

FACTORS INFLUENCING CAREER PLANNING ABILITY AMONG STUDENTS AT GUIZHOU QIANNAN ECONOMIC COLLEGE GUIZHOU PROVINCE*

Yunfei Xu¹, Sujin Butdisuwan² and Piyapun Santaveesuk³

¹⁻³Faculty of Education (International Program) Faculty of Education Shinawatra University, Thailand

Corresponding Author's Email: tosaporn.mah@krirk.ac.th

Abstract

This study examines the factors influencing career planning ability among undergraduate students at Guizhou Qiannan Economic College, Guizhou Province, China. Specifically, it investigates the effects of psychological capital, school cultural environment, career guidance curriculum and teaching, and instructor quality on students' career planning development. A convergent mixed-methods design was employed, integrating quantitative survey data (n = 341) with qualitative semi-structured interviews (n = 18). Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis, while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis. Data integration was conducted through triangulation to enhance interpretive validity.

The results indicate that students' career planning ability is at a moderate level ($\bar{x} = 3.42$, $SD = 0.61$). Psychological capital emerged as the strongest predictor of career planning ability ($\beta = 0.480$, $p < .001$), followed by school cultural environment ($\beta = 0.265$, $p < .001$) and career guidance curriculum and teaching ($\beta = 0.168$, $p = .005$). The regression model demonstrated strong explanatory power, accounting for 66.4% of the variance in career planning ability (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.664$, $F = 224.926$, $p < .001$).

Qualitative findings corroborated the quantitative results and revealed three key themes: (1) lack of systematic career planning support, (2) psychological readiness accompanied by uncertainty, and (3) uneven institutional support quality. These findings suggest that while students possess relatively strong

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internal psychological resources, institutional mechanisms remain fragmented and insufficiently structured to fully support career development.

The study concludes that psychological capital is the most critical determinant of career planning ability, whereas institutional factors function as complementary but essential enablers. The findings highlight the need for integrated interventions that simultaneously strengthen students' psychological resources and reform institutional career guidance systems in higher education.

Keywords: Career planning ability, psychological capital, career guidance, higher education, China

Introduction

Career planning ability has become a core competency for university students and early-career professionals in the context of a rapidly changing and increasingly uncertain global labor market. It enables individuals to navigate complex employment systems, align personal competencies with labor market demands, and continuously adapt to economic, technological, and organizational changes. Accordingly, higher education institutions worldwide have increasingly prioritized structured career development systems, including career guidance programs, psychological capital enhancement, supportive campus cultural environments, curriculum integration, and the professional quality of career counseling services, as key determinants of students' career planning competence and employability outcomes.

In recent years, youth unemployment has emerged as a significant global concern, exacerbated by economic slowdown and structural instability in key industries, particularly real estate and service sectors. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in late 2019, the global economy has experienced substantial disruption, resulting in labor market volatility and reduced employment opportunities for graduates (Baloch et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2022). Although existing studies do not exclusively focus on China's employment context, their theoretical frameworks provide useful insights for analyzing similar challenges. In particular, strengthening institutional career guidance systems in higher education may enhance graduates' preparedness for labor market entry, while the development of psychological capital—such as resilience, optimism, and self-efficacy—can significantly improve individuals' adaptability to uncertain economic conditions. Furthermore, despite China's reclassification of COVID-19 management as a Category B infectious disease in January 2023, its long-term structural impact on employment patterns remains evident (Chen et al., 2026).

Career planning is a critical developmental process that enables individuals to define clear professional goals, align their skills and interests with occupational opportunities, and make informed decisions regarding education and career pathways. It also facilitates the anticipation of future labor market trends, thereby improving employability, job satisfaction, and long-term career sustainability. In addition, it supports personal growth, strengthens intrinsic motivation, and provides a systematic framework for managing career transitions and challenges.

Given the increasing rate of graduate unemployment and workforce instability, employability has become a key concern in higher education policy and practice (Mohammad, 2018). However, empirical research on the determinants of career planning ability among students in regional and application-oriented universities remains limited, particularly in institutions such as Guizhou Qiannan Economic College (Cao & Chen, 2020). This gap highlights the need for context-specific evidence to better understand how individual and institutional factors jointly shape students' career planning development.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the current status of students' career planning ability and investigate the influencing factors, including psychological capital, school cultural environment, career guidance curriculum and teaching, and instructor quality. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of evidence-based strategies for improving career readiness and enhancing graduate employability in higher education contexts.

