

Student Readiness and Career Satisfaction: Analyzing the Mediating Role of Career Counselor Proficiency in Private Universities in Nanchang, Jiangxi, China

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Abstract

This research will discuss the relationship between student readiness factors (social norms, knowledge increasing, expectations broadening and skills gaining) and career satisfaction of civil engineering students in private universities. It also further investigates the mediating role of career counselor proficiency in this relationship. A survey is conducted among 285 Business Administration students and a Quantitative research design is utilized to reach the expected results. Such results indicate that student readiness factors distinctly impact career satisfaction and career counselor competency plays a critical role in mediating this effect. The implications of this research are important for institutions wishing to improve the career satisfaction and thereby, outcomes within their graduate community.

Keywords: Readiness, Counselor Proficiency, Career Satisfaction

Introduction

Agreeing to this perspective, measuring career satisfaction is one of the most important aspects which everyone should include in his/her professional life. That too from both per individual and organizational points of view (Noordegraaf, 2020). The job market is highly competitive in China and as such, fresh graduates tend to have their hands full when it comes to having a satisfying career. This holds particularly true for students working to earn business administration degrees, which is simultaneously an expansive and demanding area of study. Some of the factors that go into determining career satisfaction are whether a job fits with personal values, growth opportunities and work environment (Gander et al., 2020). Similar to many business administration students in Nanchang, one of China's largest cities located in the rugged mountains of Jiangxi province, my life there collided with expectations from society and the speed at which its economy was evolving.

The present study explores the role of student readiness that comprised social norms, knowledge, expectations and skills in career satisfaction among business administration graduates working as professionals from private universities in Nanchang (Tingting & Segumpan, 2024). It also examines the mediation role of career counselor proficiency in these relationships that indicates a pathway for educational institutions to strengthen their support on students' career development.

Research Gap

The rationale behind this study lies in addressing a crucial research gap regarding the role of student readiness factors and career counselor proficiency in influencing career satisfaction, particularly in the context of business administration students in private universities in Nanchang, Jiangxi, China. While previous studies have explored various determinants of career satisfaction, few have focused on the combined effects of social norms, knowledge, expectations, and skills, with an emphasis on the mediating role of career counselor proficiency in this relationship. Moreover, the unique educational environment in private institutions, which may differ from public universities in terms of resources, support systems, and counselor competency, remains underexplored in existing literature. By investigating these gaps, the study aims to provide insights into how targeted interventions in career counseling and student readiness can improve career outcomes, contributing to the growing body of knowledge on career satisfaction in Chinese higher education.

Research Objectives

- RO1: To examine the factors contributing to students' readiness for career satisfaction among business graduates.
- RO2: To investigate the relationship between students' readiness factors and the level of career satisfaction among business graduates and to determine its significance.
- RO3: To assess the role of career counsellor proficiency as a mediator variable in the relationship between students' readiness factors and the career satisfaction of business graduates.
- RO4: To propose an effective model for student preparation that enhances career satisfaction.

Research Questions

- RQ1: What are the key factors that contribute to students' readiness for career satisfaction among business graduates?
- RQ2: Is there a statistically significant correlation between students' readiness factors and career satisfaction?
- RQ3: Does career counsellor proficiency mediate the relationship between students' readiness factors and career satisfaction among business graduates?
- RQ4: How can educational institutions and career Counselling services implement and optimize this model to improve students' career satisfaction outcomes?

Research Hypothesis

H1: Social Norms of Students on Career Satisfaction of Business Graduates

Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant relationship between the social norms of students and the career satisfaction of business graduates in Nanchang, Jiangxi, China.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): The social norms of students significantly impact the career satisfaction of business graduates in Nanchang, Jiangxi, China.

H2: Knowledge and Expectations on Career Satisfaction of Business Graduates

Null Hypothesis (H0): The knowledge and expectations of business graduates regarding job market conditions, career prospects, and the value of their education do not significantly contribute to their overall career satisfaction.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): The knowledge and expectations of business graduates significantly contribute to their overall career satisfaction.

H3: Students' Skills and Practice on Career Satisfaction of Business Graduates:

Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant relationship between the skills and practices adopted by business graduates (e.g., networking, problem-solving, and career planning) and their career satisfaction.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): The skills and practices adopted by business graduates significantly influence their career satisfaction.

