A Study on the Influencing Factors of Future Career Confusion

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Abstract: With the popularization of higher education and the intensification of competition in the job market, university students are facing increasing employment pressure, and "future career confusion" has become a common psychological phenomenon. This study aims to explore the key factors affecting university students' future career confusion by constructing a theoretical model that includes self-concept, self-efficacy, employment information, social support, and educational and environmental factors. A questionnaire survey was administered to a sample of 178 university students. After reliability and validity testing (Cronbach's α for Future Career Confusion = 0.913), a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. The results revealed that: self-efficacy (β = .352, p = .000 < 0.01), ability to acquire employment information (β = .224, p = .001 < 0.01), and practical skills provided by school curricula (β = .191, p = .008 < 0.01) are the three most significant factors influencing future career confusion, showing a significant negative correlation with it. The influence of self-concept was marginally significant, while social support did not show a significant effect in this study. The research findings have certain theoretical and practical implications for understanding the employment mentality of university students, guiding universities in carrying out employment counseling, and helping students with their career planning.

Keywords: Future Career Confusion; Influencing Factors; Self-Efficacy; Employment Information; University Students; Quantitative Research

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Problem Statement

With the popularization of higher education and the increasingly fierce competition in the job market, university students commonly face a certain degree of confusion and uncertainty when approaching graduation or planning their future career paths. "Future career confusion" has become a key issue affecting students' mental health, academic engagement, and even their smooth transition into the workplace.[1][2] This sense of confusion may stem from various factors, such as an unclear positioning of one's own abilities, insufficient knowledge of the professional world, and ambiguity about future development directions. Especially in a rapidly changing socio-economic environment where new occupations are constantly emerging and traditional employment concepts are being challenged, university students are under unprecedented pressure in their career choices and planning.

Existing research has explored related topics such as university students' employment anxiety and career decision-making difficulties from various perspectives. However, systematic quantitative research specifically targeting the psychological state of "future career confusion" and its influencing factors is still in need of deepening. Particularly within the context of local institutions or specific majors, the factors influencing students' career confusion may have unique characteristics. Therefore, this study aims to identify and test the key individual and environmental factors affecting university students' future career confusion, with the hope of providing a theoretical basis and practical insights for universities to offer more targeted employment guidance services, help students clarify their career plans, and alleviate their career confusion.

1.2 Literature Review and Theoretical Basis

Future career confusion can be understood as a psychological state of ambiguity, confusion, and

uncertainty that an individual experiences when facing future career choices and development due to a lack of clear goals, a clear path, or sufficient confidence. It is closely related to concepts such as career decision-making maturity and career planning ability, and may be influenced by a variety of factors[3][4].

From the perspective of individual psychology, Bandura's Self-efficacy Theory emphasizes an individual's belief in their ability to successfully perform specific behaviors and achieve desired outcomes[5]. Students with high self-efficacy are more inclined to set challenging goals and persevere in the face of difficulties, thus potentially feeling less career confusion. At the same time, the clarity of Self-concept, that is, an accurate grasp of one's own interests, abilities, and values, is also a prerequisite for effective career planning. An unclear self-concept can easily lead to vague goals and increased confusion.

From the perspective of information acquisition and environmental support, the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) emphasizes the interplay among the individual, the environment, and behavior. Acquiring sufficient and accurate employment information helps individuals understand job requirements, industry trends, and job search paths, thereby reducing uncertainty[6] .Social Support, especially from family, friends, and the university, can provide individuals with emotional comfort, information resources, and practical help, enhancing their confidence in facing employment challenges[7].Furthermore, educational and environmental factors, such as whether the school curriculum is aligned with market demands and whether sufficient practical opportunities are provided, also directly affect students' employment readiness and their sense of control over the future[8].

Based on the above theoretical analysis and literature review, this study constructs a theoretical model of the factors influencing university students' future career confusion (see Figure 1). This model hypothesizes that an individual's clarity of self-concept, self-efficacy, degree of access to employment information, social support received, and the educational and environmental factors they are exposed to may all affect their future career confusion.

Accordingly, this study proposes the following research hypotheses:

H1: Clarity of self-concept has a significant negative effect on future career confusion (i.e., the clearer the self-concept, the lower the confusion).

H2: Self-efficacy has a significant negative effect on future career confusion.