Objectives

1. To examine the current status of college students' career planning ability, psychological capital, school cultural climate, career guidance courses and teaching, and quality of career guidance instructors.
2. To explore the relationships among career planning ability and the four influencing factors.

Research Methodology

1. Research Design

This study employed a convergent mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively examine the factors influencing career planning ability among undergraduate students. The quantitative component was used to test the relationships among variables, while the qualitative component was used to explain and enrich the

interpretation of statistical findings. Both datasets were collected concurrently and integrated during the interpretation phase.

2. Population and Sample

2.1 The target population comprised undergraduate students from the School of Accounting at Guizhou Qiannan Economic College, China, including students from the 2022, 2023, and 2024 cohorts, with an estimated total population of $N = 3,000$ students.

2.2 Sample size determination was conducted using Yamane's (1967) and Cochran's (1977) formulas to ensure statistical adequacy. Based on Yamane's formula ($e = 0.05$), the minimum required sample size was approximately 353 respondents, while Cochran's formula indicated a minimum of 384 respondents at a 95% confidence level.

2.3 To account for stratification and an expected response rate of 80%, a total of 450 questionnaires were distributed proportionally across three academic levels (150 per cohort). After data screening, 341 valid responses were retained for quantitative analysis. For the qualitative phase, 18 participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure diversity in academic year and career planning experience.

2.4 Sampling Technique

A stratified random sampling technique was applied for the quantitative phase to ensure proportional representation across academic cohorts. For the qualitative phase, purposive sampling was used to select information-rich participants with relevant experiences in career planning development.

3. Research Instruments

This study employed two types of research instruments, namely a structured questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide, as described below.

3.1 Structured Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of six main sections:

1. Demographic information
2. Career planning ability
3. Psychological capital
4. School cultural environment

5. Career guidance curriculum and teaching

6. Instructor quality

All constructs were developed based on previously validated scales in the literature and were adapted to fit the context of Chinese application-oriented higher education institutions. A five-point Likert scale was used, ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

3.2 Semi-Structured Interview Guide

The semi-structured interview guide was used to collect qualitative data to complement and deepen the quantitative findings. The interview questions focused on key themes, including students' perceptions of career planning development, institutional support, psychological readiness, and experiences with career guidance services and teaching.

The interviews were conducted in a flexible manner, allowing participants to freely express their opinions in order to obtain in-depth insights into students' real experiences within the higher education context.

4. Validity and Reliability

Content validity was established through expert review by scholars in educational research and career development. All items were evaluated for clarity, relevance, and contextual appropriateness.

Reliability analysis was conducted to assess internal consistency. All constructs achieved acceptable reliability levels, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding 0.70, indicating satisfactory measurement reliability.

5. Data Collection Procedure

Quantitative data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via a structured digital platform. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to data collection.

Qualitative data were collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was audio-recorded with participant permission. All responses were anonymized to ensure confidentiality and ethical compliance.

6. Data Analysis

6.1 Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis to examine the influence of

independent variables on career planning ability. Prior to analysis, data were screened for missing values, normality, and multicollinearity assumptions.

6.2 Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, involving coding, categorization, and theme development to identify patterns related to students' career planning experiences.

6.3 Finally, a triangulation strategy was applied to integrate quantitative and qualitative findings, enhancing the validity and robustness of the study results.

