

Establishing the Level of Interaction Between Career Orientation Knowledge, University Career Guidance, Parental Background and Students' Career Readiness

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Abstract: *Because of the poor linkage between career aspirations, university careers service organizations, and family upbringing, this transition from study to work is usually difficult. Knowledge of future career orientations, university career service guidance, and parental background contribute on Chinese university students' career readiness play a crucial role, in doing so, the research findings are expected to provide insight on good career readiness strategies, which can be used to mobilize better practices in policymakers, educators and parents to further improve the career readiness of university students in Shandong.*

Keywords: career orientation knowledge, career guidance, career services advantages, career guidance

1. Introduction

It will explore how knowledge of future career orientation, the role of university career guidance, and parental background play the role of shaping career readiness among university students in Shandong Province, China. Considering the rapid economic development in the region and heightening competition on the job market, this is serious pressure to get those university students prepared professionally. At the same time, this transition from study to work is usually difficult because of the poor linkage between career aspirations, university careers service organizations, and family upbringing.

In relation to this, the current research investigates how knowledge of future career orientations, university career service guidance, and parental background contribute on Chinese university students' career readiness for work life. This introductory chapter will discuss the context of the research, why investigation on the mentioned factors is necessary. In doing so, the research findings are expected to provide insight on good career readiness strategies, which can be used to mobilize better practices in policymakers, educators and parents to further improve the career readiness of university students in Shandong. This section discusses the findings in all of the research objectives and research questions in the context of supporting references and theoretical framework used in this study.

2. The Main Issue of the Research

2.1 Male and Female Students' Knowledge of Future Career Orientation, Perception of University Career Guidance, and Parental Background Based on Degree Majors

The findings indicate that STEM students, regardless of gender, generally possessed higher knowledge of future career orientation compared to non-STEM students. This aligns with prior research suggesting more structured career pathways in STEM fields (Jiang & Du, 2020). Female STEM students, however, reported slightly lower confidence in career guidance effectiveness, consistent with documented gender disparities in access to career resources (Wang & Huang, 2019). Parental background significantly varied across majors, with STEM students more likely to come from higher socioeconomic families, reflecting social capital advantages (Zhao, 2019). These results underscore the interplay between academic discipline and familial support systems in shaping students' career awareness. They also reflect Confucian cultural patterns where parental involvement remains central to decision-making, particularly in prestigious or technical fields (Guo & Guo, 2016; Park, 2013).

2.2 The Role of Career Orientation Knowledge in Predicting Career Readiness

The quantitative results of this study affirm the substantial influence of career orientation knowledge on the career readiness of Chinese university students. Students who demonstrated a high level of career-related awareness such as familiarity with job trends, clarity of career goals, and understanding of application procedures—also reported greater confidence and preparedness for their post-graduation transitions. This is consistent with theoretical frameworks such as Savickas' (2013) career construction theory and Lent et al.'s (2002) social cognitive career theory, both of which highlight future-oriented knowledge as central to employability.

In line with prior studies (e.g., Liu & Zhang, 2021; Hooley et al., 2015), this research found that university career guidance played a significant role in shaping this knowledge. Students who actively engaged with career services reported higher levels of readiness, suggesting that institutional interventions can partly compensate for uneven family backgrounds or gender-based access gaps.

Empirically, the data revealed that STEM students were more likely to report structured career knowledge and clearer goal-setting compared to their non-STEM peers a finding supported by Zhao (2019) and Tang (2020). Meanwhile, female students were more likely to report lower confidence levels despite having comparable academic performance, consistent with Wang and Leung's (2020) findings on gendered perceptions of career readiness.

Culturally, qualitative data highlighted the influence of parental expectations, showing that students often align their career knowledge and goals with family norms rooted in Confucian ideals. For many, particularly in high-SES families, this translated into proactive efforts (e.g., internships, career coaching) that enhanced their readiness, reinforcing observations by Park (2013) and Sun and Yuen (2022).