H4: Social Norms of Students on Career Counsellor Proficiency:

Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant relationship between the social norms of students and their perceptions of career counsellor proficiency in Nanchang, Jiangxi, China.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): The social norms of students significantly shape their perceptions of career counsellor proficiency in Nanchang, Jiangxi, China.

H5: Knowledge and Expectations on Career Counsellor Proficiency:

Null Hypothesis (H0): Students' knowledge and expectations about the qualifications, competencies, and outcomes of career counsellors do not significantly affect their assessment of career counsellor proficiency and the effectiveness of career guidance services.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): Students' knowledge and expectations about career counsellors significantly impact their assessment of career counsellor proficiency and the effectiveness of career guidance services.

H6: Students' Skills and Practice on Career Counsellor Proficiency:

Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant relationship between the skills and practices of students in career Counselling sessions and their perceptions of career counsellor proficiency and the overall effectiveness of career Counselling services.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): The skills and practices of students in career Counselling sessions significantly influence their perceptions of career counsellor proficiency and the overall effectiveness of career Counselling services.

H7: Career Counsellor Proficiency on Satisfaction of Business Graduates:

Null Hypothesis (H0): The proficiency of career counsellors in providing guidance, support, and relevant insights to business graduates does not significantly impact the career

satisfaction, job-related success, and overall well-being of these graduates in Nanchang, Jiangxi, China.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): The proficiency of career counsellors significantly impacts the career satisfaction, job-related success, and overall well-being of business graduates in Nanchang, Jiangxi, China.

Literature Review

Considering career satisfaction as a multidimensional construct, many studies have tried to investigate this aspect (Chan et al., 2021). Take your satisfaction for a ride in terms of how happy you are with the pace at which they let when it comes to job security, work-life balance, alignment with personal goals and other career progression factors. For Chinese graduates of business administration, career satisfaction is especially influenced by social honor and family pressure in a fiercely competitive job market.

Career choices and satisfaction are greatly influenced by social norms — the set of shared expectations held by a society or community (Horne & Mollborn, 2020). There are strong social norms involved in this: job stability, financial security and family responsibilities. These norms can affect students' career ideal and match.

Students need a reality of the job market and where their career can go from there. Career satisfaction for business administration students in Nanchang has a lot to do with knowing the trends, job openings and what is or will be demanded locally or nationally as viewed through the lenses of each individual (Muñoz et al., 2022). Those skills and practices that students cultivate during their study years are key to the success of their career. Some of these, like hard skills such as technical knowledge in business administration or soft-skills like communication problem-solving and adaptability.

Career counselors are also put in place to guide students when transitioning from academia into the workplace (Okolie et al., 2020). They help students with an insight to the right career as they align what the student wants & preparing him/her for how does it work out in actual. Theoretically, advising readiness factors are expected to influence career satisfaction through the mediating effect of competence in counseling practice as a consequence. Counselors also play a crucial role in helping students optimize both their expectations and skills, all of which ensures that they can operate effectively within social norms to derive higher career satisfaction from the whole experience (Judge et al., 2020).

It is necessary to create jobs in order to increase the likelihood that students will find employment once they graduate (Teng et al., 2019). However, the student's primary areas of study, rather than their general skill set, will be the ones to lead to employment opportunities after they graduate. This trait encompasses a wide range of abilities, including dependability, friendliness, initiative, and honesty, as well as the capacity to connect successfully with people in a group setting. It is imperative that these concerns be addressed in the context of career counselling and education if one is to facilitate the growth of students' individual perspectives and the expansion of their positive contributions to society. It is feasible to provide students with the resources they require to grow to their fullest potential, which will assist the students in reaching this objective and making it a reality (Nove et al., 2021).

