

# Understanding the Career-Decision Ambiguity Tolerance among College Students: A Conceptual Framework Linking Ambiguity Tolerance and Emotional Regulation

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## 1. Abstract

Career decision making is the gradual process, often involved challenges, uncertainty difficulty in making career choices & decision. Especially final year college students. Students faced more challenges in their career-decision making, due to the situational stressors, like employment, economic status, career outcomes. How students cope with career uncertainty, through the emotional regulation and ambiguity tolerance. Ambiguity tolerance has been identified as a crucial factor, in individual difference influencing how people respond to uncertain situations. Simultaneously the emotional regulation creates a significant impact on ambiguity tolerance, during the decision-making processes. This paper integrates existing theories on ambiguity tolerance and emotional regulation to propose a theoretical model for explaining the career decision making. This proposal model suggests that higher ambiguity tolerance facilitates adaptive career decisions and ambiguity tolerance also affected by emotional regulation, especially overcome from the difficult, ambiguity situations. This paper offers theoretical insights and directions for further empirical research and career guidance interventions. This conceptual paper investigate the impact of ambiguity tolerance among college students and how the emotional regulation mediating the role of ambiguity tolerance. The correlational study understanding the relationship between emotional regulation and ambiguity tolerance among students. Descriptive study of the ambiguity tolerance and how it related to the career outcomes. The research design was cross-sectional correlational research design. Sample of 200 final year college students recruited through systematic sampling. Standardized and validated scales will be used to measure the variables. The findings very helpful to understand the student career ambiguity tolerance and very helpful to career counselling and very helpful to future insight.

**Keywords: Career, Ambiguity Tolerance, Emotional Regulation**

## 2. Introduction

Career-decision represents a major transition point for final-year college students as they enter to workforce or pursuing higher studies. This phase is characterized by uncertainty related to employment opportunities, academic pathways, and future career and life style. Now a days so many students experience anxiety, stress and indecision during this period. Understanding the psychological factors that support adaptive career decision-making under uncertainty. This conceptual paper focuses on ambiguity tolerance and emotional regulation. These two psychological factors create a big impact on career decision- making and career outcomes.

Existing literature suggests that ambiguity tolerance influences how individuals perceive and respond to uncertain situations, here we correlate the emotional regulation with ambiguity tolerance, emotional

regulation plays a crucial role in regulating emotional responses during stressful career decision-making processes. Even though the ambiguity tolerance, emotional regulation has been examined independently in relation of career decision making uncertainty. The present conceptual paper addresses the gap by proposing a framework that integrates ambiguity tolerance and emotional regulation to explain career decision-making among final-year college students.

This paper explains how ambiguity tolerance and emotional regulation influence career decision-making. Then how emotional regulation affects the ambiguity tolerance of the individual. This paper also outlines the implications for further research and practice.

### 3. Need and significance of the study:

Now a days more choices and competition are there in the work environment. Also, the academic excellence. It's very hard to find the suitable career path to the students and define the career. This study helps individuals align their skills, interests, values with suitable jobs, reducing stress and improving life satisfaction, while also guiding institutions in designing better support systems (like counselling) foster career maturity, combat indecision (choice overload), and address changing job market demands, ultimately benefiting both personal well-being and economic productivity. Its significance lies in transforming a complex, stressful life events into a structured, informed process for better life outcomes. Personal wellbeing: poor choices lead to frustration, low productivity, and psychological distress: research helps individuals find fulfilling paths, impacting lifestyle, identity, emotional health. Navigating complexity: The modern world offers too many choices (choice overload), causing anxiety and paralysis, necessitating research into effective decision strategies. Economic & societal impact: aligned career choices boost individuals and organizational efficiency, while research identifies gaps between education and job market needs, reducing unemployment. Addressing external factors: Research explores how family, culture, and economic shifts influence choices, revealing needs for tailored guidance, especially for youth. Develop careers maturity: Helps individuals become ready and competent to make choices, a key goal of career counselling. Informs interventions: provides data for creating effective career counselling, educational programs, and tools (self-efficacy scales) to support better choices. Refines theoretical models: Expands on foundational theories (parson's trait-factor theory) by incorporating new elements like context, self-efficacy, decision making styles. promotes self-awareness: Emphasizes understanding one's own aptitudes, interests, and values as the core of a good decision. Underpins effective guidance: offers empirical evidence on factors like self-efficacy, locus of control, and future orientation, providing they significantly influence successful career decision-making. In the essence, this research moves career choice from a random event to strategic, self-aware process, essential for personal fulfilment and economic success in a complex world.

#### 3.1 Research gap

Previous research is more about the self-efficacy related to career. But this research addresses the ambiguity tolerance career decision.