H3: The degree of access to employment information has a significant negative effect on future career confusion.

H4: Social support has a significant negative effect on future career confusion.

H5: Educational and environmental factors (such as practical skills provided by the curriculum) have a significant negative effect on future career confusion.
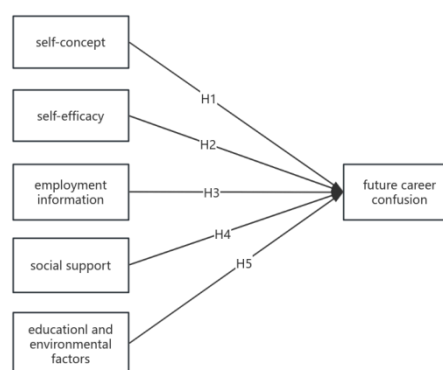

Figure 1: Theoretical Model Diagram

2. Research Design and Methods

2.1 Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research method, specifically a questionnaire survey, to investigate the predictive effects of various hypothesized independent variables on the dependent variable, "future

career confusion." The research design is a Cross-sectional Survey Design, collecting data from different individuals at a specific point in time to analyze the relationships between variables. The data analysis primarily uses multiple linear regression to test the research hypotheses.

2.2 Participants and Sampling

The survey subjects for this study were students enrolled in a university. Considering the feasibility and resource constraints of the research, this study used the Convenience Sampling method. A total of 178 valid questionnaires were collected, resulting in an effective response rate of 100%. The demographic characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample Demographic Characteristics

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender: Male	85	47.8
Gender: Female	93	52.2
Grade: Freshman	23	12.9
Grade: Sophomore	30	16.9
Grade: Junior	94	52.8
Grade: Senior	31	17.4

As can be seen from the table, third-year students represent the largest proportion (52.8%), which aligns with the initial intent of this study, as third-year students are at a key stage of career planning and employment preparation, and their career confusion may be most representative.

2.3 Measurement Tools

This study used a self-developed questionnaire as the data collection tool. The questionnaire consists of three parts: the first part collects demographic information (gender, year); the second part contains items measuring the independent variables; the third part contains items measuring the dependent variable, "future career confusion."

The measurement items for each variable were developed based on existing research and adapted to the specific context of this study. Except for the dependent variable "future career confusion," which consists of 6 measurement items, the other 5 independent variables were each measured by a single core item. All measurement items used a Likert 7-point scale (where 1 = Strongly Disagree/Not at all, and 7 = Strongly Agree/Very much, which should be consistently defined in the questionnaire). The specific variables and their measurement items are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Variables and Measurement Items

English Variable	English Measurement Item
Self-Cognition	Clarity in recognizing one's own abilities
Self-Efficacy	Confidence in one's ability to succeed in future job roles
Employment Information	Ability to access a large amount of employment-related information
Social Support	Family support for my chosen major
Educational and Environmental Factors	Practical skills provided by current university courses
Future Employment Confusion (Dependent Variable)	Degree of clarity regarding future career direction (Note: This is used as the operational indicator for the dependent variable, but is essentially a dimension. The actual questionnaire should include multiple reverse-scored confusion items or positively-scored clarity items. Six items were referenced in the reliability analysis and should be detailed here or in the appendix.)

3. Data Analysis and Results

3.1 Reliability and Validity

To test the reliability of the core dependent variable measurement tool, "Future Career Confusion," an internal consistency analysis was conducted on its 6 measurement items. The results showed that the

scale's Cronbach's α coefficient was 0.913, which is greater than the generally accepted standard of 0.7. This indicates that the scale has high internal consistency reliability, and the measurement results are dependable.

Regarding content validity, the measurement items for each variable in this study were primarily adapted from mature domestic and international scales and revised to fit the context of university students' employment. After the initial draft of the questionnaire was formed, two peers were invited to evaluate the clarity, comprehensibility, and relevance of the items to the measured constructs. Revisions were made based on their feedback to ensure good content validity.

