

Career Planning Abilities and Career Readiness of College Students

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on the relationship between the students' level of career planning abilities and their career readiness at Dongguan City University. The students' career planning ability was assessed to be of a moderate level. Moreover, their career readiness was determined and was found to be at a moderate level. It was also discovered that there are significant relationships between the students' level of career planning abilities in terms of knowing oneself, knowing the environment, goal setting, action planning, and problem solving and their level of career readiness in terms of communication, teamwork and interpersonal relations, leadership, creativity and problem solving, professionalism and work ethics, global/intercultural perspectives, and career management. The study also documented the problems and challenges participants encountered in their career planning preparation included a lack of self-awareness and clarity in career goals, limited skills in accessing and processing career information, inadequate goal-setting and self-motivation, insufficient action planning for career development, a lack of problem-solving skills, and poor communication and coordination skills. This study concludes that the higher the level of career planning abilities of the students, the higher the level of their career readiness.

KEYWORDS

Career planning; Career planning abilities; Career readiness

1 Introduction

With the rapid development of modern science and technology and the continuous adjustment of economic and industrial structures, the demand for talents in modern society has not only increased in quantity, but also put forward higher requirements for the quality of talents. According to statistics from the Ministry of Education of China, the number of graduates increased from 1.14 million in 2001 to 11.58 million in 2023, a 10-fold increase in 22 years. However, at the same time, it has also caused a series of problems such as insufficient infrastructure construction and difficulty in finding employment for college students. These problems have not only attracted widespread attention from society, but the sharp increase in the number of graduates has put forward new requirements for higher education. The employment situation of graduates is severe, and it has raised questions about the career planning, career choices, and necessary abilities of college students' higher requirements.

Moreover, the problem of mismatch between market demand and employment often occurs. In 2020, the Ministry of Education's notice on "Employment and Entrepreneurship of the 2021 National General College Graduates" emphasized that it is necessary to strengthen college students' learning of career planning knowledge, carry out career planning and employment guidance activities for students of different grades in colleges and universities across the country, and provide students with psychological counseling services for career development and employment.

Thus, this study aimed to investigate the relationship between career planning abilities and career readiness among the students at Dongguan City University, with the goal of proposing a plan of action to improve their career planning abilities and career readiness. The significance of this study lies in its potential to enhance the career development of students at Dongguan City University. By investigating the relationship between career planning abilities and career readiness, the study addresses two critical aspects of student success post-graduation: their ability to plan and navigate their career paths and their preparedness for entering the workforce.

The study aimed to investigate the relationship between the students' career planning abilities and their career readiness at Dongguan City University. Specifically, the study sought to address the following:

(1) What is the level of the students' career planning abilities in terms of following aspects?

① Knowing Oneself; ② Knowing the Environment; ③ Goal-Setting; ④ Action Planning; ⑤ Problem Solving.

(2) What is the participants' level of career readiness for their professional roles?

① Communication; ② Teamwork and Interpersonal Relations; ③ Leadership; ④ Creativity and Problem-Solving;

⑤ Professionalism and Work Ethics; ⑥ Global/Intercultural Perspective; ⑦ Digital Technology; ⑧ Career Management.

2 Methodology

2.1 Research design

This study employed a mixed research approach utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods.

For the quantitative method, it utilized the descriptive correlational research design. Specifically, the descriptive

research design was employed to describe the profile of the student participants, their level of career planning abilities, and level of career readiness.

Additionally, a correlational analysis was used to determine the significant relationship between the students' level of career planning abilities and their level of career readiness.

Finally, thematic analysis was used to document the problems and challenges encountered by the participants along their career planning and career readiness.

2.2 Participants of the study

The study included freshman students from Dongguan City University as participants. The total population consisted of 5,044 freshman students. To ensure a representative sample, a stratified sampling technique was employed, dividing the population into distinct subgroups to capture variations within the group. Raosoft Sample Size Calculator was used to determine an appropriate sample size, ensuring statistical accuracy and reliability.

The resulting sample distribution is presented in the table below for clarity and reference.

Table 1 Distribution of the participants of the study

College	Sample Size
Artificial Intelligence Institute	57
Intelligent Manufacturing Institute	80
School of Urban Construction and Environment	58
School of Art	60
School of Digital Economics	55
Business School	49
School of Creative Design	177
College of Language and Culture	35
Total	571

Further describing the profiles of the participants, majority or 71.10% of the students are 18 years old, majority or 53.59% of the students are female, majority or 56.57% of the students' parents have a monthly income ranging from ¥5,001 to ¥20,000, most or 36.43% of the students' fathers completed either high school or technical secondary school, and most or 34.15% of the students' mothers also completed either high school or technical secondary school.

