on personal and parental expectations.
13. Can you recall any instances where you needed career advice, as you were unaware of different career opportunities?	<i>"I wanted to be involved in research, but did not know how. I researched and found ISAAR through newspapers and Google."</i>	1. Took advice from different platforms. 2. Never faced such instances.