Results

1 Quantitative Research Results

This section presents the quantitative findings to examine the current status of college students' career planning ability, psychological capital, school cultural climate, career guidance courses and teaching, and quality of career guidance instructors

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (N = 341)

Variables	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Interpretation
Career Planning Ability	3.42	0.61	Moderate
Psychological Capital	3.78	0.55	High
School Cultural Environment	3.51	0.58	Moderate
Career Guidance Curriculum and Teaching	3.36	0.64	Moderate
Instructor Quality	3.40	0.60	Moderate

The descriptive results (N = 341) indicate that the overall level of Career Planning Ability among students is at a moderate level ($\bar{x} = 3.42$, SD = 0.61). Among all variables, Psychological Capital shows the highest mean score ($\bar{x} = 3.78$, SD = 0.55), followed by School Cultural Environment ($\bar{x} = 3.55$, SD = 0.63). In contrast, Career Guidance Curriculum and Teaching ($\bar{x} = 3.38$, SD = 0.66) and Instructor Quality ($\bar{x} = 3.41$, SD = 0.64) are also at a moderate level, indicating that institutional support systems are not yet strong enough compared to students' internal psychological readiness.

Overall, the findings suggest that students demonstrate relatively strong internal psychological resources with relatively consistent responses (low-to-

moderate variability across variables); however, external institutional support in terms of curriculum, teaching quality, and instructor effectiveness still requires further development to enhance students' career planning ability.

Model	Predictors	B	SE	β	t	p
1	Psychological Capital	0.938	0.062	0.636	15.193	<.001
2	Psychological Capital	0.662	0.075	0.449	8.862	<.001
	School Cultural Environment	0.618	0.103	0.304	5.992	<.001
3	Psychological Capital	0.622	0.055	0.480	11.283	<.001
	School Cultural Environment	0.474	0.102	0.265	4.642	<.001
	Career Guidance Curriculum and Teaching	0.219	0.078	0.168	2.800	.005

Model Fit: $R = 0.817$, $R^2 = 0.667$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.664$, $F = 224.926$, $p < .001$

Interpretation of Table 2 The multiple regression results show that the final model (Model 3) provides the best fit for predicting Career Planning Ability. The model explains 66.4% of the variance (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.664$), indicating a strong explanatory power, and the overall model is statistically significant ($F = 224.926$, $p < .001$).

Among the predictors, Psychological Capital has the strongest positive effect on career planning ability ($\beta = 0.480$, $p < .001$), followed by School Cultural Environment ($\beta = 0.265$, $p < .001$). Career Guidance Curriculum and Teaching also shows a statistically significant but weaker effect ($\beta = 0.168$, $p = .005$).

These results indicate that internal psychological factors play a more dominant role than institutional factors in shaping students' career planning ability. This suggests that enhancing students' psychological capital is the most effective pathway for improving career planning outcomes, while institutional support systems should also be strengthened to provide a more supportive learning environment.

2 Qualitative Research Results

The qualitative data analysis from interviews with 18 students revealed three main themes as follows:

Theme 1 Lack of Systematic Career Planning Support

Most students reported that the university does not have a clearly structured career planning system. Career guidance activities are usually organized as occasional events rather than continuous programs and are not well integrated into the academic curriculum. As a result, students' career planning development is not systematic or consistent.

Theme 2 Psychological Readiness with Uncertainty

Students generally show a certain level of self-confidence and motivation for self-development. However, they still lack clarity regarding career pathways, labor market information, and future employment opportunities, which leads to uncertainty in their career decision-making process.

Theme 3 Uneven Quality of Institutional Support

The quality of career guidance support varies across courses and academic departments. Some courses focus more on theoretical knowledge rather than practical experience, resulting in inconsistent understanding of career planning among students and insufficient practical exposure.

3. Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings (Triangulation)

The integration of both quantitative and qualitative findings shows clear consistency, as follows:

Students' career planning ability is at a moderate level in both quantitative and qualitative results.

Psychological Capital is identified as the most influential factor in both datasets.

Institutional factors such as school environment and career guidance function as supporting factors.

Qualitative findings help explain the contextual reasons behind the statistical results, providing deeper understanding of the quantitative outcomes.

Discussion

1. Quantitative Discussion

The quantitative findings revealed that students' career planning ability was at a moderate level ($\bar{x} = 3.42$, $SD = 0.61$). This indicates that students possess a basic awareness of career development; however, they still lack systematic and



long-term career planning skills. This finding is consistent with Liu et al. (2014), who argue that career development in China has shifted from a state-directed job allocation system to a market-oriented and individual-centered model, in which individuals are increasingly responsible for managing their own career trajectories. Consequently, the ability to independently construct and regulate one's career path has become increasingly important.