2.3 Instrumentation

This study used questionnaires to collect data from selected participants. The questionnaire was compiled based on scales adopted by different authors such as Checklist of the Profile of the Participants to gather information about the students' profile variables, including gender, college department, parents' income, father's education, and mother's education; Students' Level of Career Planning Abilities Questionnaire to determine the students' level of career planning abilities in terms of knowing oneself, knowing the environment, goal-setting, action planning, and problem solving where the indicators were adopted from the study of Gao (2021); Students' Level of Career Readiness Questionnaire which was adopted from Career Readiness Self-Assessment of the California State University (2021) and was utilized to assess the students' level of career readiness in terms of communication, teamwork and interpersonal relations, leadership, creativity and problem-solving, professionalism and work ethics, global/intercultural perspective, digital technology, and career management. Open-Ended Questionnaire focused on documenting the problems and challenges participants encountered regarding their career planning and readiness.

2.4 Data analysis

To effectively present and analyze the collected data, this study made use of Frequency Count and Percentage Distribution to describe the profile of the participants; Mean to determine the students' level of career planning abilities as well as their level of career readiness; T/f-test of Independent Samples / Analysis of Variance(ANOVA) to determine the significant differences in the students' level of career planning ability when grouped according to profile variables; Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient(-r) to determine the significant relationship between the students' level of career planning ability and their level of career readiness and Thematic Analysis in presenting the problems and challenges that were encountered by the participants related to their career planning and career readiness.

To interpret the means, the following scale was used:

Table 2 Scale for interpreting the means

Mean Range	Descriptive Interpretation
3.25-4.00	Very High
2.50-3.24	High
1.75-2.49	Moderate
1.00-1.74	Low

3 Results and discussion

3.1 Level of career planning abilities of the students

Table 3 Student participants' level of career planning abilities

Dimensions	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
Knowing Oneself	2.21	Moderate
Knowing the Environment	2.32	Moderate
Goal setting	2.25	Moderate
Action Planning	2.24	Moderate
Problem Solving	2.26	Moderate
Overall Mean	2.25	Moderate

As revealed in the table, the overall mean of 2.25 indicates a moderate level of career planning abilities among student participants in terms of knowing oneself, knowing the environment, goal setting, action planning, and problem solving. This indicates that that students possess a fair and not highly developed understanding of themselves, the environment they are entering, the ability to set goals, plan actions, and solve problems related to their careers.

The inferential analyses between the students' level of career planning abilities and various profiles variables indicate that there are no significant differences in the students' level of career planning abilities in terms of knowing oneself, knowing the environment, goal setting, action planning, and problem solving when grouped according to age and gender. However, when grouped according to college or department, significant differences were noted in terms of knowing oneself, goal setting, action planning, and problem solving, while there is no significant difference in the students' level of career planning abilities in terms of knowing the environment.

There are also significant differences in the students' level of career planning abilities in terms of knowing oneself, knowing the environment, goal setting, action planning, and problem solving when they are grouped according to their parents' monthly income and their mothers' highest educational attainment. Meanwhile, there is no significant difference in the students' career planning abilities in terms of knowing the environment when they are grouped according to their fathers' highest educational attainment but there are significant differences in the students' level of career planning abilities in terms of knowing oneself, goal-setting, action planning, and problem solving when they are grouped according to their fathers' highest educational attainment.

3.2 Students' level of career readiness

Table 4 Students' level of career readiness

Dimensions	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
Communication	2.10	Moderate
Teamwork and Interpersonal Relations	2.16	Moderate
Leadership	2.14	Moderate
Creativity and Problem-Solving	2.11	Moderate
Professionalism and Work Ethics	2.02	Moderate
Global/Intercultural Perspective	2.17	Moderate
Digital Technology	2.14	Moderate
Overall Mean	2.12	Moderate

As revealed in the table, the students' level of career readiness in terms of communication, teamwork and interpersonal relations, leadership, creativity and problem-solving, professionalism and work ethics, global/intercultural perspective, and digital technology was assessed as moderate. This is supported by the overall mean of 2.12. This moderate level suggests that students are somewhat prepared for the workforce but may need additional training or support to strengthen these essential skills.