The linkage between career orientation knowledge and readiness is both structural and cultural. It reflects not only the student's exposure to professional information but also their embeddedness in family and institutional networks. Thus, interventions aimed at improving career readiness must address not only informational gaps but also social and cultural barriers to career exploration.

Academic major significantly shapes students' career preparation, influencing their exposure to industry practices, internship opportunities, and employability skills. In particular, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) students tend to receive more structured career support through university-industry collaborations and targeted recruitment programs (Zhao, 2019; Tang, 2020).

Students majoring in IT benefit from strong labour market demand, often translating into higher job readiness and faster employment transitions (Chen et al., 2021). These majors are typically aligned with fast-evolving industries where practical skills and technical training are closely linked to employability outcomes.

In contrast, Arts and Humanities majors often face more ambiguous career paths, with fewer structured internships and employer connections. As a result, career readiness among Arts students may rely more heavily on soft skills, entrepreneurial initiative, and external networks (Liu & Zhang, 2021).

Discipline-specific expectations also shape students' understanding of career orientation. STEM and IT students are often trained with clear career trajectories, whereas Arts majors navigate a broader, less defined spectrum of possibilities (Jiang & Du, 2020). These disparities suggest a need for differentiated career guidance approaches that address the unique challenges and opportunities across academic disciplines.

These services assist students, in dealing with the challenges of the job market since the service provides the necessary types of equipment and knowledge to enable the student to make the right decision (Wang et al., 2024). However, the usefulness of these services depends on the manner in which they are offered and perceived by the beneficiaries, namely the students. Likewise, the parent's motivation also has positive impact on students' perception of their careers. The parent plays a social role by attending to their children's needs either psychologically, financially, or by offering advice (Zhang & Cherng, 2024). In detail, it is essential to distinguish where these two types of motivation intertwine and how the interdependence of both kinds serves as a base for developing suitable career preparation and assistance for students.

Thus, it is crucial to mention that the results of this study can be further helpful for educational institutions and families to know the suitable ways of supporting students in their career choices. From this study, insights into the specifics of external and internal influences that predetermine students' choices can be derived, and therefore the results of this study may help improve the University Guidance programs, moreover, it can assist parents in providing proper support to their children in their choice of career (Huang et al., 2022). In a wider perspective, the outcomes of the present study could be valuable for training politicians and school teachers about the absence of unity in the existing career counselling services which established viewpoints both in the institution as well as in the familial background.

In a bid to accomplish these research objectives, the study uses a survey research technique with Shandong University students as the target population of 350 students (Wang et al., 2022). All the survey questions' aims and objectives are prepared specifically to determine the extent to which University Guidance and parents' motivation have contributed to students' career choices. The collected data will be used to do descriptive and inferential statistics to determine relationships between the variables (Qi et al., 2024). In this respect, the focus on a particular

region offers a thorough understanding of the tendencies in the field of career planning in the context of Chinese higher education at large.

The limitations and assumptions of the study are also outlined in the introduction chapter, whereby the study's focus on only one province limits the generalizability of the findings. Thus, even though the subjects of this study are representative of Chinese university students in Shandong province, the findings cannot be universally generalizable to other areas with ethnic, economic, or educational differences (Zhou et al., 2024). Furthermore, the method of data collection that was used involves self-completion of questionnaires, and this method is likely to suffer from response bias whereby the students tend to give answers that they think are socially desirable. Of course, the study has its drawbacks: The sample size is limited, and volunteers cannot be considered a representative sample of the population, as all participants in the study received compensation for their participation (Ahiafor & Ren, 2024). However, the study still has the potential to attract researchers' attention and contribute to the development of further studies on the subject.

2.3 Role of University Career Guidance in Career Readiness

University career guidance plays a pivotal role in shaping students' transition from academic environments to the workforce. It encompasses services such as job placement assistance, career counselling, resume workshops, internship facilitation, and employer engagement. These institutional supports are essential in equipping students with the practical tools and knowledge required for career readiness (Hooley et al., 2015; Watts, 1996).