Because of the way the labour market is now functioning, finding full-time work in the economy after graduating from college is exceedingly difficult, if not downright impossible, for recent college graduates. This is more true in the United States of America than it is in the majority of other countries. This has some connection to the recent downturn in economic activity around the world. Students need to be aware of the likelihood that they will need to get a job in order to obtain experience in order to make an informed decision about which professional path will better meet their interests in the future. This will allow them to select a career path that will more closely align with their interests. The students have a duty to stay informed about what's going on. This is in line with the recommendation to investigate a number of other career options before committing to one. Students can increase their marketability to prospective employers in a number of ways, one of which is through expanding their skill sets and gaining new experiences (Jackson & Bridgstock, 2021). As a consequence of this, students have the opportunity to boost their employability to prospective employers. Students that take the class may find that it increases their employability. As was mentioned earlier, this has significant repercussions for the development of the whole company as a whole. It is absolutely necessary for subject teachers and guidance counsellors to work together in order to successfully address the intellectual and emotional needs of their pupils. Additional activities, such as giving students the chance to take part in competitions, internships, and other opportunities of a similar nature, could also be provided as a means of providing assistance with this problem. This is a reasonable approach to use in order to accomplish that target.

A significant component of this method is the disposition in which the students deliver their presentations. The behaviour described above is an illustration of such conduct. Students can improve their employability and increase their chances of finding work by participating in a variety of career-related activities and fairs such as mock interviews, career seminars, and job fairs. These events can help students learn more about potential careers and improve their chances of finding work (Office, 2019). This system is a great example of the centuries-old practise of traditional Chinese architecture because of the emphasis it places on collaboration between a wide variety of organisations and people operating on a variety of different levels. This is one of the reasons why this system is such a good representation of the practise. In this respect, the system offers a magnificent illustration of a type of Chinese architecture that has been practised for hundreds of years.

Aware of normative pressures, also known as subjective standards. Given that this concept is consistent with the current reformation tendencies in career advising for Chinese colleges, we can deduce that these movements will find it helpful. In other words, it is consistent with particular tendencies and beliefs since it is compatible with them in the first place. Students' career decisions and the rates of advancement they experience in the fields they pursue are influenced by a number of factors, including the students' own interests, the influence of their peers, as well as the amount of time and effort they put into developing the skills that employers seek. Current college students' chosen fields of study and areas of interest the vulnerability of students to the influence of their peers. The extent to which students acquire and put into practise the abilities that will be necessary for them to obtain and maintain employment. The greatest way to cultivate a healthy professional development is to arrive at decisions regarding one's core fields of study after doing sufficient research and reflection.

The foundation for a successful transfer in one's line of work can be laid with the assistance of a solid academic foundation and an increase in employability (Lee, 2001).

According to the World Economic Forum's Future Jobs 2020 report, by 2025, the four key skills required for the workforce will be problem solving, self-management, working with others, and technology application and development. "We are currently in the era of Industry 4.0, where advances in technology are massively impacting and changing the shape of how people live, learn, work and do business. For students to be prepared for the future, they first need to understand the times they are living in, and what the world will look like in the future." The job market will see a rise in demand for people-centered skills, including teamwork, the ability to perform well in different cultures, creativity, critical thinking, the ability to communicate effectively and having entrepreneurial skills. At the same time, active learning, making good use of technology, using data to analyze problems and coming up with innovative solutions are also skills in demand. Garnaronson reminds students that academic excellence is no longer enough; to be prepared for the future, students need to be well-rounded, which encompasses the head, or knowledge; the heart, or emotional well-being; and the hands, or lifelong life skills (Lee, 2010). Emotional Intelligence and Social Intelligence are especially important in teamwork, where students need to be self-aware and able to self-adjust, as well as socially aware of those around them, and have relationship management skills to keep the team in harmony. In addition to this, leadership skills need to be developed, as good leadership brings social impact capital to the student. Students also need to realize the importance of interdisciplinary knowledge, where knowledge is no longer just about specializing in a particular subject, but also about breadth of knowledge. Rather than just studying accounting, students need to consider taking other subjects such as data analytics, programming, digital marketing, and even psychology to help them be resilient. Lifelong learning and constantly absorbing new knowledge to stay relevant to the industry.