#### 3.2 Background and need for the concept

Starting now, picking a path after school hits hard for seniors stepping into work life. Uncertainty creeps in - jobs might be scarce, directions unclear, hopes shaky. Confusion shows up loud, sometimes fear, too, when choices pile high without clear answers. Emotions weigh heavy here, shaping how students move through doubt toward decisions. How they handle inner pressures can quietly guide their next steps.

Focusing on thought processes like confidence and personal value in job choices, earlier studies laid some groundwork. In much the same way, handling uncertainty and managing feelings popped up across different career-related scenarios - yet stayed separate. Put together, those pieces rarely show how they connect when tested at once. Especially missing is insight into seniors navigating actual shifts after school wraps up.

Something missing in past studies led to this idea. When people face unclear paths in their careers, handling uncertainty matters a lot. Dealing with feelings comes into play when choices feel stressful. One feeds into the other when mapped together. Seeing both pieces at once deepens insight into how decisions unfold over time. Research later on could follow this map like a quiet signal. Help for students might grow from it, especially when shifting directions feels rocky. Tools built from this approach may support steadier steps through change.

#### **4. Theoretical framework**

##### **4.1 Ambiguity tolerance**

Define it as a personality trait reflecting an individual's capacity to cope with uncertain, unclear, or novel situations without experiencing discomfort or anxiety, contrasting low tolerance (psychological rigidity, black-and-white thinking) with high tolerance (flexibility, openness).

When things feel unclear, some people keep moving forward without needing every detail settled first. Instead of freezing up when confused, they explore options just because something feels uncertain. A person who stays calm during messy moments often tries new paths at work simply due to discomfort fading into curiosity. Rather than wait for perfect clarity, these individuals test ideas out like puzzles missing half their pieces. Uncertainty doesn't block them - strangely it pulls them toward untested choices almost by accident.

One early thinker tied discomfort with uncertainty to strict beliefs and bias. That idea came from someone who noticed uneasy people often reacted poorly when faced with unclear pictures. A different researcher later built a tool many still reference today, designed to catch how folks respond - either shutting down or giving in - when things get messy or new. Where one saw mental stiffness feeding closed minds, another framed it as seeing puzzles not dangers. The second approach spelled out ways to score those mindsets using choices made under confusion. What began as observation about fear turned into measurable behaviour through tests on novelty, tangled ideas, even unsolvable tasks.

##### **4.2 Emotional regulation**

One way people handle feelings is by using certain methods to shift how they react. When these techniques work well, dealing with pressure becomes easier, which clears space for better choices. A look at James Gross's ideas from the late 1990s shows five steps where emotion can be shaped along its path. Choosing what situations to enter comes first; changing those conditions follows next. Then there's guiding focus away or toward things that stir feeling. How we interpret events also plays a role - rewriting thoughts changes impact. Finally, adjusting physical or behavioural reactions happens after everything else has unfolded.

Now here's how people handle feelings before they grow too strong. One way starts early - choosing where to go or stay clear of places that spark certain reactions. Sometimes changing small things around helps ease tension right then and there. Looking elsewhere when overwhelmed can shift your inner state without fixing anything outside. Focusing on something neutral pulls energy from what stirs discomfort. Each move adjusts feeling flow in its own timing. Looking at things differently can shift how you feel about them. Once emotions show up, some ways help manage what happens next - like holding back reactions. Before feelings take hold, there are moves people make - choosing situations, shifting focus, adjusting thoughts. After the feeling hits, efforts turn toward handling it. These come into play once the emotional wave arrives.

##### **4.3 Social cognitive career theory:**

Popping up in 1994 through the work of Lent, Brown, and Hackett, this model tries to show how people grow career interests, pick jobs, and land at different points in their professional lives. At its heart lies a shifting blend - personal views mixing with surroundings along with what someone lived before.

One way to look at career growth involves three linked ideas, each showing a separate phase. Starting with

what catches your attention - interest often grows where confidence lives, shaped by beliefs about what might happen if you try something. When someone thinks they can do well at a task, and expects good things from it, that activity tends to stick around in their mind. Moving forward, those steady interests begin shaping decisions; picking paths like college majors comes next, guided by inner leanings turning into clear aims. From there, steps follow - like signing up for courses - not just thinking but doing. Then comes staying power: how far people go when challenges appear depends on several forces working together. Success isn't only about actual skill - it ties closely to belief in oneself, expected results, chosen targets, and whether effort holds firm under pressure.

posits that career choices result from the interaction between rapid, intuitive, emotional "system1" thinking and slow, logical, and analytical "system2" evaluation. It addresses high stakes decision uncertainty by integrating emotional, automatic reactions with deliberate, rational analysis, often under conditions of limited information or environmental adversity.