In the Chinese context, the expansion of career services has been influenced by policy initiatives like the Double First-Class Initiative, which emphasizes graduate employability as a core metric (Ministry of Education, 2017). However, the reach and quality of these services remain inconsistent across universities, often reflecting regional and institutional disparities (Tang, 2020; Liu & Zhang, 2021).

Empirical studies suggest that students who frequently utilize university career services demonstrate greater career clarity, stronger job search skills, and higher employment confidence (Lent et al., 2002; Chen et al., 2021). Additionally, students in elite institutions are more likely to receive personalized guidance and access to well-established alumni networks, further amplifying their readiness.

Gender and major-based differences have also been observed. Female students, particularly in non-STEM fields, are more reliant on university-provided resources due to limited familial or external networks (Wang & Leung, 2020). STEM students, on the other hand, often benefit from structured university-industry collaborations that enhance their employment prospects (Zhao, 2019; Tang, 2020).

Despite these benefits, there are challenges related to student engagement and service delivery. Many students perceive university career services as too generic or poorly aligned with labor market realities. Others report a lack of integration between academic advising and career planning, limiting the holistic development of career readiness (Hooley et al., 2015; Liu & Zhang, 2021).

2.4 Parental Background and Career Readiness: A Critical Interpretation

The findings of this study affirm the significant role of parental background particularly socioeconomic status (SES), educational attainment, and parental involvement in shaping the

career readiness of Chinese university students. Quantitative results indicated a strong positive correlation between parental background and students' confidence, preparedness, and clarity in career planning. Among the three predictive variables analysed (career orientation knowledge, university guidance perception, and parental background), parental background emerged as the most powerful predictor of career readiness across both STEM and non-STEM disciplines.

This aligns with existing empirical research (Zhao, 2019; Chen et al., 2021), which has shown that students from high-SES families possess more robust career-related resources and social capital. These students are often equipped with early exposure to professional environments, internships facilitated through parental networks, and access to private educational and career services advantages that amplify their preparedness for the labour market (Lin, 1999; Xiao, 2019).

Qualitative insights from this study further support the literature, with participants frequently citing their parents' occupation, advice, or expectations as key influences on their academic and career decisions. This was particularly pronounced among only-child respondents, consistent with the literature on intensified parental investment in China's post-One-Child era (Wang & Leung, 2020). As Guo and Guo (2016) and Park (2013) argue, Confucian cultural norms of filial piety and collectivism amplify parental influence, often prompting students to prioritize familial expectations over individual interests when selecting majors or career paths. This study also found that parental educational attainment played an important role, students whose parents held university degrees reported higher career readiness in navigating career choices, echoing findings by Zhang and Bray (2020). Such students often exhibited a stronger understanding of labour market demands and were more proactive in leveraging university resources—highlighting the role of cultural and educational capital as theorized by Bourdieu (1986).

Conversely, students from rural or lower-SES families expressed greater uncertainty about career pathways and were more dependent on institutional guidance. These disparities reflect what Liu (2020) described as “career capital gaps” and highlight the structural inequalities in Chinese higher education. The results suggest that while career guidance services are intended to democratize career readiness, their effectiveness is often mediated by students' family background and pre-existing access to information and networks.

In sum, this study confirms that parental background continues to exert a critical influence on students' career development, even within a rapidly modernizing and competitive educational environment. While university career services play a supportive role, they currently do not fully compensate for inequalities in parental support and access to social capital. Therefore, future policies and practices in Chinese higher education should aim to provide more targeted support for students from less privileged backgrounds, ensuring a more equitable transition from education to employment.

3. Conclusion

Overall, this study demonstrates that career readiness among Chinese university students cannot be understood solely as an individual endeavour. Instead, it is shaped by a complex interplay of parental background (social/cultural capital), institutional support (career-guidance services), and students' own agency. By integrating quantitative trends with qualitative narratives, the research not only advances theoretical models of career readiness in non-

Western contexts but also offers concrete recommendations for universities, policymakers, and families. Finally, the proposed avenues for future research underscore the need for longitudinal, comparative, and multilevel studies to build on these findings and continue improving career-development pathways for China's next generation of graduates.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this study.

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