The conceptual framework for study is given below:

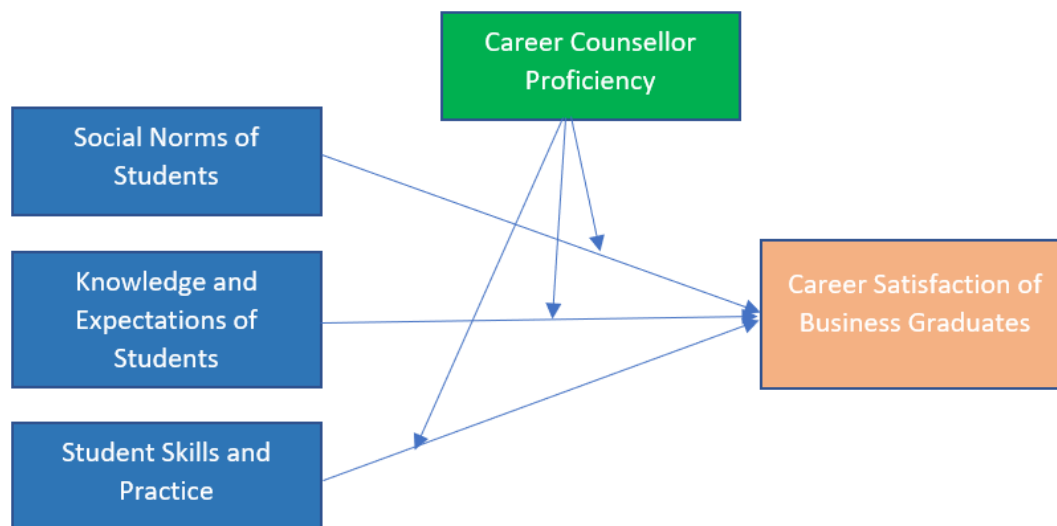


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Methodology

The research design of this study was quantitative, employing a structured questionnaire to collect data from 285 business administration students at private colleges and universities in Nanchang. The questionnaire included items designed to measure the rewards and costs

associated with college career readiness (e.g., social norms, knowledge, expectations) as well as job satisfaction and students' assessments of the effectiveness of college counselors. This design enabled the analysis of relationships between these variables using statistical techniques, specifically Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). PLS-SEM was applied due to its suitability for non-normal distributions and smaller sample sizes, contrasting with Covariance Based SEM, which typically requires at least 200 cases with normal distribution.

The study population consisted of business administration students at private universities in Nanchang, Jiangxi. A sample of 285 students was selected through random sampling to obtain a broad cross-section of the student population. Private universities were chosen as the educational environment in these institutions, including resources supporting students academically and personally and tools for college-to-career fit, was expected to differ from public institutions.

Data collection involved a structured questionnaire administered to respondents, which included demographic information, questions on social norms, knowledge, expectations, and skills. The questionnaire was specifically designed to measure career satisfaction and the proficiency of career counselors. Before full implementation, the questionnaire was pilot-tested with a small group of students (N = 20) to ensure clarity and reliability. PLS-SEM further tested multiple independent variables against a dependent variable and various mediating effects, as supported by literature. This method was chosen due to its ability to handle complex models without requiring data to follow a normal distribution.

Results and Discussion

Employing structural equation modeling (SEM) to analyze data collected from 369 business administration students in Nanchang, the key findings indicate that social norms significantly contribute to career satisfaction. It concluded: The youths who say that most of their friends and family support the career they want to pursue are among those with highest levels of satisfaction. These observations are consistent with past research that highlights the pivotal societal expectations play in career determinism.

A study also showed that unrealistic expectations, such as expecting a business administration degree to automatically equal a job with high pay, can cause dissatisfaction. Part of what career counselors do involves managing expectations by giving students a sense of the market today and putting their careers within reach, says Tonya Tennessen. It measures the relationship between soft and hard skills, what students do when they are in school with their ensuing life satisfaction career-wise. Students who have more practical experiences, e.g. internships, and communication skills as well as problem-solving abilities are often happier in their working lives.

This result also speaks to the value in experiential and skill competence learning integrated throughout business administration education. Career counselors can heighten this by urging students to take part in internships, job fairs and other opportunities that boost their employable strengths.

Carroll, Ainscough, and Norman (2017) direct elicitation study results are that readiness factors significantly predict career counselor proficiency which mediates the relationship between student readiness possibility of success information pathway to satisfaction with choice careers. Skilled counselors assists students in understanding the job market, setting realistic expectation and encouraging them to hone necessary skills for a professional life.