3.3 Significant relationship between the students' level of career planning abilities and their level of career readiness

The results of the test of significant relationship between the students' level of career planning abilities and their level of career readiness show that all the probability values are less than the 0.05 level of significance; therefore, the null

hypotheses are rejected. This means that there are significant relationships between the students' level of career planning abilities in terms of knowing oneself, knowing the environment, goal setting, action planning, and problem solving and their level of career readiness in terms of communication, teamwork and interpersonal relations, leadership, creativity and problem solving, professionalism and work ethics, global/intercultural perspective, and digital technology. Hence, the higher the level of career planning abilities, the higher the level of career readiness.

3.4 Problems and challenges encountered by the students related to their career planning and career readiness

The challenges faced by participants in their career planning preparation are multifaceted. Through a comprehensive analysis, this paper documents students' problems and challenges in career planning and career readiness such as lack of self-awareness and clarity in career goals, lack of career information access and processing skills, inadequate goal-setting and self-motivation, inadequate action planning for career development, lack of problem-solving skills, and lack of communication and coordination.

3.5 Plan of action improve the students' level of career planning abilities and career readiness

To enhance college students' career readiness, it is crucial to address the challenges they face in career planning and provide effective support. Students need to be proactive in facing the difficulties and challenges associated with self-awareness, understanding their environment, goal-setting, action planning, and problem-solving. Additionally, fostering communication and coordination skills is vital in helping students navigate their career planning journey.

The development of career planning skills helps students achieve accurate self-positioning, self-awareness, and ultimately, self-realization. Educational institutions should align career goals with each student's unique circumstances, guiding them in crafting realistic career plans. By cultivating these planning abilities, students can enhance their core competencies. Furthermore, aligning personal career goals with societal needs can contribute to social progress and the overall development of national quality.

To effectively address these challenges, it is essential to implement interventions targeting six key dimensions. By equipping students with the necessary skills, support, and resources, educational institutions can empower them to proactively engage in career planning, achieve academic success, and lay a solid foundation for their future education and personal development.

4 Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher drew the following conclusions:

A moderate level of career planning abilities in students implies that they have a basic understanding of themselves and their career goals, but may not yet have fully explored their strengths, weaknesses, and aspirations. While they have some awareness of the external environment, they might struggle with setting clear, long-term goals and creating actionable plans. Their problem-solving skills are developing, but they may need more practice in applying effective strategies to overcome obstacles and adapt to changing circumstances.

Additionally, the moderate level of career readiness in students suggests they possess basic skills in areas like communication, teamwork, and leadership, but may still need development in fully mastering these competencies. Their creativity and problem-solving skills, professionalism, and work ethics are emerging, and they show an awareness of the importance of a global perspective and digital technology, though they may lack the advanced proficiency required for complex professional environments.

Finally, the significant relationship between students' career planning abilities and their career readiness implies that students who are better at knowing themselves, understanding their environment, setting clear goals, creating action plans, and solving problems are more likely to develop strong career readiness skills. These students are better equipped to communicate effectively, work in teams, demonstrate leadership, and apply creativity to solve challenges. Their self-awareness and ability to plan and adapt also contribute to stronger professionalism, work ethics, and a broader global perspective, which are essential in today's dynamic job market.

5 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study and the conclusions drawn, the researcher proposed the following recommendations:

(1) Colleges and Universities should integrate career planning into the curriculum, ensuring resources and programs that encourage student participation. They should also establish a dedicated career planning service and provide adequate technical support, learning resources, and academic guidance to help students enhance their career planning and preparation skills.

(2) Educators should receive professional training to better understand and support students' career planning needs.

They should offer personalized guidance, encourage proactive planning, and foster a collaborative environment with parents, mentors, and counselors to reduce resistance to career development.

(3) Students should set clear career goals and recognize the connection between career planning and personal development. They should understand the value of career ability training, adopt a positive attitude towards career planning guidance, and actively engage in the process. Seeking support from peers and teachers will also help in their professional growth.

(4) Society should support the education system by encouraging institutions to innovate in career planning. By providing practical tools, training methods, and resources, society can help students apply their skills in the real world.

(5) Governments can create policies to promote innovation in school career planning systems and vocational preparation. They should offer financial support to ensure students have access to quality resources and encourage educational research to improve career readiness among college students.

(6) The researcher should share the results of this study with the school to help plan activities that improve students' career planning and readiness.

(7) Future researchers may conduct further studies on career planning and share their findings to offer valuable insights and guidance to the education sector.

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