#### **4.4 Happenstance learning theory (HLT)**

Developed by John Krumboltz, posits that chance events, both planned and unplanned, significantly shape career paths and life decisions. Rather than relying on traditional linear planning, HLT emphasizes action, adaptability, cultivating curiosity to transform unexpected opportunities into learning experiences for a more satisfying, fulfilling career.

#### **4.5 The chaos theory of career (CTC)**

Bent paths define careers more than straight lines do. Chance bumps into plans when least expected. Twists arrive without warning, reshaping directions suddenly. Predictability rarely lasts long here. Flexibility matters much more than fixed schedules ever could. Staying steady through shifts makes space for surprise openings. Opportunities slip in sideways, never always front door. Long views blur easily under pressure of now. What bends today might break tomorrow's map entirely.

Right now, feelings and unclear situations link together through what we call tolerance for uncertainty. When students face moments full of unknowns, their ability to sit with confusion matters a lot. Dealing with open-ended options shows how they handle mental pressure without quick answers. Handling stress in those cases often depends on that same skill - staying steady when things lack clarity.

### **5. Conceptual framework model**

#### **5.1 Description of the framework**

Ambiguity tolerance is conceptualized as a key antecedent of career decision-making. Emotional regulation is proposed as a mediating mechanism through which ambiguity tolerance influences career decision-making outcomes.

#### **5.2 Framework:**

Ambiguity tolerance: high ambiguity tolerance leads to proactive career exploration – Emotional intelligence: help students manage the fear and stress of leaving academia–career decision adaptability: where better emotional regulation and higher tolerance for ambiguity lead to greater career adaptability – the ability to cope with unpredictable job changes.

### **6. Theoretical propositions**

Proposition 1: ambiguity tolerance is theoretically associated with adaptive career decision-making among final-year college students.

Proposition 2: ambiguity tolerance is positively associated with emotional regulation during career-decision making.

Finding calm inside uncertainty shapes how people choose their work path. When situations feel unclear, staying steady helps weigh options more clearly. Not reacting too fast gives room to think ahead. Pausing

when things seem foggy supports better choices over time. How someone handles inner shifts affects professional turns they take.

## **7. Future relevance and practical application**

When it comes to guidance, one thing stands out - helping seniors handle uncertainty matters more than listing job options. Instead of focusing only on roles and salaries, talking through emotional awareness makes a difference. Because clarity doesn't always come fast, sitting with confusion becomes part of growth. What sticks isn't data - it's how students learn to feel steady when answers aren't clear.

Ahead of today's thinking, watching students grow over years could show what happens when colleges help certain qualities thrive - how that links to later work achievements, contentment in jobs, even emotional well-being down the road.

Surprising how culture shapes things - what ties certain traits together in one place might not hold elsewhere, so findings from one region can't always apply everywhere else. Context changes everything.

### **7.1 Implications:**

When things feel shaky, learning to handle emotions matters. Instead of fearing unclear outcomes, getting comfortable with them helps. Facing an unpredictable job scene means building inner balance first. Dealing better with doubt opens space for calmer choices. Staying steady emotionally supports clearer thinking down the road.

One way to make choosing a path easier? Tackle discomfort around uncertainty first. Shifting how someone sees unclear options often loosens up stiff choices. A smoother pick emerges when foggy outcomes feel less threatening. Less fear of the unknown means fewer mental roadblocks during decisions. When picking a path, school help matters more than we think. Stress piles up fast for learners weighing options. Strengths like emotional control and adaptability step in right there. These traits shape decisions quietly but firmly. Readiness grows where mental tools are strong. Fewer people walk away from their goals when inner skills hold steady.

Emotions play a role just as much as thinking when shaping a path that lasts. One way to stay steady through shifts is building inner tools over time. Flexibility grows not just from plans but from how people handle uncertainty. Staying ready means working on mindset along with goals. What matters most shows up when change arrives without warning.

## **8. Conclusion:**

Ambiguity tolerance is a critical, direct predictor of career decision-making success. High AT allows students to navigate the uncertain, complex, often contradictory information of the modern job market, reducing general indecisiveness, dysfunctional beliefs.

The emotional regulation: career choices are often high-stakes and anxiety-provoking, effective emotion regulation is essential. Students with high emotional intelligence are better at managing stress, enabling them to remain engaged in, and effective at, the decision-making process rather than avoiding it.

### **8.1 Implications for career counselling**

Besides sharing job details, programs ought to strengthen inner resilience - helping learners sit with uncertainty while managing emotional reactions, which quietly builds self-assurance and eases hesitation about future paths.

Starting down an unclear path, some find their footing by staying calm amid confusion; that quiet strength turns worry into steady choices about work ahead.

Ultimately, fostering a high tolerance for ambiguity and strong emotional regulation helps final-year students transform the anxiety of an uncertain future into proactive, well-informed career action.

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