3.2 Descriptive Statistics

A descriptive statistical analysis was conducted on the distribution of scores for the dependent variable "future career confusion" (operationalized as "degree of clarity about future career direction," where a higher score indicates greater clarity, i.e., less confusion).
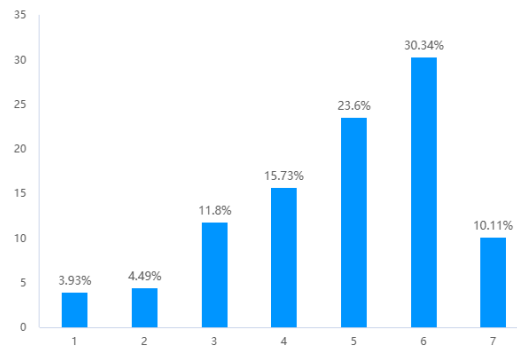

Figure 2: Distribution of Scores for Clarity of Future Career Direction

As seen in Figure 2, the sample students' scores for clarity of future career direction are primarily concentrated at 6 points (Clear, 30.34%) and 5 points (Slightly Clear, 23.6%). The proportion of students who chose Very Clear (7 points) is 10.11%, while the proportion who chose Very Unclear (1 point) is 3.93%. Overall, the sample students' clarity about their future career direction is at a mid-to-high level.

3.3 Linear Regression Analysis of Factors Influencing Future Career Confusion

To test the research hypotheses (H1-H5) regarding the impact of self-concept, self-efficacy, employment information, social support, and educational and environmental factors on future career confusion (measured reversely as "degree of clarity about future career direction," where a higher score means less confusion), a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted.

Table 3: Linear Regression on Future Career Confusion.

		Model Summary (b)			
model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.806a	0.649	0.639	0.922	2.172

Table 4: Coefficient ^{a}

Variables	Unstandardized Coefficient B	Standard Error	Standardized Coefficient Beta	t	Sig. (p-value)	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	0.4	0.283		1.416	0.159		
Clarity of self-cognition	0.128	0.068	0.123	1.894	0.06	0.482	2.073
Confidence in future job competence	0.339	0.07	0.352	4.814	0	0.383	2.613
Access to employment information	0.225	0.069	0.224	3.245	0.001	0.427	2.343
Family support for major choice	0.046	0.065	0.044	0.712	0.477	0.527	1.897
Practical skills from current courses	0.185	0.069	0.191	2.673	0.008	0.401	2.497

Note: a. Dependent Variable: Clarity of future career direction.

The model summary *Table 3* shows that the R Square of this regression model is 0.649, and the Adjusted R Square is 0.639. This indicates that the five independent variables in the model can jointly explain 63.9% of the variance in the dependent variable (future career confusion), suggesting a high overall goodness of fit for the model. The Durbin-Watson value is 2.172, which is close to 2, indicating that there is no significant autocorrelation issue among the residuals.

Looking at the coefficients *Table4*, the VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) values for all independent variables are far less than 10, indicating that there is no serious multicollinearity problem among the independent variables, and the regression results are robust. Under the significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, the regression coefficients for each variable were tested:

Self-Efficacy ($\beta = .352$, $t = 4.814$, $p = .000 < 0.01$) has a significant positive effect on clarity, meaning it significantly reduces career confusion.

Employment Information ($\beta = .224$, $t = 3.245$, $p = .001 < 0.01$) has a significant positive effect on clarity, meaning it significantly reduces career confusion.

Educational and Environmental Factors ($\beta = .191$, $t = 2.673$, $p = .008 < 0.01$) have a significant positive effect on clarity, meaning it significantly reduces career confusion.

Self-Concept ($\beta = .123$, $t = 1.894$, $p = .060 > 0.05$) does not have a significant effect at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level, but is marginally significant at the $\alpha = 0.1$ level.

Social Support ($\beta = .044$, $t = .712$, $p = .477 > 0.05$) has no significant effect on career confusion.

(Note: The dependent variable was "Clarity of future career direction." Therefore, a positive coefficient indicates that the independent variable increases clarity, which is equivalent to decreasing confusion. The results align with the hypothesized negative relationship between the predictors and "confusion".)

4. Discussion

4.1 Summary and Interpretation of Results

H1: The effect of self-concept on career confusion. The regression results show that the effect of self-concept ($p = .060$) is marginally significant, not reaching the conventional $\alpha = 0.05$ significance level. This suggests that while a clear self-concept is theoretically a foundation for reducing confusion, its direct effect was not as strong as expected in this study's sample. A possible explanation is that the measurement item, "Clarity of understanding of my own abilities," might be too general and failed to capture more specific dimensions of self-concept relevant to career choices, such as career interests and values.

