

# *The Influence of Vocational Identity on Career Decision-Making during Internship among Vocational College Students: The Mediating Role of Career Decision Self-Efficacy*

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**Abstract:** The correctness of college students' career decisions is closely linked to their future career development and influences their career and employment behavior. This study builds a conceptual framework based on relevant vocational theories, such as social cognition, focusing on three dimensions: vocational identity, career decision self-efficacy, and career decision. A new concept of career decision-making is proposed. The research employs a simple random stratified sampling method to calculate a sample size of 380 from a defined population of 36,927 individuals. Structural equation modeling using AMOS 24.0 validates the model, revealing that vocational identity significantly and positively influences career choice behavior, with career decision self-efficacy acting as a mediator between the two. The analysis of the research results suggests that vocational colleges should continuously improve their education and internship systems, enhance students' vocational identity, and empower them to face career choices and decisions with greater determination and confidence.

## 1. Introduction

The significance of college students' career decisions cannot be overstated, as they directly impact future career development, income levels, and life satisfaction (Eva et al., 2020)<sup>[1]</sup>. However, the complexity of the decision-making process, combined with the global economic instability, poses challenges for students in making informed career choices during their college graduation period (Trevor-Roberts et al., 2019)<sup>[2]</sup>. This is particularly evident among graduates from vocational colleges, who face various challenges, including mismatches between their majors and job positions, high turnover rates, and low-income levels (Jemini-Gashi, et al., 2021)<sup>[3]</sup>.

The prevailing preference of vocational college students for management roles over technical positions can lead to missed job opportunities and unemployment (Wang, B., 2020)<sup>[4]</sup>. Addressing this research gap, the present study adopts a quantitative empirical research approach to explore the motivational mechanisms and dimensional structure of career decision-making among Chinese

vocational college students in the current economic landscape.

## **2. Theory and Research Hypothesis**

### **2.1. Theoretical Foundation**

The Social Cognitive Career Theory provides a fundamental framework for understanding individual personality and career behavior. It includes the Social Cognitive Career Theory, the "Holland's Vocational Personality" theory, and the Vocational Needs Theory. Bandura incorporated internal cognitive processes into behaviorist theory in his Social Cognitive Theory, emphasizing the role of cognitive factors in behavior modification and revealing the mechanisms underlying the formation and maintenance of human behavior (Bandura, A., 1977)<sup>[5]</sup>. The Social Cognitive Career Theory views the entire process of career choice or decision-making as an interactive "person-environment-action" system: an individual's learning experiences are influenced by their personal characteristics and social background.

Among the interacting environmental and cognitive factors, cognitive factors play a dominant role, with self-efficacy and outcome expectations being the primary determinants of individual behavior. According to Bandura's definition, self-efficacy is an individual's judgment of their ability to perform specific tasks, which results from the interaction of various external and internal factors, including the external environment, self-regulation mechanisms, personal abilities, past experiences, and achievements. This theory provides the theoretical foundation for this study, demonstrating that influencing individuals' cognitive and value-based perceptions of careers can, in turn, affect their career choice behavior. Additionally, individuals can develop cognitive perceptions and expectations regarding different careers, forming their own career goals and decision-making (Long, L., 2006)<sup>[6]</sup>.

In summary, building upon career decision-making theories, the purpose of this study is to explore the critical factors and structural theoretical models of career decision-making. Additionally, it extends the research field of career identity and establishes a connection between career identity and career identification, which is beneficial for generating new research findings at the intersection of different fields.

### **2.2. Career Identity and Career Decision-Making**

Career identity refers to an individual's affirmative evaluation of the occupation they are engaged in, providing meaning and direction to their career journey (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2021)<sup>[7]</sup>. Therefore, it is necessary to reexamine and investigate the concept of career identity within the context of vocational college students. Based on the above analysis, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1. Career identity has a significant positive impact on college students' career decision-making.

### **2.3. Career Decision Self-Efficacy and Career Decision-Making**

Career decision self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to make effective career decisions and take appropriate actions to achieve their career goals (Lent et al., 2017)<sup>[8]</sup>. Moreover, career decision self-efficacy has been found to positively influence career decidedness, which refers to the level of certainty and commitment in career decision-making (Penn & Lent, 2019)<sup>[9]</sup>. Based on the existing literature, it is hypothesized that:

H2. Career decision self-efficacy positively influences college students' career decision-making, leading to more proactive career exploration and increased career decidedness.

### 3. Research Method

#### 3.1. Participants and Procedure

Six vocational colleges in Guangxi were selected, including two national-level vocational colleges, two provincial-level vocational colleges, and two regular vocational colleges, which align with the theme of this thesis. According to Qiu Liping's perspective (2015)<sup>[10]</sup>, in a population ranging from 30,000 to 40,000, the sample size should be 380. As the study population exceeds 30,000 people, the researcher chose 380 participants as the sample size for the study. There were 251 male college students, accounting for 66.05% of the total; and 129 female college students, accounting for 33.95%. This included three different academic years: 33.37% were from the middle year, 35% were from the high year, and 27.63% were from the low year.