The following tables summarize the key findings of the study

Table 1

Correlation Between Student Readiness Factors and Career Satisfaction

Readiness Factor	Correlation Coefficient	Significance Level
Social Norms	0.65	$p < 0.01$
Knowledge	0.72	$p < 0.01$
Expectations	0.68	$p < 0.01$
Skills	0.75	$p < 0.01$

Table 2

Mediating Effect of Career Counselor Proficiency on Career Satisfaction

Pathway	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect
Social Norms → Career Satisfaction	0.55	0.12	0.67
Knowledge → Career Satisfaction	0.62	0.15	0.77
Expectations → Career Satisfaction	0.58	0.14	0.72
Skills → Career Satisfaction	0.70	0.18	0.88

Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of practical experience in enhancing career satisfaction among business administration students. The findings indicate that students who actively engage in internships, job fairs, and other experiential learning opportunities tend to report higher levels of satisfaction in their career paths. This suggests that institutions need to prioritize the integration of real-world experience into the curriculum, allowing students to develop essential soft and hard skills. Career counselors can play a pivotal role by guiding students toward these opportunities, helping them understand how to apply theoretical knowledge in practical settings. By aligning students' expectations with the realities of the job market and equipping them with the necessary skills, career counselors enhance the overall satisfaction students experience in their professional lives.

Additionally, the mediating role of career counselor proficiency in this study reveals that effective counseling can bridge the gap between student readiness and career satisfaction. Counselors who are adept at managing student expectations and providing personalized advice significantly contribute to students' success in navigating their career journeys. This underscores the need for continuous professional development programs for career counselors to ensure they remain competent in the ever-evolving job market landscape. Institutions can benefit from investing in the training and upskilling of their career counselors to ensure that they are well-equipped to address the unique challenges faced by students. By doing so, they can foster a supportive environment where students are better prepared for their transition into the workforce, ultimately improving career satisfaction and post-graduation outcomes.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates how student readiness factors, which include social norms, knowledge levels and expectations with career management skills used in determining of the satisfaction from a business administration graduate working case: A study private universities located at Nanchang Jiangxi China. It also highlights the crucial position of career counselor competency as a moderator in these associations.

Interventions aimed at modifying social norms or increasing the ability to enter a field seems most essential for improving career satisfaction and thus remain an important target of educational institutions. Ensuring a proper training and professional development scheme for career counselors is important so that they can do their best to assist students where transitioning from education into the workforce.

These findings add value to the increasing dataset on concepts and practices of career satisfaction (CS), while providing future implications for improving Career Counseling Practices in Chinese Universities. The findings should be used however with caution and future studies would benefit from examining the influence of other factors i.e. technological changes or global economic trends on career satisfaction in different regions within China (or even abroad).

Implications*Implications to Theory*

The findings of this study contribute significantly to the theoretical understanding of career satisfaction by highlighting the mediating role of career counselor proficiency within the framework of student readiness factors. The integration of social norms, knowledge, expectations, and skills as predictors of career satisfaction expands existing career development theories by emphasizing the interaction between personal and external influences on career outcomes. Furthermore, this research deepens the understanding of the role of career counselors as facilitators in the transition from education to employment, suggesting that their proficiency is a crucial factor in enhancing career satisfaction. By framing career counselor competency as a mediating variable, the study encourages future theoretical work to explore other potential mediators in career development, such as technology integration or economic trends, thus enriching the academic discourse around career satisfaction in various contexts.

Implications to Practice

From a practical standpoint, this study underscores the need for educational institutions, particularly private universities, to invest in improving the proficiency of their career counselors. Ensuring that career counselors receive continuous professional development and training will allow them to better manage student expectations and guide them toward opportunities that align with their skills and aspirations. The study also calls for greater integration of experiential learning opportunities, such as internships and job fairs, into the curriculum, as these significantly boost career satisfaction. Institutions should focus on creating more structured pathways for students to gain real-world experience, ensuring that they graduate with both the knowledge and practical skills necessary to succeed in their chosen careers. Ultimately, these efforts will contribute to better career outcomes for

students and enhance the reputation of universities in supporting student career development.

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