H2: The effect of self-efficacy on career confusion. The results strongly support this hypothesis. The standardized regression coefficient for self-efficacy ($\beta = .352$) is the largest among all independent variables, indicating it is the most powerful predictor of university students' career confusion. This is highly consistent with Bandura's theory, which posits that students who believe in their ability to succeed in future work are better able to proactively face the uncertainties of the job market, and their levels of anxiety and confusion are consequently lower. This highlights that enhancing students' self-efficacy is a core pathway to alleviating their employment anxiety.

H3: The effect of employment information on career confusion. This hypothesis was also strongly supported. In an era of information explosion where information quality is mixed, the ability to effectively acquire, screen, and utilize a large volume of employment information is key to reducing uncertainty. This indicates that an information deficit or poor information processing skills are important causes of career confusion.

H4: The effect of social support on career confusion. The results show that social support had no significant effect in this study ($p = .477$), which contradicts our hypothesis. The reason may be that the operationalization of "social support" in this study was too narrow, measuring only "My family supports my chosen field of study." On one hand, support for a field of study is not entirely equivalent to comprehensive support for career choices. On the other hand, as university students' sense of independence grows, the direct influence of their families on their career decisions may be weakening. Students might place more importance on support from other sources, such as peer groups or professional mentors.

H5: The effect of educational and environmental factors on career confusion. This hypothesis was supported. Whether the university curriculum provides clear practical skills significantly affects students' career confusion. This shows that students generally recognize that practical abilities and professional skills are the "hard currency" for securing a desirable job in a competitive job market. If theoretical learning is not effectively combined with practice, it will exacerbate students' concerns about their own employability.

4.2 Theoretical and Practical Significance

Theoretical Significance: The findings of this study partially validate the crucial role of self-efficacy and informational factors in college students' career development psychology, providing empirical data from a specific sample to understand the construct of "future employment uncertainty." Simultaneously, the results where some hypotheses were not supported suggest that future research should employ more refined measurement of relevant variables and explore more complex interaction or mediation models.

Practical Implications: The most significant practical implication of this study is that higher education institutions should focus on enhancing students' self-efficacy and broadening their access to employment information when helping them alleviate job uncertainty. For instance, students' career confidence can be strengthened through successful role models, skills training, and career experience programs. Additionally, organizing job fairs, providing career counseling, and developing employment information platforms can help students gain a comprehensive understanding of the job market.

5. Conclusion and Research Limitations

5.1 Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study validates the significant roles of self-efficacy, information acquisition, and practical education in the psychological adjustment of university students' career development, enriching the application of social cognitive theory in the field of career counseling. At the same time, the unexpected non-significance of the social support variable suggests that future research needs to conduct a more detailed analysis of the structure and sources of social support.

Practically, this research provides clear directions for university employment guidance work:Focus on enhancing students' self-efficacy. Through sharing success stories of professional role models, simulated job interview training, and internship practices, students should be allowed to "learn by doing" and build confidence in their future careers through successful experiences.

Strengthen information literacy and practical skills education. Universities should not only provide rich channels for employment information but also offer courses or workshops to cultivate students' ability to screen and utilize information. Concurrently, curriculum reform should be deepened, industry-university-research collaboration should be strengthened, and more high-quality internship and practical opportunities should be provided to students to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Improve the career planning guidance system. In response to the finding of the non-significant effect of self-concept, it is suggested that university career counseling should intervene earlier, starting from the freshman year. Through professional assessment tools and counseling services, students can be helped to deeply explore their personal interests, abilities, and values, thereby forming a more comprehensive and specific self-concept.

5.2 Research Limitations

This study also has some limitations. First, the research sample was collected through convenience sampling and the sample size is relatively small, primarily concentrated in one university. This limits the external validity of the research findings. Future research should adopt more representative multi-stage random sampling and expand the sample size. Second, this study is a cross-sectional study and cannot reveal the dynamic causal relationships between variables over time. Future research could adopt a longitudinal study design to examine how these factors dynamically affect students' employment mentality throughout their four years of university. Finally, the measurement of some variables (such as social support) in this study was relatively simplistic. Future research could construct more comprehensive and multidimensional measurement indicators to more accurately grasp the

connotations of the variables.

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