#### 3.2. Measurement Instruments

**Career Identity Scale:** The scale employs a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Research reports indicate that the scale's reliability ranges from 0.81 to 0.89 and shows a significant positive correlation between the scale and career decision-making, career planning, and career exploration among adolescents and college students (Hirschi, A., 2012)<sup>[11]</sup>.

**Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale:** Referring to Long Yanmei's (2003)<sup>[12]</sup> research, the scale has high reliability, with an internal consistency coefficient of 0.8953 and a test-retest reliability of 0.851. The results of confirmatory factor analysis show that the scale has good structural validity.

**Career Decision-Making Scale:** The CDM scale developed by Xu (2020)<sup>[13]</sup> consists of three dimensions: information analysis, information exploration, and goal setting, with a total of 16 items. It also uses a 5-point Likert scoring. The internal consistency coefficients for satisfactory decision-making and proactive creation dimensions are 0.79 and 0.80.

### 4. Result

#### 4.1. Model Fit Verification

Model fit analysis aims to validate the goodness of fit of the model. It requires that the  $\chi^2/df$  value is less than 3, and the values of GFI, NFI, CFI, and IFI should be greater than 0.9, while the RMSEA value should be less than 0.8 (Hair, J.F., et al., 2010)<sup>[14]</sup>. The fitted Structural Equation Model (SEM) in this study yields the following indices: GFI = 0.967, RMSEA = 0.028, CFI = 0.991, NFI = 0.965, TLI = 0.989, and IFI = 0.899. Therefore, the model demonstrates a good fit.

#### 4.2. Direct and Indirect Effects

Table 1 presents the results of the path analysis. All path coefficients are statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) and greater than 0. Specifically, the analysis reveals the following significant positive effects. These findings provide support for Hypothesis 1.

Table 1: Direct Path Analysis

Path	Estimate	STD.Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
Career identity → CDMSE	0.258	0.353	0.043	5.984	0.000
CDMSE → CDM	0.444	0.387	0.087	5.104	0.000
Career identity → CDM	0.276	0.329	0.049	5.610	0.000

Furthermore, the bootstrap method was employed to validate the effects. Using 5000 bootstrap samples, a 95% confidence interval was obtained. As shown in the Table 2, Hypotheses 2 and 3 were supported.

Table 2: Analysis of indirect and total effects

Parameter	Estimate	Lower	Upper	P
Career identity → CDMSE → CDM	0.196	0.118	0.304	0.000
Career identity → CDM	0.478	0.365	0.589	0.000

### 4.3. Model results

As shown in the Figure 1, the model results examined the mediating effect of Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy (CDMSE).

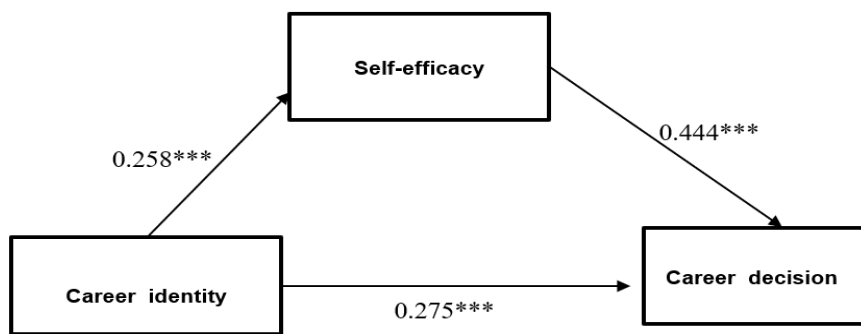


Figure 1: Research model validation.

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1. Positive Impact of Career Identity on Career Decision-Making

The study demonstrates a significant positive correlation between career identity and college students' career decision-making. This aligns with the findings of Keijzer et al. (2020)<sup>[15]</sup>, supporting the notion that career identity positively influences career behaviours. A well-defined career identity offers a coherent understanding of various occupational experiences and aspirations. Individuals with stronger career identity perceive fewer barriers and are more proactive in making effective career decisions, thus increasing their job opportunities.

### 5.2. Mediating Role of Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy (CDMSE)

The study reveals that career decision-making self-efficacy mediates the relationship between career identity and career decision-making among college students. It indirectly impacts career behaviours by influencing career cognition. This finding is consistent with the perspectives of Goulet & Singh (2002)<sup>[16]</sup> and others, who assert that achieving a strong career identity is linked to positive individual and organizational outcomes, including higher job involvement.

## 6. Contributions

This study contributes in three key ways. Firstly, it examines the interactive relationship between identity and behaviour in the career decision-making process, an area that has received limited attention despite their critical roles as antecedents. Secondly, it investigates the mediating role of

career decision-making self-efficacy in the career decision-making process. Lastly, the study integrates applied psychology and vocational psychology, analysing the effects of affect and behaviour on career decision-making.

## 7. Limitations and Future Directions

The study has certain limitations. Firstly, the measurement of career identity focuses only on the personal value dimension, neglecting organizational value orientation. Secondly, the sample is limited to colleges in Guangxi, China, and lacks a broader scope for analysis. These aspects can be addressed in future research.

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