Regarding the independent variables, psychological capital recorded the highest mean score ($\bar{x} = 3.78$) and emerged as the most influential predictor of career planning ability ($\beta = 0.480$, $p < .001$). This finding suggests that internal psychological factors such as self-confidence, hope, and psychological resilience play a more significant role than institutional factors. This result is consistent with Wang and Zhu (2015) and Li and Cao (2011), who found that psychological capital is a key determinant of students' career readiness and employability.

In contrast, the variables school cultural environment ($\beta = 0.265$) and career guidance curriculum and teaching ($\beta = 0.168$) showed positive but moderate to weak effects. This indicates that institutional factors still have limitations in their effectiveness, particularly due to the lack of a continuous and structured career guidance system.

Overall, the regression analysis (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.664$) demonstrates that the independent variables collectively explain 66.4% of the variance in career planning ability, indicating a relatively high level of predictive power. These results clearly confirm that internal psychological factors exert a stronger influence than institutional factors.

2. Qualitative Discussion

The qualitative analysis of interviews with 18 students revealed three main themes, which further support and explain the quantitative findings.

The first theme, lack of systematic career planning support, indicates that most students perceive career guidance activities as fragmented and event-based rather than integrated into a continuous curricular system. This finding is consistent with the quantitative results, which showed that curriculum and instructor quality have only moderate influence. It suggests that the current

institutional support system is not sufficiently structured to effectively enhance students' career planning development.

The second theme, psychological readiness with uncertainty, shows that although students demonstrate confidence and motivation for self-development, they still lack clear information about career pathways, labor market conditions, and future employment opportunities. This helps explain why psychological capital is high, yet overall career planning ability remains only moderate.

The third theme, uneven institutional support quality, reveals significant variation in the quality of career guidance across courses and departments. This inconsistency leads to unequal learning experiences among students and reduces the overall effectiveness of institutional support systems.

In summary, the qualitative findings suggest that although students possess relatively strong psychological resources, institutional limitations remain a key barrier to fully developing their career planning ability.

Recommendation

1. Policy Recommendations

1.1 Based on the findings indicating that psychological capital is the strongest predictor of career planning ability ($\beta = 0.480$, $p < .001$), higher education institutions should prioritize policies that systematically enhance students' psychological resources.

1.2 First, universities should establish structured psychological capital development programs, focusing on self-efficacy, optimism, resilience, and hope through workshops, mentoring systems, and experiential learning activities. These programs should be embedded within the formal curriculum rather than offered as optional activities.

1.3 Second, institutional career guidance systems should be strengthened by developing a comprehensive career development framework that ensures continuity from the first year to graduation. This includes integrating career planning modules into academic courses and ensuring alignment between curriculum design and labor market demands.

1.4 Third, universities should improve the quality assurance system for career guidance instructors, including continuous professional development, certification programs, and performance evaluation mechanisms to ensure consistency in delivery across departments.

2. Practical Recommendations

2.1 At the practical level, the study highlights that students' career planning ability remains at a moderate level ($M = 3.42$), indicating a need for targeted interventions.

2.2 Firstly, universities should implement individual career planning portfolios, allowing students to track their career goals, skills development, internships, and reflections throughout their study period.

2.3 Secondly, career guidance should shift from event-based activities to continuous coaching systems, including one-on-one counseling, peer mentoring, and alumni engagement programs to provide real-world career exposure.

2.4 Thirdly, teaching and learning activities should incorporate labor market intelligence and experiential learning, such as internships, simulation-based training, and industry collaboration, to bridge the gap between theory and practice identified in qualitative findings

3. Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should address the following limitations identified in this research.

3.1 First, longitudinal research designs are recommended to track changes in career planning ability across academic years, which would allow for stronger causal interpretations.

3.2 Second, future research should expand the sample beyond a single institution to include multi-university and cross-regional comparisons, improving the generalizability of findings.

3.3 Third, additional variables such as family support, internship experience, peer influence, and digital career resources should be incorporated to construct a more comprehensive predictive model.

3.4 Finally, future studies should apply advanced statistical techniques such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test mediation and

moderation effects, particularly the mediating role of psychological capital in the relationship between institutional support and career planning ability.

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